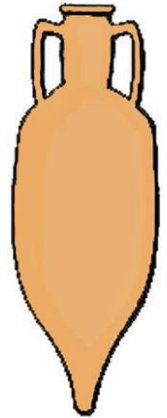


The Yarmouth Roads Wreck

Discovery of the wreck

In the early 1980's oyster fisherman began to find fragments of Roman amphora in the sea close to Yarmouth. These fragments were taken to the 'Isle of Wight Archaeological Centre' for identification and recording.



County Archaeologist *David Tomalin* organised searches by volunteer divers to see if they could find a Roman wreck lying on the seabed.



Roman Amphora
IWCMS.20000.2.5100

Hundreds of ceramic objects of various ages were recovered, but there was no evidence of a Roman shipwreck. The divers found a shipwreck, but not one that was Roman.

During the first investigations, lines of timbers were observed protruding just a few centimetres above the seabed. Near these timbers three pewter plates were found, tentatively dated to the 16/17th century. Two spoons were also recovered and were thought to date to around 1500. Close by the wreck site a bronze gun (known as a *minion*) with part of its wooden carriage still attached, was uncovered.



Pewter plates in situ at the Yarmouth Roads wreck site.

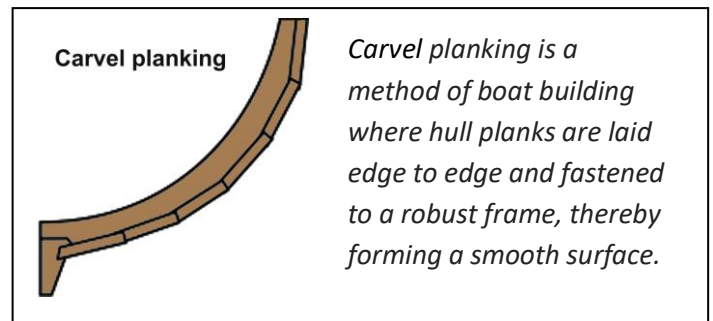
The importance of the discovery was recognised and the area was designated a 'Protected Wreck Site'. There are currently 53 wrecks designated under the Protection of Wrecks Act.

Underwater investigations

The Isle of Wight Maritime Heritage Project was formally set up in 1986 and was granted a licence to survey and excavate the site. Their work began to reveal more about the structure and the finds associated with the wreck.

Four substantial and well preserved fragments of timber were found. Exactly how much of the ship remains buried is unknown.

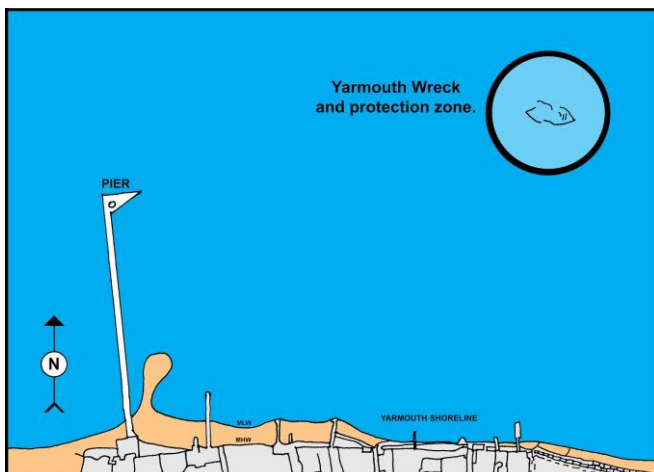
Excavations established that the ship was thirty-two metres (105 feet long). It had iron fastenings and carvel planking indicating that the ship was probably a 'carrack' of Mediterranean origin.



