

La Trinidad Valencera Project

To All Club Members:

An important meeting of the Club will be held at Magee University College at 8.00pm on Wednesday 19th February to discuss and decide the future of the project.

Such a meeting is necessitated by virtue of a proposal by Professor Lelievre of Magee University College that the project be controlled by a company registered under the "Charities Acts". This company would comprise those parties interested and involved in the project i.e. City of Derry Sub Aqua Club, Institute of Maritime Archaeology St. Andrews University, and Magee University College Londonderry. (3)?

This proposal arose out of a recent meeting attended by Eamonn Molloy, Prof. Lelievre, Colin Martin and Lawrence Flanagan of the Ulster Museum. The proposal was the subject of discussion at the last general meeting when it was resolved that this explanatory letter be drafted and when approved by the Committee circulated to Club members as notification of a meeting on the subject.

The reasoning behind the proposal is as follows -

- (a) The project is too important and the operation too large to be handled by the Club on its own. This is evidenced by the facts that we have found it necessary to obtain the services of
 - (i) a marine archaeologist - to supervise the excavation
 - (ii) Magee University College - as the embryo of a conservation system
 - (iii) BBC consortium - to provide finance for operations to date
- (b) Money. The BBC contract is completed and no more funds are available from that source. The only available source of funds to carry on the operation (estimated current costing - £8,000 to £10,000 per annum to cover site running and conservation) would be from a Trust fund as the result of an appeal. You may recall that the Trust Fund idea was mentioned in September 1974. Professor Lelievre undertook at that time to investigate the possibilities with regard to conservation. He also undertook to approach another body re site running costs. He has now investigated the procedures and as a result of a meeting of the Council of the New University of Ulster is in a position to launch an appeal through the good offices of the New University of Ulster.

There are however two snags. Firstly the Club wishes to make money out of the project and it has been ascertained that a Trust Fund, a charitable body, will not finance a project from which the organisers will make money. The second snag is that a Trust Fund will insist that a body to which it will contribute funds, form itself into a company limited by guarantee registered under the Charities Acts. This is to ensure that the Trust's donation is not reduced by taxation. It also of course removes the profit motive from the applicant.

Set out above is the proposal of Prof. Lelievre and an attempt to explain its necessity. It should be made clear at this stage that Colin Martin considers this proposal to be the way forward for the project.

We should at this stage perhaps look at what acceptance of this proposal would mean to the Club.

- (1) Finance - The Club would have no claim for reward in respect of artifacts recovered under the proposed arrangement. It would of course retain the right of reward it has at present in respect of artifacts lifted to date.
- (2) Control of the Project - The project would be controlled by the Board of the proposed company. There have been no discussions in detail of the make up of the Board but it would seem possible that representation might be - City of Derry Sub Aqua Club 2, Institute of Maritime Archaeology 1, Magee University College 1. This and other detail would be subject to negotiations.
- (3) Site Operations - These would as in the past be directed by a Marine Archaeologist but the Archaeologist would be appointed by the proposed company. It is anticipated that the Archaeologist would be from the Institute of Maritime Archaeology if they have one available. Colin Martin is at present Director of the Institute and he has proved eminently qualified.
- (4) Club Involvement - It has been emphasised by Colin Martin and Prof. Lelievre that there can be no excavations without involvement by the Club. If it seems at this time that, the Club cannot provide perhaps a minimum of 3 or 4 enthusiastic members who would be interested in the archaeology element and who would train on the site and eventually perhaps play a major part in working it, then there is no point in forming the proposed Company. It is considered that the site cannot be worked without the Club. The 3 or 4 deeply involved people would only be a nucleus and there would be a necessity that other Club divers, or non-divers, involve themselves even on a more casual basis as in the past. The reasons why Club involvement is essential are briefly:

- (i) manpower
- (ii) technical assistance and ideas on the cheap
- (iii) the good name attained by the Club internationally due to the principles it established and practised in relation to the project is essential to the proposed company when it sets out its case to a Trust Fund. Your reputation has not been understated here.

The most controversial point above is that of finance but before dwelling on this and before considering the possible alternatives it is necessary to refresh our memories and consider what the City of Derry Sub Aqua Club project 'La Trinidad Valencera' is.

The story starts in 1969 when it was decided to undertake a project to find the site of the wreck 'La Trinidad Valencera'. Spasmodic searches provided good training but no wreck and after discussion at the AGM in 1970 it was resolved to continue the project.

The site was found by a team of 13 divers on a routine training dive. They considered their position, declared it a Club project, and it was resolved immediately that there should be a proper archaeological excavation. Through Club meetings and Committee meetings the following principles evolved.

