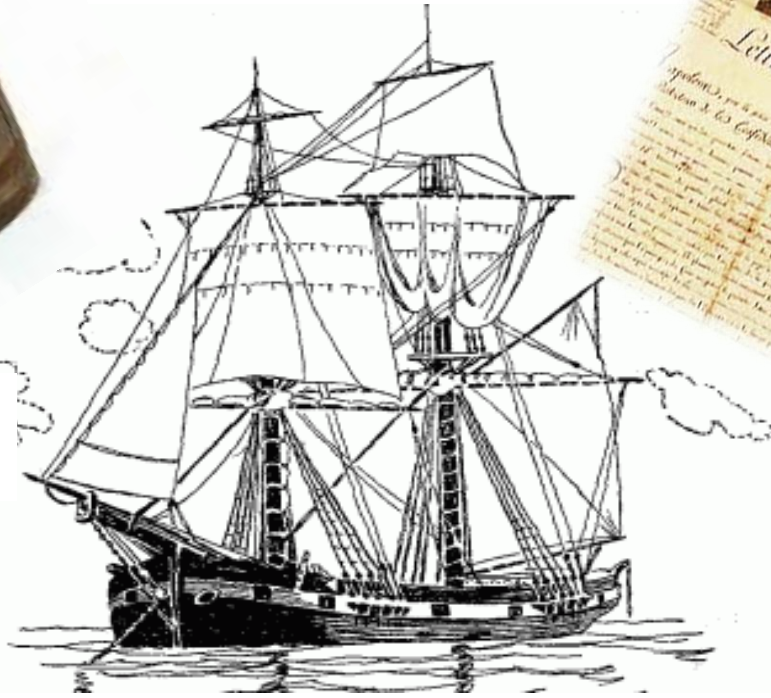


Dragon Archaeological survey report



1757



# PRIVATEER & ENGLISH MERCHANTMAN "DRAGON"

LOST ON THE SOUTH DEVON COAST



SPONSORED BY THE BSAC JUBILEE TRUST

STEVE CLARKSON  
OCTOBER 2014

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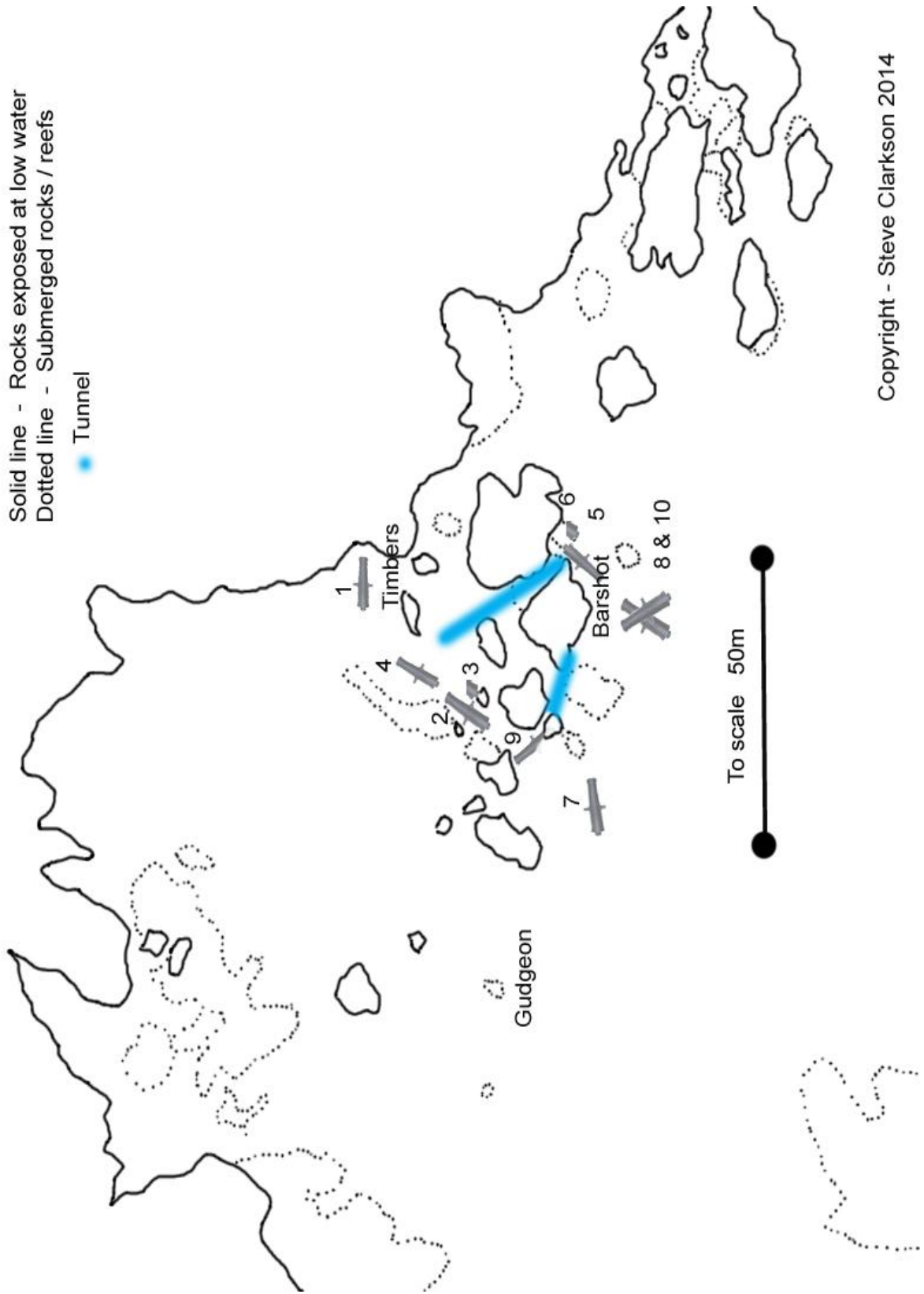
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WRECK SITE PLAN

Sketch D01 - Dragon Site - Steve Clarkson  
Layout of Cannon



Solid line - Rocks exposed at low water  
Dotted line - Submerged rocks / reefs

● Tunnel

Copyright - Steve Clarkson 2014

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## INTRODUCTION

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The “Dragon” is a ship of which little has been documented in terms of its history and wrecking. She was a small armed merchantman and “Privateer” of 196 Tons. A privateer or "corsair" was a private person or ship authorised by a government by “letters of marque” to attack foreign vessels during wartime. In this case, the war was the “Seven Year war” which started in 1756.

Her role at the time of sinking would appear to be as a merchantman taking out dry goods from London to Jamaica and returning with a cargo of sugar, Rum and wood. This report is a brief history of the ship and how she came to be wrecked on the South Devon coast. The wreck site is very rarely exposed and most of the time remains metres beneath the sand. The winter storms of 2013 again exposed the site allowing us to document what is left, including her cannons. Only four people are known to have dived the site prior to us and that was only on two occasions that the site was exposed in the early nineties.

The report not only documents what remains of the wreck and details of the site but also the maritime history at the time. Some of the passengers that drowned during the wrecking lived in Jamaica and are buried in a local churchyard so we have included details of what was happening in Jamaica in the 1750’s.

We have discovered that this ship had a “Letter of Marque” so what was she doing carrying passengers and children? The guns also appear rather large for such a small ship.

This report will be added to as and when the shipwreck is exposed and the research throws up clues of her and her passengers past.

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## BACKGROUND TO PROJECT

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In the 1990’s a friend of mine, Bill Bunting, started looking for the wreck site of the sailing ship “Dragon”. Living in South Devon, he and his then wife, Mary, were able to spend many evenings searching the area where the Dragon was reported to have been wrecked. The location remained a mystery for some time as its secrets lay metres beneath the sand until a winter storm uncovered some fragments of the wreck, including some cannon, in 1991. The wreck was again covered with shingle and sand within a year and was not seen again until after the winter storms of early 2013 when approximately 2m of sand were washed off the site close to the shore. Unfortunately Bill is no longer with us, but his ex wife, daughter and a team of amateur archaeologists are helping me to complete the research and produce site plans.

We started looking for the wreck about ten years ago but it was not until 2012 that we located the , what we thought might be, cannon using a magnetometer but all that could be seen by the divers was sand and shingle. During the summer of 2014 ten cannon and some wood were now visible.

At this stage, we cannot be absolutely sure this is the wreck of the Dragon, as other ships have also met their end in the area.

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## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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National Maritime Museum Greenwich	The late Bill Bunting's notes provided by his ex wife Mary Martell
Public Records Office Kew	
Department of Transport (Marine Directorate)	History of Jamaica George Hunte
University of St Andrews	Devon Records Office
Malborough Church	Receiver of Wrecks
"Kingsbridge and its surroundings" by Miss S.P.Fox published in 1894	"Osprey guide to the Seven Year War" by Daniel Marston
"Shipwrecks of the South Hams" by Kendal McDonald	"History of Jamaica" by Frank Gundall
"Shipwrecks of the Devon Coast" by Richard Larn	Western Flying Post 1757
	London News 1757

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## LEGAL STATUS OF WRECK

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English Heritage sent the Archaeological Dive Unit (ADU) to survey the site in 1990 and came to the conclusion the site did not meet the criteria to obtain "Protected wreck" status. This may well be because not enough information was acquired on their one and only dive on the site, as well as the limited information know about the Dragon at the time.

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## PROJECT OBJECTIVES

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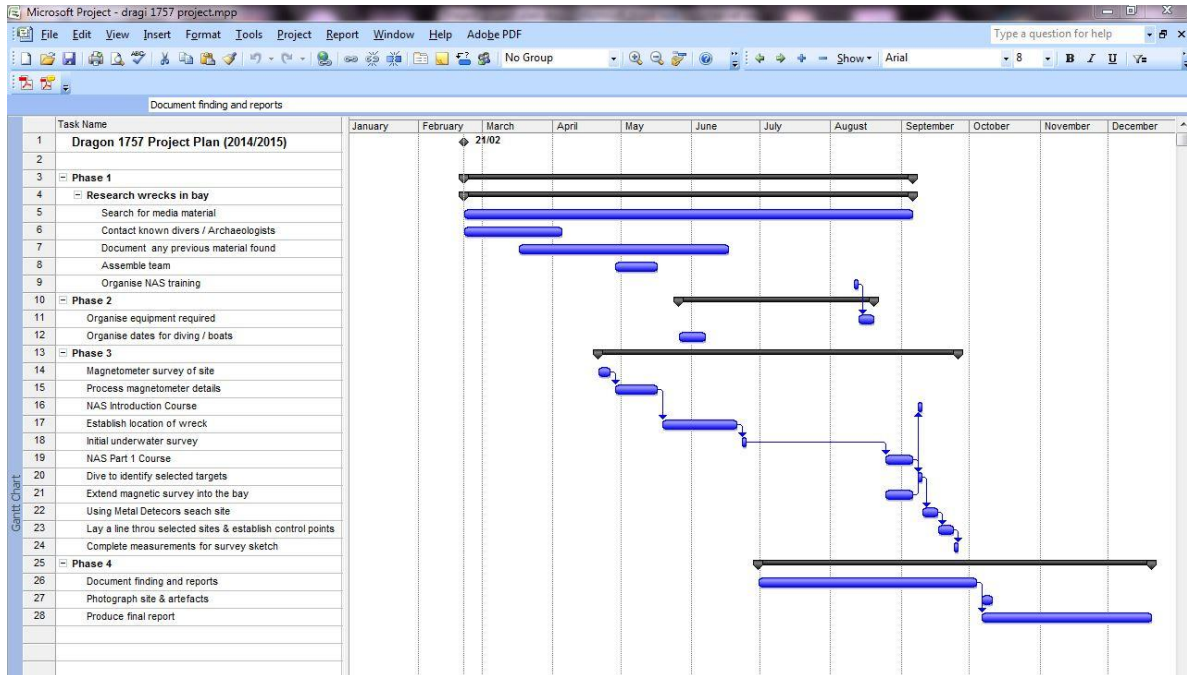
The following were the planned objectives of this project.

- **Research what type of ship this was?**
- **Establish its route and cargo / passengers**
- **Survey the site with a magnetometer in order to locate objects such as cannon and anchors.**
- **Identify what was left of the ship and document the artefacts.**
- **Produce a site plan**
- **Train BSAC & PADI divers in Marine Archaeology**



## PROJECT PLAN

The following chart shows the plan of activities for 2014. The condition of the site and good weather windows have enabled us to keep roughly to the plan.



