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Preliminary Survey and Assessment of a wreck on the island of Fuday

Barra, Western Isles

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Project summary sheet

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<i>Parish</i>	BARRA
<i>Council</i>	COMHAIRLE NAN EILEAN SIAR
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<i>NMRS No</i>	NF 70NW 8004
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<i>Fieldwork</i>	RGW PRESCOTT, DE ATKINSON, S LISCOE
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<i>Report</i>	OCTOBER 2008

Signed off by:.....

Russel Coleman MA(Hons) FSA Scot, Project Manager

Date:.....

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Illus 1
Site location

Preliminary Survey and Assessment of a wreck on the island of Fuday, Barra, Western Isles

By R G W Prescott, D E Atkinson and S Liscoe

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This paper presents a preliminary survey and assessment of a wreck in the intertidal zone on the island of Fuday, Barra. The vessel is a wooden ship of probable Dutch origin, provisionally dated to 1500 - 1650. It is of a double-planked, transitional type. The lower part of the vessel survives from stem to stern, and the wreck measures 31.7 x 5.5 metres. In the past the site has been periodically completely buried in white sand, re-emerging at intervals of c.10 years. The present degree of exposure is the greatest in living memory and there are signs that the site is becoming unstable. The wreck is readily accessible at low water and has been subject to considerable salvage activity. In addition to human interference, tide and wave action are progressively dispersing the wreck and its remaining contents. Recommendations for the future protection and management of this significant archaeological resource are set out in the report.

1.0 THE BRIEF

We were commissioned by Historic Scotland to inspect the site of a wreck (NMRS Number: NF70NW 8004) on the island of Fuday in the Sound of Barra, and to prepare a report bringing together the results and analysis of previous assessment work with the results of the assessment carried out as part of the present commission. The report should aim to help Historic Scotland identify the principal threats to the site and to consider what, if any, protection and monitoring protocols might be relevant to the site. The report is to be copied to Dr Mary MacLeod at Comhairle nan Eilean Siar and to the Royal Commission on the Ancient and Historical Monuments of Scotland (RCAHMS).

2.0 THE VISIT

Having previously ascertained from local contacts on South Uist that the wreck was still exposed at low tide, we travelled from St Andrews to South Uist on 5th August 2008, returning to St Andrews on 8th August. Between these dates we inspected the wreck site on Fuday on two consecutive days, when the tide served, travelling by boat from Ludag to Fuday. We also interviewed a number of local people about the recent history of the site and obtained from them copies of photographs of the site along with samples of material collected from the wreck. In addition, we spoke with Dr Mary MacLeod at Comhairle nan Eilean Siar; and with staff at the South Uist Area Office of Scottish Natural Heritage to inform them of our work on Fuday.

This report describes our findings during the recent visit in August 2008. It also incorporates information relating to three previous visits to the site, two by Dr Robert Prescott and one by



Illus 2

General view of the beach from high on the machair, showing the wreck near the tide-line

a party of archaeologists from the University of Sheffield.

3.0 THE SITE LOCATION

The wreck lies in the inter-tidal zone towards the western end of the beach Traigh Bahn, on the north coast of Fuday. The site lies well above the Low Water Mark of Ordinary Spring Tides, as represented on the Ordnance Survey plans from 1881 and 2000 at a scale 1:10,560 and 1:10,000 respectively (Illus 1 & 2), and dries out completely at low water spring tides. However, the wreck itself is not always exposed. Periods when it is extensively uncovered alternate with periods when it is buried in sand to a varying degree. From time to time it becomes completely buried in sand while at other times it is exposed to such an extent that the stern-post attains a height of c.2 metres above the beach level (see 4.0 The site history below).

A number of locations for the site have been recorded since 1998, namely:

National Grid Reference:

NF 735 096 (D Rixson, March 1998, method unspecified)

NF 737 095 (University of Sheffield, Sept. 2000, method unspecified)

NF 7366 0958 (Stern post, RGWP, 2002, by two-point compass fix)

NF 73678 09452 (Stern post, RGWP et al., 2008, by GPS fix)

Latitude and longitude:

N 57° 03.6' W 07° 23.1' (Stern post, RGWP et al., by GPS fix)

4.0 THE SITE HISTORY

The island of Fuday has been occupied intermittently since pre-historic times. It is currently uninhabited, the last shepherds having departed the island prior to the Great War. Though without permanent residents, the island is frequently visited for recreational purposes by passing yachtsmen and local residents from Barra and South Uist.

