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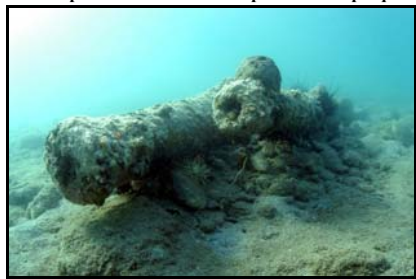
Children watching the divers on a video link



The front 40 ft of the White House Bay Wreck



Simon presents Minister Astaphan with a plaque



Two of the five White House Bay cannons



The team for the second half of the project

In the process we were sowing the seeds for the next generation of divers and maritime archaeologists. We were developing the children's knowledge and appreciation of the rich Maritime Heritage of St. Kitts.

The project was a race against time. The working hypothesis about this wreck has now been proved as a result of the work done last April. We have the measurements of most of the timbers and frames, and I will be drawing a scale plan of the wreck in due course. The main objective we achieved, was the beginning of the preservation of the islands underwater cultural heritage. We shall be continuing the work in Phase 2! This is the survey of the historic port of Basseterre, where over 200 ships sunk. We aim to survey and record the exposed remains of these once magnificent ships.

As with all large projects, assistance was given from many departments of the Government: Ministry of Tourism, Ministry of Health & Environment, Ministry of Finance and Customs, Port Authorities, Water Department, St. Kitts & Nevis Defence Force & Coastguard, The Royal St. Christopher-Nevis Police Force, Fisheries Management Unit Brimstone Hill Fortress National Park Society and members of the St. Christopher Heritage Society. The private companies and organisations who assisted with sponsorship in various ways are:

- The Geest Line.
- Delta Petroleum (Nevis) Ltd.
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- Woodsrite Enterprises Ltd.
- Nova Foods Ltd & Cooper Kauffman Ltd.
- WinnFM 98.9, ZIZ, GIS.
- The Labour Spokesman, The Democrat.
- The St. Kitts-Nevis Observer.
- The Montessori Academy, Clarence Fitzroy Bryant College, Rutlish School.
- 151 Regiment RLC (V) and the Bank of England Sports and Social Club.

In addition a number of volunteers assisted in the project. Hazel Brooks; Dierdre Stubbs; Vandel, Christopher & Sinclair Berry; Kate, Steve & Philippe Orchard; Dr. Ronald & Patricia Jorgenson; Joseph Simmonds; Kenneth Samuel; Bernie Greaux; Douglas Gillanders; Michael Ryan; Keith Bergan; Alan Winicki, Dale Amory; Dr. Ian Jacobs and Dr. James Astaphan. A special thanks goes to the Minister of Tourism G. A. Astaphan; Jacqueline Armony and Randolph Hamilton for the assistance in the planning and organisation. The ADMAT Team are very grateful to all these companies and individuals who volunteer and gave assistance.

**The ADMAT Team will be returning to St Kitts later this year, to conduct a survey of the historic port of Basseterre and to assist with the setting up of the new conservation laboratory. This is Phase 2.**

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A. D. M. A. T.

# St Kitts Maritime Archaeological Project

## 2003 - 2008

### Phase 1: White House Bay Wreck

The Story So Far, by Simon Q. Spooner, BSc, MRICS, MIFA.  
President and Excavation Director.



The lower bow section of the White House Bay Wreck



School children visit the Project for an educational lesson

I welcome you to the St. Kitts Maritime Archaeological Project newsletter. Phase 1, the survey and excavation of the largest exposed wreck in White House Bay, was very successful.

The team recorded the main wreck in the bay, as well as locating two new wrecks near by. This large wreck was partially uncovered by a hurricane. According to testimonials from divers, when uncovered it had at least 13 iron cannons on the deck. As the wreck was further excavated, the team found the wreck's massive timbers. These were in excellent condition, stretching for about 60 ft (18 meters) 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 could be as long as 100 to 130 ft (39 m.). The stern section has not been found.

From the remaining timbers, this ship is a very important example of pre 1760s ship construction and falls within the top 3% of the best historic wrecks in the Caribbean. Unfortunately the wreck has been heavily looted since it was uncovered, with very few artefacts surviving. Careful analysis of the ship construction and the wrecking process was undertaken. Nearly 300 artefacts, ranging from musket balls to pot sherds were saved and recorded. Significant and historically important finds were made, with numerous regimental buttons, spoons, a wooden and copper alloy rule, a wooden pulley wheel, a French bar shot, and cannon truck pins being saved. Research is continuing on the buttons. These are from 11 different English regiments, including the Royal Irish Brigade, 56<sup>th</sup>, 66<sup>th</sup> and 69<sup>th</sup> regiments, Armagh Volunteers and the Somersetshire 40<sup>th</sup> Regiment. Some of these regiments were unknown to St. Kitts and this important new historical information will add to the history of the island. Over the next number of months, full research will be undertaken in the Public Records Office and other archives.