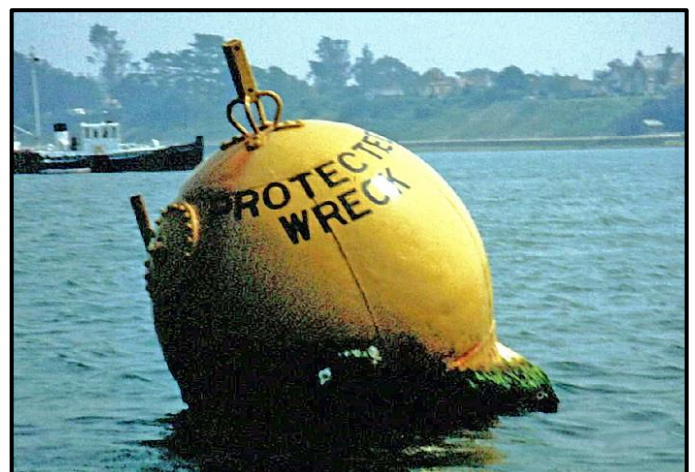
Glass bottle neck IWCMS.20000.2.5122

An impressive array of finds were discovered, some of Mediterranean origin. Also found were artefacts from England and the Low Countries (the region of north-western Europe, consisting of Belgium, the Netherlands, and Luxembourg.).

The ship may have been a Mediterranean merchant vessel trading in the mid-16th century.



Location of the Yarmouth Roads Wreck.



This large yellow buoy east of Yarmouth pier marks the wreck site. © HWTMA

The archaeological investigation ended in 1989. Finds from the site were deposited with the Isle of Wight Council's Heritage Service.

Identifying the wreck

The Maritime Heritage Project researched the identity of the wreck. Many hours were spent visiting archives, looking for written evidence of a 16th century ship being lost off Yarmouth. Eventually, a letter from a Spanish Merchant, '*Antonio de Gwarras*', was discovered.

De Gwarras was asking the *Captain of the Isle of Wight*, to return wool salvaged from the '*Santa Lucia*'. This Spanish ship was bound for Flanders with a cargo of wool when she was lost off Yarmouth in 1567. "*The ship by fortune perished and was lost in the seas thwart of Yarmouth in the Isle of Wight*".

Reports stated that the main cargo had been salvaged from the *Santa Lucia*. However, an impressive variety of artefacts were still excavated from the Yarmouth Roads wreck site in 1986. These include pewter plates, spoons and ceramics. A bronze mortar was found, this is similar to those found in Spanish Armada shipwrecks (1588).