The dangerous reefs in the area the ship was wrecked



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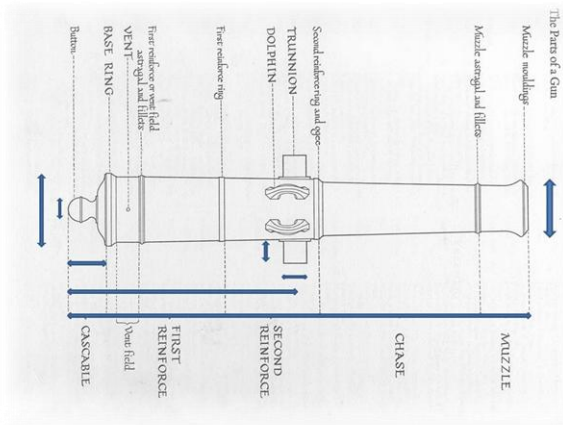
## PLANNED APPROACH

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In order to establish the possible location of the site, we used a magnetometer at high water springs to identify any potential targets for non ferrous objects such as cannon and anchors. We knew this would be difficult due to the number of metal wrecks in the area. The original position obtained from Bills notes was 0.1 of a nautical mile from the actual site and this position also had some large magnetic anomalies under the sand so it took a couple of years of detective work to find the actual wrecksite.

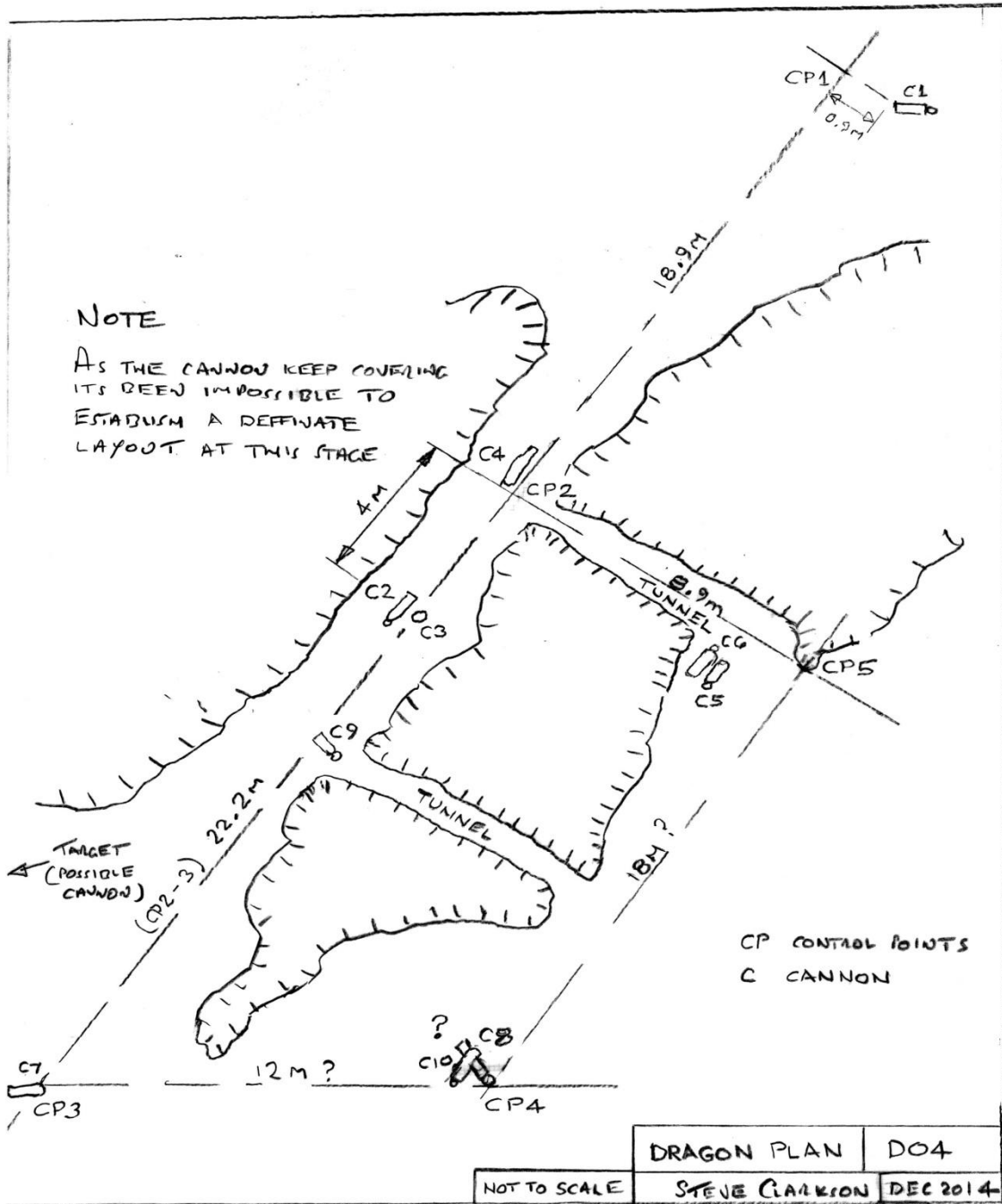
The potential sites were amongst drying rocks with gullies from 1m to 5m, so our approach was to lay weighted rope lines down two gullies. The line will have tags every 1m and all objects found will be measured relative to these lines. To help identification of the cannon, measurements will be taken as shown below.

Bottom photo is a magnetometer



The following sketch is of the site using the approach outlined above.

CP = Control points and C = cannon identification numbers





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## TRAINING

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Three divers were trained on the dive site and another eight to Nautical Archaeological Society Part 1 standard on a NAS course run in Reading

Practicing measuring then producing first sketch of cannon 7 found on wreck site



NAS training course (Organised by me) held at Reading BSAC headquarters in Reading. Attended by both BSAC & PADI divers



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**PROMOTION**

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Steve promoting the project locally at Prawle History Society



Steve promoting the project as far away as Cheam Golf Club in Surrey



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**PEOPLE INVOLVED**

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**The project team consisted of the following people:**

Steve Clarkson (Project Leader)	Reading BSAC
Neville Oldham	East Cheshire BSAC
Dave Parham (Advising Archaeologist)	Bournemouth University BSAC
Mike Turner	Totnes BSAC
Keith Rushton	East Cheshire BSAC
Christine Bunting	Reading University BSAC
Mary Martell	Ex BSAC member
Paul Fiander	Reading BSAC
Sue Mitchell	Reading BSAC
Dave Illingworth	East Cheshire BSAC
Lizzie Heaver	Reading BSAC

*Other amateur divers involved in the projects training but not the diving*

Les Ruse	PADI DM / BSAC DL
Pamela Pound	PADI AOW
Antony Rodden	PADI & TDI Advanced Trimix CCR
Lawrence Crow	PADI & TDI Extended Range
Julio Lema	PADI RD
Martin Lewin	PADI RD

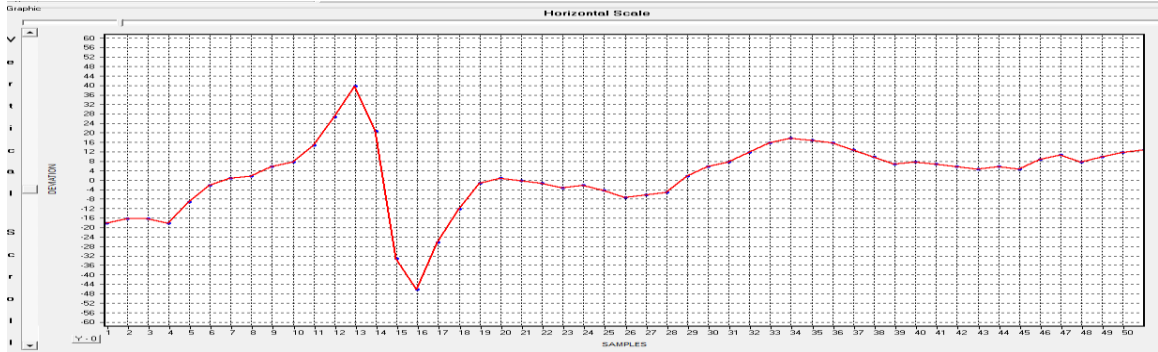


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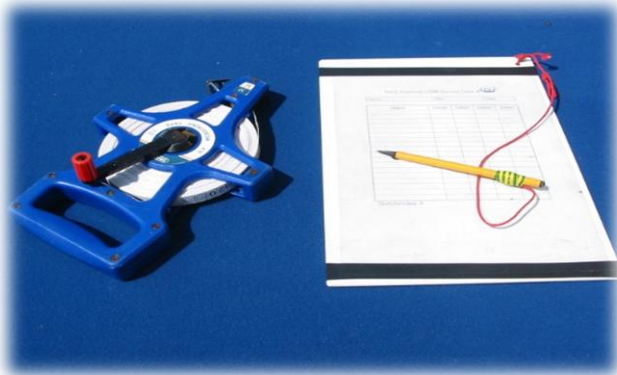
**EQUIPMENT USED**


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The initial survey was done using an underwater Proton magnetometer towed behind the boat. A trace from one of the cannon is shown in the following image.



The underwater work was carried out using weighted lines marked at 1m intervals. All objects found were measured relative to these lines using tapes. The results were documented on slates. Bottom right – Magnetometer equipment



