



Chairman,
General Services Committee,
States of Alderney.

20th November 2013

Dear Sir,

Elizabethan Wreck – Report 2012-2013

In preparing a Report on the achievements of the Maritime Trust in the year 2012-2013 it may be helpful to your Committee to begin with a thumbnail sketch of the history of the Trust and the Elizabethan Wreck to date, for the benefit of those States Members who have not themselves been actively involved throughout this period.

The ship sank in November 1592 forty six years after the “Mary Rose” foundered.

She was discovered by Bertie Cosheril and Fred Shaw in 1977 and again in 1987, and the first Survey was performed in 1991-92 enabling the States of Alderney to evaluate the historic and archaeological importance of the wreck and to promulgate protective legislation in the form of The Alderney Maritime Trust (Incorporation) Law 1994.

The 1994 Trust, under the able and energetic Chairmanship of Royston Raymond gathered substantial funds, and carried out much useful work, and the Trust received considerable financial support from the States of Alderney which paid a salary to Michael Bowyer as the first Project Director and subsequently to Jason Monaghan who is now Director of the Guernsey Museums and Honorary Curator of the Alderney Museum. It was Jason’s diligent and painstaking work which resulted in the book ‘Cast Away About Alderney’ of which Mensun Bound was named as co-author. Noteworthy contributions to the book were written by Colin Partridge, Trevor Davenport, Professor David Loades, Royston Raymond and several others.

In the late 1990s, the Trust entered somewhat turbulent waters as a small group of members sought autonomy and established an independent website which purported to claim much of the credit for the work of the Trust. The States of Alderney was obliged to intervene and to re-establish the Trust under a new Trust Deed which was signed in November 2003 under the Chairmanship of Sir Norman Browse.

I was invited to become Coordinator Trustee under the New Trust Deed and in the intervening ten years I have learned to appreciate the enormity of the task and the historic and archaeological significance of the Elizabethan Wreck, and its importance to the Island of Alderney both as an integral part of the island's cultural heritage and as an attraction to visitors, erudite and tourist alike.

One of my first tasks as Coordinator Trustee was to participate in the drafting of a Lease of the so-called Wreck Shed in which a large number of artifacts continued to undergo primary conservation but had made little or no progress towards the completion of the conservation process.

The following year the States withdrew its remaining financial support for AMT and ceased to pay for the electricity consumed in the Wreck Shed and insisted that AMT must pay for both electricity and Water Rates and Occupiers Rates, about £2,500 per annum. The decisions we made were ineluctable: the remaining artifacts were shipped to York for conservation to be completed, and AMT relinquished the Lease of the Wreck Shed, acquiring instead the small, but exceedingly useful Fisherman's shed in Crabby Harbour which has been our Centre of Operations and Dive Shack ever since.

A lunchtime conversation at Government House in 2003 led to our gaining the support of His Excellency the Lieutenant-Governor, Sir John Foley, in seeking Royal Patronage for the Maritime Trust, a proposal which was energetically pursued by Sir Norman Browse, as Chairman of AMT and President of the Island of Alderney. His Royal Highness The Duke of York, KG, KCVO, ADC graciously agreed in 2004 to become our Patron, and our work has greatly prospered under his Standard.

Of the thousand artifacts which have been raised the most conspicuous in size, and perhaps in archaeological importance, are the cannon, the first of which (confusingly known as Cannon 2) was raised in 1993. The second and third cannons to be raised (cannons 3 and 5) were raised in 2008 by the Belgian Divers on board the "Commandant Fourcault" and transported to the Tower of London and thence to the laboratories of York Archaeological Trust for conservation.

The film made for BBC Timewatch on the 2008 Dive was instrumental in gaining for the Trust wider publicity, but the costs incidental to the making of that film exceeded expectations, and in the years which followed we have been obliged to maintain the most frugal conduct of our affairs, and to treat the raising of further funds, and the completion of the conservation of artifacts as our highest priorities.

As a consequence there have been no further dives on the wreck site until this October, but 2013 has already seen the return from York of the second cannon, and both cannon now in the Alderney Museum are fully conserved. We expect the return of the third cannon from York by the end of this year. All three will be displayed on the replica gun carriages made by Fred Shaw out of elm "liberated" from the Royal Parks at Windsor by HRH The Duke of York.

Thanks to the generosity of further benefactors the cost of conservation of these cannon and other artifacts has been met and our financial affairs are once again on a sound footing, and AMT is solvent and able to pay for ongoing conservation work.

One other unexpected development is worthy of mention in this report, namely the story of the so-called “Viking Sunstone”, a calcite crystal retrieved from the wreck site by diver Steve Wright in 2002.