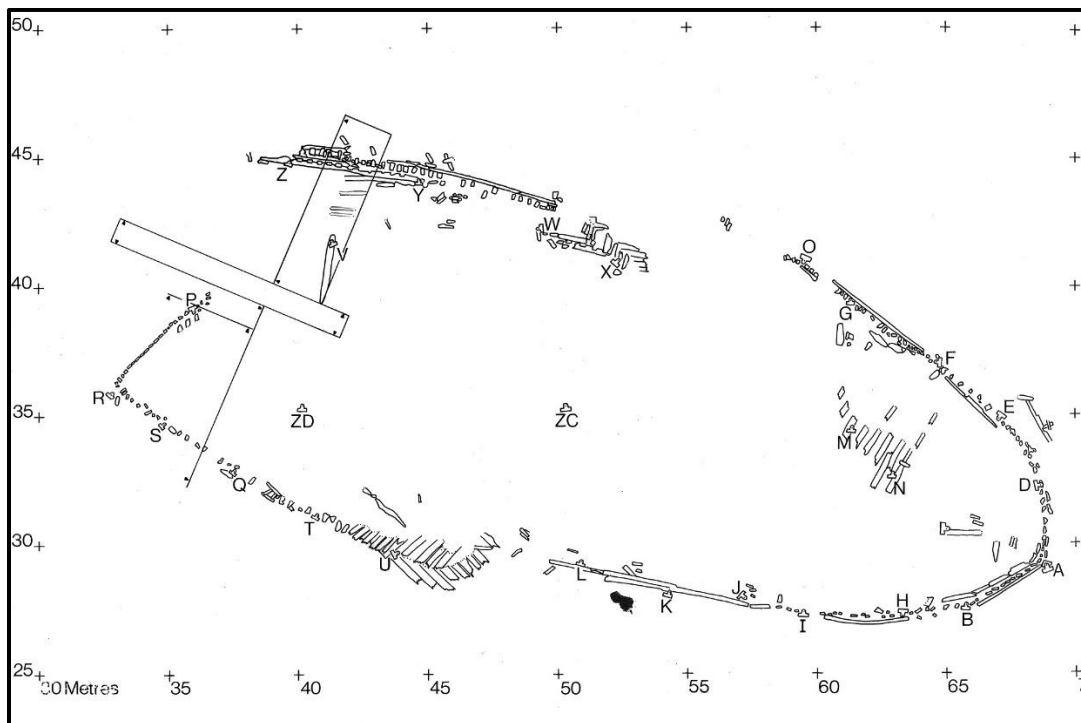


Bronze mortar IWCMS.2000.15.5339

There have been so few wrecks recorded in this area over the centuries that it has been suggested that the Yarmouth Roads Wreck is the '*Santa Lucia*'.

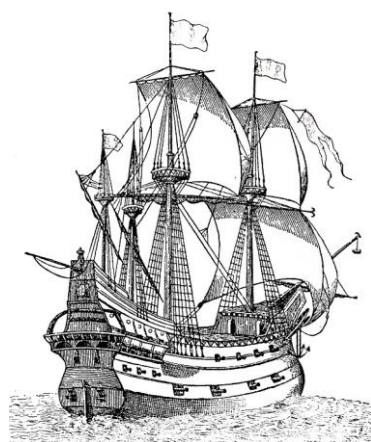
Further investigation

During 2004, the Hampshire & Wight Trust for Maritime Archaeology (HWTMA) were granted a Licence to dive on the Yarmouth Roads wreck site. Their dives have shown that there are timbers still visible on the seabed.



Plan of the discovered remains of the Yarmouth Roads wreck.

At the end of the 1980's excavation areas of the site were covered in sandbags to protect the ship's timbers. During the 2004 dives the sandbags, although torn and degraded, were still in place.



A Spanish carrack of the 16th century.

In 2009 a further inspection of the wreck site was completed and revealed that the area remained relatively stable.

In 2015 and 2016 the HWTMA began working with the 'ForSEAdiscovery' project, to investigate the Yarmouth Road timbers in detail.

One of the project's aims is to understand historic Iberian forests and how shipbuilding from the 16th-18th centuries impacted on them. The investigation may provide more information on the date and origin of the timbers from the Yarmouth Roads Wreck, which could then assist with identification of the wreck as that of the Santa Lucia