The wreck was first drawn to the notice of the RCAHMS in a letter from Mr D Rixson in March 1998 (see Appendix 2:1). The letter enclosed copies of photographs of the wreck dating c.1993, which had been sent to Mr Rixson by Mr Duncan MacKenzie of Ullapool, a former resident of South Uist. It is not clear whether Rixson had personally visited the site.

In September 2000 a party of archaeologists from the University of Sheffield visited the site and took samples of timber and bricks back to Sheffield (Mr Ian Tyers, personal communication). In February 2001 Dr James Symonds wrote to the RCAHMS stating that the Sheffield dendrochronology laboratory had dated "a fragment of loose planking that may be associated with the vessel to the late fifteenth century". This claim is assessed below (see 6.0 Interpretation).

With the assistance of Historic Scotland one of us (RGWP) visited Fuday in May 2001 to carry out a preliminary assessment of the wreck. At that time, the site was completely buried in sand. It was not feasible to study the wreck on this visit, but discussions with local residents in South Uist revealed that timbers and other samples had been gathered from the wreck by people, with a view to augmenting their winter fuel supplies. A tour of a number of croft houses resulted in the collection of several substantial timber pieces from the wreck, along with a number of yellow hand-made bricks. These samples were taken to the University of St Andrews, where photographic and drawn records of the specimens were made. For the analysis of these specimens see 6.1 dating the ship, below. This somewhat disappointing visit was followed by a second visit in 2002 which was much more productive. At that time the wreck was partially exposed, with a substantial section of the stern post and the tips of several frames un-

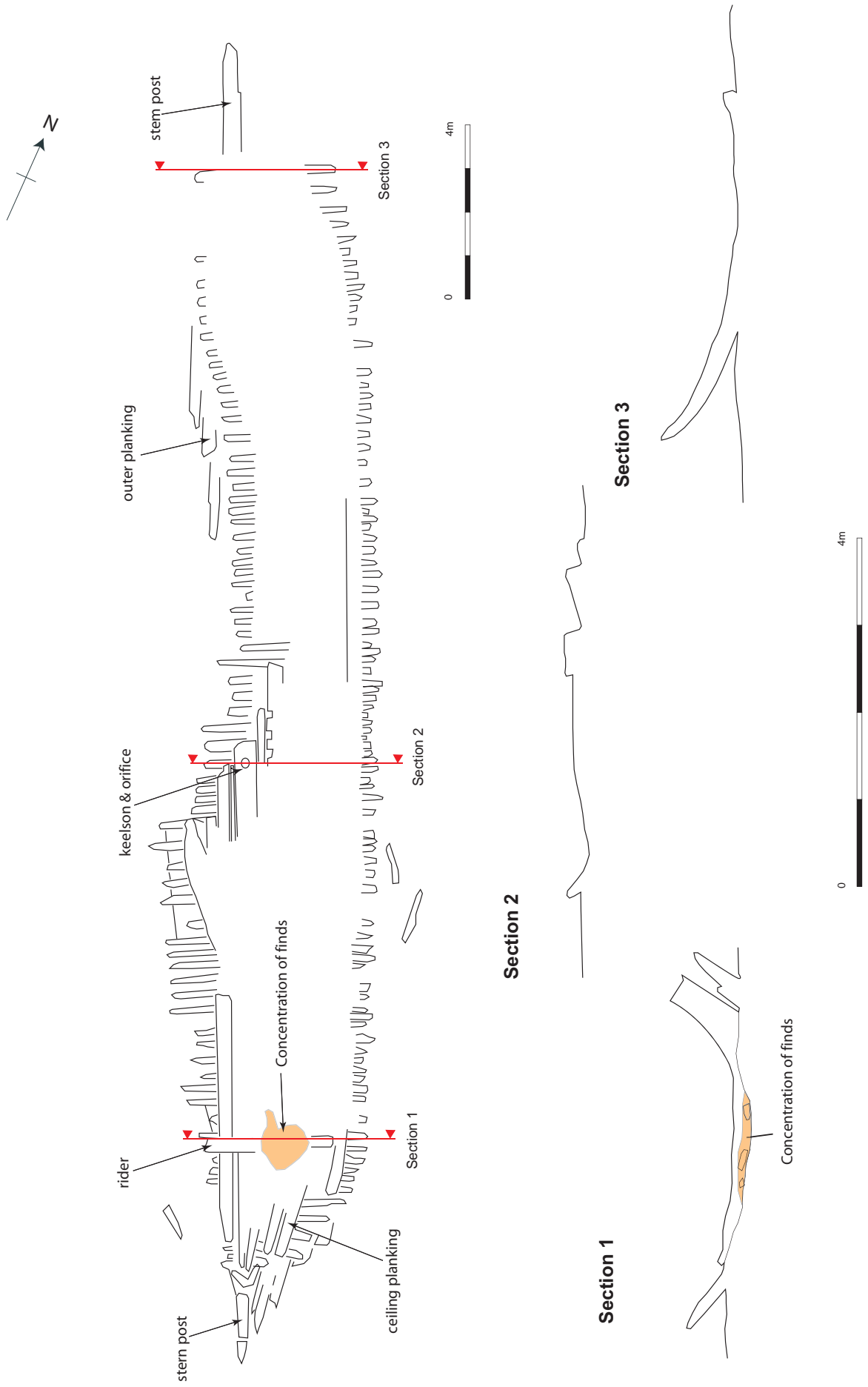
covered, revealing part of a coherent structure with a length of c.10 metres overall. During this visit, certain key features of the vessel were ascertained, notably, the existence of double rabbet lines and the presence of numerous bricks within the confines of the site. A site location was obtained by means of compass bearings, providing a two point fix.

