

Going Electronic

How Ebooks are helping bring vintage dive books back into circulation

by Chris Mitchell

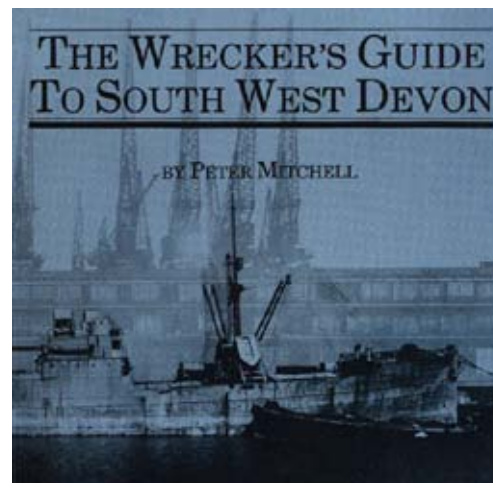
We're all familiar with the dramatic rise of ebooks, driven particularly by Amazon.com and their Kindle ebook reader (along with their free Kindle software for PCs, Macs and pretty much any other device). For scuba divers, the popularity of ebooks represents an interesting opportunity for more books to be published about obscure but fascinating diving topics. Few people write diving books with dreams of being the next JK Rowling, more for the love of sharing their knowledge and connecting with other people.

Unfortunately diving is very much a niche subject, and it's often hard work to sell more than a couple of thousand copies of a title due to the vagaries of distribution and promotion. This in turn used to make it a financially risky proposition for publishers to publish diving-related books because it was hard to know if the initial outlay would ever be earned back. Before ebooks, some brave souls turned to self-publishing, shouldering not only the costs but also the formidable logistics of creating

and marketing a book singlehandedly. It's a similar situation with magazines - Underwater Photography magazine originally began life as a printed magazine back in 1987 but struggled to be financially viable. Relaunching as a PDF digital magazine in 2001, UwP has gone from strength to strength because it's no longer hampered by high production overheads and distribution worries.

I saw first hand how much hard work self-publishing was because back in 1986 my dad, Peter Mitchell, self-published his own book *The Wrecker's Guide To South West Devon*. It gave insights into discovering and diving on some of the most famous shipwrecks around coast, including detailed accounts of the history of each ship, rare photos unearthed in various marine archives and, crucially in those pre-handheld-GPS days, location marks to actually find the wrecks.

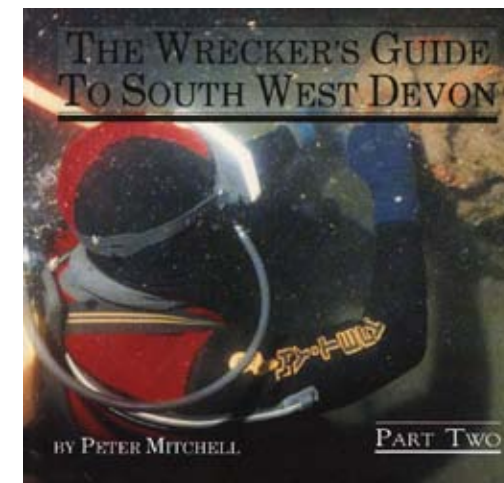
Unsurprisingly, it was such an obscure topic my dad couldn't get publishers interested. After much encouragement and a generous offer



The original printed copies represented a significant financial gamble but sold well locally long before the days of central ordering databases, when local WHSmiths and the like had autonomy over what they stocked (and so could tailor their books to local tastes).

to split the costs by Plymouth dive shop owner Steve Carpenter, Dad decided to publish it himself and got in contact with a local printer. The layout and printing process in those pre-computer days was quite longwinded but eventually I came home from school one day to find our kitchen table piled high with cardboard boxes. In there was 5000 copies of *The Wrecker's Guide To South West Devon*.

