Forgotten Wrecks of the First World War







2018

SS *South Western*

Site Report







FORGOTTEN WRECKS OF THE FIRST WORLD WAR

SS South Western SITE REPORT



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i Acknowledgments

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MAT Staff who took part in fieldwork: Jan Gillespie, Brandon Mason and Garry Momber.

MAT staff who took part in research and reporting: Amanda Bowens, Jasmine Noble Shelley, Jan Gillespie and Julie Satchell.

ii Copyright Statement

This report has been produced by the MAT with the assistance of funding provided by the Heritage Lottery Fund through their Heritage Grants Programme. Unless otherwise stated all images are copyright of the MAT.

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1. Project Background

Forgotten Wrecks of the First World War is a Heritage Lottery Funded project which is dedicated to raising the profile of a currently under-represented aspect of the First World War. While attention is often focused on the Western Front and major naval battles like Jutland, historic remains from the war lie, largely forgotten, in and around our seas, rivers and estuaries.

With over 1,100 wartime wrecks along England's south coast alone, the conflict has left a rich heritage legacy and many associated stories of bravery and sacrifice. These underwater memorials represent the vestiges of a vital, yet little known, struggle that took place on a daily basis, just off our shores. The study and promotion of these archaeological sites presents a unique opportunity to better interpret them and improve physical and virtual access.

The project focuses on underwater and coastal sites between Kent and Cornwall, which include merchant and naval ships, passenger, troop and hospital ships, U-boats, ports, wharfs, buildings and foreshore hulks. These sites, under water and on the foreshore, have been degrading and deteriorating due to natural and human processes for approximately 100 years and, as a result, are extremely fragile. In many cases, this project represents a final opportunity to record what remains on the seabed and foreshore before it is lost forever.

The project aims to characterise the nature and extent of the maritime First World War archaeological resource surviving on the south coast's seabed and around the coast. This will enable an understanding of maritime activity just off our shores during the conflict and provide a window onto some of the surviving sites. While it will not be possible to visit and record all c.700 vessels dating to the First World War, lost off the south coast of England, a representative sample of sites have been selected for more detailed study, analysis and interpretation.

This report collates information collected during the project, relating to one of the south coast's First World War wrecks, the SS *South Western*.

2. Methodology

General detail on the methodologies employed during the project are outlined within *Forgotten Wrecks of the First World War: Project Methodology Report*, this report section concentrates on approaches and resources relating specifically to SS *South Western*.

2.1 Desk Based Research

Research to gather information on the *South Western* and its crew took revealed a range of primary and secondary sources.

Online information/ sources for South Western

Pastscape:	(1)						
	http://www.pastscape.org.uk/hob.aspx?hob_id=767222&sort=4&search=exact&criteri						
	a=South Western&rational=q&recordsperpage=10						
	(2)						
	http://www.pastscape.org.uk/hob.aspx?hob_id=1164755&sort=4&search=exact&crite						
	ria=South Western&rational=q&recordsperpage=10						
Wrecksite	https://www.wrecksite.eu/wreck.aspx?1260						
EU:							
Other URL:	: https://www.uboat.net/wwi/ships_hit/5664.html						
Other URL:	Crew list: www.crewlist.org.uk/data/archivecrewlists/72341						
Other URL:	Wreck plan, photographs and dive trail: http://www.divernet.com/wreck-						
	tours/p301802-wrecktour-171:-the-south-western.html						

The National Archives

Research was further extended through visits to view relevant material held at The National Archives (TNA) at Kew.

Documents relating to the South Western	Ref.	Where	Date
			accessed
ADM 137 1477 – German submarines 15-30 March 31 March 1918	TNA	MAT	2017
ADM 137-2964 – British Merchant Vessels captured or sunk by the	TNA	MAT	2017
enemy 16-31 March 1918			
ADM 137-4013 – Enemy submarines, particulars of attacks on	TNA	MAT	2017
merchant vessels in home waters			
BT 110-414 Registrar for Transmission to Registrar-General of	TNA	MAT	2017
Shipping and Seamen.			