Towing the magnetometer

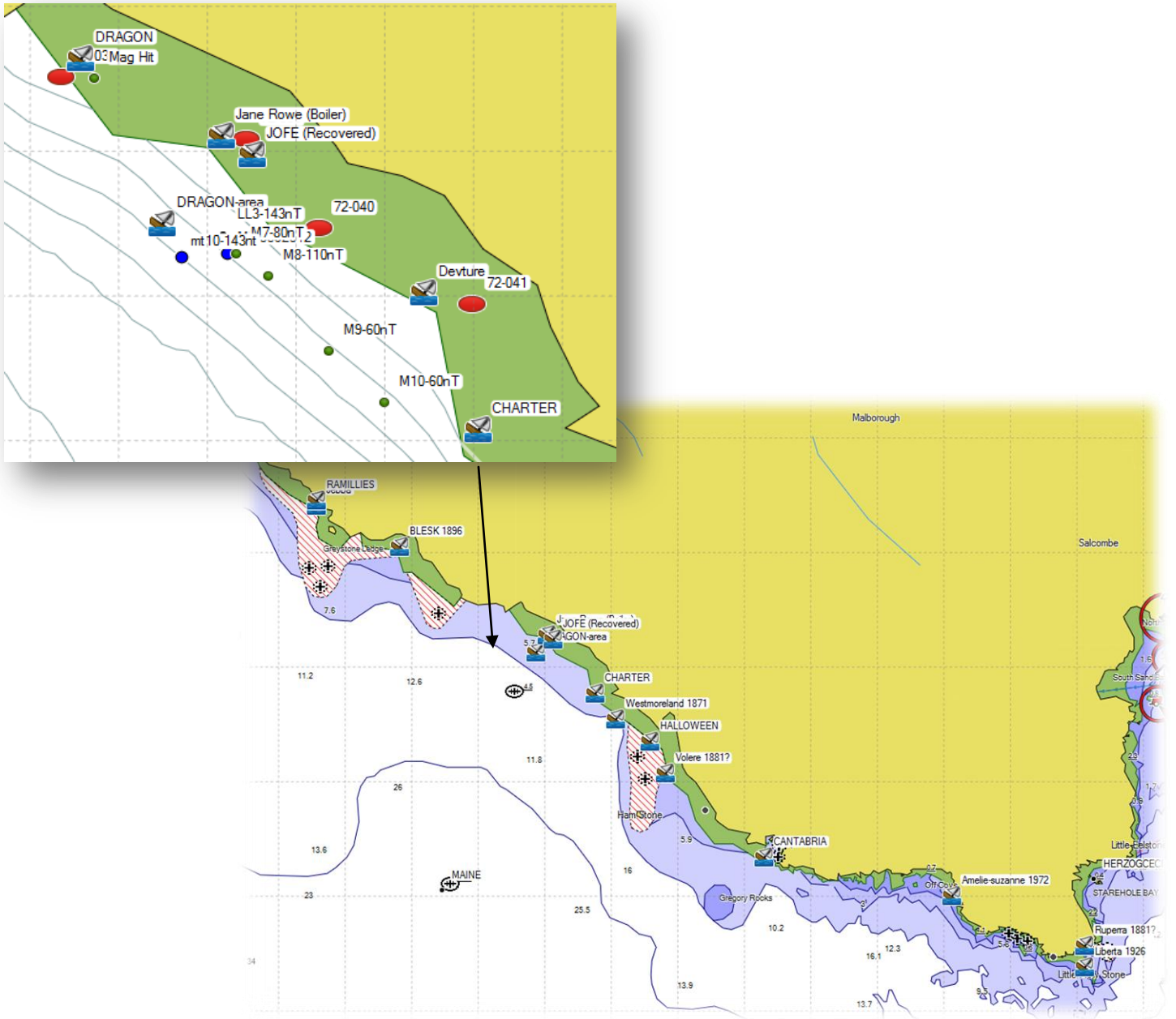


Preparing to dive



MAGNETIC SURVEY RESULTS

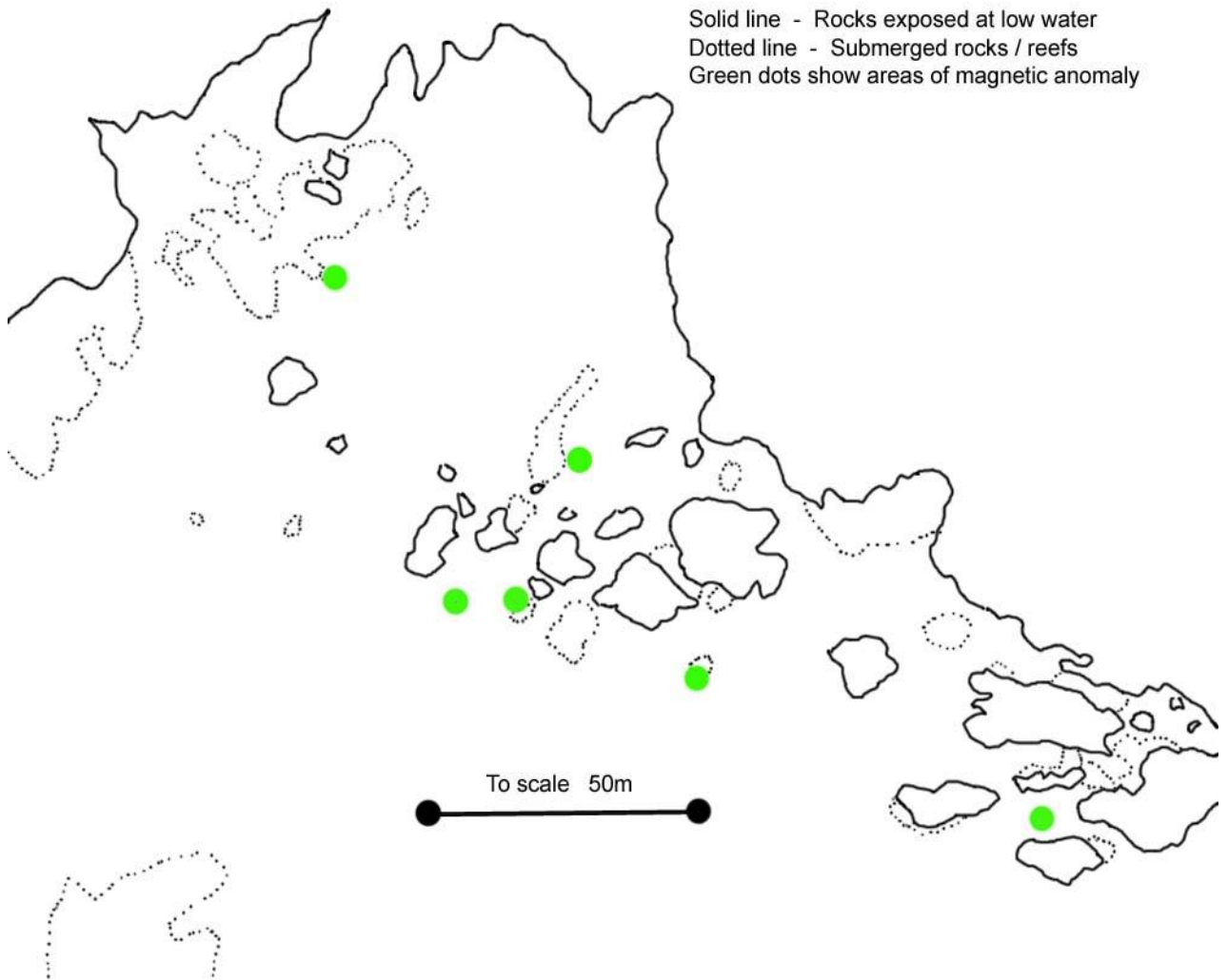
The initial magnetic survey located twelve shipwrecks sites in the area. The following chart shows what wrecks were located during the search for the wreck of the Dragon. The red and green dots are some of the magnetic targets found during the survey. You can see we had two potential Dragon sites as the original position we were given was not correct but does contain a number of magnetic anomalies all unidentified as divers found they are covered in sand.. The Blue dots are where the Dragon was initially thought to be.



The following chart shows the results of the detailed magnetic survey on the most probable site. The positions of the magnetic anomalies are shown in green. The central group of four turned out to be ten cannon.

Sketch D02 - Dragon Site - *Steve Clarkson*  
Magnetic Anomalies

Solid line - Rocks exposed at low water  
Dotted line - Submerged rocks / reefs  
Green dots show areas of magnetic anomaly



## Ramillies 1760

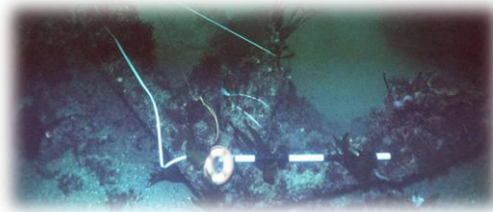


This 90 gun Man o War was a great loss to the Royal Navy, as not only was the ship itself wrecked near Bolt Tail on the South Devon coast, but only 26 of her 734 crew survived. She was an old ship and had been leaking for years with the crew well rehearsed in manning the pumps.

She had been launched in October 26, 1664, as the Katherine. She was rebuilt in 1702 and became the Royal Katherine. In 1749 she was rebuilt again and became Ramillies and by 1760 she was repaired again because she was leaking so badly that she missed the Battle of Quiberon Bay, the great triumph of the Seven Years' War. She was repaired at Plymouth this time and then, captained by Wittewronge Taylor, rejoined the Channel Squadron under Admiral Edward Boscawen. Boscawen was due to join his squadron to the Fleet in Quiberon Bay, but had twice been beaten back by bad weather. On February 6, 1760, despite warnings of bad weather he tried again. With him and his flagship Royal William, went Ramillies, Sandwich, St. George, Princess Amelia, Venus and Hawke.

The ship was heading into a south westerly gale which eventually became a hurricane and all the ships in the fleet were scattered in the English Channel. HMS Ramillies headed east for Plymouth in order to get some shelter. Eventually they saw an island which they thought was Looe Island. In fact the island was Burgh Island, and he was in Bigbury Bay, 26 miles further to the east than he thought. "He was on a lee shore, with a giant south-westerly blowing him to disaster". If he had decided to ride it out in the Bay all might have been well, but believing he was only a headland short of Plymouth Sound, he set his topsails and tried to round the Bolt.

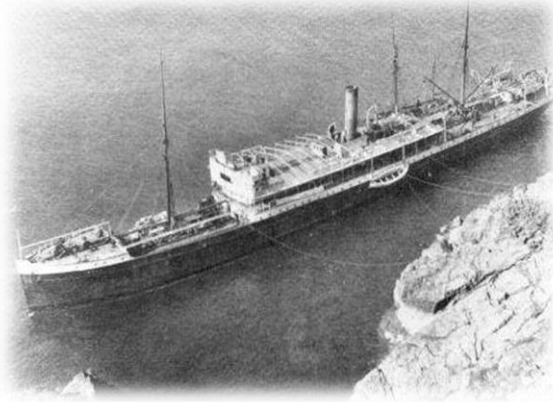
By the time Captain Taylor realised the mistake there was no room to manoeuvre so he ordered the mast to be cut down and the anchored to be deployed. Our Bigbury Bay project located the anchors, so we now know at this point the Ramillies was about half a mile south of Bolt Tail. Two of the anchor cables lay across each other gradually chaffing away, but we also know they were anchored on a reef that will have also played a part in the anchor cables eventually parting and the ship drifting into the 300 ft



cliffs.

Today her remains are scattered in a cave and although a considerable amount of salvage has been done you can still see some of her cannon. The image on the left clearly shows the cave where HMS Ramillies met her end. The underwater image above shows the only anchor that is close to her final resting place.

## Jebba 1908



Named the Albertville when she was built in 1896 by Raylton Dixon and Co at Middlesbrough for the Africa Steamship Company, this 3813 ton steamer was renamed Jebba when taken over by the Elder Dempster Line. In the early hours of March 18, 1907, in thick fog, she ran ashore near Bolt Tail, a few yards to the east of the wreck of HMS Ramillies where she finally came to rest, broadside on with her bows to the east. She was carrying ivory, rubber, palm oil, pineapples, bananas and the mail from Nigeria and the Gold Coast.

On board were 79 passengers and 76 crew. But even though the mail steamer was filling fast, there was no panic. Her distress rocket soared high above the sheer cliffs of Bolt Trail. The Hope Cove lifeboat was launched within minutes, but the rescue of the passengers came from the land. Two local fishermen climbed along the cliffs in the dark and got close enough to rig a bosun's chair, by means of which all were saved. The fishermen, Isaac Jarvis and John Argeat, were both awarded the Albert Medal for their bravery. For days afterwards the sea was too rough for boats to get alongside and start proper salvage, though most of the mail was later recovered. There was no chance of getting the Jebba off. Divers who inspected the hull reported that she was too badly rent on the rocks. Most of the cargo was saved, though some of the ivory was reported missing. A month after she was wrecked, she started to break up and by the summer was completely in pieces. The fruit washed out of her littered the beaches all around. The ship's cat, two chimpanzees and many parrots, the crew's pets, were brought off the ship safely and some of the parrots were given to local people.



The Jebba today is at 50 14.165N – 03 51.769W and the image on the left, taken by team member Sue, shows some of the brass fittings embedded in the rocks around the Jebba.



## Blesk 1896



One of the first ships in the world designed to carry benzine in bulk, this oil tanker, built in 1890, was the first tanker in the world to be wrecked – and the first to bring large scale pollution to the coast of Britain.

The Blesk, loaded with 3180 tons of petrol-oil in the special tanks forward and with her engine at the stern was 298ft long, and left the Black Sea port of Batum on November 14, 1896. She was headed for Hamburg. On December 1, the Blesk had reached the English Channel and seeing a light, Captain Adolph Deme assumed it was the Corbier lighthouse and altered his course more to the north. The idea that the light might be that of the Eddystone never crossed his mind. In fact it was. The Blesk was now on collision course with the land. At 9.08pm on December 1, in blinding rain, at ten knots, she ran into and up on the Greystone, to the east of Bolt Tail. All 43 of the crew were saved by the Hope Cove lifeboat.

By December 2, pounded by huge seas, it was clear her tanks were ruptured. The oil spread along the coast killing fish and seabirds. The oil could be smelled in Totnes, 20 miles away. At 4pm she broke in two.

She is at 50 14.019N 03 51.272W and her wreckage is spread widely on both sides of the Greystone in less than 10m. Though there is iron plate amid the kelped gullies which run out to sea from the Greystone, the major part of the wreckage is under sand on the eastern side. This cover is often removed by storms and then her keel, propshaft and engine parts are exposed.

## Deventia 1929



On 12th of February 1929 the 800 ton steamship Deventia, was carrying a shipment of soda from Fleetwood to the Port of London when she got caught out in an east-south-east gale.



The image on the right taken by team member Paul, shows a diver investigating the seabed around the wreck of the Deventia which mostly lay beneath the sand.



## Jane Rowe 1014

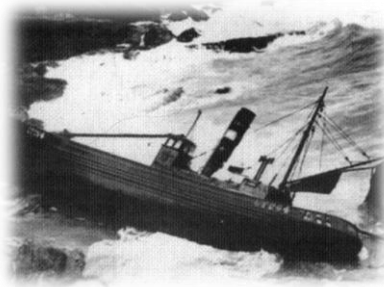
This 1259 ton Swedish steamer, whose home port was Gefle, set out from Cardiff with a cargo of coal on January 27, 1914, and delivered this to Oran on February 4. She was in Oran for a fortnight before sailing for Rotterdam on February 18 with her holds filled with iron ore. In dense fog on February 28, she went ashore at exactly 10.29am and sat on an even keel on a sandbank among rocks near Soar Mill Cove and under Bolberry Down. She looked as though she would float off easily but though first one tug tried and then the Kingsbridge Packet had a go, she stayed stuck. By the next day there were five tugs pulling at her without success. Then it was too late.



At 10.30am on March 1 all the crew were taken off by breeches buoy as the Jane Rowe was pushed further in onto the rocks as the tide rose. Soon she was broadside on, with the seas breaking over her. Within a short time all four of her holds and the engine room were pierced. She was soon a total wreck. A good mark for the totally broken wreckage is the boiler of the Lowestoft steam-drifter Charter, which came ashore close by in 1933

The image above taken by Steve, clearly shows the boilers of the Jane Rowe half buried in the sand. As with the Dragon the sand had reduced in the winter storms of 2013 revealing the wrecks along this coast.