Over the course of the next 5 years, my mum and dad wandered into pretty much every bookshop in Devon and Cornwall and managed to flog a handful of books to each one. This was long before the days of central ordering databases, when



local WHSmiths and the like had autonomy over what they stocked (and so could tailor their books to local tastes). Almost to everyone's surprise, the book sold well and there were numerous repeat orders from bookshops, especially independent ones keen to support local authors. It turned out there were plenty of interest in the book's subject matter from non-divers as well as divers because it was local history which had previously remained unrecounted. It was such a success there was a second book in 1992 - the imaginatively named *Wreckers Guide To South West Devon Part 2* - which also sold well.

The first book had frankly been a huge gamble - there was nothing but

a hunch to go on that people would be sufficiently interested to buy the book, and also that it could be distributed to enough places for people to even know it existed. There was a very real possibility that the family home could have had 5000 books mouldering in the garage years later. But given the interest had been proven to be there, it seemed a real shame when they finally went out of print. While the location marks might be irrelevant nowadays, the shipwreck histories were still just as fascinating as when the books were first published.

While Dad still got plenty of emails via his website www.submerged.co.uk from people wanting to buy the books, it seemed like doing another self-published print run would take a long time to recoup the cost and generally be one huge headache to manage. Print On Demand services like www.lulu.com were interesting but because the book was photo-heavy it would have meant charging a high cost per book just to recoup the costs.

Creating an ebook version of each book proved to be the way to make the Wreckers Guide books available again without a huge printing and distribution overhead. There was the initial setup cost of getting a designer to create a version of the book in electronic format for the Kindle, and reformat all the photos to look good on the Kindle screen (the original books were all black and white photos so colour wasn't an issue). But once that was done and the books uploaded to Amazon, the Wreckers Guide Parts 1 and 2 were available again. If readers interested in the books don't have a Kindle device, that's no problem - Amazon give away free software so that you can read Kindle books on pretty much any device out there.

To create a new book directly for the Kindle platform would be even easier and cheaper than

www.uwpmag.com

The Wreck of HMS *Ramillies*

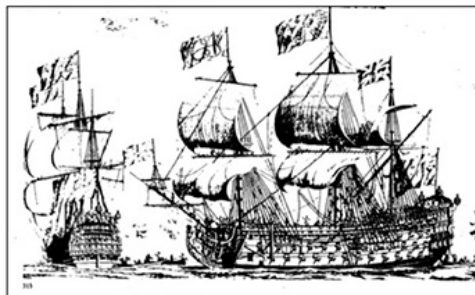


Figure 118: Actually a drawing of the *Royal George* (1715), this vessel, from a diver's point of view, is very similar

In the 18th century, shipwreck was very much a way of life for many villages along the south Devon coast. The sheer poverty of the inhabitants is hard to imagine nowadays, but for many, even the provision of their next meal was filled with uncertainty. It is no wonder then, that when news of a shipwreck was heard, hundreds would flock to the clifftops in all weathers so as not to miss an event which could keep their bodies clothed and fed for nearly a full year. For the seafarer however, shipwreck meant only one thing, death, and a pretty nasty one at that. Still life was pretty cheap in those days, but late in the evening of 14 February 1760 a shipwreck occurred near Bolt Tail whose loss of life was so great, that even today its awful memory still lingers on.

The ship was the *Ramillies*, a 90-gun ship of the line, whose main claim to fame was that she had been in almost continuous service for ninety-six years.

repurposing an old book from scans of its pages. This means that for the next generation of divers who want to write, there is a good opportunity to publish their work themselves without it costing them a small fortune - and perhaps eventually make a modest profit. Just as the old maxim goes - "How do you make a small fortune in scuba diving? Start off with a big fortune" - so there are plenty of more effective ways to make money than write about diving. With ebooks it's easier and cheaper for books about esoteric topics only of great interest to a few people to come into being. Of course, there is still the hard work of actually writing the book - that doesn't go away. But the ability to contribute to the greater store of our knowledge about the sea and

Originally built at Woolwich in 1664 as the 82 gun *Katherine*, she was rebuilt twice, renamed the *Royal Katherine*, and finally as the *Ramillies* in 1749, was given another 18 guns which brought her all up weight close to 1700 tons.