Records at other archives/collections

The personal records of historian Dave Wendes relating to the *South Western* were consulted and digitised with the kind permission of Dave Wendes, these records included a large amount of information relating to the ship and to the crew.

Source	Ref.	Where	Date accessed
C1 Railway steamers 1 and 2	D Wendes	MAT	2015
HMS Ettrick log 1 and log 2	D Wendes	MAT	2015
Mail Ships of the C1	D Wendes	MAT	2015
Crew lists and passenger details	D Wendes	MAT	2015

2.2 Associated Artefacts

While the Forgotten Wrecks project had a non-recovery policy, where possible, the project aimed to 'virtually reunite' artefacts historically recovered from the Forgotten Wrecks. Artefacts from the *South Western* have been located within the personal collection of Dave Wendes, they include a brass compass bowl, bridge telegraph and a steam pressure gauge.

2.3 Site Visit/Fieldwork

Forgotten Wrecks site visits and fieldwork aimed to:

- Provide opportunities for volunteers to access and take an active role in the recording and research of a range of different types of maritime First World War site.
- Record extant remains for heritage records.
- Record extant remains for public dissemination, enabling 'virtual' access for those not able to achieve physical access.

The most appropriate methods for site recording were chosen from the following, on a site-by-site basis including: site sketch, measured survey, photography and/ or video.

Forgotten Wrecks funded diving from the dive boat *Wight Spirit* took place on the wreck of the *South Western* on 14 June 2017. Initial dives aimed to assess the condition of the remains and obtain a photographic and video record of the wreck and key features.

In 2017 a total of four divers undertook a total of 230 minutes diving on the *South Western*. The dive team used self-contained underwater breathing apparatus (SCUBA) with a breathing gas of air and EAN (enriched air nitrox) and carried out accelerated decompression procedures.

The diving conditions were moderate visibility caused by particulate matter in the water column resulting in very low light.

3. Vessel Biography: SS South Western

SS South Western was chosen as one of the Forgotten Wrecks case study sites because it demonstrates the multi-national aspects of the First World War. Among its crew and passengers were people from both sides of the English Channel and even from as far afield as Trinidad. They were from all walks of life: young, old, male, female, from dockworkers to seamstresses and everything in between. The South Western's story was similar to many other vessels of the time as pre-war roles changed and people came from all over the globe to help the war effort and earn a living (Figure 1).

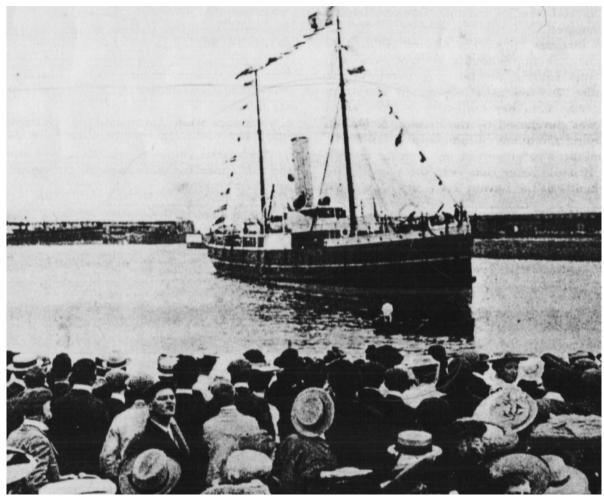


Figure 1: The South Western entering Jersey. Image courtesy of John Attwood

3.1 Vessel Type and Build

SS South Western was built in 1874 by J & W Dudgeon in London. The ship was a single screw, schooner rigged steamer with a gross tonnage of 657 (Figure 2). The 67.7m (222ft) long ship had a beam of 8.26m (27.1ft) and draught of 3.96m (13.5ft). It was powered by a triple expansion engine with 225 nominal horse power and a speed of 13 knots. Its official number was 72341. It was armed with one 13-pounder stern gun.