During 2008 it became clear that the wreck was considerably more exposed than in earlier years. Dramatic photographs received in St Andrews from Mr Domhnall Iain Cambeul of East Kilbride, South Uist, showed that the lower part of a substantial vessel was exposed throughout its entire length. Appraisal of these images and discussions with Historic Scotland led to the decision to make a further visit to Fuday, with sufficient resources to produce a pre-disturbance survey of the site and an assessment of its significance and current condition. The results of this 2008 survey form the core of the present report.

In discussing the site with a number of local people in South Uist (principally Mr Domhnall Iain Cambeul, whose help has been invaluable throughout this work) a clear picture has emerged of the cyclic burial and re-appearance of the wreck. Mr Cambeul was born in Glendale, South Uist, in 1957 and as a boy visited the wreck on Fuday a number of times, particularly during the 1970s. He has maintained his interest in the site over the years (his present house overlooks the Sound of Barra and the beach at Traigh Bhan) and has visited it on many occasions up to the present. He, and a number of other local residents, reported a cycle of emergence and re-burial in the past with a cycle-length of c 10 – 11 years.

The cyclic burial and exposure of the wreck raises questions about the dynamics of the site and the structural stability of the vessel's remains. During periods of maximum exposure is there evidence that winter storm activity and high spring tides are capable of moving the wreck and dispersing its contents? Or does the wreck remain static within three-dimensional space, while large 2 metre sand waves pass over it at intervals? The definitive answer to this question must await further investigation, for example by obtaining a series of precision measures of the location and orientation of the ship's structure over time, or by gathering geophysical data on the underlying substrate beneath the wreck. For the present we can report that there seems no evidence of significant changes in the location or orientation of the wreck since 2000. Furthermore, geophysical phenomena such as the migration of 2 metre sand waves through the site would not be especially surprising occurrences at Traigh Bhan (Dr Richard Bates, personal communication). It seems likely therefore that the vessel's position remains fairly static, though it is periodically abraded and its contents are dispersed by the action of wave and tide following the removal of the overburden of sand.

There is an impression forming locally that the site has recently been exposed more frequently and to a greater extent than in former years. In Mr Cambeul's opinion, the wreck is currently uncovered to a greater extent than he has ever seen. In discussing this



Illus 3
Plan and sections of the vessel

possibility, local residents point out that the causeway to Eriskay, which was completed in July 2001, has introduced changes to the tidal regime in the Sound that may have consequences for the movement of sand waves through the area from the west.