Pottery sherds on the seabed at the Yarmouth Roads wreck site. © HWTMA



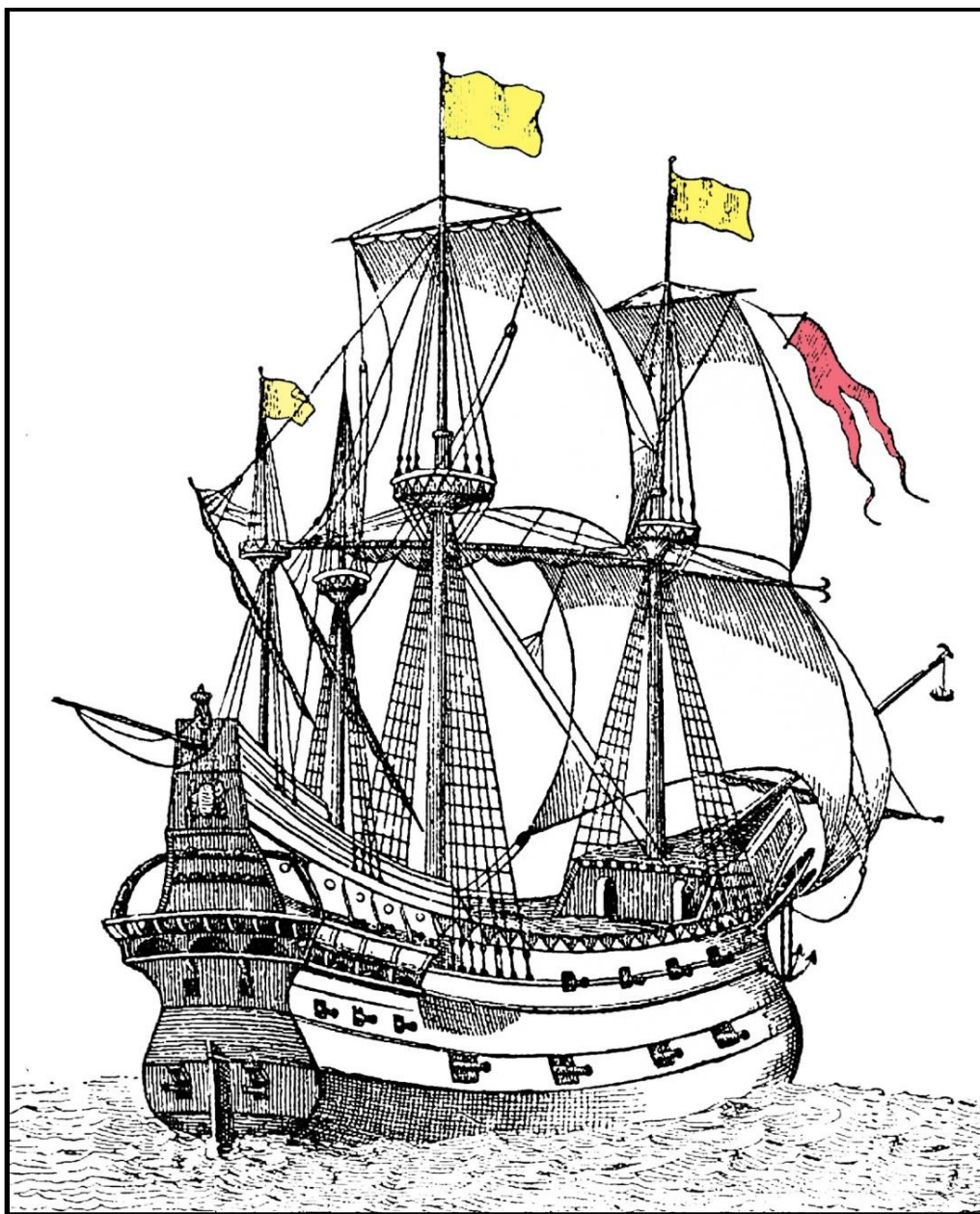
Pewter plate from the Yarmouth Roads wreck site. IWCMS.20000.15.5362



The Spanish Carrack

The largest European sailing ship of the 15th century was the 'Spanish carrack'. Developed in the Mediterranean, a carrack had three or four masts, with an aftcastle* and a forecastle, enlarging the vessel at both ends.

Carracks were the first proper ocean-going ships in Europe. They became the standard vessel of Atlantic trade and adventure in the mid-16th century. Carracks were valued because of their large capacity for carrying troops or cargo.



The most famous Spanish Carrack was the '*Santa Maria*,' the ship that *Christopher Columbus* sailed to America in 1492. Explorer *Ferdinand Magellan* also used a Carrack class vessel when circumnavigating the globe in 1519, proving the design was reliable for long journeys.

Carracks are the immediate predecessor of the galleon in terms of ship design. The Yarmouth Roads wreck was identified as a thirty-two metre/105 feet long merchant carrack, possibly of Spanish origin.

* The **aftcastle** (or aftercastle) is the structure built at the stern (back) of the ship providing a heightened platform from which to fire upon other ships. It usually houses the captain's cabin. At the front of the ship is the smaller forecastle.



Archaeologists after a dive on the wreck.

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Isle of Wight Council Heritage Service