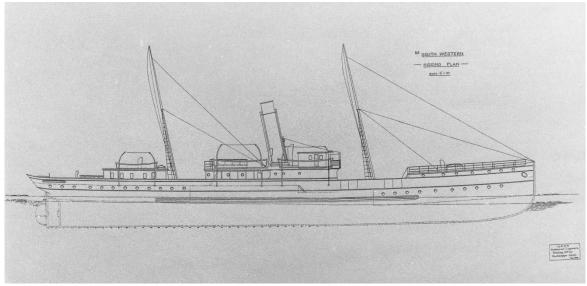


Figure 2: Rigging plan for the *South Western* (Dave Wendes collection with permission from The National Archives).

3.2 Pre-war Career

The *South Western* (Figure 3) was built for travelling between Southampton and St Malo and the Channel Islands and began a trial period of use in March of 1875. Later, when bigger ships took over this route, the *South Western* served as a relief ship on other routes and wintered on the St Malo route.

In 1890 the ship had a major overhaul, when the efficiency of steam had finally overtaken sail – it was during this time that a new triple expansion engine and new boilers were fitted. Later, in 1906, electric light was fitted and the deck-house was enlarged. *South Western* operated these routes until 1913 (Le Scelleur, 1985), when a replacement was planned, but with the outbreak of the war the *South Western* was kept on (Masterson, n.d).



Figure 3: The South Western (courtesy of Dave Wendes collection, copyright unknown)

3.3 First World War Use & Loss

Owned at the time of loss by London & South Western Railway Co (wrecksite.eu, 2017), the *South Western* continued its pre-war duties during wartime, operating mail runs to the Channel Islands (Masterson, n.d.).

On its last voyage on the 17th March 1918, the *South Western* was travelling from Southampton, bound for St. Malo with twelve and a half tons of general cargo and four passengers. It has been progressing at 10 knots, zigzagging to make itself a more difficult target (ADM 137 1477), when a submarine was spotted on the surface close to the vessel. It was UB-*59*, which had been hunting in the area and had already sunk two ships in the preceding days (the SS *Tweed* and the SS *Venezuela*). The *South Western* turned astern to allow the gunners clear fire, but they were too close for action, and the submarine dived out of harm's way.

Half an hour later, UB-59 was again spotted on the surface, and the order was given to open fire, however, no shots were actually fired. This became a bone of contention later as the gun crew were believed to have shirked their duty:

'Master appears to have done everything possible and to have carried out his instructions but the gunners do not appear to have acted with sufficient promptitude and did not fire the gun in spite of definite orders to do so, and it is reported that they jumped overboard (both are now missing).' – Quote from ADM 137 4013.

An account from one of the survivors, Frank Gleadhill, however, caused this opinion to be overturned when he reported that both gunners had rushed to position but were likely killed when UB-59 fired a torpedo, striking the ship on the starboard side fore part of the bridge.

The ship began to sink quickly; some life rafts were launched but others were jammed and could not be lowered. Two of the boats which were successfully launched capsized with people in them. Three of the survivors (Gleadhill, John Turner, and Chief Engineer Cole) managed to climb onto the bottom of one of the upturned boats where they remained until HMS P30 picked them up several hours later. The Master (John Clark) was flung to the deck from the bridge by the explosion but managed to recover and slip overboard, where he was saved by a raft and joined by Chief Officer Gardner. There were six survivors in total (TNA, ADM 137/1477). Clark, Gardner and Henry Bedford were picked up by TBD Ettrick.

3.4 Associated Vessels

UB-59 was a type UB III Submarine, commissioned in August 1917. At the time of sinking the *South Western*, it was under the command of Erwin Waßner, a highly efficient commander who sank 86 enemy vessels over the course of his career. He was awarded the Pour le Mérite for "outstanding leadership and distinguished naval planning and successful submarine operations". UB-59 sank only six vessels before it was scuttled at Zeebrugge on the 5th October 1918 (uboat.net, 2018).

HMS P30 picked up three of the survivors from the South Western. Frank Gleadhill reported that 'we were treated most kindly on board P30 and everything possible was done to make us comfortable' (AMD 137 4013).

TBD *Ettrick* picked up the other three survivors.

