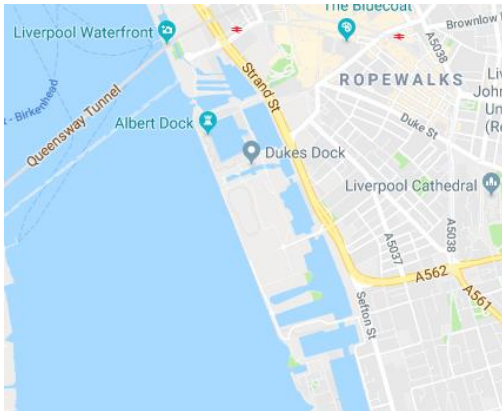


North West England

Seasearch Site Surveys 2019

This report summarises the results of surveys carried out during 2019 by Seasearch divers in North West England.



Duke's Dock Liverpool

Since the opening of The Albert Dock complex for leisure purposes in 1986, the marine life has taken hold and continues to flourish. The main features of the habitat are silty seabed and stone dock walls. Water quality is paramount as this is a public place thus the marine life is very important in helping to achieve this. Diving is restricted to November – March inclusive as there is an Aqua Gym in place during the summer months, which precludes diving.

The year started with an Observer course held in Middlewich Cheshire with 4 new students and 3 refreshers attending. Qualifying dives were carried out at Duke's Dock on an unusually

warm day for February – we were able to sit out on the dockside in between dives and fill out forms. Qualified divers joined us; a total of 23 dives were carried out with the focus being either the dock wall or the sea bed. A second dive was conducted a month later with a total of 9 divers. In total 21 Observer forms and 1 surveyor form were submitted.

A second Observer course was run in November for Sutton Coldfield SAC and Lutterworth SAC. Qualifying dives were completed in Duke's Dock which coincided with the removal of the inflatable Aqua Gym. I had been told that this would be completely removed by the time we dived, however several items were still afloat and one inflatable was on the platform. This provided a very interesting insight as to the colonisation – 2/3 species of bryozoans *Cryptosula pallasiana*, *Conopeum reticulum* and *Crisia* plus edible mussels (*Mytilus edulis*) were seen. This was very encouraging to the life in the docks – several previous papers had expressed concern that spat fall of the mussels was low suspecting that future generations were not being established.

Nine divers carried out a total of 18 dives at various points within the dock and surveyed both the dock wall and floor. Two further expeditions were carried out at the end of November and the beginning of December.

Mytilus edulis (edible mussels) are the predominant species on the dock walls, along with *Ciona intestinalis* (yellow-ringed sea squirt). *Halichondria bowerbanki* continues to encrust the walls as *Pholis gunnellus* (butterfish) zipped about. *Botryllus schlosseri* and *Botrylloides spp.* seem to be taking hold and increasing in numbers and molgulids were observed. The non-native sea squirt species *Styela clava* was seen but not in great numbers and for the first time *Ficopomatus enigmaticus* (Australian tubeworm) was found.

Small mysid shrimps hopped along the wall and the dock floor, along with *Carcinus maenas* (shore crab), however the large lobster that we have seen previously was absent. Divers from Liverpool City Divers reported that they had seen the old fellow turned white and immobile thus sadly perished. The dock floor was surprisingly clean of too much debris – we have Liverpool City Divers and Whiston and Prescott SAC to thank for this as they regularly do litter picks on these docks, clearing away single-use plastics, glass, paper and tins. Small *Oxydromus flexuosus* worms were seen crawling across the floor and plenty of fish life was spotted – *Gobiusculus flavescens* (2-spot goby), *Gobius niger* (black goby), *Platichthys flesus* (flounder),

Ciliata mustela (5 bearded rockling – a new sighting), *Syngnathus acus* (greater pipefish), eels and flat fish. Speaking to security it was reported that a large ray had been seen in Albert Dock at night-time which was really very exciting.

Over the years we have spied a small orange stalked multi-tentacled anemone, which has been the cause of a lot of debate as to its ID. Armed with advice from Chris Wood, a couple of divers 'tickled' the anemone to gain characteristic withdrawal behaviour and we concluded that the anemone we see is *Diadumene cincta*.