From the archaeological information found on the wreck, the date of sinking could coincide with the Battle of Frigate Bay in 1782. This ship may have been one of the 2 English troopships, (the *Converts* or the *Fortune*) delivering a small force of 700 men under the command of General Prescott to relieve the surrounded Brimstone Hill Fort. The 5 cannons nearby, appear to be from the wreck, and are thought to be the secondary armament for the ship. With over 3,000 photographs taken, and the ships



A Wooden pulley wheel found on the wreck



The Shore of White House Bay with visiting yacht.



Kathy showing a concreted Truck Pin

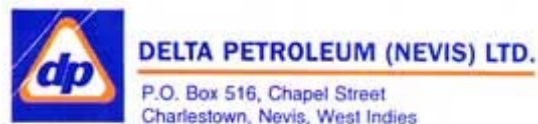
remaining timbers measured and recorded, a full report including the wrecking theory is in progress. It is planned that the artefacts found will be displayed in the National Museum, together with a detailed plan of the wreck taken from the measurements and a slide show of the best photographs.





**GEEST LINE**

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Unloading the pontoon boats ready for shipping



The base camp



The important Kawasaki water pumps



The Coastguard Dive Team & Chef



A copper alloy buckle found on the wreck



Chef Collins and Christine finding artefacts

The team consisted of archaeological students and divers from Canada, USA, Mexico, France, Denmark and the UK, with the support of additional volunteers from St Kitts. In all about 30 participants took part in the project over the five weeks.

The project has taken nearly 2 years to plan & execute. Jacqueline Armony from the St Christopher Heritage Society, and the ADMAT team worked hard to plan the project and the infrastructure necessary to conduct the operation. Originally the British Army were going to participate in the diving and lend us the tents and camping equipment. I remember it well, one evening we had 40 tents and a field kitchen, then a telephone call stating that all the army participants and equipment was being sent to the Gulf War. We had a problem! However the team were able to obtain all the necessary camping equipment from Rutlish School CCF, 151 Regiment RLC(V) and the Bank of England Sports and Social Club, as well as personal friends. Aquascan International were able to lend us the Proton Magnetometer, metal detectors and the underwater video system. Abyss UK loaned us a small drop camera, so that we could keep an eye on the divers.

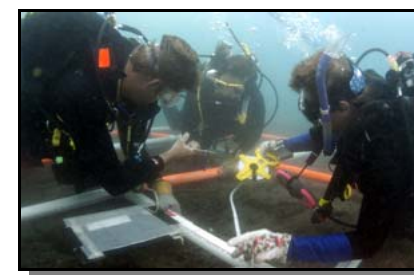
The next challenge was how to transport about 20 tonnes of vital equipment to St Kitts? The Geest Line solved this by sponsoring the loan of two 20 ft containers and the cost of shipping all our equipment to and from the island. This was the essential starting point. Delta Petroleum sponsored the project via generous discount on fuel which was vital.

When we arrived on the island Michael Brisbane from Port Authorities, had arranged for the containers to be delivered to the site on a Saturday. Tropical Shipping had kindly lent us an empty container, which we used as a dive store. TDC supplied the all important water piping, as well as great prices on vehicle hire. The Water Authority arranged the water connection, giving our field base fresh water and showers. This was essential as equipment and people needed to get rid of the salt after many hours in the sea. Interesting enough the water tasted excellent and slightly sweet. But we had the challenge of all the local cows wanting our water. Before we arrived there had been a drought on this end of the island, and all the cattle were heading for us! To arrange for three containers, two toilets, the connection of the water to the mains, 75 ft of PVC water piping and two showers to be installed, delivered and up and running within a few hours on a Saturday in the Caribbean, was a miracle and our deepest thanks to all involved in achieving this.

Major Wallace, from the St Kitts and Nevis Coast Guard, kindly supplied two armed coastguards to patrol the camp during the night. I must say that we all slept peacefully with the knowledge that we and our equipment were well look after. In addition, for the last two weeks Major Wallace lent us Collins, the Coastguard's Chef, who joined the team and improved our quality of life.