5.0 THE SITE DESCRIPTION

The site comprises a coherent structure forming the lower part of a timber vessel which is currently exposed throughout its length from the stern-post to the rounded fore-foot (Illus 3 on previous page, 4 & 5). The structure has an overall length of 31.7 metres and a breadth of 5.5 metres at its widest point. The wreck has a list to starboard and appears to be trimmed by the stern. From the stern-post, the fore-foot lies on a bearing of 308 degrees magnetic (311 degrees true) along the centre line of the vessel. There are a small number of detached timbers associated with the coherent structure and a probable ballast trail extends outwards from the port quarter for a distance of c7.5 metres. A measured survey of the entire exposed structure was carried out and plotted at a scale of 1:100. In addition, three transverse sections along the length of the vessel were plotted at a scale of 1:50

The exposed structural elements include components of the compound fore and after stems, floor timbers and futtocks, two layers of external hull planking,



Illus 4

The wreck in close up. From stem to stern



Illus 5

The wreck in close-up. From stem to stern

internal ceiling planks, a keelson and a large floor rider near the stern. There is a double rabbet line on both fore and after stems, associated with the double skin of outer hull planking (Illus 6). The vessel is fastened with a mixture of treenails and iron fastenings. The scantlings of the principal structural components are recorded in Table 1 below. Additional observations of significance are: a) the irregular pattern of frame spaces, with frames sometimes in groups of two or three closely-spaced together, their scantlings diminishing along their length from the centre-line outwards; b) the exposed keelson is penetrated by a circular orifice, 200mm diameter, just astern of amidships, which may be a pump well; c) the ceiling plank to starboard of the keelson bears several checks which may have been to receive upright stanchions for a longitudinal partition (Illus 7-10, opposite page)

Despite some deterioration and biological degradation at the exposed ends of frames and stems, the overall condition of the assemblage is remarkably sound, as judged by the weight and hardness of the timbers. However, a number of the timbers show evi-



Illus 6

Stern assembly, showing double rabbet

dence of salvaging activity in the past. For example, the fore end of the keelson has been truncated amidships and its damaged end bears tool marks, probably from an axe. Also, the top of the rider on the port side has been sawn off square and the cut surface matches that of a piece of timber previously collected in 2002 from a wood-store in South Kilbride (R G W Prescott) and currently held in St Andrews. Also, during the present visit, a slightly charred timber from the wreck was col-

Structural element	Sided dimension (mm)	Moulded dimension (mm)
Floor timbers	170	190
Keelson	520	90
Rider	214	223 +
After stem/apron	167 – 293	705
Hull plank (inner layer)	52 - 60	332
Hull plank (outer layer)	31	319 - 331

Table 1

Scantlings of structural elements

lected from the beach, where it had possibly been used as fuel in a beach bonfire.

Several loose finds were collected from the beach outside the port (landward) side of the wreck towards the stern. These comprised yellow bricks and terracotta tile, some with mortar attached, concreted iron objects and putative ballast stones. A small number of loose surface finds were taken from within the wreck towards the stern, namely, yellow bricks, metalliferous slag and a small sheet of worked lead (Illus 11 – 14, see



Illus 7
Stern post



Illus 8
Fore-foot with scarf



Illus 9
Keelson, with circular orifice (pump well?)



Illus 10
Midship structure including; double outer planking; ceiling planking; keelson; floors and starboard futtocks (top of picture)



Illus 11
Stern structure including the floor rider and concentration of finds *in situ* (above the rider on the right of the picture)

over). The presence of further artefacts embedded in stratified deposits below these finds within the body of the wreck was noted. A sample of luting was collected from the surface of a scarf joint on the forward stem. A detached piece of framing, bored for several treenails was recovered from the edge of the machair to the east of the wreck, at the probable site of a beach bonfire (see above). A list of finds and samples collected is provided in the Appendix

6.0 INTERPRETATION

6.1 Dating the ship

Time and resources have not permitted a search for historical evidence about the loss of the ship. However, the significance of the wrecking episode to the communities of the Outer Hebrides and beyond would have been such as to suggest a reasonable probability of eventually locating such evidence.



