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UK NEWS

DIVERS DAYS AWAY FROM GOLD OF PRINCE CHARLIE



HIDDEN DEPTHS: Divers believe many of the coins destined for Bonnie Prince Charlie are scattered

Sunday September 27, 2009

By **Paula Murray**

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TREASURE lost before it could reach Bonnie Prince Charlie and fund the Scottish rebellion could be found within days after more than 250 years at the bottom of the sea.

Divers are set to explore the site where it is thought a ship sent by King Louis XV of France and laden with gold coins sank in 1746.

Historians have speculated the outcome of the Jacobite Rebellion could have been different had the riches reached Charlie and funded a renewed bid to seize the

throne from England.

Divers say they will know for certain within 10 days if a wreck, off the coast of Anglesey, is one of the French fleet sent to help the Young Pretender.

Team leader Joe McCormack, 65, said yesterday he is "pretty convinced" they will solve the mystery on the seabed.

He said: "The preparations are done and we are ready to dig a hole through the seabed to the bedrock.

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"When the ship smashed into millions of pieces everything got scattered and in time the gold, being such a heavy material, sank to the bedrock.

"We'll have to dig a hole through all the mud and stone and sand to get to the very bottom of the sea and then Hoover up and sift through all the murkiness."

The project began earlier this year when experts at the National Museum of Scotland identified a copper coin Joe and son Kevin, 42, uncovered more than a decade ago as the ring seal of Bonnie Prince Charlie's grandmother, Mary Queen of Scots.

That would suggest it was lost on a vessel sent by France to sponsor the Scottish rebellion in the aftermath of Charlie's defeat in the 1745 Battle of Culloden.

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It is known Louis XV sent ships laden with supplies, including 852,000lb of gold coins, but two are recorded as being damaged in an encounter with the British Navy after which they limped back to France.

There is speculation further relief vessels were sent, but sank.

A team of 50 divers and technicians are working on the site 50ft below the sea, and a special scaffolding platform has been built into the cliff face.

Only a small number of Louis d'Or gold coins, portraying the king's head, have ever been found in the world, with experts speculating it is "almost certain" a trove lies there.

Mr McCormack said it would also offer an explanation as to how Louis managed to lose his country's fortune.

He said: "It was the largest shipment of gold mankind has ever recorded. Everyone thought it was in the bank in France but that was not the case.

"We know the amount involved was 852,000lbs in gold coins – some 426 tonnes in bullion. If you think there were five ounces of gold to every 10 d'Or coin, and half an ounce to one d'Or, we are talking about millions and millions of gold coins.

"I believe they could well be scattered around Anglesey. Should we be right it would be a tremendous boost for the area."

Born in 1720, Charles Edward Stuart was the grandson of James II and VII, who had been deposed in the Revolution of 1688.

The Jacobite movement tried to restore the family to the throne but failed at Culloden.

- For more information, log on to www.maritimeresurgence.co.uk.



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