3.5 People Associated with the SS South Western

29 of those aboard the *South Western* at the time of its loss were killed; there were six survivors. Details of the survivors and those who were lost are included in Appendix 8.1, and the Maritime Archaeology Trust have added their details to the Lives of the First World War website set up by the Imperial War Museum which can be found here https://livesofthefirstworldwar.org/community/1126

The passengers and crew of the *South Western* represent the diversity of those at sea at the time. They ranged in age from 15 (Horace Newton, deck boy, Figure 5), to 67 (James Sweetingham, cook) and were from both sides of the Channel. Many of the crew were from Southampton, but also included people from Wales, Scotland, Trinidad, Jersey, Guernsey, and France.

3.6 Post-loss Activity

There was initially some confusion as to the identity of the wreck of the *South Western* as it lies in close proximity to the wreck of the *Iduna*.



Figure 4: The Southampton and District Pictorial announcing the death of Horace Newton the youngest victim and crew member lost on the *South Western* (Southampton and District Pictorial)

4. Seabed Remains

4.1 Site Location and Environment

The *South Western* lies approximately nine nautical miles SW from St Catherine's Point, Isle of Wight in 40 meters of water at position 50.41667 -1.425 (Figure 6). The surrounding seabed consists of sand and gravel.

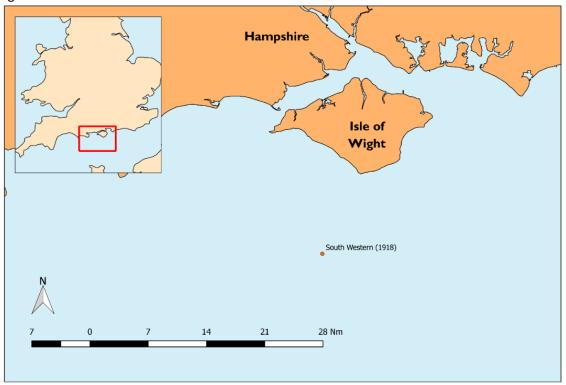


Figure 5: Location of the South Western

4.2 Archaeological Methodology

The methodology used on the dive on the *South Western* was photogrammetry survey which was carried out by two divers. Two other divers took measurements of key features. A wreck tour by John Liddiard published on DiverNet in 2013 indicates that the midships and stern section were the most interesting areas. They contain the most complete structural remains, and those that help in the identification of the ship.

As time is a limiting factor on a deep dive and in low light, one diver concentrated on the midships section to capture the boiler and engine area, and the other concentrated on the stern of the vessel to capture the propulsion mechanism. The divers each used a Nikon D700 DSLR camera in a Sealux CD7000 camera housing with one Orcalight Seawolf 1860 diving light in a rugged casing (Figure 7).



Figure 6: Diver carrying out photogrammetry survey

The wreck tour image generated by John Liddiard and Max Ellis (Figure 8) proved a helpful addition to the photogrammetry survey of the wreck, and it was not apparent that there had been any noticeable deterioration of the remains since this survey (four years earlier).



Figure 7: Plan of the South Western (Copyright John Liddiard and Max Ellis, with permission)

4.3 Description of Surviving Vessel Remains

The remains of the *South Western* lie in approximately 40m of water on a sand and shingle seabed. The sand appears to shift around therefore the wreck appears to cover and uncover.

The wreck is lying over towards its starboard side and is collapsing further with items of structure moving from their original position. Amidships the two boilers are found with sections of the port side of the hull in that area having collapsed and leaning on one of them shadowing the boiler beneath it (Figure 9). The second boiler, presumable the starboard one, sits beside it, the fire tubes are exposed through the casing (Figure 10). The fireboxes are also evident at what would be the forward end of the boiler (Figure 11).



Figure 8: Boiler with hull plating resting on it



Figure 9: Fire tubes evident through casing



Figure 10: Fireboxes on boiler

Moving forward from the boiler, and crossing mixed metal debris, the hull becomes flattened against the seabed with no obvious bow structure visible.

Just aft of the boilers the triple expansion steam engine lies on the seabed having fallen upside down (Figure 12). The pistons protrude from the engine along the seabed. Part of the engine is under collapsed plates of the hull (Figure 13 and 14).