We invited Lt Jason Maloney, 2Lt. Lynn Wilkin and Sargent Brian Mills, to join the team as they are the Coastguard dive team. Their assistance was invaluable and ADMAT was delighted to make them members of our British Sub Aqua Club branch No:2349, which was set up specially for the ADMAT projects. Their dive equipment was a little old, so they borrowed equipment lent to us by the Bank of England Dive Club.

During 450 hours of logged diving, the team measured & recorded the main wreck in the bay, as well as locating two new wrecks near by. The thirteen or more cannons originally seen on site had been looted over the last few years. As the team uncovered the wrecks massive timbers the age and significance of the ship became apparent. The timbers were in excellent condition and proved to be double height without a keelson. Some of the timbers 40 x 60 cm in section. Small artefacts were found under the planking and between the frames of this once great ship. From the remaining timbers, this ship is a very important example of pre 1760's ship construction. Not many ships of this period has been surveyed and excavated and it is significant that St. Kitts has this fine example.



Simon training students in Underwater Survey



Kathy & Amarys recording the artefacts



Andy with the Polypipe dredge head



Some of the artefacts rescued



Florence & Simon uses the Aquascan metal detector



One of the "69" regimental Buttons

The team and students received instruction on the Underwater Survey Diver course. This course is unique to ADMAT, and involves all aspects of underwater surveying, from the basic principles to drawing the ships timbers to scale. All the timbers, floors and ships construction were measured in detail by the team as part of this course. One of the sections of the course is to accurately measure the site. This included setting up an accurate grid. So as the students prepared the front section of this impressive wreck, Dee Cee Trading Ltd, kindly donated the PVC piping and cross pieces so that we could build the grid necessary to measure the site. Lectures were given most mornings, about other wrecks sites the ADMAT team had been working on, as well as courses on how to use the scientific equipment. The Kawasaki water pumps were in constant use for the water dredges, which were initially made from PVC pipes donated by Polypipe. The great fascination of using a dredge is that you are uncovering the past. You never know what is going to be discovered; animal bones from the sailors last meal, musket balls, buckles, buttons and spoons. All had to be carefully recorded. The site was continually photographed with high resolution digital cameras, as well as using the Aquascan underwater video camera.

The metal detectors uncovered numerous concreted items, which were left on site having been re-buried. At the moment there are no facilities to deal with the conservation of iron concretions on the island. Numerous pottery sherds were located on and between the frames. These were photographed and recorded, as were all the buttons and other artefacts found. At the end of the survey, 70 artefacts were given to the St. Christopher Heritage Society. These are going through a simple water flushing process to stabilise them, until such time a conservation laboratory is in place. It is vital that artefacts receive proper conservation, prior to being put on display in museums for all to enjoy and learn from. If conservation is not undertaken, artefacts will be destroyed and the information they could give us lost forever.

The next question was could we place the wreck in a historical context? From the ship's construction we knew that she was built before 1760; because the ship was constructed using wooden trunnels and had iron keel bolts, but had no copper sheeting, bolts or nails. How early we do not know. The regimental buttons originally gave us some clues. It became apparent that they could be from multiple time periods and in effect give the life story of the ship. One of the buttons, the 40th Somersetshire button, was only created in 1782, which ties in nicely with the troop movement. However there are some difficulties with the research so far, in that the Somersetshire regiment was not suppose to be in the Caribbean at all after 1781.

Time will tell what the archives yield. I did find it fascinating to read the personal observations of Admiral Hood during the Battle of Frigate Bay. A battle with 60 ships of the line, with an average of 700-1,500 men per ship is an impressive thought. Unfortunately the Admiral's letters does not mention any craft smaller than a 70 gun ship of the line. The five iron cannons found nearby to the wreck site, appear to be from the wreck, and are thought to be the secondary armament for the ship. In a battle these small guns would have been used for self defence as they were too small for offensive weapons. Whilst these cannons are concreted, they appear to be 4 pounders (pdrs) from their dimensions. In addition we found a concreted iron bar shot. Due to it's design it appears to be of French origin and would match the 4 (pdr) found. Bar shot was used to dismast enemy ships at close range. This is an important find as they are extremely rare. The Musée National de la Marine in Paris, only has one!

One of the most enjoyable events was the children's visit from the Montessori Academy. These children had helped clear the site of rubbish enabling us to set up the base camp. They were invited back for a tour of the project. I found it exciting 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.