

HM ship *Roebuck*: clues to its location and subsequent identification:

Utilising William Dampier's own accounts and the logs of various Captains and
Masters of
HMS Anglesey
HMS Hastings
*HMS Lizard*¹

Together with the accounts of
John Hughes, Master
John Penton, Carpenter's Mate
Mark Doyd? Boatswain's Mate
Stephen Dolling
Charles Harbree

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Note: Clues relevant to the location or identification of the wreck are presented in bold. Where appropriate a footnote provides explanation of the compiler's thoughts on the relevance of the text.

¹ From originals located and photocopied at the PRO in London by Ms Hannah Cuncliffe of Wiltshire, England, a researcher commissioned in February 2000 with the task of locating these logs.

From: William Dampier's unpublished account of the loss of the "Roebuck." (Public Record Office, Admiralty 1/5262)

Dated: 29 September, 1701

An account of the loss of His Majesty's Ship Roebuck Febry 21st 1700/1. At three a'clock in the afternoon being in Sight of the Island Ascension, and not having Light enough to carry us into the Bay where design'd to anchor, ...we stood to the Eastward, At half an hour after 8 in the night we sprung a **Leake on the larboard bow about four Strakes from the Keele²**, which oblig'd us to keep our **Chain pump³** constantly going, at twelve at night having a moderate gale, we bore away for the Island and be daylight were close in with it, at nine a'clock in the morning **anchored in the N.W. bay in ten fathom and half water, sandy ground about half a mile from the shoare, the S. point of the bay bore S.S.W. dist. one mile and a half and the northermost point, N.E. 1/2 N. dist. two mile⁴**, Being come to anchor I ordered the Gunner to clear his Powder roome, that we might there search for the Leake, and endeavour to stop it within board if possible, for we could not heele the Ship so low, **neither was there any convenient place to haul her ashoare⁵**...I ordered the Carpenter's Mate...with the Boatswain and some others to goe downe and search for the Leake, the Carpenter's Mate and the Boatswain told me that they could not copme at it unless **they cut the Ceiling⁶**, which I bid them doe, which done they found the Leake against one of the foothook timbers, it was very large, and the water gushed in with great violence... **after the cutt the timber⁷**... the leake so increased...I ordered a **bulkhead to be cutt open⁸** to give passage to the water, and withall ordered to **cleare away abaft the bulkhead⁹**, that we might beale...But about 11 a'clock at night the Boatswain came to me, told me... that the **Plank was quite rotten¹⁰**, and that it was now impossible to save the Ship...I therefore hoysted out the boate, and next morning, being the 23rd, we weigh'd anchor and warped in nearer the shoare, but to little purpose till in the afternoon we had a Sea breeze by which we gott in within a Cable's length of the Shoare¹¹, then made a Raft to carry men's chests and bedding ashoare., and before Eight at night most of them were gott ashoare, **She struck not before nine a'clock at night, and so continued, I ordered some sailes to be cut from the yards to make us some tents, etc, and the next morning being the 24th myself and Officers went ashoare¹²**...

² This feature may be evident if there are substantial hull remains on the seabed.

³ Remains of the chain pump will prove a useful identifying feature. See Fn 13.

⁴ There are very few places on the Island that produce these bearings, substantially narrowing down the possible anchoring place. See also Fn 14.

⁵ An examination of the shore from the deduced anchoring place should confirm this observation.

⁶ As per Fn 2

⁷ ditto

⁸ ditto

⁹ Ditto

¹⁰ Ditto

¹¹ This indicates that the wreck sank at a similar or lesser distance offshore. See Fn 30.

¹² Dampier appears to have been offloading his men as the ship was being warped in. An hour elapsed between 8pm when they got to within a cables length of shore and a depth of three and a half fathoms and when 'she struck not before 9'. See also Fn 17. As expected in the depth given by Dampier, the sails and yards were accessible, though there are no clues about the angle of heel of the wreck.