## Charter 1933



This Lowestoft wooden steam drifter of 96 tons was wrecked at 50 13.507N 03 50.094W, on January 7, 1933, when fishing out of Plymouth. She went ashore at Cathole Cliff just west of Soar Mill Cove in the afternoon. She was undamaged, despite a fresh wind and ground swell, until the tide went out, when she fell over on to her side. Despite the efforts of the ten-man crew, who tried to save her on the next tide, she was found to be too badly damaged to sail again. The wreck is in very small pieces in less than 10m. Her boiler marks the site.

The date of her wrecking was exactly one year after she had been forced to put back into Plymouth with two other steam drifters, after running into a massive westerly gale. Three of the crew had to be taken to hospital with head injuries. In this incident the Charter had lost all her nets, having to cut them away. Her steel remains lay close to the site of the **Dragon**, making the use of a magnetometer to locate cannon difficult.

## Westmoreland 1871

### (Another West Indiaman of the same era as the Dragon)



Just to the west side of Soar Mill Cove and about half a mile to the west of the Hamstone, lie the remains of the Westmoreland, a barque of 450 tons. This is another West Indiaman trading the same route as the **Dragon** and in fact was a very similar ship. The image to the left is a painting of a similar ship. The Westmoreland ran ashore on the foggy night of July 14, 1871 while carrying a cargo of rum and sugar from Jamaica. Though the crew of 17 got ashore safely, the ship became a total wreck. The wreckage is usually covered by several metres of sand

## Halloween 1887

### (Sister ship to the Black Adder both owned by Jon Willis of London, as was the "Cutty Sark")

She was a Tea clipper bringing 1600 tons of tea from China to London. Her sister ship is the Black Adder was wrecked off Bahia in Brazil years later in 1905.

On January 17, 1887, the iron fully-rigged tea clipper "Halloween" was fighting a south-easterly gale on her way to London from Foochow with 1600 tons of tea in her holds. She was an exceptionally fast ship and carried a mainyard 78ft long which in turn supported an significantly large mainsail. On her maiden voyage to Sydney she took only 69 days, and she held the Shanghai to London record with an amazing 89 days, which made her one of the fastest ships afloat.



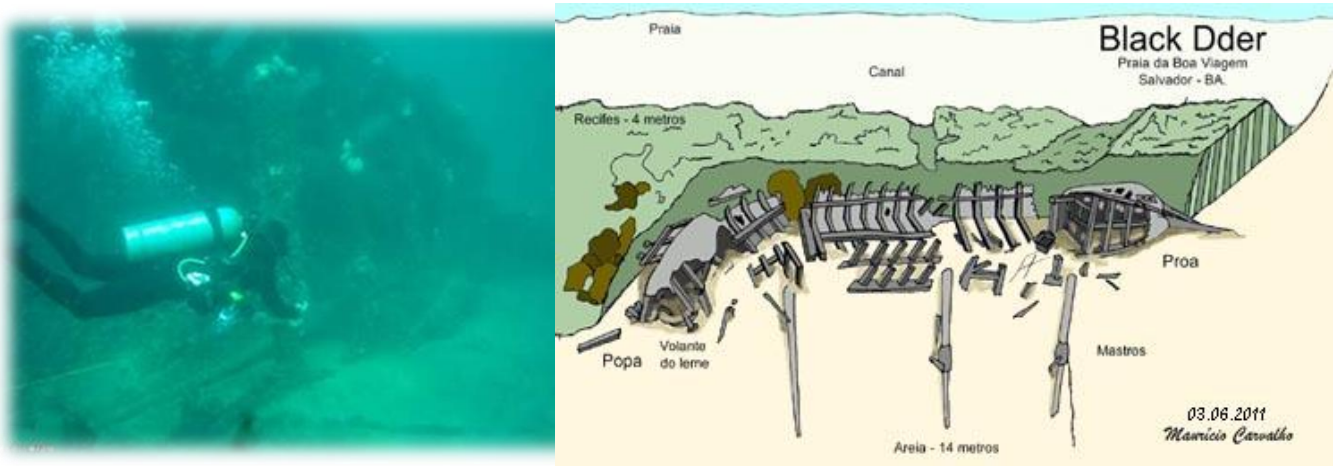
But on this voyage no records were to come her way. Bad weather had dogged Captain Dawton from the moment he left China on August 13. It had taken her 155 days before she sighted the Eddystone Light and now in the dark she was unwittingly running straight in towards the land. Huge seas, wind and rain blotted out everything, and at 7.30pm she shot inside the Ham Stone and crunched into the rocks of Soar Mill Cove. During that night three men tried to swim ashore with a line. One drowned and the other two lost the line, but did manage to reach the shore and climb the cliffs to Southdown farm. The Hope Cove lifeboat was launched. It was now 8.30am. It was 10am before they reached the wreck and took off 19 men, more dead than alive, clinging frozen to the masts and rigging. Within three days the ship was broken by squalls and her cargo was piled 12ft high on the beach.. A "conman" came down from London and contracted with farmers to cart the damaged



tea to Kingsbridge where it was put on a train for London. The tea and the man disappeared and no one was ever paid for their trouble!

Today the ribs of the Halloween and some of her plates, well-rusted, are to be found about 100m off the western end of the Cove, amid kelp in 11m. in position 50:13.340N 003:49.763W  
We have been in touch with a diver in Brazil, Daniel Gusmão of Federal University of Sergipe, who is carrying out an archaeological survey on the sister ship of the Halloween that was lost on the South Brazilian coast. It would appear that there is a lot more remaining of the Tea Clipper Black Adder than the Halloween.

The following show the skeleton of the Black Adder and a sketch of her remains in 15m of water.



## Volere 1881



This three masted 464 ton barque formally “Aproevate” was carrying 330 tons of marble from Genoa in Italy to London when she encountered a storm. Image shows marble being recovered from wreck. These marble blocks weighed six tons and fourteen tons, each in her holds with an additional cargo of walnut timber on her decks. She was driven into Soar Mill Cove by a south-westerly gale on March 6, 1881.

The Captain of the Volere, his wife and one seaman were drowned, but nine were saved. Some of the marble was salvaged by hard hat divers in the 1920s, and more was raised in 1939. The divers drilled holes in the blocks, then used the tidal lift method to bring the blocks ashore. It could not have been easy, for 200 tons can still be found scattered in 7 to 18m of water at the foot of the cliffs, just to the east of the Cove



## Cantabria 1932



This 1803 ton Spanish steamer was bound for Newcastle from Bilbao with a cargo of iron ore on December 13, 1932, when she ran ashore before dawn in thick fog in Steeple Cove on the Bolt. Her 24 man crew abandoned ship and reached the shore, but were then no better off because their landing place was under steep cliffs. The coastguard rocket team got a line to them from above because of the overhang. The Salcombe lifeboat eventually found the 263ft steamer despite the fog and then, in a big ground swell, ran a shuttle service from lifeboat to shore with a small boat they had

found on the Spanish steamer. All the crew were finally landed at Salcombe.

Today, the Cantabria is completely broken at 50 12 54; 03 48 57, but her boilers stand upright and divers can peer into them from the top. Steeple Cove has a pretty seabed with coloured growths in under 10m. The main debris is at the western end, just to the right of two rocky pinnacles on the shore. Lobsters hide under the plating. The wreckage of the ship, which was formerly the British steamer, Hornsey, is scattered widely, but her anchor and winch can be easily spotted. Her iron propellor is there too, but extremely difficult to spot amid the growth. Steeple Cove is easily identified by the unmanned Coastguard hut high on the cliffs on the eastern side.

The image below shows the remains of the Cantabria buried in the sand.

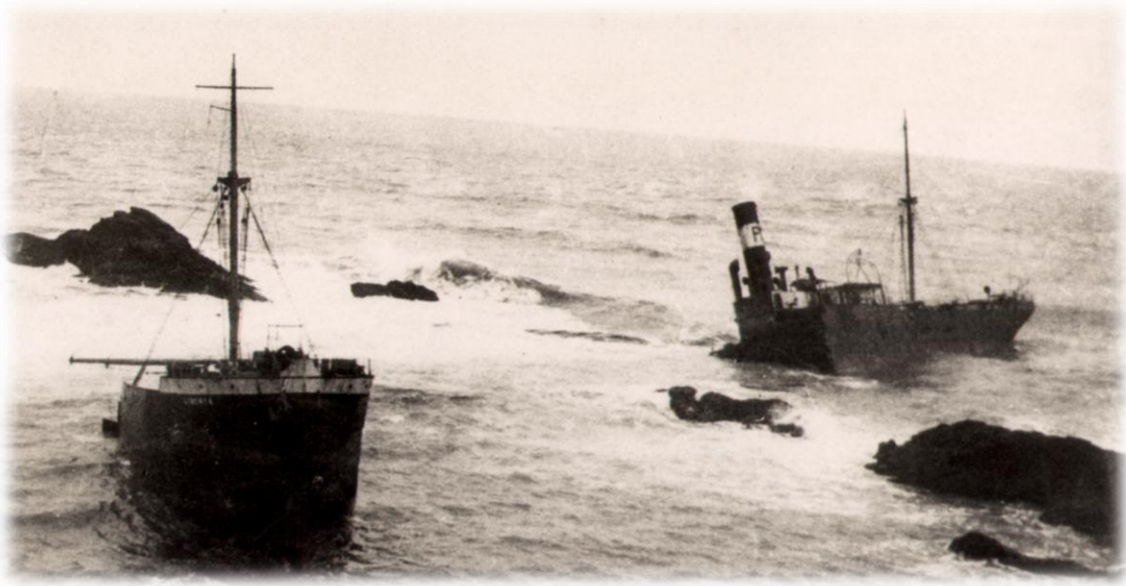


## Amelie Suzanne 1992



During the foggy night of March 31-April 1, 1972, this Belgian MFV went on the rocks at the eastern point of Off Cove. Following a distress May-Day, the crew of five was rescued by Salcombe lifeboat. Soon after, the fishing vessel slipped deeper. There she is today at 50 12 46; 03 47 53 in less than 10m and very broken indeed.

## Liberta 1926



An Italian steamer of 4073 tons, which went on to the Mewstones under Bolt Head on February 15, 1926, in the strange combination of fog and a gale, which whipped up tremendous seas. Both Hope Cove lifeboat and the one from Torbay got close to her, but both cox'ns agreed that it would be suicidal to go in among the rocks in the darkness and thick weather and they waited for dawn. Even then it was impossible to get alongside, so a line-throwing gun was used to make contact. Three Italians were saved by this. The remaining 30 were hauled up by breeches buoy once the Hope Cove rocket apparatus was set up on the cliffs above. When the tide went down the Liberta's bow was poised on a rock out of the water. Soon afterwards she broke in two.

The 376ft long steamer, which had a beam of 48ft, was on her way from La Spezia to Rotterdam in ballast. She had been built by Barclay Curle of Glasgow in 1900 as the Vermont. Her boilers are there today, as is a deal of iron plating, in very shallow water and many gullies. This is a dive only to be undertaken on days of complete calm as the flow of sea between the Mewstones and Bolt Head can produce violent currents at other times.



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## SHIPBUILDING IN NEW ENGLAND

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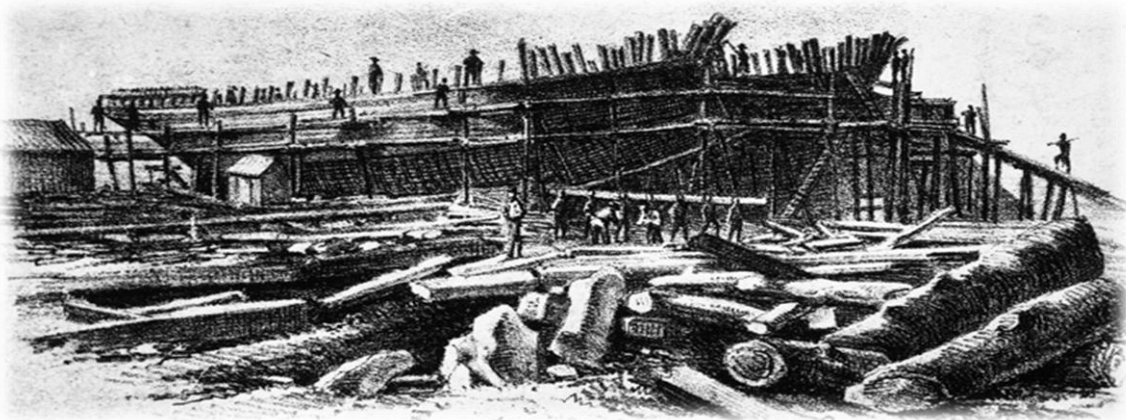
The Dragon was built in Philadelphia during a time when there was a significant expansion of the shipbuilding industry in New England. Not only did the English colonial merchants have the money to invest, there was also an abundance of raw material for building wooden ships with white oak being the most common. The image on the right is a section of wood recovered from the wreck of the Dragon for the purpose of identifying its date and origin.