The dock life continues to thrive and thanks to the efforts of many divers, we strive to keep the docks as clean as possible for healthy life to continue and thus the enjoyment of all who visit the docks.

Photos







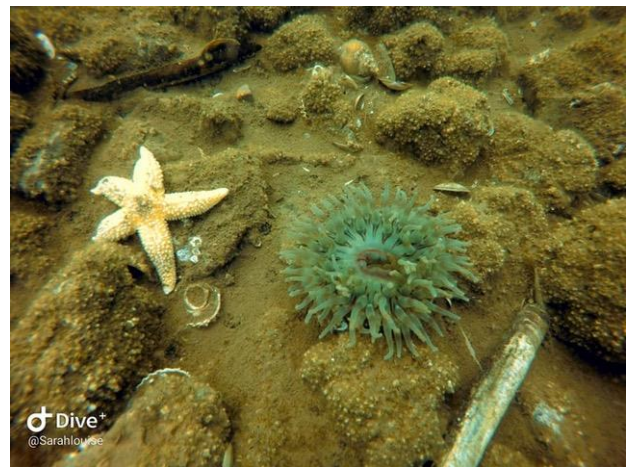
Blackpool

May saw a couple of surveys carried out as a guest of West Lancs SAC. After a slight hiccup with launching, we headed out on a gloriously sunny day to Shell Flats, an area just south of the Lune Deep, which has been previously surveyed by Natural England via grab samples. We opted for this site which was close to a wreck so the option was to either dive the wreck or the seabed. We weren't able to locate the wreck on the echo sounder – it was on the chart but could have been flattened so a shot was dropped in the vicinity. One buddy pair went north of the datum, the other pair went south. This showed a very interesting seabed – muddy sand with rich life. The predominant life was *Ophiura sp.* (brittle stars) but with *Euspira catena* (moon snails), *Aphrodita aculeata* (sea mouse), small hermit crabs, heart urchins and spiny cockles littering the seabed.

Our second dive was on the Crusader Wreck, which has been previously surveyed. In 2017 we named this as The Stone Barge but it is now determined to be the Crusader Wreck. This was one of the best dives I have done on this site – fabulous visibility – 3m and very light. The superstructure was abundant in *Metridium dianthus* (plumose anemones), *Hyas arenas* (sea toad) and *Pholis gunnellus* (butterfish). Shoals of *Trisopterus luscus* (bib) meandered over the top and most excitingly, a small cuttle fish, possibly *Sepioloatlantica*, was also spied. Amongst the cobbles (possibly cargo) several lobsters and edible crabs were seen. The seabed surrounding the wreck was also surveyed with *Ophiura sp.* being dominant, along with *Lanice conchilega* (sand mason worms), *Buccinum undatum* (common whelk) and *Corystes cassivelaunus* (masked crab). Very little litter was seen on the seabed on either of the 2 dives which supports the blue flag status of Blackpool.

The waters around Blackpool show an amazing array of life with adequate visibility. This coastline is often overlooked but thanks to the pioneering spirit of a local dive club, it proves to be a hidden gem.

Photos





Liverpool Bay

Owing to poor weather, diving in Liverpool Bay did not happen in 2019. Next year hopefully!

Species List

Scientific Name	Common Name	Duke's Dock	Blackpool
Porifera			
<i>Halichondria bowerbanki</i>		O	
	Encrusting orange sponge	R	
<i>Halichondria panicea</i>	Breadcrumb sponge	C	R
Cnidaria			
<i>Aurelia aurita</i>	Moon jelly	R	
<i>Diadumene cincta</i>	Small orange stalked anemone	C	
<i>Urticina felina</i>	Dahlia anemone	R	R
<i>Metridium dianthus</i>			S- C
<i>Cereus pedunculatus</i>	Daisy anemone		R
	Feathery hydroids		O -R
	Hermit crab hydroid		O
<i>Rhizostoma pulmo</i>	Barrel Jelly		R