From: Wm Dampier : a Voyage to New Holland

'On the 21st we made the Island of Ascension, and stood in towards it. The 22^d between 8 and 9 a-Clock, we sprung a Leak, which increased so that the **Chain-pump** could not keep the Ship free. Whereupon I set the **hand-pump**¹³ to work also, and by 10 a-clock suck'ed her:...the Chain-pump just kept her free. At 5 the next Morning we made Sail and stood in for the Bay; and at 9 anchored in 10 and a half Fathom, sandy ground. The South-point bore South-South-West distance 2 miles, and the North-point of the Bay, North-East half North, distance 2 Miles¹⁴.... ...[as per the original hand-written account above then]...

The Ceiling being cut, they could not come at the Leak; for it was against one of the foot-hook-timbers, which the Carpenter's Mate said he must first cut, before it could be stopp'd....my men were all employ'd, pumping with both Pumps;...I presently went down, and found the Timber cut away... I ordered the Bulkhead to be cut open, to give Passage to the Water that it might drain out of the room; and withal ordered to clear away abaft the Bulk-head, that we might bail... About 11 a Clock at Night, the boatswain came to me and told me... that the plank was so rotten, it broke away like Dirt; and now it was impossible to save the Ship...¹⁵

And in the Morning we weighed our Anchor, and warp'd in nearer the shore; yet did but little good.

In the Afternoon, with the help of a Sea-breeze, I ran into 7 Fathom, and anchored; Then carried a small Anchor ashore¹⁶, and warp'd in till I came into 3 Fathom and a half. Where having fastnd her, I made a Raft...¹⁷

On the 26th following, we, to our great Comfort, found a Spring of fresh water, about 8 Miles from our Tents, beyond a very high Mountain, which we must pass over: So that now we were, by God's Providence, in a Condition of subsisting some Time; having Plenty of very good Turtle by our Tents....The next Day I went up to see the Watering-place...where we found a very fine Spring on the South-East-side of the high mountain, about half a Mile from its top:...About 2 Mile South-East from the Spring, we found 3 or 4 shrubby Trees, upon which was cut an Anchor and Cable, and the year 1642....¹⁸

[on 3 April] ...appear'd 4 Sail, which came to anchor in this Bay. They were his Majesty's Ships, the Anglesey, Hastings and Lizard; and the Canterbury East-India

¹³ Remains of both a chain pump and a hand pump should be visible in the wreckage mound.

¹⁴ See Footnote 4 from the earlier handwritten account. There is some difference in the details provided. Notwithstanding, the anchoring place should be able to be fixed and unless the ship was blown out to sea after the men got ashore, the wreck should lie inshore of that place and as indicated at a distance of 200 yards or one cable from shore at the most.

¹⁵ More details adding to indicators referred to in Fn 5-9 above.

¹⁶ This anchor may have been the one recovered later See below.

¹⁷ Indications are that, unless *Roebuck* drifted back out to sea in offshore winds, the search should concentrate one cable or c.200 yards from shore in a maximum depth of c. 3 Fathoms (18 feet).

¹⁸ This clue attests to the grounding being on the NW side of the island at a place frequented by turtles.

Ship. I went on board the Anglesey with about 35 of my Men; and the rest were dispos'd of into the other Men of War.¹⁹

We sail'd from Ascension, the 8th...

From: ADM 52/135- Master's Log HMS Lizard for 1701.

April 2

Ditto 3...at 10 anch'rd in Ascension road: in 7 1/4 fathoms the N'th pynt [point?] NbE the So: pynt SWb1?...[?] hill SE1/2S...being the Roebucks men ashore having lost their ship the 23 of February

Winds 3-7 April; SE, ESE, SebE, SE, S, 'fresh gales'.²⁰

From: ADM 51/3886- Captain's Log HMS Lizard for 1701

April 3...At anchor at Ascension. In Turtle Bay. The No Point nebn ye So Pt SWbS, the Middle of ye bay ESE1/2S. ... at 9 This morning anchor'd in **Turtle Bay** in 7 1/2 fa[thoms] when we came to anchor saw sev.[eral men ashore w[hich] proved to be Roebucks who was lost here by a leak.²¹

April 8... At 9 this morning weigh'd... all the Roebucks men Came on bd [board] the three Men of Warr being glad of a favourable opportunity. Everyone going on bd w. [which] Ship he pleased where of ye m. [men] came on bd of us, 2 of ye m. being Officers, (viz) Chirugion [surgeon] & boatswain, 39 of ye m. went on bd the C..nado [Canterbury?] & 7 on bo [board] the Hastings.

