

SAS Lecture 9th October: Researching protected wrecks.

This month's lecture gave us double value, with two speakers: marine archaeologist Alison James of MSDS Marine and conservator Angela Middleton from Historic England (HE). They talked about two wrecks from the 17th and 18th centuries, the *London* and the *Rooswijk*. Alison told the story of the *London*, a British naval vessel loading up at Tilbury in 1665 with supplies to join in the Anglo-Dutch War, when she unfortunately exploded and sank, with the loss of over 300 men. The hull broke into two parts which were found over 200m apart and although it was a catastrophic event at the time, the wreck lay forgotten until discovered in 2005 by dredging, and the site was eventually protected under the Protection of Wrecks Act 1973. Diving conditions are difficult in the Thames, and a group of local volunteer divers became involved to manage the site, which has produced lots of archaeology including a spectacular gun carriage – but not before a number of items were removed illegally, such as cannon, some of which have been returned. A selection of the artefacts is currently on display at the National Maritime Museum at Greenwich in the Tudor & Stuart Seafarers' Gallery; and an exhibition at Southend on Sea (close to the wreck site): *The London Shipwreck: A Sunken Story* includes one of the recovered cannon.

Angela then told us about the Dutch East India Company (VOC) ship the *Rooswijk* which foundered in a storm on the Goodwin Sands in January 1740, en route to Batavia (now Jakarta) with trade-goods. At the time nothing was found apart from some letters being carried on board, but she was rediscovered in 2005 and designated in 2007, as the site was being damaged by erosion and salvage work. Historic England has been working with the Dutch Cultural Heritage Agency (RCE) to record and excavate the site during 2017/18. Several outreach events were organised during the excavation and were well-attended.

Angela showed examples of finds in the process of assessment, including iron objects which are x-rayed before removing concretions to ensure no information is lost; and the care taken with conservation of small artefacts such as a wooden violin key and a tiny metal dress pin, and luxury leather boots. Rare survivals include a leather book cover; callipers used for measuring cannon balls; a metal sundial and other navigational aids.

On Sunday 11th November Historic England is holding an Open Day at Fort Cumberland, Portsmouth where the project team will display artefacts from the *Rooswijk* and showcase the methods used to stabilise artefacts for study. Free entry from 10.00 to 15.00, Fort Cumberland Road, Eastney, Portsmouth PO4 9LD.

Sarah Hanna

You can explore the *London* site for yourself on the HE funded virtual dive trail at: www.cloudtour.tv/London.

A virtual dive trail for the *Rooswijk* will launch on 10th January 2019.