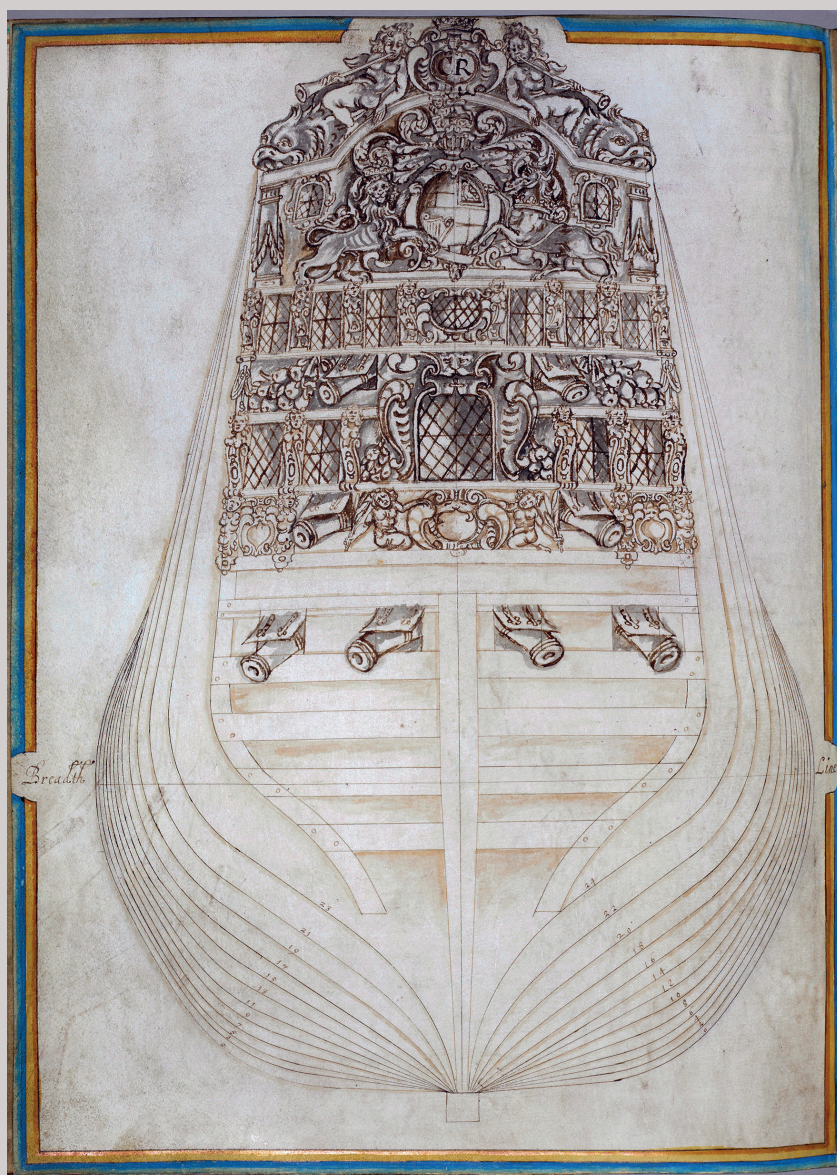


THE WRECK OF THE *LONDON*

Archaeological Investigations of
a 17th-century Warship

edited by Michael Walsh



Cotswold Archaeology Monograph 20

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Edited by
Michael Walsh

With contributions by

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Front cover: Contemporary drawing of the stern of the London showing the Royal arms (© Royal Collection Enterprises Limited 2026 Royal Collection Trust)

Top: Gun carriage after conservation (© Historic England Archive, photograph Christopher Redgrave); Middle: Chapter-ring with folding gnomon from the horizontal pocket sundial (© Historic England Archive, photograph James O. Davies); Bottom: Shoe 3064/3065 (© Historic England Archive, photograph James O. Davies)

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Summary

Since March 2014 a programme of archaeological excavation, geophysical survey and finds assessments has been undertaken by Cotswold Archaeology (CA) and its specialist sub-contractors on the site of the *London* wreck.

The *London* was an English second-rate ship-of-the-line built at Chatham in 1656 during the Interregnum. The *London* served in both the Cromwellian and Restoration navies, saw action during the Anglo-Spanish War in 1657 and participated in the English show of strength during the Battle of the Sound. At the time of the Restoration in 1660 the ship formed part of the fleet that brought the future King Charles II back from exile in the Netherlands.

The *London* sank in the Thames Estuary in 1665 while preparing for the Second Anglo-Dutch War. The ship was blown apart by an explosion, probably of its gunpowder magazine, and, as mentioned in Samuel Pepys' diary entry of 8 March 1665 (Latham 1996b, 138), only 24 personnel survived. The site was rediscovered in 1962 and was designated in 2008 under the Protection of Wrecks Act 1973.¹ The wreck has been on the Heritage at Risk (HAR) register since 2009, owing to the risk of exposure and environmental decay of archaeological material.

More than 700 items have been recovered both through excavation and under the terms of a surface-recovery licence by the licensee team led by Steve Ellis. The artefacts, ecofacts and environmental samples brought up from the vessel during the excavations have been subject to initial stabilisation and processing (as required), assessment, analysis and conservation.

This volume presents a brief summary of the excavations and the results of the assessments of the recovered finds, subsequent analyses and the conservation of the materials. It considers the archaeological, historical and documentary evidence collectively in its local, regional and national context. The remarkable results of the conservation of the broad range and variety of recovered artefacts and material types have presented an ideal opportunity to contribute to the public understanding of the principles, practices and achievements of conservation science through this volume and online resources. The project has also provided many opportunities for public engagement including the use of quayside volunteers, provision of web content, articles in popular archaeological magazines, talks and the early display of artefacts in museums. It has also enabled a collaborative professional training opportunity in an environmental specialism.

The rare and well-preserved objects provide an exceptional insight into the navy during one of the most significant periods in England's history, a time when English naval power was emerging on the European stage. The close dating of the assemblages adds greatly to its contribution to our understanding of the development of various 17th-century technologies and trade patterns. The collective assemblage also enhances our understanding of the known history of the vessel, particularly details of onboard life and provisioning, and our understanding of the last days of the ship.

1. <https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/1973/33> (accessed 3 September 2025).