

MAKING A SPLASH:

public engagement on the #Rooswijk1740 project

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Since 2017 the #Rooswijk1740 project has been leading the way in delivering public benefit by creating opportunities throughout for visits, training and engagement.

The project aimed to provide as many opportunities as possible for the public to see the material recovered and to meet the team.

Seven open days have now been held specifically for the project. This open day took place in Ramsgate in the onshore finds facility. The project even provided a British Sign Language guide for deaf visitors and had activities to engage all audiences from old to young.

Many visitors stayed in touch after their visits through social media to stay up to date with the project. Credit: #Rooswijk1740 Project



After its designation in 2007, the Dutch East Indiaman *Rooswijk* was identified as at high risk of immediate loss on the Historic England Heritage at Risk Register. As a result, the Cultural Heritage Agency of the Netherlands (RCE) worked with Historic England (HE) to set up the #Rooswijk1740 project. MSDS Marine were identified as the UK project managers. A key aim of the project was engaging with and helping professional, volunteer and local communities to understand and care for the remains of the *Rooswijk*. Engagement was seen as a crucial way to increase the site's protection and to reduce the risk to the remains from opportunistic recoveries.

The #Rooswijk1740 project undertook two seasons of excavation in 2017 and 2018 before moving into the post-excavation assessment and analysis phase. Throughout, the project has acted as a hub for training and capacity building in the sector whilst additionally providing numerous opportunities for public involvement to raise awareness of the site. Providing opportunities for public engagement is written into the job descriptions of all international project staff, including numerous volunteers from mainly the Netherlands and the UK.

In order to provide as much access to the project as possible, and to reduce travel, the project held open days throughout the UK. This open day in landlocked Derby proved popular with families and was an excellent way to bring underwater cultural heritage to a new audience who wouldn't traditionally engage with it. Credit: #Rooswijk1740 Project





Innovative site open days were held for divers to visit the diving support vessel and visit the wreck site during the excavation work. Here divers from the UK and Netherlands wait on the diving support vessel to dive the site, having had the opportunity to talk to the dive team and see the commercial diving equipment being used. Credit: #Rooswijk1740 Project

Over 1600 people have attended the open days in the field and the laboratories, nearly 20,000 people have accessed material in virtual reality through either the virtual trail, the online exhibition of the Dutch Huygens Institute or the Sketchfab models, and over 34,500 people have visited the *Gezonken Schatten* exhibition at the Museum Prinsessehof, where part of the exhibition was dedicated to the *Rooswijk*.

Public engagement was also achieved with an active media strategy. Apart from the news stories during the excavations, long-running productions were made together with mainstream media. Through series episodes and documentaries, including an episode of *Drain the Oceans* by National Geographic, *Digging for Britain* on the BBC, an hour-long documentary by Dutch public broadcaster WNL and an episode of *Klokhuis*, a very popular children's programme in the Netherlands, millions of people were reached.

During the excavation the Ramsgate project base became a focus for events. The project undertook local awareness initiatives such as project information boards on the quay wall and presenting at local events such as the Ramsgate Festival. Providing a British Sign Language interpreter and hosting 50 home-schooled children and their parents allowed engagement with hard-to-reach audiences.

During the excavation the project ran two diving campaigns for avocational SCUBA divers, a non-traditional audience. One campaign allowed divers to

dive on the site and see what the archaeologists were doing. On a terrestrial excavation it is commonplace to open the site to visitors but this is not normal practice on a site 25m under the sea. The project is the first of which we are aware to have held a site open day on the seabed. The second campaign enabled archaeological and volunteer divers to investigate an outlying anomaly to contribute to the main project.

#Rooswijk1740 has been a maritime archaeological project on a scale seldom seen in recent years in the UK, or even north-western Europe, and has brought a great deal of attention to Ramsgate, from where the excavation was undertaken. Ramsgate is a Heritage Action Zone. This initiative aims to achieve economic growth by using the historic environment as a catalyst. *#Rooswijk1740* has resulted in two types of impact that relate to Ramsgate Heritage Action Zone. The first is the directly measurable financial contribution to the Ramsgate economy. Calculations show that over £100,000 was directly spent in Ramsgate by the project, those visiting the project and team members in their own time whilst based there in 2017 and 2018. The second element is the impact that the high-profile project, and its associated media coverage, has had on the area by raising its profile. This is harder to measure in financial terms, but may have a long-lasting effect.

Connections across Europe have commonly been forged via water. Waterways were often the preferred and sometimes even the only way of transport.



Project open days provided opportunities for visitors to talk to the conservators and other specialists and find out about their work. Here Nicole Schoute shows visitors an X-ray alongside the actual artefacts to reveal what conservators have found hidden within a concretion. Credit: #Rooswijk1740 Project

Shipwrecks are the physical remnants of these ties. Their finds reflect the connection and thus the cohesion rather than the distances between cultures, and enabling those connections has been a huge part of the project's public benefit. Shipwrecks reflect differences and similarities but also show the influences of these cultures on each other. Put simply: ships connect Europe. As a Dutch vessel lost in UK territorial waters, the *Rooswijk* is very much representative of the shared cultural heritage of Europe. Indeed, in an 18th-century vessel of the Dutch



Project open days provided opportunities for visitors to talk to the archaeologists and find out what it is like to work on an archaeological site underwater. Visitors were able to try on some of the equipment used and we would like to think we have inspired the next generation of maritime archaeologists. Credit: #Rooswijk1740 Project

East India Company such as the *Rooswijk* it is likely that 50 per cent of the people on board were from elsewhere in Europe. Research by the *#Rooswijk1740 project* has already shown that of the 22 crew members identified to date, individuals came not only from the Netherlands but also from Norway, Germany and Sweden.

The success in raising awareness and connecting people to the *Rooswijk* will have a direct impact on future attitudes to the wreck and that of underwater cultural heritage in general. Increasing people's knowledge of what lies beneath the waves will have a positive effect on people taking ownership and their care for heritage assets. Children who joined the public events may be the sports divers, heritage managers and policy makers of the future. Highlighting underwater cultural heritage in a positive way ensures it is placed high in the consciousness of future generations. When this – often still invisible – heritage becomes part of the conscious living environment of people, there will be a huge step forward in management and protection of that resource.

Funding and organisation of the #Rooswijk1740 project

The *#Rooswijk1740 project* is both funded and led by the Cultural Heritage Agency of the Netherlands (Ministry of Education, Science and Culture), working in collaboration with project partner Historic England and UK contractor MSDS Marine. The conservation work is largely undertaken by a multidisciplinary team of specialists in the research facilities of Historic England at Fort Cumberland.



The authors

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