

PROTECTING WRECKS: THE NEXT GENERATION

Maritime archaeology in England is underpinned by a system of volunteer licensees, but it's long been recognised that the demographic of volunteers working on the protected wreck sites is one of an ageing population. In addition, there are sector-wide skills shortages in areas of maritime archaeology, including marine geophysics and geoarchaeology. To address these challenges there has been a focus on reaching new audiences, attracting new people into the profession, and recruiting the next generation of volunteers.



Visitors to the protected wreck roadshow. Credit: MSDS Marine



Intern Jack Doyle talking to younger visitors at a pop-up event. Credit: MSDS Marine

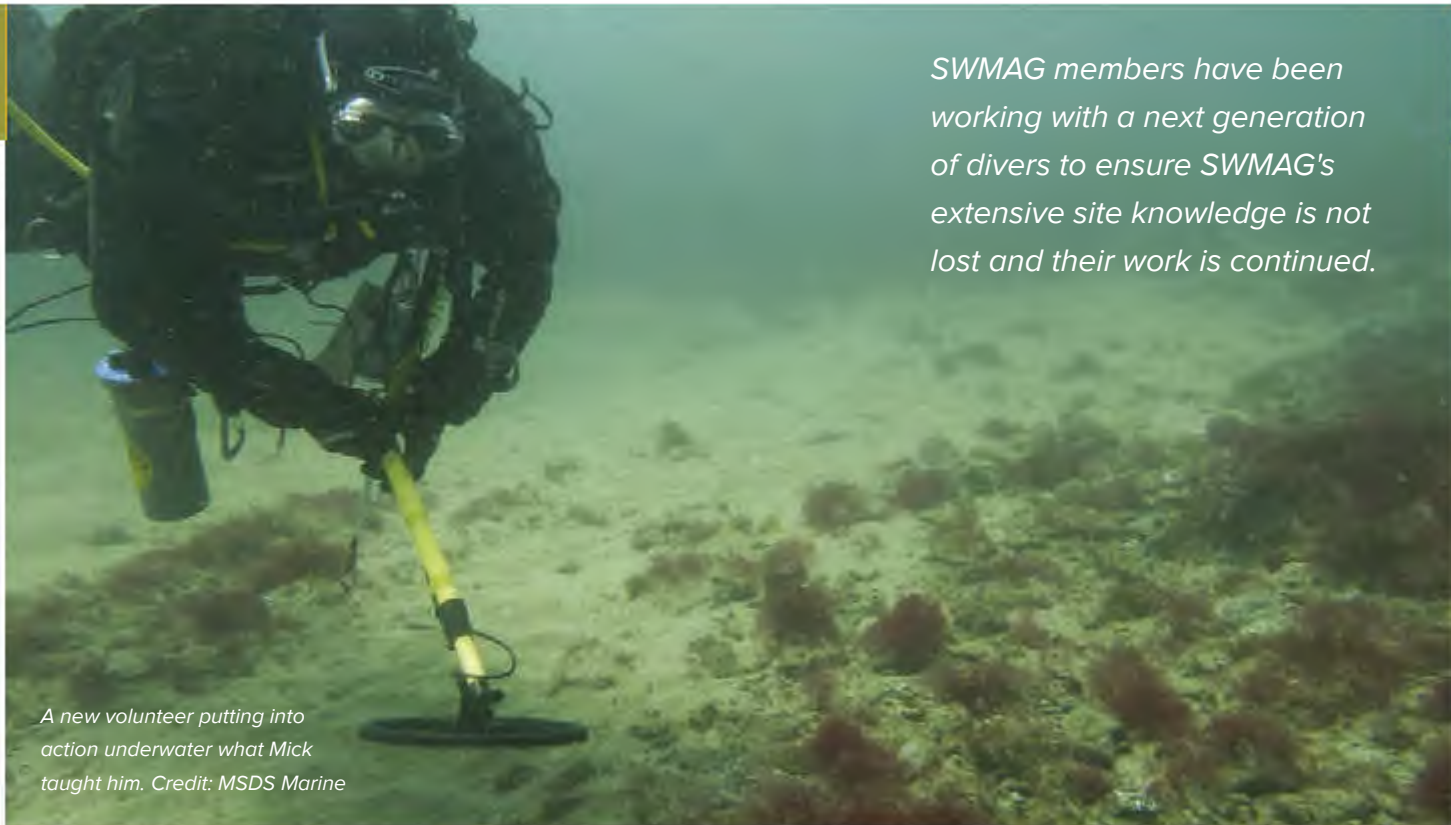
Alison James MCIfA (6059), Director, MSDS Marine

