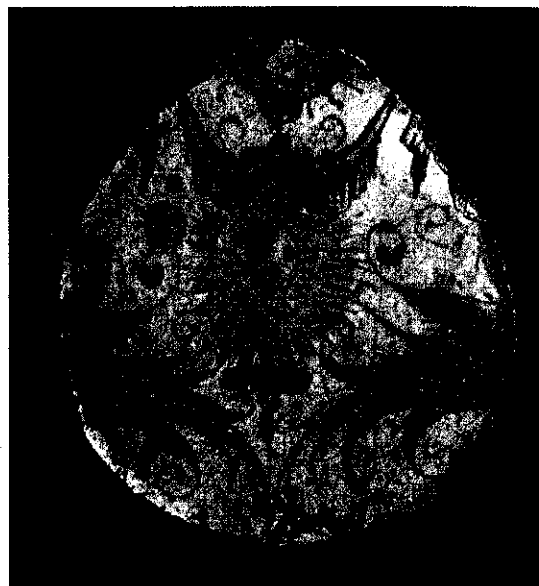


The wreck of the Kinlochbervie:

partnerships in maritime archaeology

Although expanding rapidly, the number of experienced marine archaeologists remains small, so several organisations often work as partnerships managed by a lead partner. In this case Phil Robertson of NAS Scotland managed a group drawn from Cook & Kaye, Mary Rose Trust, National Museums of Scotland, Oxford Archaeology North, Pritchard Diving Services, Scottish Cultural Resources Access Network, RAF Lossiemouth Sub Aqua Club and the universities of Bournemouth, Dundee, Southampton and St Andrews to work on the protected wreck site at Kinlochbervie in north-west Scotland.

Base of a maiolica bowl from the Kinlochbervie. Photograph: Colin Pritchard



Spanish Armada?

The wreck was discovered by RAF Lossiemouth Sub Aqua Club in 2000 and designated an historic wreck under the Protection of Wrecks Act in 2001. Initial evaluation by the Archaeological Diving Unit, the RAF Team and *Time Team* (*Diving for the Armada*, shown 20 January 2002) suggested a late sixteenth-century date, probably connected to the Spanish Armada of 1588. This work led to more questions than it answered, so further work was commissioned by Historic Scotland.

The site from an adjacent cliff. Gemini Storm is moored over the wreck. Photograph: Colin Martin



Cannons and anchors

Exposed to the full force of Atlantic weather and remote from rescue services the site is technically challenging to work and one of the deepest recorded archaeological sites in UK waters. The wreck lies within an exposed cove, surrounded by 100m-high sea cliffs and outlying skerries. Underwater the site lies in two distinct halves, a shallower site consisting of a group of cannons and anchors, with a small number of artefacts lying in 5–8m of water at the top of an underwater cliff. At the foot of the cliff in bare rock and rock scree at 35 metres depth lies another group of cannon and anchors and many artefacts, providing the visually striking image of large guns and anchors propped against a sheer cliff. Major features include four anchors and four cast-iron cannons (three with remains of their carriages concreted to them). The relatively small size and number of cannons is typical of a merchant rather than war ship of the late sixteenth or seventeenth centuries.

Grotesque maiolica

The majority of artefacts recovered are bricks (possibly part of the ship's galley or items of cargo), the remains of olive jars, and high status Italian pottery, primarily maiolica. The site has produced



the largest group of Italian pottery found on an archaeological site in Scotland and the largest group of grotesque maiolica found in Britain. Work to date indicates that the maiolica originates from Pisa and may be from one workshop. Art historical work suggests it dates around the first quarter of the seventeenth century, contrary to the dating of the coarse wares 25–50 years earlier. Other finds include cannon balls, a sounding weight and tiles.

Unreported wrecks

Searches of the primary printed and hydrographical sources for the area have failed to uncover any references to wrecks. However the area was then even more remote than it is now and it is unlikely any wreck would have been officially reported, and may have occurred completely unnoticed. The presence of foreign shipping off the west coast of Scotland was common, as many ships voyaging between southern Europe, the Netherlands, Scandinavia and the Baltic often took the 'north about' route to avoid the contrary winds, hostile (English) Navigation laws and pirates of the English Channel.

Collapse inevitable

Our initial impression of the site is of a highly dynamic environment in which only the larger, more robust artefacts were stable, but examination of the finds and study of environmental conditions on site using 'bottom drifters' suggests the opposite. Environmental monitoring detected no movement

at depth on the site and the condition of the finds suggests a short violent episode in antiquity followed by a prolonged period of stability. Corrosion potential study of the anchors and cannon indicated that these are actively corroding and are in the final stages of decay, with eventual collapse inevitable. The small amount of iron pan on the site is the remains of smaller iron objects such as nails or small arms.

The combination of the sizes of anchors and cannon and the pottery collection suggest a merchantman of medium to large size outward bound from the Mediterranean for Scandinavia, the Netherlands or the Baltic. The limited number of cannon and lack of certain finds types suggest we only have part of a wreck, the remainder perhaps lying on the outlying skerries to seaward or at the base of the cliff inshore of the located site. Typically, dating evidence is not consistent, suggesting dates over a period of fifty years, but nothing found to date indicates a definite connection with the 1588 Armada.

Whatever its exact date the site adds considerably to our picture of trade and navigation in the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries

Phil Robertson

Nautical Archaeology Society, Scotland

Dave Parham

Bournemouth University



SCUBA diver recording the deep anchors and cannon.
Photograph: Peter Pritchard

