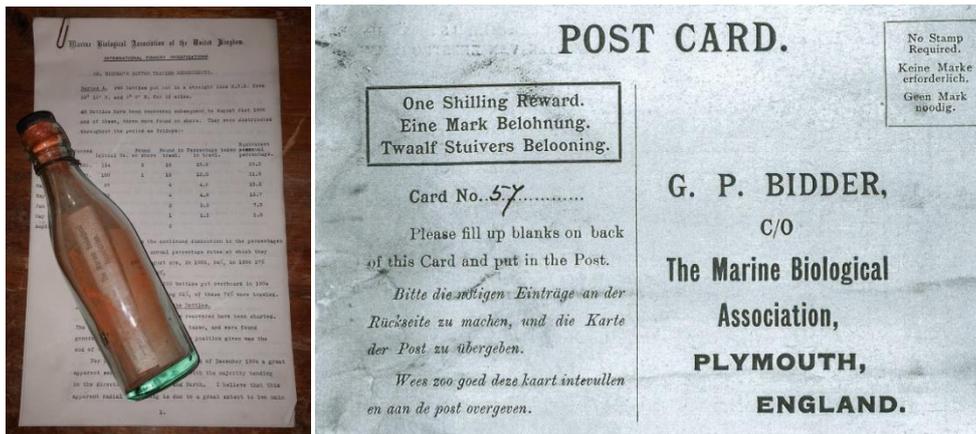




## Adrift for over 100 years – the world's oldest message in a bottle

A postcard returned to the Plymouth Laboratory of the Marine Biological Association (MBA) has been recognized by Guinness World Records as the oldest message in a bottle ever found!

Bottles containing postcards were released in the southern North Sea in the early years of the 20th Century as part of the MBA's research into ocean currents and the behaviour of commercial fish. The message in the bottle had been drifting on currents for 108 years, 4 months and 18 days before being picked up by a walker on a beach on Amrum island, one of the North Frisian Islands on the German North Sea coast.



**Left: A 'bottom trailer' bottle similar to the one found at Amrum Island. Right: The postcard returned to the Marine Biological Association after over 108 years at sea.**

George Parker Bidder the third was a significant figure in the development of the MBA (and therefore of marine biology in the UK) in the first part of the 20th Century. So MBA staff were thrilled when a letter addressed to G. P. Bidder, containing an original postcard from one of his bottles, arrived at the MBA's Plymouth laboratory in April 2015.

The MBA honoured the promise on the postcard and sent a reward of one shilling to the finder.

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G. P. Bidder had devised what today we would call a 'citizen science' project. Bidder released over 1,000 'bottom-trailer' bottles into the North Sea between 1904 and 1906 and reported a return rate from fishermen (encouraged by a one shilling reward) of around 55%.

What was probably the most significant finding from his experiments was that in the southern North Sea many of his bottom-trailers got cast on the English shore, whereas floating bottles would, for the most part, move across the North Sea towards the continent. He deduced from this that river outflow causes a shoreward flow of denser salt water.

Confirmation of the record from Guinness World Records was received in February 2016.

### **How do today's scientists learn about fish behaviour?**

G. P. Bidder enlisted the help of fishermen and the public to further our scientific knowledge, and MBA scientists do the same thing today. The modern equivalent of a message in a bottle is the electronic tag. Tags are attached to individuals of commercially important fish species such as plaice, and transmit signals which enable scientists to track fish at sea, revealing new, detailed insights into their behaviour. If the fish is caught, a reward is paid for the return of the tag. In 2014, MBA scientists [deployed unmanned surface vehicles coordinated with the release of tagged fish into a marine protected area](#). For the first time, scientists were able to eavesdrop in real time on the daily lives of individual fish, and find out how they occupy the various habitats within a protected area through time.

### **Ends**

#### **Notes for editors:**

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### **Citizen Science**

There are a host of citizen science projects which help scientists collect information and provide fun and learning for the wider public. The projects below survey the shores around the UK and are open to anyone who would like to be involved:

[https://www.mba.ac.uk/shore\\_thing/](https://www.mba.ac.uk/shore_thing/)

<http://www.capturingourcoast.co.uk/>

**The Marine Biological Association (MBA)** is a professional body for marine scientists with some 1,400 members world-wide. Since 1884 the MBA has established itself as a leading marine biological research organization contributing to the work of several Nobel Laureates and over 170 Fellows of the Royal Society. In 2013, the MBA was awarded a Royal Charter in recognition of its long and eminent history and its status within the field of marine biology. The award strengthens the Association's role in promoting marine biology as a discipline and in representing the interests of the marine biological community.

[www.mba.ac.uk](http://www.mba.ac.uk)