

ADMAT team uncover 1740's English troopship in the Caribbean

Christine Nielsen

The Anglo-Danish Maritime Archaeological Team (ADMAT) has surveyed and excavated, what is believed to be a 1740's English troopship on St. Kitts in the Caribbean. This was a successful beginning to a planned five-year maritime archaeological project, designed to record and protect the underwater cultural heritage of the island.

The first phase, called *The White House Bay Maritime Archaeological Project*, led by ADMAT's president Simon Q. Spooner (mature PhD student of Bristol University), was run as a field school and had participants from

Canada, USA, Mexico, France, Denmark and the UK. The team spent five weeks surveying and excavating what is believed to be a 1740's English troop ship, possibly sunk during the Battle of Frigate Bay in 1782.

With hundreds of historic shipwrecks around the coastline, St. Kitts has a major challenge. The island, like the Dominican Republic – which is another area where ADMAT has worked – is leading the way in protection of their shipwrecks. Action not words!

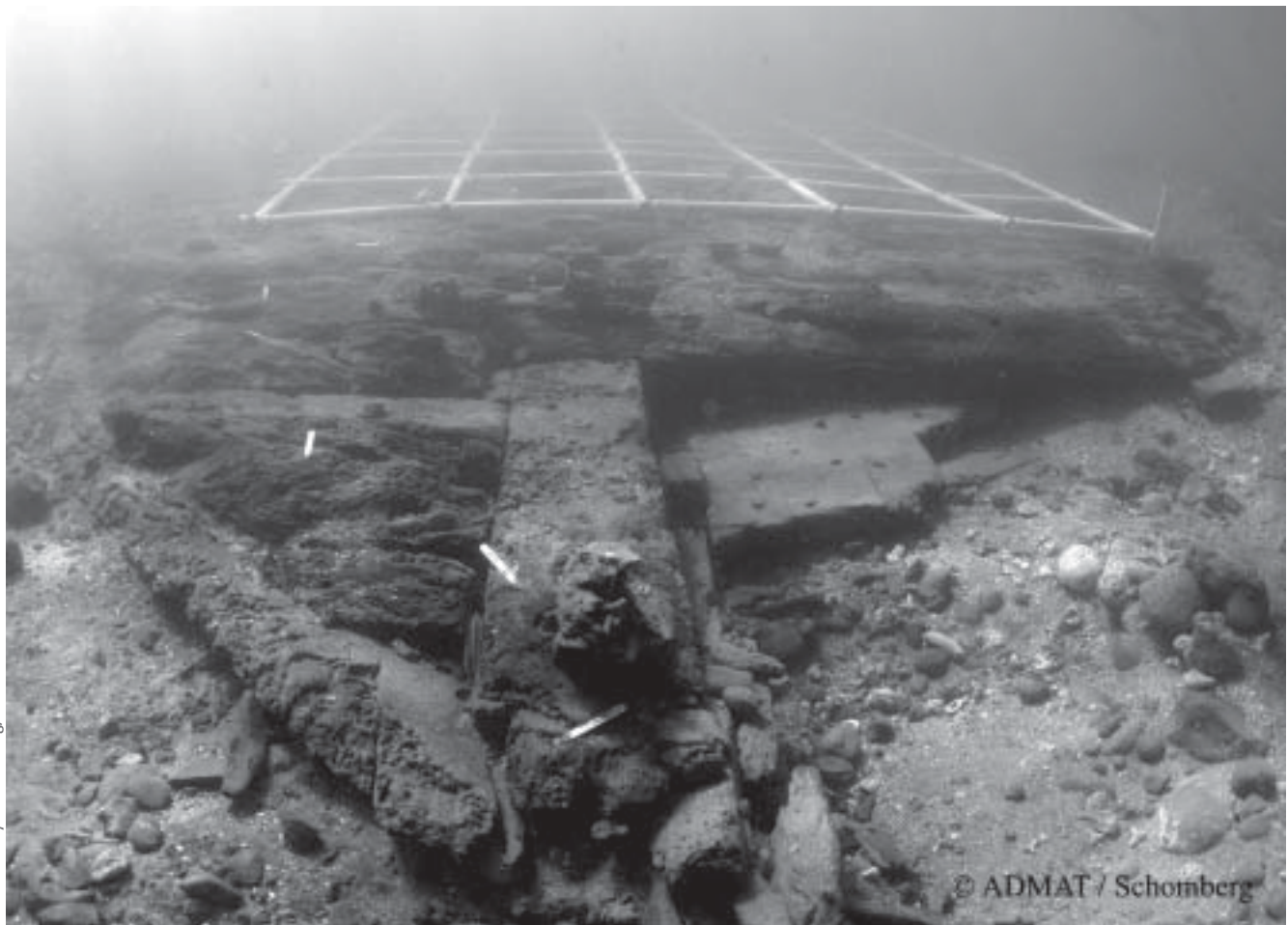
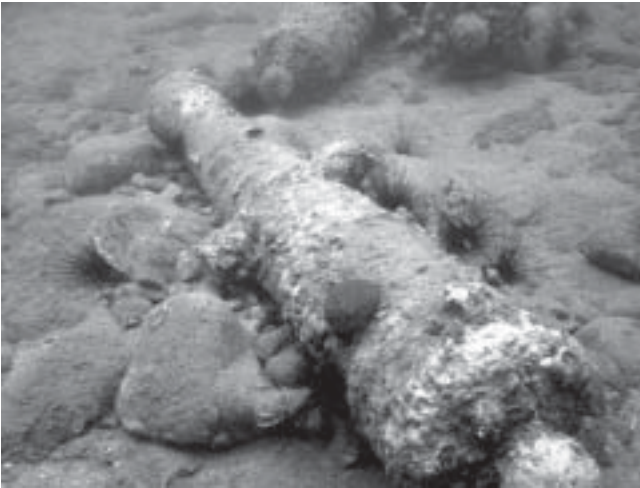