- (i) the project be conducted as an archaeological excavation
- (ii) the Club would limit its claim on salvage reward if the artifacts are established in a local museum
- (iii) Should (i) not be possible the site will be closed ?
- (iv) the Club will strive to keep the artifacts as a complete collection ?
- (v) publish a scientific report ?

The above principles are those laid down by the Club, and it is because of these high standards that the BBC-Time Life-RTE consortium saw its way clear to involve itself in the project. These principles and the Club's proven resolve to adhere to them also evoked Colin Martin and Magee University College to associate with the Club's project.

City of Derry Sub Aqua Club has been acknowledged world wide in archaeological circles for the high standards on the site. The BBC film to be screened on 16th April will depict these aspirations and we will then receive more, if perhaps less learned, acknowledgement of our principles and work.

Having examined the principles of the Club in relation to the project we will now consider the site and attempt to assess the present position.

We have now completed three seasons on the site. The site has now proved more important and interesting archaeologically than those involved had anticipated. Evidence available points to reasonably extensive organic remains. The organic material is, if considered commercially, a liability but to the archaeologist exceedingly valuable academically. No further evidence has been found of cannon guns although three of the most likely metal detector contacts have been excavated to reveal barrel hoop concretion and other small ferrous objects. There are several theories about the cannon guns

- (i) Salvaged shortly after the sinking. There is evidence that other Armada wrecks were subject of salvage work to recover cannon guns. This is possible but so far not documented in respect of La Trinidad Valencera.
- (ii) Guns tossed overboard to lighten sinking ship as she was making for land. A sound and practical theory but it is unlikely that the missing 37 cannon were all tossed in the sea.
- (iii) Floatation Theory. As the ship broke up in shallow water large sections with guns attached had enough floatation or surface area to be affected by tide and storm and were carried off the site to settle elsewhere. This is also a theory with sound foundation.

A combination of (ii) and (iii) seems possible and it may require a mammoth and extensive search survey with specialised equipment to locate the cannon guns. Some may of course prove to be in or around the site.

With regard to the site therefore we have proved the archaeological significance and there is some possibility of turning up valuable "goodies".

Our difficulty is that we can't finance an operation which will be within the principles of the Club, other than as suggested by Prof. Lelievre.

The nub of our problem is that in accepting Prof. Lelievre's proposal as the way forward the Club will not be entitled to profit financially from the artifacts recovered on future operations.

There are possible alternatives to the proposal and it has been suggested that some Club members may feel that one or some of these are practical. These ignore the principles established, but it is accepted that this is a democratic Club and by a vote the principles could be changed. The alternatives are -

- (i) Forget the archaeology and let the Club dig out what "goodies" it can. The answer to this is that the State would withdraw our site lease of mineral rights and declare the site of archaeological significance under the National Monuments Act. This would effectively close the site and whilst relevance of the National Monuments Act may be dubious who would have the money to contest it in the High Court. Also to consider is the effect on the image we have portrayed to date. The film and our work would be a lie and this would be exposed by the media. We couldn't finance the operation in any case unless we received payment now for the guns and artifacts already recovered.
- (ii) Sell the guns and artifacts to finance a treasure hunt on the site. The problem with this one is that the State would not grant an export licence and the market would be restricted to the 26 counties of the Irish Republic. The National Museum are not interested and this fact narrows down the field of potential buyers considerably. We would get a deflated price and when we start to "cowboy" the site it will be closed.
- (iii) Sell the guns and artifacts to finance an archaeological excavation of the site. The deflated price theory would still apply and the sale wouldn't cover the first year's operation let alone establish conservation facilities and finance subsequent excavations.

The above alternatives are totally impractical and it is considered that the Club would benefit most by adhering to its principles as already established.

We should continue with the project on an archaeological basis, and pursue our objective of establishing the artifacts in a local museum. Establishment of a local museum is already being pursued by the Donegal County Council and also there have been discussions about establishment of a museum in Derry. You have probably read of this in the newspapers during the past year. These plans appear to be little more than suggestions at present but it would seem possible that a local museum is a possibility in the foreseeable future. The proposed new Company, being charitable may donate future artifacts but bear in mind that

City of Derry Sub Aqua Club is entitled to salvage reward on the artifacts recovered to date. The sum involved could well be five figures or near it. There are no guarantees but considering the facts as they are it seems possible that in the foreseeable future there will be a local museum.

We have been requested by Prof. Lelievre to consider his proposal and make a statement of intent.

The Committee of the Club having studied the facts, resolved at a meeting on 8th February that the proposal be accepted in principle, and that there should be a meeting on Wednesday, 19th February 1975 to put the case to the Club.

This correspondence, although perhaps unnecessarily lengthy, is considered essential in order that you the Club members have sufficient information on which to base a decision.

C. E. Molloy
C.E. MOLLOY- Project Co-Ordinator