This expansion was accelerated by the fact that the English had lost many merchant ships during King Williams's war (1687–1689) as well as Queen Anne's war (1702-1713) and the Navy was hiring merchant vessels to compensate for this lack of naval ships. The cost of shipbuilding in England had also increased compared to that in the colonies so the English merchants turned to the colonies to get their ships built, even though they had a reputation of building inferior ships often using unseasoned wood. The view of the Royal Navy was that these ships built in New England would only have a life of four to five years. By the early 1700's almost a third of the "West Indiaman" had been built in New England.

The Navy was building bigger ships, using approximately 4000 mature oak trees to build one ship thus depleting the forests in England. The first types of timber to run out would have been large, straight trees used for masts and naturally curved pieces, or compass timber, for frames and knees. As England's native forests were depleted, the timber trade with the Baltic and the American colonies took on increasing importance. Other, less frequently used types of shipbuilding timber, such as pine, maple, beech, birch, hickory, ash, and cypress, were also plentiful in New England.

The typical shipyard in colonial America consisted of a small plot of flat land located near the water. Most yards were located in areas close to cities where the additional craftsmen needed to work on a vessel could be hired. The yard would have been basic, perhaps with only a building for tools or just a wharf on the river. A shipwright needed only his tools and timber to begin construction. Shipwrights were paid by the day or for a specific piece of work whilst the yard master would have been sourcing all the materials needed, supervising the construction and dealing with the ship owner. Typically approximately six shipwrights would be working on each ship.



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## JAMAICA, THE RUM & SUGAR TRADE

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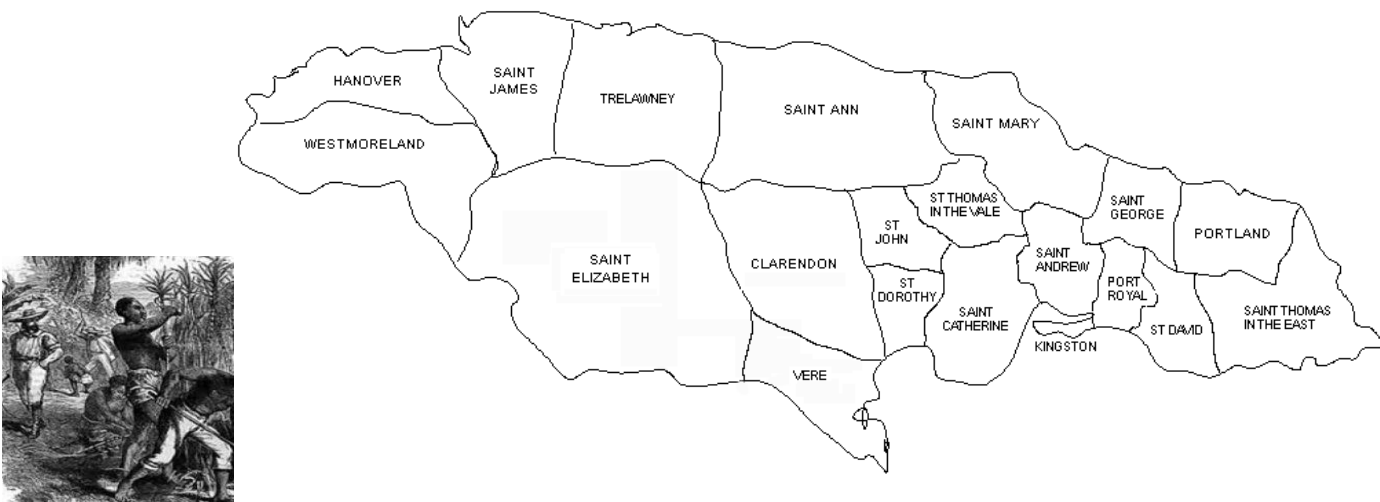
The first inhabitants of Jamaica, which is the third largest island, are believed to be the Arawaks, also called Tainos. They came from South America 2,500 years ago and named the island Xaymaca, which meant “land of wood and water”. The Arawaks were a mild and simple people by nature. Physically, they were light brown in colour, short and well-shaped with coarse, black hair. Their faces were broad and their noses flat. They grew cassava, sweet potatoes, maize (corn), fruits, vegetables, cotton and tobacco. Tobacco was grown on a large scale as smoking was their most popular pastime. They built their villages all over the island but most of them settled on the coasts and near rivers as they fished to get food. Fish was also a major part of their diet. Later sugar cane became the crop of choice which was also turned into rum. During the period the Dragon was carrying goods, the main export was sugar, rum and hardwood.

The Arawaks led a peaceful life until they were invaded by the Spaniards some years after Christopher Columbus discovered the island on 5<sup>th</sup> May 1494. The Spanish invaders tortured and killed the local inhabitants and stole their land.

Columbus himself was stranded on Jamaica from 1503 to 1504 during his fourth voyage. The Spanish settled in Jamaica in 1509 and held the island against French privateer raids from their main city, now called Spanish Town. This was the capital of Jamaica from its founding in 1534 until 1872 when Kingston became the capital.

In 1655, Jamaica was conquered by the English, although the Spanish did not relinquish their claim to the island until 1670.

The following image is a map of the Jamaica parishes around the time when the island was visited by the Dragon.



Many slaves arrived in Jamaica via the Atlantic slave trade, shown below. During the early seventeenth century, the first enslaved Africans also arrived in North America. By the early nineteenth century, people of African descent greatly outnumbered ethnic Europeans. Due to the harshness of the conditions, there were many racial tensions and Jamaica had one of the highest number of slave uprisings of any Caribbean island.



After the British Crown abolished slavery in 1833, the Jamaicans began working toward independence. The British ruled the island from 1655 until 1962 when they gained independence

Jamaica became a base of operations for privateers, including Christopher Myngs, Edward Mansvelt, and most famously, Henry Morgan, operating from the main English settlement Port Royal. In return these privateers and bunch of renegades stopped the other colonial powers from attacking the island. Following the destruction of Port Royal in the great earthquake of 1692, refugees settled across the bay in Kingston. By 1716 it had become the biggest town in Jamaica and was designated the capital city in 1872. Until slavery was abolished by Parliament in 1833, the island sugar plantations were highly dependent on slave labour, based on Africans who initially were captured, kidnapped, and sold into slavery from peoples of Europe and Central Africa. By the eighteenth century, sugarcane became the most important export of the island.



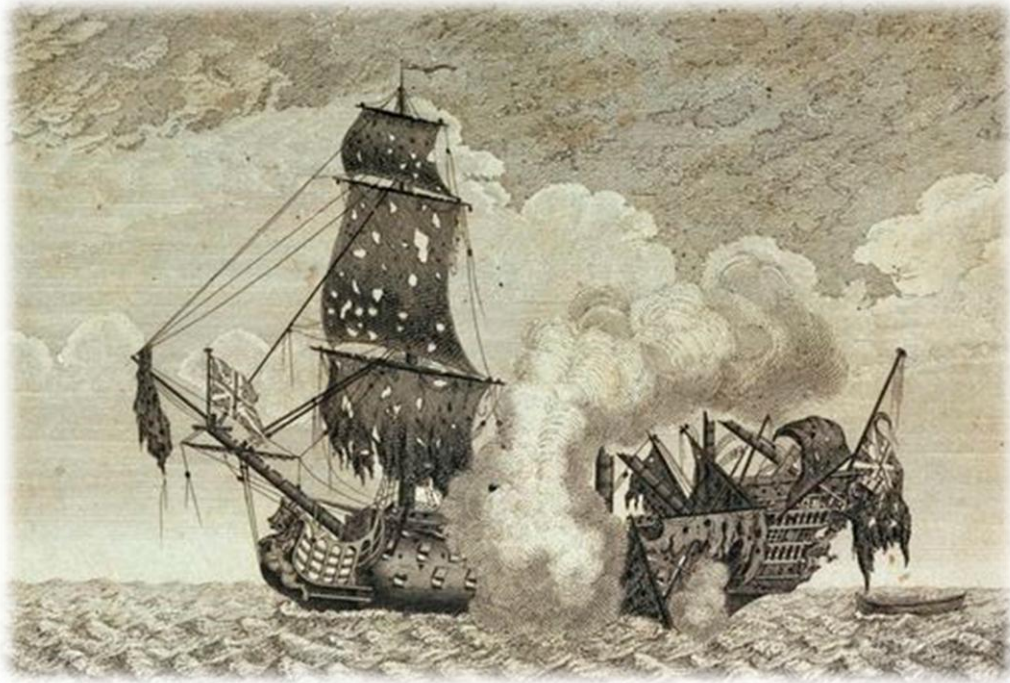
Henry Morgan

With the English came a period of expanding prosperous sugarcane plantations as well as piracy. Slaves were imported from Africa to work the plantations of wealthy Englishmen, many of whom lived in England lavishly spending their Jamaican profits. Investment and further settlement hastened as profits began to accrue from cocoa, coffee and sugarcane production

Although the pirates had had their day, the English continued to prosper from Jamaica's agriculture. Slave rebellions didn't make life any easier for the English, as the Maroons, escaped slaves, engaged in ambush-style campaigns and constantly fought the British.

In 1756, the seven year war had started so the British were protecting their trade with Jamaica using a Royal Navy fleet. This is probably why the "Dragon" got its "Letter of Marque" in 1756, allowing it to arm, giving it Government approval to capture and sell French and Spanish ships.

This Royal Navy fleet had 16 ships, commanded by Rear Admiral of the Red Thomas Cotes. The Naval ships ranged from frigates of 20 guns to the 90 guns man o war HMS Marlborough.



Painting of HMS Marlborough after the Battle of Toulon (1744)

## Royal Navy Squadron at Jamaica 1757

Rear Admiral of the Red, Thomas Cotes

HMS Marlborough 90 guns (Reduced to 68 guns in 1752)

HMS Edinburgh 64 guns

HMS Augusta 60 guns

HMS Dreadnought 60 guns

HMS Princess Mary 60 guns

HMS Assistance 50 guns

HMS Greenwich 50 guns

HMS Lynx

HMS Sphynx 20 guns

HMS Squirrel 20 guns

HMS Wager 20guns

HMS Lively 20 guns

HMS Rye 20 guns

HMS Shoreham 20 guns

HMS Shoreham, HMS Rye and HMS Sphynx were involved in escorting a convoy of 104 ships from Jamaica to various ports in the UK during the same period the Dragon made the journey.



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**PRIVATEERS & PIRACY**


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The scale and impact of privateering during the eighteenth century was significant, involving nearly 7,000 privateering ships dispatched from Britain alone in the period 1702-1783.

Privateers were very much part of Naval Warfare in the 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> centuries. A privateer or "corsair" was a private person or ship authorised by a government by "Letters of Marque" "to attack foreign vessels during wartime. Privateering was used in using armed ships and sailors without having to spend treasury money or Naval ships and crew. They were necessary in order to boost the Navy in helping protect the colonies and seas around the UK and meant the Navy did not have to deploy less ships to protect the trade route from marauding pirates and enemy navies who were disrupting commerce and also pressured the enemy to deploy

warships to protect merchant trade against commerce raiders. The cost was borne by the private ship owner who saw the opportunity for investment, profiting from prize money earned from captured cargo and ships. The proceeds would be distributed among the privateer's investors, officers, and crew. The downside was that any captured crew could be considered part of the Navy.

The difference between the Privateers and pirates was that the pirates had not been authorised by any government. This meant the sponsors could keep all the monies gained with none going to the governments.

Some of the famous privateers and pirates who followed in Henry Morgan's and Blackbeard's footsteps around during the Dragon's life were:

Christopher Condent , Plymouth 1690 -1770  
 Anne Bonne, pirate born Ireland 1700 - 1782  
 Lars Gathenhielm, Swedish, 1710–1718  
 Ingela Gathenhielm, Swedish, 1710/18–1721  
 Fortunatus Wright, English of Liverpool, 1712–1757  
 David Hawley, colonial United States, 1741–1807  
 Jonathan Haraden, colonial United States, 1744–1803  
 William Death, English, 1756  
 Alexander Godfrey, colonial Nova Scotia, 1756–1803

Anne Bonne



Anne Bonne's husband was pirate "Calico Jack". Earlier than our story, on November 20, 1720, Calico Jack and his crew was hanged on an island called Deadman's Cay near Port Royal, Jamaica.