Foto: Jeremy Schomberg/ADMAT

The White House Bay Wreck with survey grid partly removed. Photo from the bow.



Some of the remaining cannons that lie near the wreck.

The White House Bay Wreck

A large old shipwreck in White House Bay on St. Kitts, was partially uncovered by a hurricane some years ago. The wreck has since suffered damage by looters, worms and storms. Nothing was known about this wreck, and ADMAT recognised that it urgently needed recording before there was nothing left. According to testimonials from divers, when first uncovered it had at least 13 iron cannons on the deck, but these have been looted over the last few years.

During 450 hours of logged diving, the ADMAT team excavated, measured and photographed the wreck. As the team uncovered the wreck's massive timbers, the age and significance of the ship became apparent. The timbers still covered by sand were in excellent condition, stretching for 60 feet, and consisted of the lower hull arrangements of the bow section, going as far as the main mast step which was not found. It is calculated that the ship originally would be 100–130 feet long. The stern section has not been found.

– Judging from the remaining timbers, this ship is an important example of a pre 1760's ship construction, and falls within the top three percent of the best historic wrecks in the Caribbean,

says Simon Q. Spooner.

– We knew that she was built before 1760, because the ship was constructed using wooden trunnels and had iron keel bolts, but no copper sheeting, bolts or nails.

Of great public interest

Close to the wreck lie five concreted iron cannons that most likely come from this wreck. During the excavation 300 artefacts, including musket balls, potsherds, spoons, a pulley wheel, glass bottles, a ruler, a bar shot and buttons from eleven different regiments were found and

recorded. The artefacts are now being conserved and will be placed on display in St. Kitts' National Museum, along with drawings and photographs of the wreck.

The island, and also visiting tourists, took a great interest in the project and many visited the site. Some even snorkelled over the wreck to watch the archaeologists work. Simon Q. Spooner recalls that one of the most enjoyable visits was from the Montessori Academy children:

– These children had helped clear the site, enabling ADMAT to set up a base camp. They were invited back for a tour of the project. It was gratifying to see the interest on the children's faces as they watched the divers underwater on close circuit TV, as well as handling the artefacts – *their* underwater cultural heritage.