The crystal is milky white and almost opaque and, at first sight, insignificant, but its existence came to the attention of Albert Le Floch and Guy Ropars, professors of Laser Physics at the University of Rennes who have visited the Museum and have pronounced the crystal to be of important scientific and archaeological significance.

We have cooperated with Professors Le Floch and Ropars who have conducted numerous scientific tests and experiments and have recently submitted a forty page scientific study to the Royal Society in London which has accepted and published the Paper which has thus acquired the “imprimatur” of the Royal Society as being a paper of the highest scientific standing.

I hope that I correctly summarise the conclusions of that Paper by saying that the crystal, being calcite, is birefringent, and would have been capable of being used by navigators to assist them in maintaining an accurate East-West course such as would have been required to cross the Atlantic, and that the “milky opacity” would have been acquired as a consequence of immersion in sea-water for four hundred years.

No such crystal has ever been found in a Viking burial site but they are referred to in the Icelandic sagas as “Sun-Stones” and are recognized to have such navigational properties. They tend to be referred to as “Icelandic Spar” since Iceland (and Norway) were the primary sources of calcite crystals. Dr Trevor Davenport has confirmed that, whilst calcite does occur naturally in Alderney he has never seen a calcite crystal of the dimensions of this particular crystal whose presence on the site of the Elizabethan Wreck is therefore an unexplained anomaly.

Any claim that it is truly a “Viking Crystal” and might have been passed down to the navigator of our Elizabethan ship is incapable of being substantiated but nevertheless the story has hit the world’s scientific press, has provoked considerable international interest, and has even been made the subject of a lengthy article in the 2013 summer edition of Quarterly Review of American Bureau of Shipping under the title “They Found the Fabled Sunstone”! American Bureau of Shipping is of course the American Classification Society, the equivalent of Lloyds Register of Shipping, a highly respected institution.

We hope that a display may be mounted in the Museum to include both the crystal itself and a working model to show the qualities of double refraction which are the attributes of calcite, and which would be of interest to scientists young and old.

The Future of the Elizabethan Wreck Site and the Trust.

At our Trustees Meeting in April 2011 we debated the future of the Elizabethan Wreck Site in the context of our having attracted two Tenders to perform Geophysical Surveys of the site for this purpose, one from Wessex Archaeology and the other from Bournemouth University.

Some doubt was cast upon the value of continued work on the site by Mensun Bound reporting that excavations performed by the Belgian divers using mechanical prop-wash in 2008 had reached bedrock in several locations and revealed that there was no more wreck to be found. The body of Trustees found his report to be inconclusive and it was resolved to commission Bournemouth University to perform a Geophysical Survey, it being the clear duty of the Trust to be able to give accurate and conclusive advice to the States of Alderney before concluding that the job is at an end.

We have received one substantial offer of funds towards a complete Geophysical Survey. Further fund-raising is required or alternatively a truncation of the survey to exclude the more expensive scientific instrumentation before the full Survey can be commissioned.

In the meantime a Preliminary Dive Survey took place during the last week of October 2013, conducted by a Team of Alderney Divers led by our Trustee Phil Murray (all qualified Commercial Divers) working under the archaeological guidance of Dave Parham and Tom Cousins of Bournemouth University.

I am pleased to report that that Dive was successful in that the divers observed, photographed, and video-filmed not only at least three further cannon on the sea bed but also substantial ships timbers, one of which measured approximately four meters long by 40 cm square. The Dive also began the process of clearing the debris left by previous Dives, notably the Dive of 2008 when the two cannon were raised, and laying solid datum points to establish a rope rectangle for a magnetometer survey. It is hoped that the balance of this work and survey will be performed in summer 2014.

At the Trustees Meeting in April this year Mensun Bound informed the trustees of his recent illness which remains unresolved, and said that because of this and his other commitments he was no longer able to fulfill the role of our Director of Archaeology. It is hoped that this vacancy will be filled by Professor Dave Parham of Bournemouth University who is eminently well-qualified for the role.

A further vacancy arises as a consequence of the resignation of Hugo Pickering whose work on our website has been invaluable. The States of Alderney's web designers, Submarine, and the St Anne's School's Information Technology teacher are two possibilities and I strongly believe that our website should be designed and managed locally in Alderney in close conjunction with the States of Alderney's own Marketing Manager.

The States initiative with Alderney Wildlife Society in jointly employing a consultant from Yorkshire to market Alderney as a holiday destination seems to be a highly commendable strategy and I would like to ask the General Services Committee to consider embracing the Maritime Trust's website and marketing in the same scheme as being part and parcel of the attraction of Alderney as a holiday and educational destination.

I would like to conclude my Report by thanking the General Services Committee for its support and cooperation recently in authorizing the Harbour Master to issue a Dive Permit which has borne fruit as set out above.

Yours Truly

Michael Harrisson – Coordinator Trustee