



Selsey Bill Sub-Aqua Club
Branch No. 2157 of the British Sub-Aqua Club

Press Release

22th November 2015 – For Immediate Release

New Underwater Heritage Plaque for Selsey

Summary

Selsey Bill Sub-Aqua Club, the Manhood Wildlife and Heritage Group and Selsey Town Council combine to extend, underwater, the "Selsey Heritage Trail".

Locating a plaque on the "Far Mulberry" wreck, the club is commemorating the part the people of Selsey and the surrounding area played in the production of the Mulberry Harbours that proved so important in supporting the Allied Troops following the D-Day landings in Normandy in the Second World War.

Fixed to the concrete that made up the A1 "Phoenix" unit, the plaque is thought to be the first of this type located underwater, now able to be seen by divers visiting this popular West Sussex dive site.

With a maximum depth of 12m and a variety of marine life to be seen, the Far Mulberry provides a fascinating dive for divers of all levels of qualification and experience.

Selsey Bill Sub Aqua Club, a branch of the British Sub-Aqua Club have been actively exploring the waters around Selsey and further afield for over 18 years, and would welcome enquiries for membership from divers of all agencies.

Full Story

Selsey Bill Sub Aqua Club, The Manhood Wildlife and Heritage Group and Selsey Town Council combine to extend, underwater; the " Selsey Heritage Trail".

For many years visitors to Selsey have enjoyed following the heritage trail, commemorating the famous people and historic buildings of this charming old fishing town.

But Selsey is also known within the scuba diving fraternity as the home of one of the south's favourite dive sites, 'The Outer Mulberry'. This site lays underwater just 2 miles offshore in Pagham Bay.



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Many a trainee diver has started their diving career here and has wondered at the fantastic underwater sea life and the unique heritage of this submerged structure.

Built to support "Operation Overlord" - the invasion of the Normandy beaches - Mulberry Harbours were designed to take up to 12,000 tons of cargo and 2,500 vehicles a day. They also had to be capable of providing berthing facilities for Liberty Ships drawing up to 25ft, while, at the same time offering shelter for the landing craft ferrying equipment to the beaches.

The code name "Mulberry" was given to Louis Mountbatten, who was appointed Chief of Combined Operations, by Churchill himself!

There were six types of 'Phoenix' units forming the harbour walls, with the largest, the A1 being 210 feet long, 56 feet wide, 60 feet high, and displacing 6,004 tons. Working day and night, 20,000 men were employed to build a total of 213 units; 147 of which were re-used after D - Day to build two harbours, each with over 3 miles of concrete walls. The surplus units were used for repairs.

It is this type of unit (A1) that now lays 12 metres beneath the waves off Pagham. A smaller unit, a D1, can easily be seen from the Pagham beach shoreline at low tide and this too is a popular dive site in shallow water.

To give an idea of the scale of this project, 542,000 cubic yards of concrete, 49,170 tons of mild steel bar and thousands of tons of rubble from the Luftwaffe's bombing of London were used to construct the Phoenix units.

They were designed to be sunk so they could be hidden from any Luftwaffe reconnaissance flights, and to be raised again when the coast was clear, using inbuilt flotation chambers. At times during this period it was stated that the area between Selsey and Bognor looked like a graveyard with all its grey concrete structures in the sea.

It was during the testing phase, where units were lowered and raised that disaster struck: the Phoenix A broke its back, sinking down into the sand and gravel. However, it still towered above the surface and couldn't be left like that. In stepped the RAF who used it for target practice, practicing their skills in preparation before the landings began. Once below the low water mark the unit was abandoned and this is how we find it today.

Being so close to Selsey and a part of our heritage, Selsey Bill Sub Aqua Club approached the Town Council and offered its services in a joint venture, to lay a commemorative plaque. This request was passed on to the Manhood Wildlife and



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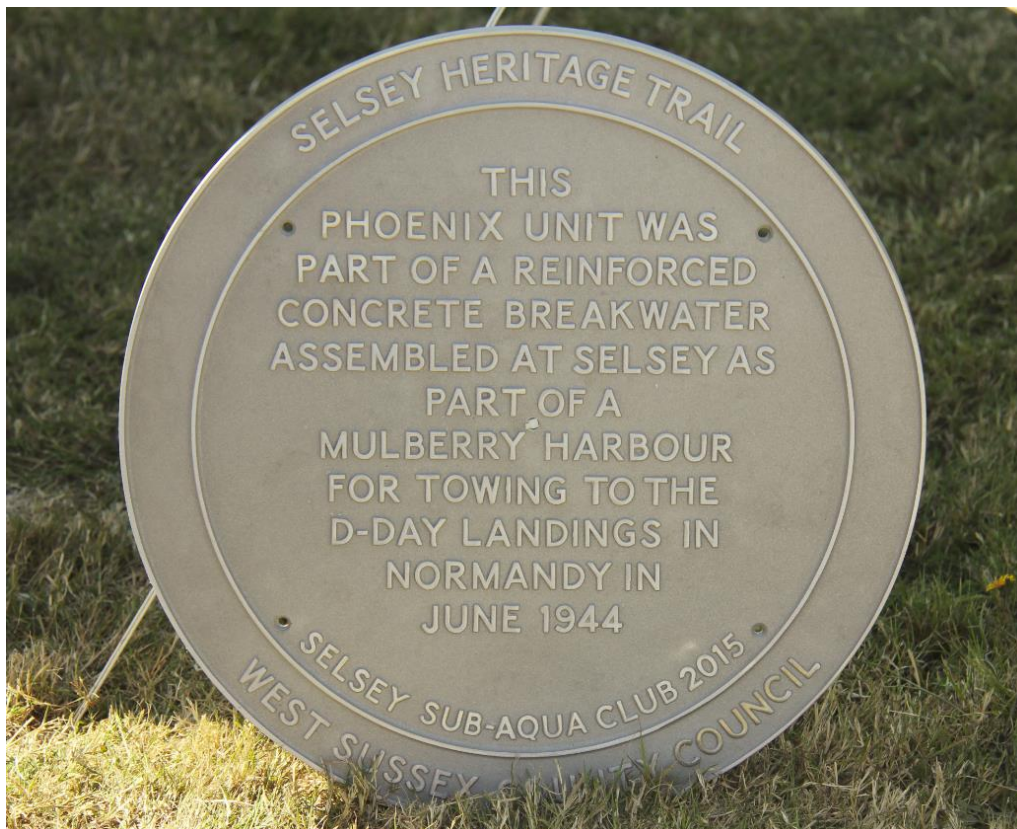
Heritage Group [MWHG], who co-ordinate the Trail, resulting in a collaborative effort to produce the plaque. . It will form part of the remembrance events that have been organised nationally surrounding the D Day landings. The Club have enjoyed diving on this site for many years and the members feel a strong urge to give something back in the form of a lasting tribute to the people who worked on producing these units.