They were lost here the 23'd of February Last, & have lived here ever since in good health, without any man[er] of bread. Din'd [?] upon Turtle, goats, Men of Warr bird & booby, for **Saved no provisions** nor not a bone 20 or 30 Gallons of water.²² Which not a bone a day but by diligent Sarch & god Great providence found water at ye ascent? Of the highest Mountain where they saw ye Weeds Look green 7 the earth moist dug'd Just ye Rheem of ye earth away & water sprung up which was gods Gr [eat] providence for there was never heard of any found before on ye Island but in ye Rocky Gulley in ...[?] time, this Spring was at least? 8 or 10 miles from ye bay the war [?] Lost in and ye docent of ye Side of ye highest Mountain w.th the ..?.. obliged to go..?.. Every ...?:... or other of y m [ye mountain] for Water but ..?.. first... almost half the ships company fainted by ye way till they ware supp'td by those that ...?.... able perform in ye Journy..

¹⁹ The bay in which Roebuck men had their tents and presumably that in which it was warped ashore was large enough for four vessels at least.

²⁰ The winds at this time were offshore.

²¹ The ship's are anchored in a bay with turtles and while the Roebuck men are seen the ship is not.

²² Dampier indicates that while getting his men, their bedding and chests off, he warped Roebuck ashore into 3 and a half fathoms and secured it there. Dampier's comment indicates that he was unable to access the stores in this ship.

From: ADM 51/3859- Captain's Log HMS Hastings for 1701

Thursday 3. Att Anchor in Ascension road... att tenn This morning Anchord on ye NW side of y Island²³ in Tenn fath [oms] the E [eastern] point boar NebN y north point SoWbSo O ye S [of ye ship?] From ye shore 1/2 mile: ...[?]. Sent out boate on Shoar which brought us word off that Cap Dampier and his men where on shore having lost his Maj [esty] s Ship ye Roebucke on y Island.

Fryday 4... Fresh gales and fair weather

Satterday 5.. Wind and Weath Do. In y afternoon came on board seven Of y Roebuck men at 10 at night got on board y Roebuck anchor being her small bower and fourtenn fath[om] of cable In giting of which o[ur] Longboat Lost her Grapnel:²⁴

Sunday 6 ... At anchor in Ascension Road ..Fresh Gailes and Fair Weathr... Sent our Longboat and Pinnois to the SW Bay for more Turtle.

Munday 7... Wind and Weathr Do in y afternoon got on board a spair Topmast of the Roebucks in y morning.²⁵

From: ADM 51/4114- Captain's Log HMS Anglesey for 1701

Thursd 3 ... at 9 this forenoon I anchord in 9 1/2 fatham ye No. most point of ye Bay NEBN ye So. Most SSW 1/2 W: as I came In ? Saw many Men ashore Unexpected²⁶ w[hi]ch proved to be Capn Dampire of ye Roebuck and men there Ship having foundard in ye Road [?] saved there lives a Shore It being on ye 23 Day of Feb'y 1701 being in number of them 51 a Shore

Satt'd 5... Is noe watter to be gott upon this island only up in ye mountains Is a small Spring

ADM 51/4114- Master's Log? HMS Anglesey

2a

Sund 6th 1701 ... small gailes cont ye long boat for more turtle at ye SW Bay and and Capn Dampire and his men Came aboard me.

²³ Confirming that the anchorage was on the NW side.

²⁴ That the longboat had to use a grapnel to recover the anchor and cable indicates that it was submerged and this may not have been the anchor Dampier sent ashore in order to secure *Roebuck*.

²⁵ Was the topmast recovered from the ship *Roebuck* or from the 'Roebucks' a term used elsewhere describing the crew? This may have been used as a tent ridge pole.

²⁶ Like the other ships present *HMS Anglesey* appears to have seen the men first and not the stranded *Roebuck* as one would have expected. This poses the question whether *Roebuck* had broken up in the swells, whether it lay on its side and was lying just submerged, drifted back out or was lost elsewhere.