During the "Golden Age of Piracy" in the late 17<sup>th</sup> and early 18<sup>th</sup> centuries, Port Royal, Jamaica stood as one of the most popular ports of call for thieves, prostitutes and pirates of every stripe. The small harbor's association with marauding began in the mid-1600s, when Jamaica's governors offered it up as a safe haven for pirates in exchange for protection from the Spanish. The buccaneers accepted the deal, and the town soon became a major base for British and French privateers. Ship captains were commissioned by the Crown to disrupt Spanish shipping in the Caribbean and British coastline.

Port Royal prospered on the back of its pirate economy, and by the 1660s its streets were lined with taverns and brothels eager to cater to the whims of young buccaneers flush with Spanish loot. There



are historic accounts of a seamy harbour overrun with gambling, prostitution and drink, where hard-living mariners often squandered thousands of Spanish reals in a single night. Even after privateering had ended, the so-called “wickedest city on Earth” continued to serve as a retreat for a new brand of lawless, freelance pirates. But when these raiders began indiscriminately plundering shipping traffic in the Caribbean, Port Royal’s colonial authorities were finally stirred into action. By 1720, the town had begun to clean up its act and its “Gallows Point” became a notorious site for pirate hangings. Among countless others, buccaneers like the ruthless Charles Vane and the flamboyant “Calico” Jack Rackham would eventually meet their end in Port Royal. By the mid 1700’s piracy and privateering was in the decline having had its heyday in the late 1600’s to the early 1700’s.

Privateers were part of naval warfare from the 16th to the 19th centuries. The vessels would be commissioned into regular service as warships.

Historically, the distinction between a privateer and a pirate has been, practically speaking, vague, often depending on the source as to which label was correct in a particular circumstance. The actual work of a pirate and a privateer is generally the same (raiding and plundering ships); it is, therefore, the authorisation and perceived legality of the actions that form the distinction. At various times, governments indiscriminately granted authorisation for privateering to a variety of ships, so much so that would-be pirates could easily operate under a veil of legitimacy.

The era of piracy in the Caribbean began in the 16th century and died out in the 1830s, after the navies of the nations of Western Europe and North America with colonies in the Caribbean began combating pirates. The period during which pirates were most successful was from the 1660s to 1730s. Piracy flourished in the Caribbean because of the existence of pirate seaports such as Port Royal in Jamaica, Tortuga in Haiti, and Nassau in the Bahamas.

During the mid 1700’s when the Dragon was journeying between London and Jamaica, it was an equally dangerous time as the Seven Years' War took place between 1754 and 1763 with the main conflict being in the seven-year period 1756–1763. It involved most of the great powers of the time and the English merchant ships had to very careful in the English channel as there were many French Privateers operating.

This all led the Royal Navy providing escort ships between Jamaica and the UK and a Royal Navy Squadron was base in Jamaica.

The image on the left shows the fleet in Port Royal,



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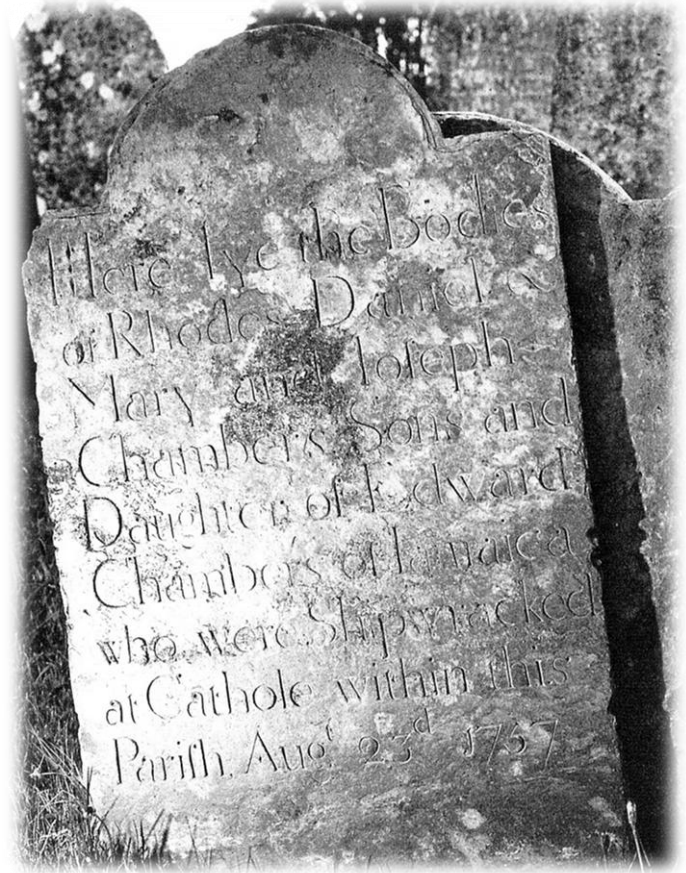
**WHAT DO WE KNOW ABOUT THE DRAGON?**

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The first thing we know about the Dragon is a grave in the Malborough church with the names of children drowned when she sank. The following is engraved on the gravestone:

*“Here lye the bodies of  
Rhodes, Daniel  
Mary and Joseph  
Chambers. Sons and  
daughters of Edward  
Chambers of Jamaica  
who were shipwrecked  
at Cathole within this  
Parish – August 23rd 1757”*

*Note Rhodes Daniel is actually the same  
person*



On board were the children father, Col Edward Chambers with his sister and cousin. We believe his sister and cousin died during the wrecking. Reports suggest the 9 people died in total but only the children are buried in the churchyard. It is possible the bodies were never recovered, buried on the beach or in the graveyard with no headstone..

We believe Col. Edward Chambers owned a plantation in the North West of the island and went back to manage his sugar cane estate and also remarried. He died leaving a lot of debt due the sugar prices reducing.

Reports show that there were 10 to 12 survivors from the wrecking of the Dragon, most of these being crew. We don't know how many crews were on board for this last trip but she normally had 13 or 14 crew. This suggests the ship had 20/21 people on board.

The Dragon was a privately owned merchantman and was built in New England in 1748. She was registered in London and owned by Robert Pott Co. and appears to have spent most of her life trading between London and Port Royal in Jamaica. When the seven year war started she obtained a “Letter of Marque” giving her Government approval to capture French and Spanish ships. This was also sometime given to merchant ships carrying mail.

The Dragon was a three masted square rigged ship of 196 tons and is recorded as carrying a crew of 14 although on one voyage the number is recorded as 3 on arrival in Port Royal. She must have been attacked or suffered some fatal illness. When she got her Letter of Marque in 1756 she upgraded from 2 guns to 4 guns and 3 swivel guns. This must have been increased as records show she had 10 guns in 1757. This ties up with the number of guns found on the wrecksite.

Captain Gleast had captained her since at least early in 1755 when she is recorded as visiting Port Royal in Jamaica delivering dry goods and caskets. She would then return to London with sugar, rum and wood. It was on such a journey she was making when she was wrecked in August 1757 and we know she left Port Royal on 18<sup>th</sup> January 1757.

Details of the “Dragon” from Jamaican Shipping List

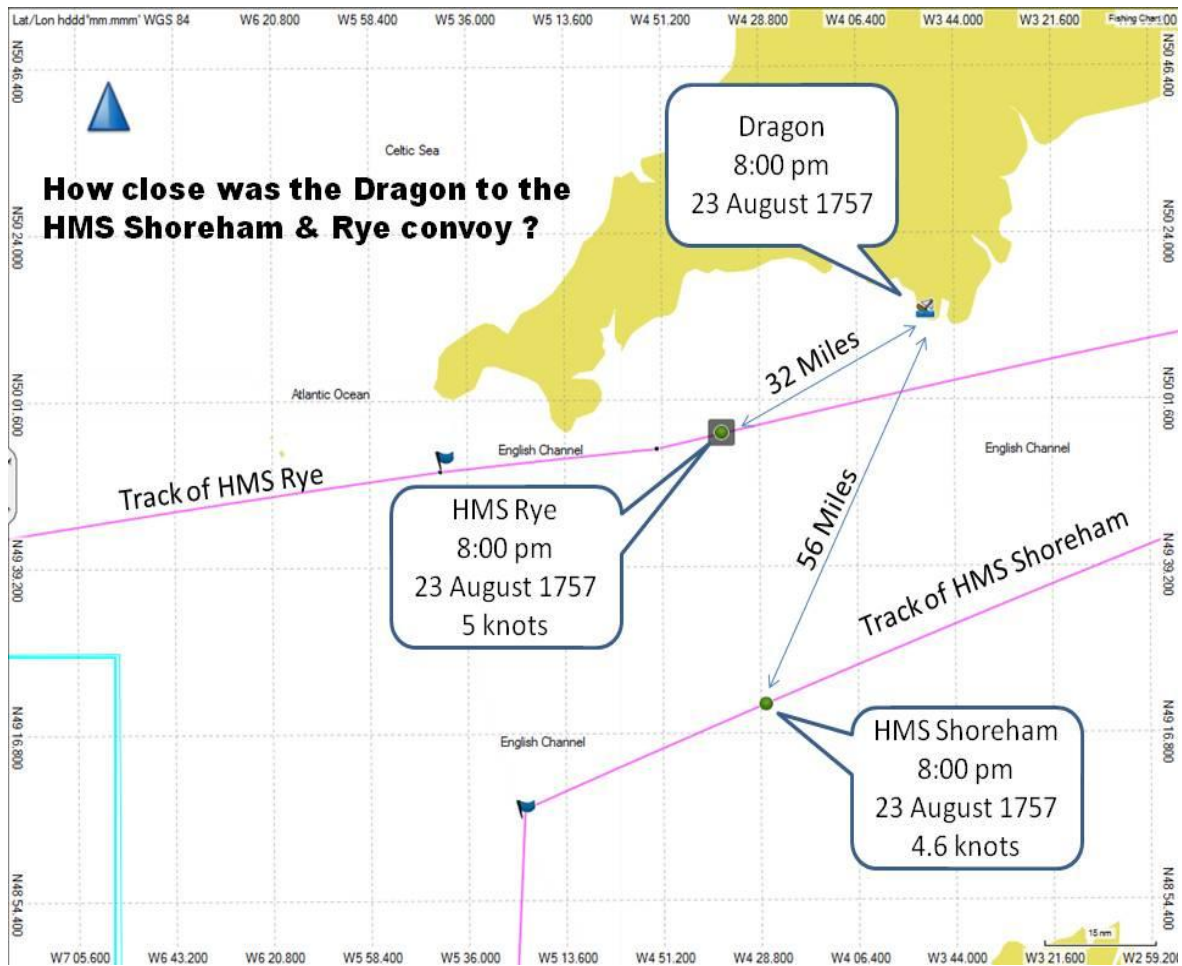
<i>Port</i>	<i>Cargo</i>	<i>Ship Type</i>	<i>Displacement</i>	<i>Guns</i>	<i>Crew</i>
<b>Outbound Port Royal Feb 3<sup>rd</sup> 1753</b>	<b>Sugar, Rum &amp; hardwood</b>				
<b>Inward Port Royal Dec 10<sup>th</sup> 1753</b>	<b>Dry good , bricks &amp; caskets of corckets</b>			<b>2 guns</b>	<b>14 crew</b>
<b>Outbound 10<sup>th</sup> Dec 1753</b>	<b>Sugar, rum &amp; hardwood</b>			<b>2 guns</b>	<b>14 crew</b>
<b>Inbound Port Royal Feb 3<sup>rd</sup> 1755 Capt Gleast</b>	<b>Dry good &amp; caskets of corckets</b>	<b>Square rigged</b>	<b>196 tons</b>	<b>10 guns</b>	<b>8 crew</b>
<b>Outbound port Royal Feb 3<sup>rd</sup> 1755 Capt Gleast</b>	<b>Sugar, Rum and hardwood</b>			<b>?</b>	<b>14 crew</b>
<b>1956</b>	<b>Only 3 merchant vessels left Port Royal but no Dragon</b>				
<b>Inbound Port Royal Jan 18<sup>th</sup> 1757 Capt Gleast</b>	<b>Dry goods</b>			<b>?</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>Outbound Port Royal Jan 18<sup>th</sup> 1757 Capt Gleast</b>	<b>Sugar &amp; rum</b>			<b>?</b>	<b>13 crew</b>

We know the ship itself was built in New England with one report identifying its place of build being Phillidelphia.

Three of these ships, the Naval frigates, HMS Shoreham, HMS Rye, and HMS Sphinx, were assigned to escorting over 100 ships from Jamaica on 1<sup>st</sup> July 1775. They were 20 gun sixth rate frigates and two of them were feeling their age, being launched in the mid 1690's. As the convoy reached the English coast, some of the ships split off for their destination ports of Bristol and Liverpool.