Joe Savill, MWHG Trustee and Selsey Heritage Trail Co-ordinator, commented "This is a fitting addition to the Trail at this time and an exciting one, as I am unaware of other blue plaques sited underwater."

Selsey Bill Sub Aqua Club Chairman, Simon Barnard added "I'm delighted we've been able to mark the efforts of Selsey in the production of these harbour units, which proved so vital in the war effort. It's also good to help divers understand what they're looking at!"

The plaque has been produced in a material that should withstand the harsh conditions experienced off our coastline.

The Selsey Heritage Trail forms part of West Sussex County Council's Blue Plaque Scheme.

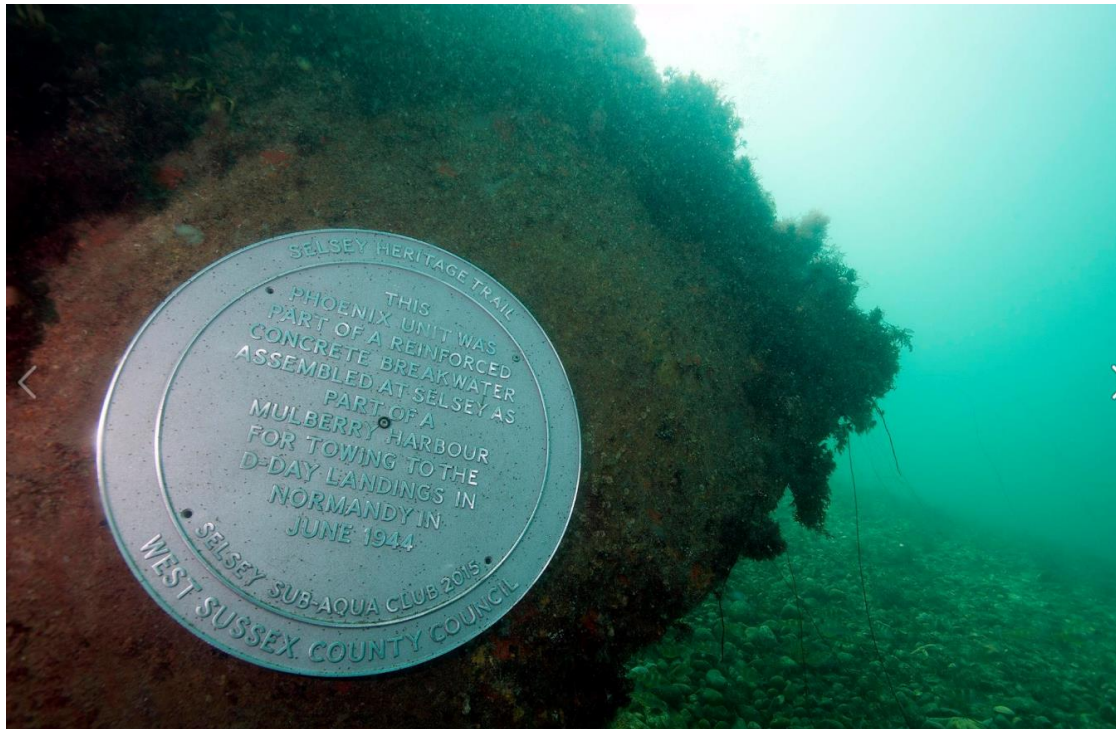




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So it was now down to the club members to mount the plaque on the unit. This sounds like an easy task but these units were built to last and the strength of the concrete proved to be challenging, taking several dives before the mounting holes were successfully drilled and the plaque mounted.



Club Diving Officer, Malcolm Tipping commented that as a club, we are proud to have been part of this project and are happy that we have provided a constant reminder to visiting divers of the importance of this heritage site.



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About Selsey Bill Sub-Aqua Club

Selsey Bill Sub-Aqua Club is a branch of the British Sub-Aqua Club, the sport's governing body for SCUBA diving in England.

Based in Selsey, West Sussex, and established for over 18 years, we dive a variety of sites, both locally and across the south coast. Diving takes place every weekend, weather permitting. Additionally diving trips abroad are also regularly organised.

We exist as a not-for-profit organisation and are funded by our members and our fund raising activities.

We would welcome enquires for membership from BCAS qualified divers and divers from all other agencies.

Selsey Bill Sub-Aqua Club regularly runs diver training, to a variety of levels of qualification.

For more information, please contact:
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