Illus 12
Brick



Illus 13
Lead object



Illus 14
Tile

Dendrochronological evidence

The letter from Dr James Symonds of Sheffield University to the RCAHMS (see Appendix 2:2) stated that a dendro-date from the late fifteenth century had been obtained, but did not include a report from the dendrochronology laboratory. This letter has been followed up by Dr Prescott, who has communicated with Dr Symonds and Mr Tyers, the head of dendrochronology at Sheffield when the timber from Fuday arrived there. Unfortunately, no report from the dendrochronology laboratory exists and the date claimed cannot be substantiated. Apparently the timber was never fully investigated due to a lack of resources. After some initial inspection and discussion it was eventually destroyed (see Appendix 2:3). Mr Tyers suggests, from memory, that there was a discussion about the bricks from the wreck and thinks the fifteenth century date mentioned may have related to an informed estimate of their age. In the absence of any scientific dating evidence from the wreck it will be necessary to look for comparisons elsewhere in the archaeological record, using typological evidence relating to the vessel's structure and her contents as a guide to the date of the ship.

Ship structure

The observation of a double rabbet line on the stern post during the 2002 inspection, reinforced *a fortiori* by the more extensive recent survey, when the forward stem was also shown to have a double rabbet, and both stems were seen to marry up to the hood-ends of a double skin of outer hull planking (the inner, ceiling planking is a single layer) has clear parallels in the archaeological record (Maarleveld, 1994, Probst, 1994). Some half-dozen vessels showing this characteristic have been studied in sites from the Netherlands, Denmark and the Far East. This feature is found in both large ocean-going vessels such as the Dutch East Indiaman *Batavia* (1628) and in smaller, vernacular trading vessels from the North Sea margins. The double skin has been interpreted as an adaptation to strengthen hulls at the time when the technological change from shell-first construction to frame-first construction was taking place in North-west Europe, as a result of cultural influences from Southern Europe. This transition, in the cases reported above, has been dated to the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries.

The finds

The bricks recovered from the site by various people and taken to St Andrews in 2002 were tentatively assigned to a Dutch origin. They resemble a group of bricks in the collection at the Montrose Museum, from a Dutch East Indiaman that was wrecked north of Montrose in 1707, and also specimens from the wreck of the *Kennermerlandt* (1669) in Shetland. The bricks collected

in 2008 are similar in character to overijsselse steen, yellow bricks of Dutch origin carried on VOC ships as ballast. A specimen of Terracotta tile was also collected in 2008 and has been assigned to an earlier date in the fifteenth century (J Franklin, personal communication). Some of the bricks and the tile have mortar on them and are clearly re-used. Whether as ballast, a cargo or part of the structure of the galley, these bricks and tile may be older than the ship that carried them.

The small piece of sheet lead found within the wreck has parallels in finds from the *Dartmouth*, wrecked in the Sound of Mull in 1690 (Martin, 1978). Similar items are mentioned in Sir Henry Mainwaring's seventeenth century *Seaman's Dictionary*, where they are described as tingles for repairing leaks both within and outwith the hull. Their small size would enable their use to repair leaks between the frames.

The samples of putative ballast collected have not yet been fully investigated but their geological source may throw light on the provenance and service history of the ship.

Summary of dating evidence

Taken as a whole, the evidence from small finds and from vessel typology would suggest a date for the archaeological assemblage somewhere between the fifteenth and the mid seventeenth century, with the earlier date dependent upon the finds and the later date resulting from comparable vessels elsewhere in the archaeological record. It is of course possible that this particular ship might predate the rather small sample of similar vessels already known, so that the apparent disparity between the age of the finds and that of the ship might be reduced. For the present, it seems reasonable to suggest a date somewhere between 1500 and 1650 for the building of the ship. It remains a pity that no dendrochronological date for the vessel has so far been obtained and correcting this situation must be a priority. Some of the samples at St Andrews could provide material for this purpose. Obtaining reliable dendrochronological dating evidence would greatly assist the search for a documentary trail relating to the wreck.