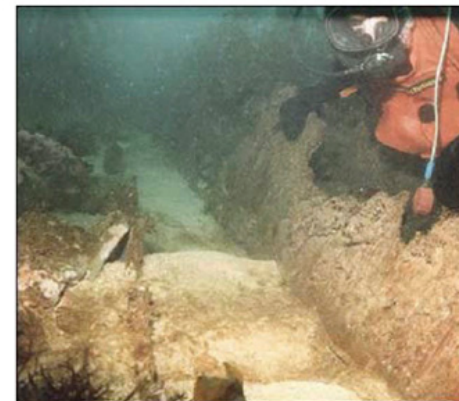


Figure 119: After nearly three hundred years you can still touch the *Ramillies'* hull. Wonderful

In 1760 the British were busy blockading the French sea ports and on the 6 February the *Ramillies* in company with several other ships sailed from Plymouth to join Admiral Boscawen's Channel fleet. By the 14th, a violent southwesterly gale had sprung up, scattering the fleet and causing the *Ramillies* to heave-to in order to make repairs to her badly leaking hull. The gale pushed her steadily eastwards until Bolt Tail came into sight. The sailing master, thinking that he was back off to Plymouth, mistook Bolt Tail for Rame Head and advised the Captain to run for the shelter of Plymouth Sound. As the *Ramillies* stood into what was really Bigbury Bay, the terrible truth dawned on the sailing master and he frantically called for full canvas as he attempted to

history has been made less complicated, and also to ensure that that knowledge remains accessible and doesn't disappear when books go out of print.

You can buy the ebook versions of The Wrecker's Guide To South West Devon Parts 1 and 2 online

www.submerged.co.uk
www.amazon.co.uk

Chris Mitchell
www.divehappy.com

Don't settle for 2nd best



Film - No Filter
No White Balance



Digital - No Filter
Manual WB



Magic Filter
Manual WB

Digital cameras have opened up new possibilities to underwater photographers. For available light photography manual white balance is an invaluable tool for restoring colours. But when you use it without a filter you are not making the most of the technique. You're doing all the hard work without reaping the full rewards.

These three photos are all taken of the same wreck in the Red Sea. The left hand image was taken on slide film, which rendered the scene completely blue. The middle image is taken with a digital SLR without a filter, using manual white balance. The white balance has brought out some of the colour of the wreck, but it has also sucked all the blue out of the water behind the wreck, making it almost grey. The right hand image is taken with the same digital camera and lens, but this time using an original Magic Filter. The filter attenuates blue light meaning that the colours of the wreck are brought out and it stands out from the background water, which is recorded as an accurate blue.

www.magic-filters.com

Guidelines for contributors

The response to UwP has been nothing short of fantastic. We are looking for interesting, well illustrated articles about underwater photography. We are looking for work from existing names but would also like to discover some of the new talent out there and that could be you! UwP is the perfect publication for you to increase your profile in the underwater photography community.

The type of articles we're looking for fall into five main categories:

Uw photo techniques - Balanced light, composition, etc

Locations - Photo friendly dive sites, countries or liveaboards

Subjects - Anything from whale sharks to nudibranchs in full detail

Equipment reviews - Detailed appraisals of the latest equipment

Personalities - Interviews/features about leading underwater photographers

**If you have an idea for an article,
contact me first before putting pen to paper.
E mail peter@uwpmag.com**

How to submit articles

To keep UwP simple and financially viable, we can only accept submissions by e mail and they need to be done in the following way:

1. The text should be saved as a TEXT file and attached to the e mail

2. Images must be attached to the e mail and they need to be 144dpi

Size - Maximum length 15cm i.e. horizontal pictures would be 15 cm wide and verticals would be 15cm.

File type - Save your image as a JPG file and set the compression to "Medium" quality. This should result in images no larger than about 120k which can be transmitted quickly. If we want larger sizes we will contact you.

3. Captions - **Each and every image MUST have full photographic details** including camera, housing, lens, lighting, film, aperture, shutter speed and exposure mode. These must also be copied and pasted into the body of the e mail.