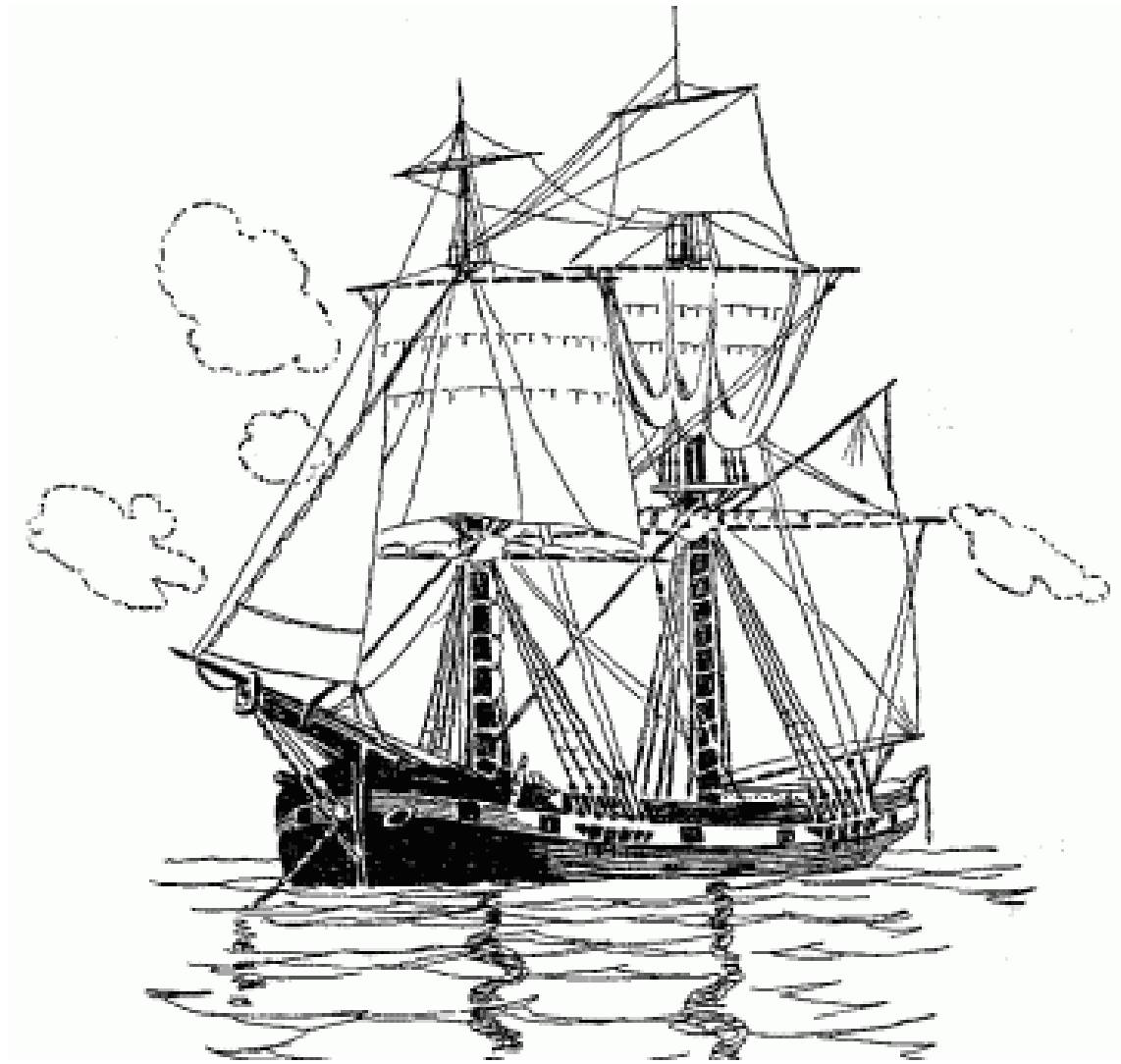
The "Dragon" and HMS Shoreham both entered the channel at the same time in August 1757, although we cannot be absolutely certain that she was part of the convoy. There was also a French pirate ship in the area at the time and it is possible the Dragon was being chased and separated from the convoy.

The following chart has been created from the logs of HMS Shoreham & HMS Rye in order to establish their position relative to the Dragon at the time of wrecking. The blue flags are the log coordinates and the green dots are the dead reckoning positions at 8:00pm on the 23 August 1757 when the Dragon hit the rocks.





The Dragon probably looked similar to this New England built ship of the mid 1700's . You can clearly see the 5 gun ports which is what the Dragon probably had. Image Courtesy of gutenber.org



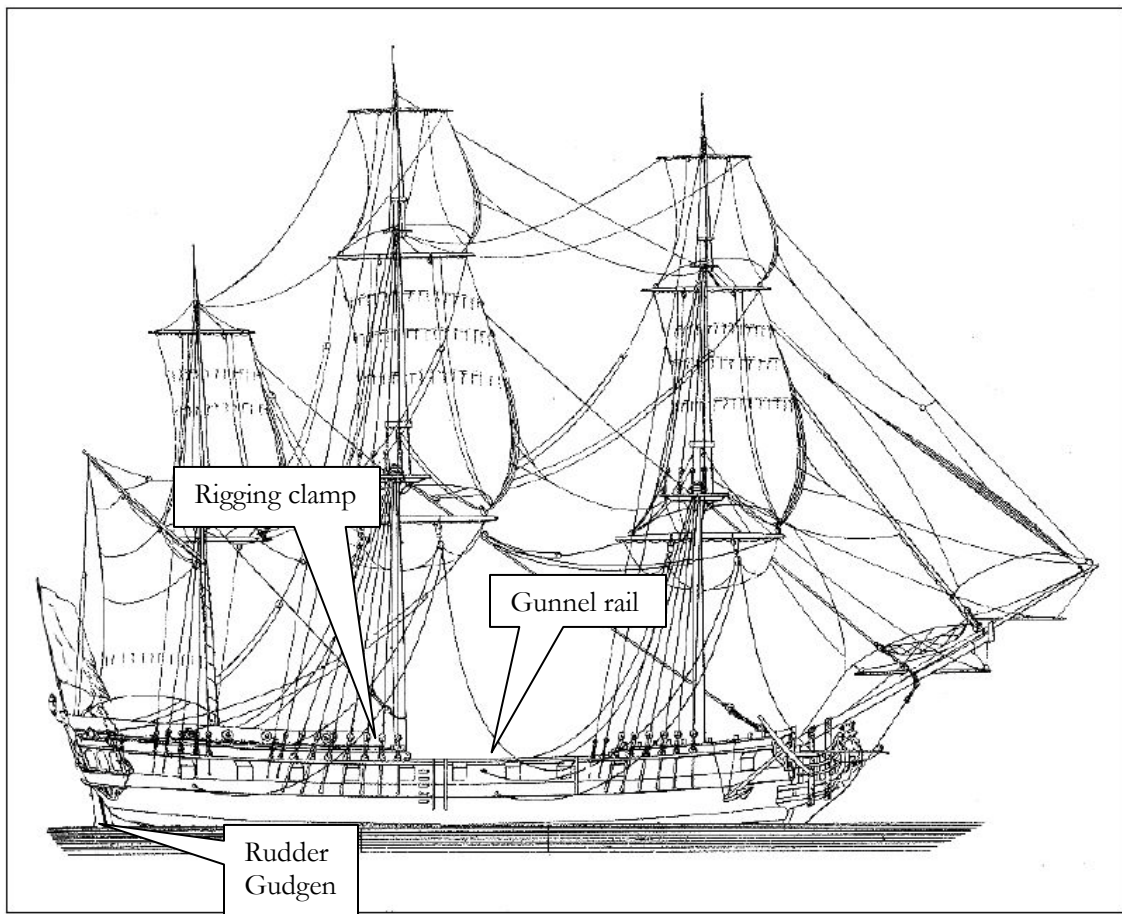
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**ARTEFACTS**

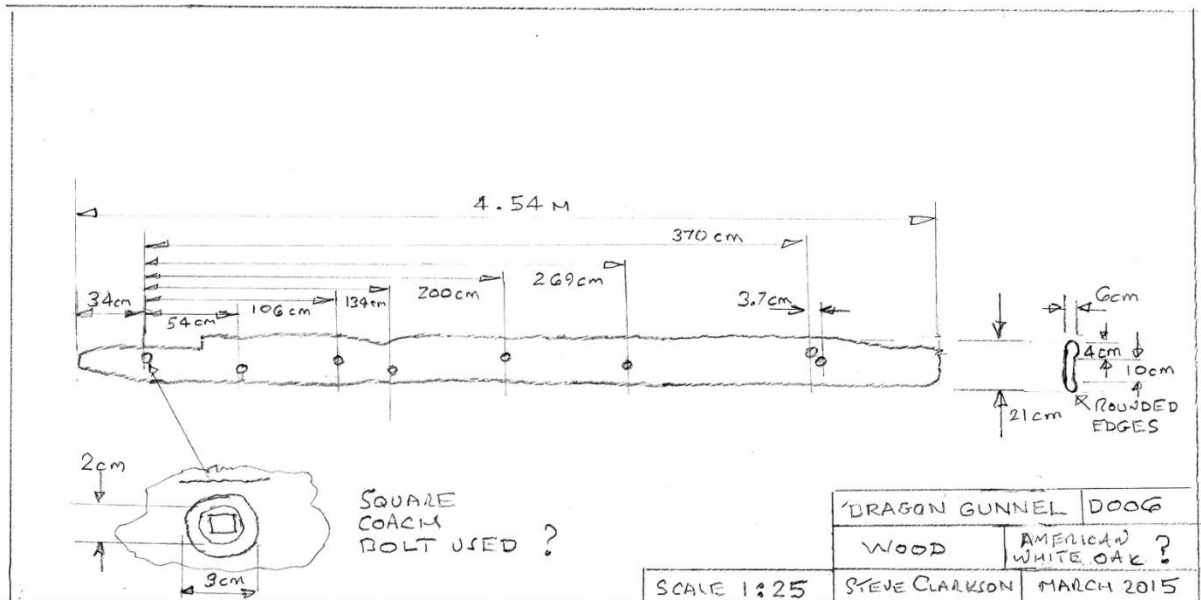
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The wreck site consists of ten cannon, rigging parts, a broken Anchor and various sections of wood.

The following ships plans shows where the artefacts may have been located. These have been removed from the wreck to help identification. The recovered artefacts have been reported to the Receiver of Wrecks on a DROIT form. All the other artefacts on the site including the cannon have been left in situ

**Location of the artefacts on a sailing ship.**

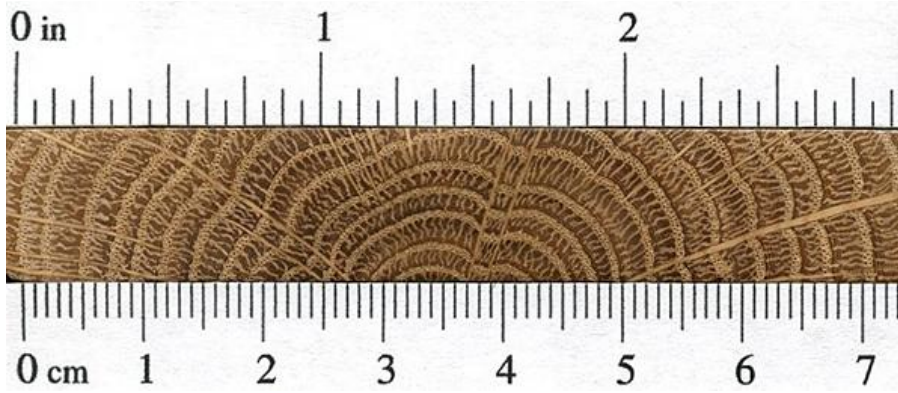
The following photograph is of the 5m long piece of wood, probably the gunnel rail, which will be identified and dendro dated.