Traditionally maritime archaeology outreach has focused on areas that are closest to the sea, and to the wrecks themselves. Many UK counties are landlocked but two frequently claim to be furthest from the sea – Derbyshire and Nottinghamshire in the East Midlands. Residents of these counties often do not have the opportunity to visit the coast and to engage with maritime heritage, yet the areas have strong links to the sea and maritime history that are little known. Examples include Nelson's monument and the three ships on Birchen Edge, lead ingots originally from Derbyshire and recovered from protected wrecks that are housed in the Peak District Mining Museum, and the technology employed at the Derwent Valley Mills which helped to inform the redevelopment of Portsmouth Dockyard. ClfA Registered Organisation MSDS Marine is based near Belper in Derbyshire, which made us ideally placed to take maritime archaeology inland.

Historic England funding enabled MSDS Marine to deliver 50 pop-up events this summer to the public, and to schools and youth groups, to encourage active participation with maritime heritage, specifically new audiences who do not traditionally or who are not able to engage with heritage. Some 13,647 individuals attended an event and as a direct result, enquires for work experience at MSDS Marine have risen significantly. It is hoped that by having an understanding and appreciation of maritime archaeology more people will value the hidden maritime heritage that surrounds the UK.

The project also enabled three paid internships for archaeology students to gain practical experience through on-the-job training. Internships were tailored to the interests of participants to ensure that students were able to gain as much practical experience as possible during their placements.

Focusing on volunteers, MSDS Marine has been working with the South West Maritime Archaeology Group (SWMAG) to help secure their archive and to ensure that their knowledge is passed on to younger divers. SWMAG describe themselves as a team of avocational divers with a passion for history from the sea. The group has a long-standing relationship with several protected wreck sites including those at Salcombe and Moor Sand. The protected sites there contain both Bronze Age and 17th-century material and a wealth of finds that are now on display in the British Museum. SWMAG's work has resulted in many startling



SWMAG members have been working with a next generation of divers to ensure SWMAG's extensive site knowledge is not lost and their work is continued.

A new volunteer putting into action underwater what Mick taught him. Credit: MSDS Marine

discoveries, from Bronze Age gold jewellery to tin ingots that are helping redefine our understanding of Bronze Age trade in northern Europe. SWMAG members come from Northampton British Sub-Aqua Club (BSAC). At its height the club had over 220 members but today there are only a few members remaining.

SWMAG is committed, enthusiastic and important to how maritime archaeology is managed in the UK. However, like many of the volunteer teams working on the wrecks, they are now in their late 70s and early 80s, which impacts on their ability to dive. The Salcombe Cannon wreck was selected for a Historic England funded pilot project because of the ageing demographic of SWMAG members. SWMAG members have been working with a next generation of divers to ensure SWMAG's extensive site knowledge is not lost and their work is continued. Members have attended fieldwork on the diving support vessel, and the use of 360° video footage is being trialled to enable them to see how the site has changed in recent years since they stopped diving. This project will continue into 2024.

Maritime archaeology has its challenges for people coming into the profession and for volunteers, not least the cost of training and equipment needed to enable the required skills to be gained. Specific projects such as those discussed here are vital if we are to ensure the profession has the skills required to support offshore development and heritage management in the future, as well as providing the training required for volunteers to continue to play an active role.



SWMAG member Mick Kightley briefing new divers on the diving support vessel. Credit: MSDS Marine

Alison James

Alison is a director at MSDS Marine with experience in the management of historic shipwreck sites, volunteer involvement, community engagement and education initiatives. Previously Alison spent ten years with Historic England managing England's protected wreck sites and working with the licensed teams and volunteers who work on the sites. Alison is also a Trustee of the Nautical Archaeology Society.

