

# The Australian Historic Shipwreck Protection Project – Reburial of the *Clarence* (1850) and *James Matthews* (1841) shipwreck sites

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Increasingly archaeologists are opting for on-site examination, reinterment and in-situ preservation of underwater cultural heritage sites as the first option in the management of sites at risk as opposed to the more traditional excavation, recovery, conservation and display/storage methods. This decision will inevitably be based on significance assessment, degree of perceived risk and resourcing issues. However, long-term monitoring must become an integral part of these management programmes in order to quantitatively evaluate the effectiveness of the in-situ preservation techniques employed. The Australian Historic Shipwreck Protection Project (AHSP) is a national collaborative project funded by an Australian Research Council (ARC) Linkage Projects grant, which commenced in February 2012. One of the major aims of the project is to develop a protocol for the excavation, detailed recording and reburial of significant shipwrecks under threat, fostering a strategic national approach for the management of underwater cultural heritage sites at risk. Two historically significant shipwreck sites were chosen for this longitudinal comparative study – the *Clarence* (1850), located in Port Phillip Bay, Victoria, and the *James Matthews* (1841), which lies in Cockburn Sound, Western Australia. Both sites have been preserved in situ using two very different but innovative remediation strategies. The *Clarence* was considered an ideal site for this project for a number of reasons. This early colonial Australian-built vessel was test-excavated and surveyed in the 1980s, providing a baseline for ongoing longitudinal comparative research. The site is relatively small (16-m length; 6-m width), easily accessible and lies in 5 m of water. The site is subject to continuing anchor damage by illegal recreational anglers as well as by the natural impact of the strong currents experienced in Port Phillip Bay, and is considered under serious threat. The ex-slaver turned colonial trading vessel, *James Matthews* was chosen as the second site to be included in this longitudinal study. Again, the site is relatively small (24-m length; 6-m width), lying approximately 100 m off shore in 2–3 m of water. More importantly, it has been the subject of a long-term detailed in-situ preservation research programme with more than ten years of accumulated data. Due to a combination of industrial activity in the area and the natural near-shore sedimentary processes, the continued exposure and subsequent deterioration of the site is occurring at an alarming rate. Therefore, the implementation of appropriate long-term, in-situ preservation strategies for both sites, supported by an extensive monitoring programme in order to assess the viability of the different methodologies, was of paramount importance. This poster presents a brief synopsis of the in-situ preservation techniques applied to each site to mitigate against further deterioration caused through anthropogenic and natural forces. Furthermore, the long-term monitoring programme, which will characterise changes in the reburial environment and the effect on the reinterred wreck material, will be described. In this way, the efficacy of both in-situ preservation techniques will be systematically tested, providing a comparative analysis of practical protocols for the long-term protection and management of underwater cultural heritage.