In the process ADMAT were sowing the seeds for the next generation of divers and maritime archaeologists.

Two years of planning

The St. Christopher Heritage Society and the ADMAT team worked hard for two years to plan the project and the infrastructure necessary to carry it out. Maritime archaeological fieldwork requires a lot of equipment, and as the wreck is located on an uninhabited part of the island it was necessary to camp.

The Geest Line sponsored the loan and transport of two containers, so the 20 tons of equipment necessary could be transported from England to St. Kitts. Tropical Shipping supplied a container for safe lock up of diving equipment while in camp. Aqua Scan International assisted with a proton magnetometer, metal detectors, and a tow video camera. Dee Cee Trading Ltd. supplied the PVC for the survey grid. Abyss provided the use of their drop camera, enabling guests to observe the underwater work as it took place. TDC supplied water pipes as well as good prices on van hire.

The St. Kitts and Nevis Coast Guard kindly supplied three members of their dive team, their chef, and two armed guards to stay in camp with the team during the



Excavation director Simon Q. Spooner showing a pewter spoon found on the wreck.

night. Kawasaki gave discounts on a generator for the camp and on two water pumps used for the water dredge, which was initially made from PVC pipes that Polypipe donated. Assistance was given from numerous departments of the Government: Ministry of Health & Environment, Ministry of Tourism, Ministry of Finance and Customs, Port Authorities, Water Department, St. Kitts & Nevis Defence Force & Coastguard and the Royal St. Christopher–Nevis Police Force. The ADMAT team are very grateful to all the companies and individuals who volunteered and gave assistance.



Foto: Simon Q. Spooner/ADMAT

Photo of the White House Bay on St. Kitts, showing the base camp (on the left) and the position of the wreck (by the buoys).

Further investigations

The ADMAT team will be returning to St Kitts later this year, to look at other sites that are in danger and need addressing, as well as assisting St. Kitts in setting up a conservation laboratory. To keep updated, please look at ADMAT's web-site www.admat.org.uk.

Christine Nielsen är vice ordförande i och assisterande utgrävningsledare för ADMAT – Anglo-Danish Maritime Archaeological Team



The Anglo-Danish Maritime Archaeological Team (ADMAT)

The Anglo-Danish Maritime Archaeological Team, or ADMAT for short, is a non-profit organisation set up to promote, carry out, and educate about maritime archaeology, and to protect historic shipwrecks under threat from looters, worms and weather. ADMAT was founded by Simon Q. Spooner from England and Christine Nielsen from Denmark, hence the name *Anglo-Danish*.

During work on historic shipwrecks on the North Coast of the Dominican Republic, they realised the great need for maritime archaeology to be carried out in the Caribbean, an area with many historic shipwrecks under serious threat from treasure hunters, looters, and the frequent hurricanes. It is an area, where the governments often have no money or expertise to carry out archaeological investigations of their underwater cultural heritage.

They also realised the great need for educating on the subject and for giving students the possibility of gaining hands on practical experience in the field. Since the beginning of ADMAT, many individuals as well as organisations and museums from around the world, have volunteered to assist ADMAT in their endeavour.

Maritime archaeology on St. Kitts

ADMAT's latest project, in co-operation with the local government and organisations on St. Kitts, the *St. Kitts Maritime Archaeological Project 2003–2008*, started with Phase 1 last April – the *White House Bay Maritime Archaeological Field School project*. During the field school a survey and excavation was carried out on a looted 1740's shipwreck in White House Bay, some years after it was first uncovered by a hurricane.

Phase 2, planned to begin later this year, will be a survey of the historic Basseterre Harbour – where archives tells of more than 200 historic ships sunk – to obtain knowledge of the state of the shipwrecks still there, and to make a protection plan for them. It also entails setting up a conservation laboratory and creating a course with the local college, as well as taking some students onboard for practical fieldwork experience.

For further information please see ADMAT's web-site (www.admat.org.uk) or e-mail info@admat.org.uk, or phone +44 (0)208 399 1284.