Shipwreck research: Joys and challenges
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I could be crass and cliched by claiming that researching a shipwreck has the potential to not only make you feel that you're sailing the seas on a calm sunny day with the wind in your sails, secure in the knowledge you're making good progress. Or on the other hand you can find yourself in turbulent seas smashing into rocks which another more experienced captain could've navigated through or around but leaves you an inexperienced sailor feeling if not wrecked then drowning under the sheer weight of accumulated information and endless questions. But I won't. The only cliché I'll use is that, undoubtedly, I have entered uncharted waters. However, for me the challenge of learning about and researching a new subject is absolute bliss!

I love history recently engrossing myself in the events and people who populated the 18th century, which is timely for the shipwreck project as the 18th century saw the rise of shipping in 'the age of sail' and inevitably the sad increase in frequency of shipwrecks and lives lost. I also love a puzzle, asking questions and digging around sources to find snippets of information which at first glance may not be relevant but squirreled away may prove to be a crucial link or key in the puzzle. I also enjoy learning from and sharing knowledge and working alongside enthusiastic volunteers is always a pleasure.

Of course there are challenges but for me it's part and parcel of research. Here's a list of general problems related to research followed by a list of the challenges related specifically to researching shipwrecks that I've encountered so far:

General challenges with research (and solutions)

Keeping track of searches, threads of enquiry / rabbit holes: set up a system on onenote
- Mind maps for initial questions that arise & where to search
- Mind map to keep track of / provide overview of what I'm thinking/ ongoing questions I want answered
- Repository of information I've found eg. Photos of documents from archives
- Table of searches conducted

Knowing when to stop!
My problem is that I love a challenge and always thinking of where else I could search – also find new questions as I'm curious about lots of stuff which may or may not be relevant!
Solution: I have yet to find one as I'm curious! Inevitably time will restrict my efforts

Easy to feel a bit despondent: eg. Thinking the following:

- 'if only I knew that before I started I wouldn't have wasted time'. Eg. I had no idea about Lady's Day (see below). But that's research! We can't know everything and for me I love that I've discovered something new to me by my own efforts rather than relying on others to give me that information. I see it as my own personal 'ah ha' moment..
- 'I haven't found enough information so can't submit the form'. Other volunteers will take up the research on the second round so I've decided to record my own efforts of the searches/ rabbit holes I've been down/ photos of documents that I've found in archives which may be useful to the next researcher.
- 'Waste of time as I haven't found anything': even though I haven't been able to find all the information requested, I've still found the process of researching invaluable eg. how to navigate the National archives, how to keep track of information /develop my own strategy, and generally building a database of resources and information from which to draw upon for my next ship

Specific issues to remember when researching historical data

1. ***Dates***: Lady's Day & Julian calendar & day starts at noon
    - Lady's Day: Until 1752 New Year began on 25th March (Lady's Day). Therefore, when searching for naval records / other records before 1752 and date your searching is before 25th March in a given year, bear in mind that the date recorded in contemporary books may not marry with the date recorded in the original documents. Eg. My ship was recorded in contemporary sources as being wrecked on 4th March 1744 but the original documents from that time were dated 4th March 1743
    - Julian calendar: UK switched to the Gregorian from the Julian calendar in 1752 but other countries switched either earlier or later than 1752. Therefore when searching databases overseas dates may not correspond with the UK dates.
    - Day starts at noon. Until early 19th century naval practice dictated that the start of the day began at 12 noon!

2. ***Names***:
    - **Royal navy** ship names changed if already one in existence (eg. Buy ship overseas) except cutters which had a progress book of their own.
    - **Hired** ships all retained their own mercantile names.
    - **Captured** ships kept their own names or given name of the ship which captured it and given suffix 'Prize' until mid 18th century
    - **Spelling of peoples names change!**

3. **Origin of merchant ships** hired or purchased can be tricky to find: naval sources not always precise