6.2 Significance of the site

The vessel appears to be a north-west European (probably Dutch-built) trading ship from the sixteenth – seventeenth century. As such it is among the oldest known sea-going wrecks in Scottish waters. Ships of this date and type are of special interest as they illustrate North European ship-building at a transitional stage of technology, when long-established practices such as shell-first, clenched lap construction were being modified by influences from the Mediterranean (changes which were a crucial ingredient in the expansion of Europe and the growth of world-wide sea-borne empires).

Although of probable Dutch origin it is possible

that the vessel was Scottish-owned, for there were strong trading links with the Low Countries at the time and Scots ship-owners did sometimes buy Dutch vessels (T C Smout, personal communication). This question of ownership might be illuminated by information arising from future excavation of the wreck, with consequent implications for the history of trade and the Scottish economy.

A further point adding to the significance of this wreck is its accessibility, which, if properly managed could have important implications for education and access to the maritime heritage of the Western Isles.

7.0 MANAGEMENT ISSUES

7.1 Threats to the site

The site at present has no statutory protection and, when uncovered by tide and sand, is readily accessible to anyone with a small boat. There is ample evidence of human intervention on the site, probably over many generations past but certainly continuing to the present day. Timber has been harvested from the wreck for the domestic hearth and maybe for other uses. There may well be parts of the ship incorporated within buildings in the area (a research strand well worth pursuing in the relatively treeless Outer Hebrides).

In addition to this man-made threat to the site, wave action and tidal scouring are having a considerable influence over the distribution of the contents of the vessel. This is amply demonstrated by the debris and ballast trails to be seen outside the ship, and the ease with which loose finds have been recovered from the site by a number of visitors in the recent past.

These threats are serious, given the significance of the wreck as a continental vessel of early date and transitional type lying on a Scottish beach. Further attrition of the site, by whatever causal agents, will increasingly weaken the value of this wreck for our understanding of ship technology and history, and of Scottish connections with the continent.

7.2 Steps to ameliorate threats to the site

The best thing that could happen to the site in the short term is for it to be re-buried by an advancing sand wave. However, this is an unpredictable form of protection and if local opinion is correct, reburial may become a briefer and less frequent event in future.

The ship structure is fairly robust unless attacked by crowbar and saw. It is the remaining contents of the vessel that are under greatest threat from both human action and tidal flow. We therefore suggest that consideration be given to a complete excavation of the contents of the vessel, which have by now been reduced to a relatively small and manageable amount of stratified infill, mostly between the

floors at the after end of the wreck. A full understanding of this archaeological assemblage would help greatly with the interpretation and subsequent management of the site. It might be necessary to provide some form of statutory protection for the wreck, at least on a temporary basis until this phase is completed.

Protecting the ship structure against human intervention might be achieved by some form of listing or scheduling but, given the special character of community in the Western Isles, it might be better provided for by the careful dissemination of information and guidance about the wreck and how to look after it (perhaps through a 'mentoring' initiative). If the contents of the vessel could be properly excavated and treated, the empty structure could perhaps be returned to the local community as a source of wonder and pride. The wreck site could be visited safely without fear of doing damage to its integrity, provided standards of good behaviour are set in place and monitored. Dr Mary MacLeod should be consulted about this possibility. Her experience of managing the archaeological resource in the Western Isles would be of considerable help in developing a suitable management programme for the "empty" wreck.

8.0 RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Consideration should be given to the necessity or otherwise of introducing formal protection for the site, pending thorough survey and analysis. The level of protection could be down-graded later, once the risk of damage by casual visitors has been pre-empted by excavation. The local community could thereafter, under guidance, eventually assume "ownership and responsibility" for the site.
2. Consideration should be given to commissioning a dendrochronological survey of the timber samples gathered since 2002 which are currently at St Andrews, with the aim of dating and provenancing the timbers in the ship.
3. A decision should be made to excavate the remaining contents of the interior of the ship, which are at continual risk from the action of wave and tide. This excavation should progress steadily along the length of the ship, clearing the spaces between the frames to the full depth of the hull. Work on the site would be restricted by the tidal cycle; each excavation session should end with the systematic re-packing of the excavated spaces with Hessian sand-bags, filled with nearby beach sand of the same quality as that within the hull. Thus consolidated, the site would have a measure of homogeneity and similarity to the characteristics prevailing before excavation began. The infill of sand-bags would also safeguard against adversely changing the hydrostatic regime within the wreck.