Mond 7th... faire weather at 9 this morning weighted... in company with ye Hastings, Lizard and Canterbury Indiaman bound for St Iago...

ADM 51/3859-

Letter October 1701... Admiralty Office ...Pembroke, Haversham, Mitchell and Churchill.. re delivery of Journal of the proceedings of Roebuck and the payment of Dampier's wages.

List of crew: not reproduced

From: H 1310/87- Hydrographic Office File: Royal Airforce Sub-Aqua Association Report of the Joint Services Expedition to Ascension Island 15/10-3/12/1985.

Roebuck was a 26 gun²⁷ 5th Rate ship built in 1690 by Edward Snellgrove of Wapping. The ship was originally built as a 'fire ship'²⁸ and was 96 feet long 'on the gun deck', 25'6" in beam²⁹ and depth of hold 10 feet³⁰ and of 292 tons.³¹

20184 An account of the loss of his Majesty's Shipp Roebuck by John Penton. Carpenter's Mate. ADM 1/ 15262

On ye 21 of Feby 1700 in sight of ye Island of Ascention we sprung a leak...kept her up till ye 23 in ye aft'noon. At which time with the help of a Sea breze and warping we got her witthin a cables length of ye shore. She then being full up to ye hatches with water.³² And that night and next morning we provided ourselves for goeing a shore on ye foresaid Island Ascention.

Dated 29 September 1701

²⁷ The number of guns on an exploration voyage is expected to be less than 26.

²⁸ Fire ships may also have some archaeologically-recognisable characteristics. One is the hinging of the gunports.

²⁹ The length is expected to be reflected in the remains on the seabed and will be an important identification tool, while the breadth is dependent on factors such as angle of heel and depth buried in sediment.

³⁰ The depth of hold is an important clue at 10 feet (from the underneath of the deck beams to the top of the ceiling) i.e. *Roebuck* probably had a draught of 10 feet at most. When this is considered with the account that, while the vessel was warped in a cable length from shore and fastened to shore in a depth of three and a half fathoms (21 feet) at 8 O'Clock, she did not strike the ground until 9 O'Clock, *Roebuck* was either sinking or was warped in further in the intervening hour. Unless the anchor dragged and the wreck floated out in the south easterly 'gales' that appear to have been prevalent after *Roebuck* was lost, she lies at, or inshore of, the three and a half fathom (21 foot) line mentioned by Dampier.

³¹ The tonnage will be reflected in anchor size and this should prove an important tool in identifying the remains.

³² An indication of the depth of water in the ship and why they recovered so little. If the masts were cut down for use ashore, this would help explain why the rescuers saw nothing of *Roebuck*...a major problem still in locating the ship.

20184 An account of the loss of his Majesty's Ship Roebuck by Mark? Doyd? Boatswains Mate. ADM 1/15262

On the 21 of Feby 1700 in sight of ye Island of Ascension about eight A clock at night we sprung a leak on our larboard bow... All we could do with pumping and bailing she still gained? of us **which when we came in she being full of water forced us a shore on ye 23 in ye Evining...?** in a short time after sunset.

Dated 29 September 1701

20184 Charles Harbree ADM 1/15262

[as above]...this night the 23 we warp'd in and in ye even[ing] **having gott wthn a cables length of ye shore in sum short time after ye ship sunk.**³³

Dated 28 die Sept 1701

20184 An account of the loss of his Maj's Ship Roebuck by Stephen Dolling ADM 1/ 15262

[nothing new]

Dated 28 die Sept 1701

20184 Acc'nt of the loss of his Ma's Ship Roebuck by John Hughes Master ADM 1/15262

[As per Dampier].... At nine a'clock...? Anchored in the NW Bay in ? & half fath. Water Sandy ground **about half a mile from the shoare...ye 23 in ye evening at which time by ye help of a sea breeze and warping we gott her within a Cables length of the shoare, and she soon struck for?** that night we made provision to save our lives and next morning Capt Dampier and his Officers went ashoare...

Dated 29 September 1701

³³ The ship did sink, casting doubt on the possibility it could have floated back out to sea