Crustaceans			
<i>Mysid shrimp</i>		C	
<i>Carcinus maenas</i>	Shore crab	R	
<i>Palaemon serratus</i>		P	
<i>Paguridae</i>	Small hermit crabs		F
<i>Cirripedia</i>	barnacles		C-F
<i>Inachus spp</i>			R
<i>Pagurus bernhardus</i>	Large hermit crab		C
<i>Necora puber</i>	Velvet swimming crab		C
<i>Cancer pagurus</i>	Edible crab	R	C
<i>Pandalus montagui</i>	Humpback prawn		O
<i>Jassa sp.</i>	Amphipods		C
<i>Hyas araneus</i>	Sea toad		R
<i>Corystes cassivelaunus</i>	Masked crab		R
<i>Liocarcinus depurator</i>	Harbour crab	R	
Molluscs			
<i>Mytilus edulis</i>		R - C	
<i>Poss Littorina spp or Buccinum undatum</i>	Very small snails poss juv	C	
<i>Cerastoderma edule</i>	cockle	R	
<i>Acanthocardia aculeata</i>	Spiny cockles		O
	Razor clams		O
<i>Euspira catena</i>	Moon snail		O
<i>Buccinum undatum</i>	Common whelk		R
<i>Hinia reticulata</i>	Netted dog whelk		R

<i>Sepiola atlantica</i>	Little cuttle fish		R
<i>Razor clams</i>	Empty shells		O
<i>Large tellin shell</i>	Empty shell		R
<i>Aeolidiella glauca</i>			R
Ascidians			
<i>Ciona intestinalis</i>	Yellow-ringed sea squirt	C	
<i>Botryllus schlosseri</i>		R	
<i>Ascidiella aspersa</i>		R	
<i>Botrylloides spp.</i>		R	
<i>Styela clava</i>	Leathery seasquirt	R	
<i>Molgulids</i>		R	
Fish			
<i>Ciliata mustela</i>	5-bearded rockling	R	
<i>Gobius niger</i>		C	
<i>Gobiusculus flavescens</i>	2-spot goby	C	
	Fry (unknown)		
	Eel	R	
	Flounder	R	
<i>Gasterosteus aculeatus aculeatus</i>	Stickleback	O	
<i>Pholis gunnellus</i>	Butter fish	R	C
Gobiidae	goby		R
<i>Pleuronectes platessa</i>	Plaice		R
<i>Trisopterus luscus</i>	Bib	R	F

<i>Conger conger</i>			R
	Sand eels		R
<i>Scyliorhinus canicula</i>	Cat Shark		r
<i>Limanda limanda</i>	Dab		R
<i>Syngnathus acus</i>	Greater pipefish	R	R
<i>Ctenolabrus rupestris</i>	Goldsinny		R
	Flat fish	R	
Algae			
<i>Ulva lactuca</i>	Sea lettuce		
	Non-calcareous red algal mat		
<i>Heterosiphonia</i> sp.		C	
<i>Cladophora</i> sp.		C	
<i>Chaetomorpha</i> spp.		O	
<i>Rhizoclonium riparium</i>		O - C	
Worms			
<i>Oxydromus flexuosus</i>	Segmented worm	R	
<i>Aphrodita aculeata</i>	Sea mouse		F
<i>Lanice conchilega</i>	Sand mason worms		R
<i>Ficopomatus enigmaticus</i>		R	
Echinoderms			
<i>Ophiura</i> spp	Brittle sand stars		A
<i>Asterias rubens</i>			R - C
<i>Echinocardium</i> spp			O
<i>Astropecten irregularis</i>			R

Bryozoans			
<i>Crisia</i> spp		O	
<i>Cryptosula pallasiana</i>		R	
<i>Conopeum reticulum</i>			

Acknowledgements

Thank you to all who have the tenacity to dive NW England. It is a challenging area but one which has a rich variety of life and we have been rewarded with some interesting dives.

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Seasearch is a partnership between the Marine Conservation Society (MCS), The Wildlife Trusts, statutory nature conservation bodies and others, co-ordinated nationally by MCS and co-ordinated and delivered locally in England by Wildlife Trust and MCS local co-ordinators. For more information on Seasearch and to see all of the partners involved nationally, please visit www.seasearch.org.uk or email info@seasearch.org.uk