4. The existing preliminary survey of the ship's structure should be extended to provide a complete record of what remains. This survey will inform subsequent decision-making about the future management of the wreck.
5. A discussion meeting should be convened of all interested parties to consider these recommendations and to develop a conservation management plan for this important site.

9.0 ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

We received valuable help and in some cases samples of wreck material from many people. In South Uist, special mention must be made of Domhnall Iain Cambeul and his family, who provided much vital information and excellent hospitality; Iain MacInnes, the boatman who ferried us to Fuday each day; Annabell Gordon who provided us with comfortable accommodation and the late Michael MacInnes, who shared his knowledge of the wreck during a memorable visit to Fuday in 2002. On the mainland, Duncan MacKenzie from Ullapool maintained a keen interest in the wreck, and provided some early photographs and samples of timber. In the Edinburgh headquarters of Historic Scotland, Noel Fojut and Philip Robertson provided valuable advice, guidance and support for this survey and assessment.

10.0 REFERENCES

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APPENDICES

Appendix 1: Registers*Finds Register*

Find Number	Context	Description
1	Unstratified	Futtock, bored for treenails
2	Unstratified	Iron concretion (fastenings?) (17 objects)
3	Unstratified	Yellow brick(s), with mortar adhering (2 fragments)
4	Unstratified	Tile, with mortar adhering
5	Stern	Sheet of lead, margin pierced for nails
6	Unstratified	Red/brown square brick
7	Unstratified	Orange brick (3 fragments)
8	Unstratified	Large squared stone (ballast?) with mortar adhered

Samples Register

Sample Number	Context	Description
1	Stern	Shingle (ballast?)(10 pebbles)
2	Unstratified	Shingle (ballast?) (17 pebbles)
3	Unstratified	Shingle (ballast?) (35 pebbles)
4	Unstratified	Large stone (ballast?)
5	Stem post	Fibrous luting from scarf at forward stem
6	Stern	Metalliferous slag

Appendix 2: Correspondence file:2.1 *D Rixson to RCAHMS*2.2 *J Symonds to RCAHMS*2.3 *Ian Tyers to R G W Prescott*

Appendix 3: Digital archive metadata

Project: Fuday, Sound of Barra, Western Isles

Project Code: FHSU08

Project Manager: Russel Coleman

Project Officer: Dan Atkinson

Digital Data: Primary Archive

File name	Description	Folder	Linked Files	Software	Version	3 rd party data
none						

Digital Data: Report Archive

File name	Description	Folder	Linked Files	Software	Version	3 rd party data
FHSU08-Digital-archive-metadata.xls	This file	FHSU08-Project-archive	-	MS Excel	2003	N
FHSU08-Final-Report-cn.pdf	PDF of final typeset report	FHSU08-Project-archive\FHSU08-Report\	FHSU08-Final-Report-cn.indd	Adobe Acrobat	8 Pro	Y
FHSU08_report_v02_ee.indd	Typeset report	FHSU08-Project-archive\FHSU08-Report_v.2	FHSU08-DSR-report.doc, FHSU08-Illus01v01-ee.ai, FHSU08-Illus02v01-ee.ai, FHSU08-Illus03v01-ee.ai, FHSU08-Illus04v01-ee.ai, FHSU08-Illus05v01-ee.ai, FHSU08-Illus06v01-ee.ai, FHSU08-Illus07v01-ee.ai, FHSU08-Illus08v01-ee.ai, FHSU08-Illus09v01-ee.ai, FHSU08-Illus10v01-ee.ai, FHSU08-Illus11v01-ee.ai, FHSU08-Illus12v01-ee.ai, FHSU08-Illus13v01-ee.ai, FHSU08-Illus14v01-ee.ai	Adobe InDesign	CS3	Y
	Report text	FHSU08-Project-archive\FHSU08-Report\	-	MS Word	2003	N
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