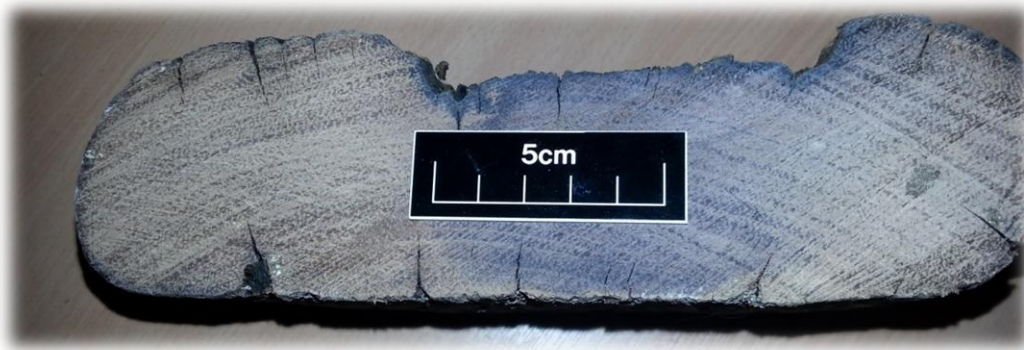
See other photos of the wooden gunnel rail. If this is the Dragon which was built in Philadelphia, the hull and structure would most likely have been built from "American White Oak". The wood has

been sent away for dating but you will see from the photos below that the piece of wood found could well be made from the white oak .

Section through a piece of American White Oak



Section through the piece of wood found



Detail of piece of wood found when cleaned in water (Very similar to American white oak)





The following is a photo of the musket and pistol shot found on the wreck site. They will have been for the guns similar to those shown on the right



The following image is of a piece of steel rigging, probably part of a steel shroud with a clamp at the end.





Bits of lead sheet were also found on the wreck.



The ten cannon have been left in situ and are all around 2m long. The following photos show how some of them have been eroded due to contact with the surrounding rocks.

Cannon number 4 worn halfway through





The cascabel of a cannon







Above shows part probably part of a broken anchor

Below – Cannon sat on sand





This Bar Shot found will be related to the ships use as a Privateer.

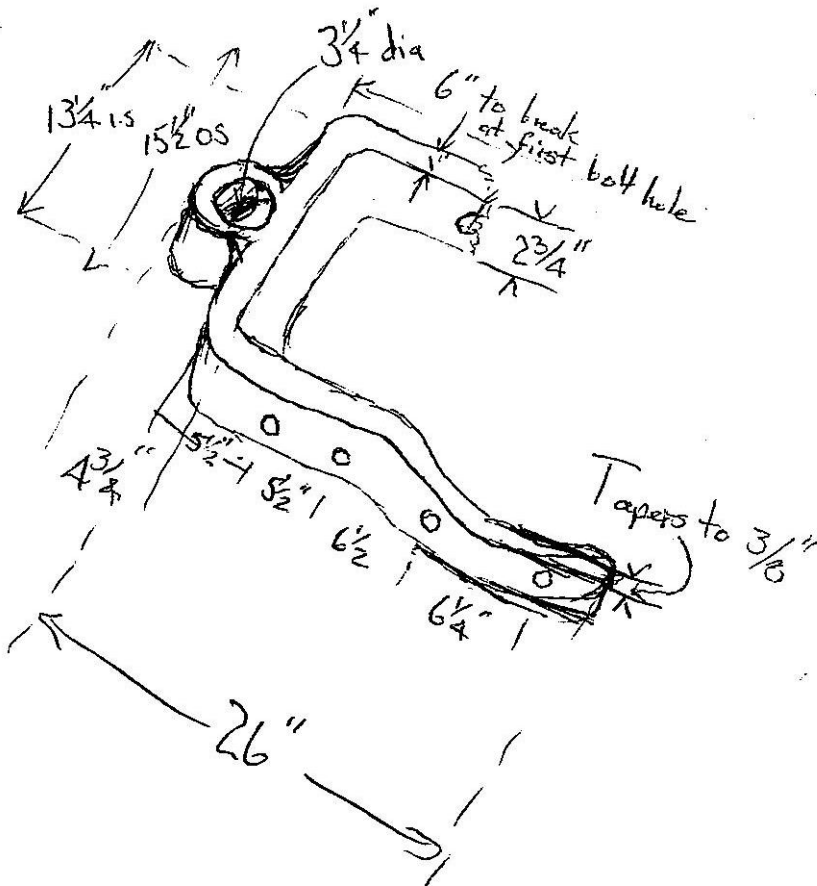


Bar shot was similar to chain shot except a metal bar attached the shot at each end. The bar was one to two feet long. A type of this was referred to as a sliding shot. The connecting bar was actually two bars which, upon firing, would slide over each other by connecting grommets that expanded the distance between shot as well as its destructive force. All forms of bar shot were called angel shot for its appearance in flight to deliver a not so angelic impact.



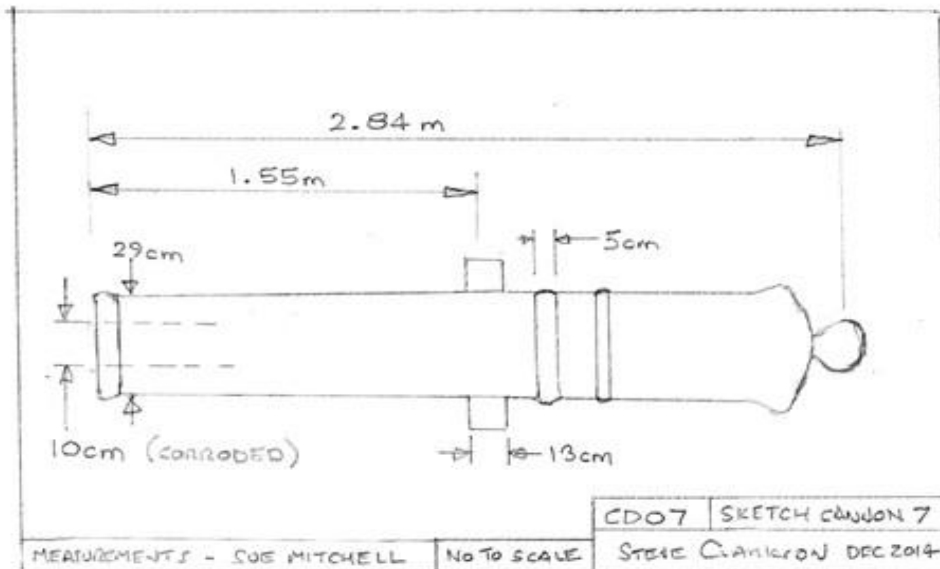
Bronze / brass pin probably from the rudder hinge.

The photo and sketch below show , what is probable the Gunden of the rudder



Detail measurement of the cannon found

<b>Cannon 1</b>	<b>Under sand</b>	
<b>Cannon 2</b>		<b>Length 2.2 m</b>
<b>Cannon 3</b>	<b>vertical 45 deg.</b>	<b>Circumference above trunion 96.5 cm Across Trunions 47 cm Bore Diameter 8 cm Muzzle to Trunion 1.22 m</b>
<b>Cannon 4</b>		
<b>Cannon 5</b>		
<b>Cannon 6</b>		
<b>Cannon 7</b>		<b>Length muzzle to cascabel 2.84 m Eroded bore 10 cm Muzzle to trunion 1.55m</b>
<b>Cannon 8</b>		
<b>Cannon 9</b>		<b>Length 2.2 m Muzzle circumference 77 cm Diameter of muzzle 25 cm Bore 7 - 8 cm</b>
<b>Cannon 10</b>		





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**ON-SITE ACTIVITIES**


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The site is very exposed so the diving and survey work has been limited.

3 <sup>rd</sup> May 2014	Visual survey of the site in order to establish where the shallow rocks were for the magnetic survey
18 <sup>th</sup> June 2014	Initial magnetic survey of ¼ mile of the coastline in the area. 5m to 10m
29 <sup>th</sup> June	Dive 4 target sites in the area
22 <sup>nd</sup> July 2014	Survey close into the cliff in 2m of water
27 <sup>th</sup> July 2014	Initial dive to access what was on the site
8/9 September 2014	Dive to locate position of the cannon
1 October 2014	Dive to measure and photograph cannon and other artefacts





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## WERE OBJECTIVES MET?

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- **Research showed that the Dragon was a “Privateer” and her routes, cargo and passengers indentified.**
- **The site was found using a magnetic survey**
- **A site plan has been produced**
- **Three members of the team have been trained in marine archaeology and a course is planned for six others using the site.**

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## CONCLUSION

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This wreck site is probably of the Dragon but there are still some discrepancies. For example the letter of marque the year before identifies her having only four guns and three Swivel guns and not ten large 2m guns as found on the wreck. No swivel guns have been found but its early days investigating the site.

The Dragon was a privately owned ship, built in New England or Philadelphia and registered in London.

She had become a “Privateer” in 1756 so what was she doing carrying 6 children and 3 adults as passengers?

It’s not clear whether or not she was part of a convoy of 104 ships en-route from Port Royal, Jamaica to Bristol and London. They did appear to leave at the same time and also entered the English Channel at the same time.

There is no record of the crew that survived and it would be interesting to trace what happened to them, eg who looked after them after the sinking.

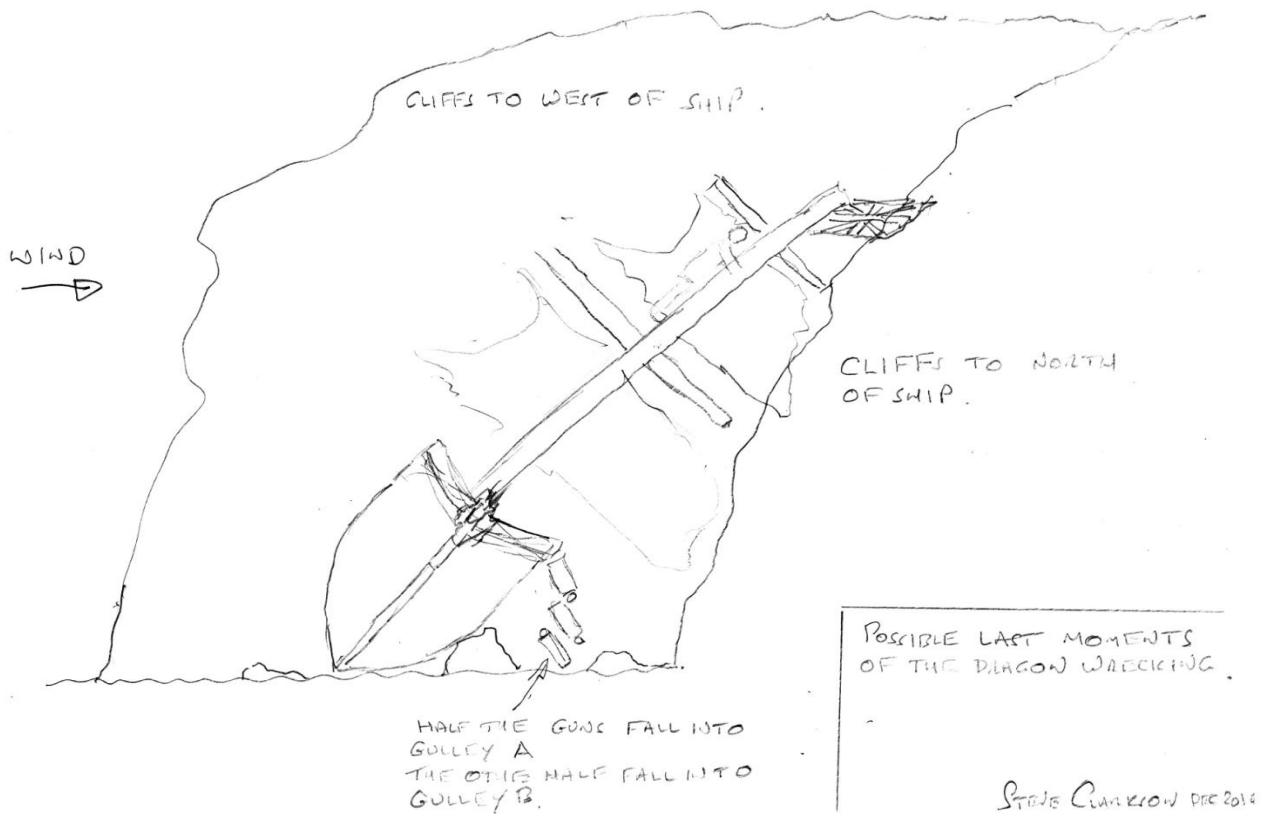
More investigation of the site is required as well as tracing details of her final voyage.

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**HER FINAL MOMENTS ?**

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The following sketch is a possible scenario of what happened when she hit the shore. All of the crew survived so it is possible they climbed the mast and rigging to get onto the cliffs. It would not have been possible to climb the cliffs from water level or get rescued from the sea. See picture of cliff and reef the ship wrecked on below.



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**FINANCIAL REPORT**

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Hire Equipment	Magnetometer/metal detector hire	
Equipment bought	Rope, buoys, slates, tapes & weights etc	
Air		
Boat fuel	Fuel for club & private boats & harbour fees	
Boat Hire	Own boats used	
Research	Trips to Kew/Exeter etc	
	Total spend	
	Jubilee Trust Funding	

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PHOTOS OF THE TEAM

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