Just near to and just behind the collapsed engine a winch, which was likely a cargo winch, lies slightly under the hull plating (Figure 15). A broken piston rod lies nearby.



Figure 11: The triple expansion engine

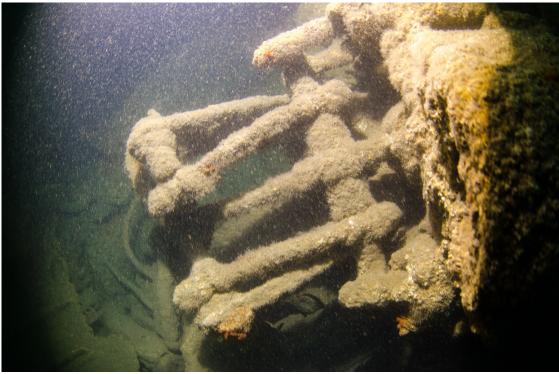


Figure 12: Piston rods beneath the engine



Figure 13: Part of the hull plating is resting on the engine



Figure 14: Winch just under the plating

Moving further aft the hull is broken apart, a set of bollards have fallen from the deck and lay amongst the debris next to metal plating (Figure 16). Crossing this area amongst broken metal structure, a mangled shell case and what appears to be a complete cod bottle are detected, probably some evidence of the general cargo the ship was carrying (Figure 17).



Figure 15: Bollards fallen from deck



Figure 16: Evidence of cargo, a shell case and cod bottle (middle left of image)

Towards the stern where the hull has collapsed and the keel has split, the propeller shaft can be traced all the way to the stern (Figure 18) where it can be followed to where the rudder post and propeller are present.



Figure 17: Propeller shaft complete with one of the flanges

At the stern end the rudder is still complete (Figure 19) and has fallen to the seabed with the propeller still attached to its post (Figure 20 and 21).



Figure 18: Collapsed rudder



Figure 19: Propeller still in place



Figure 20: Propeller and rudder stock

The condition of the *South Western* is consistent with what might be expected of a wreck that has survived the natural processes within the area in which it lies for nearly 100 years. Although the remains are partially broken down some aspects of the ship are still moderately preserved.

5. Recovered Archive

The project identified the following artefacts from the *South Western* which are owned by historian and dive skipper Dave Wendes. They are all from the artefact class 'fixtures and fittings'; they are a brass compass bowl (Figure 22), A bridge telegraph (Figure 23) and a steam pressure gauge (Figure 24).



Figure 21: Brass compass bowl from the South Western (courtesy of Dave Wendes)



Figure 22: Bridge telegraph from the South Western (courtesy of Dave Wendes)



Figure 23: Steam pressure gauge from the South Western.

A brass compass binnacle is also known to have been retrieved from the area in 1993, but it is not clear if this is from the *Iduna* when it was thought to be the *South Western*, or the actual *South Western*. It is described as having three cast brass legs of serpent design, soldered with lead and with the compass bowl and gimbals missing. It is recorded as being approximately 636mm in height and weigh 16.5kg (Pastscape, 2018).

6. Site Significance & Potential Further Research

The South Western is an example of a merchant ship carrying passengers as well as cargo and trying to carry on its work during the First World War, yet it was still torpedoed with much loss of life of both passengers and crew. Designed for the cross-channel trade, this was a modest sized steam ship at 67.7m long, its single triple expansion engine being typical for the period, and in recognition of hostilities it had been fitted with a deck gun. Although an example of a relatively 'ordinary' vessel type, this does not decrease its significance within the wider group of vessels lost to the on-going U-boat threat during the war.

As the centenary of the wrecking of the *South Western* is marked, there is still much work to do to understand the full history and significance of the ship and its full place in history. Initial work has highlighted the potential for further investigation in a number of areas:

- Searching for definitive evidence that the identity of the wreck is the South Western.
- Further diving work to examine areas of structure and map the remains.

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8. Appendices

8.1 Crew and passengers of the SS South Western

Those who survived and those who were lost are listed below, (the list is compiled from census returns, ship's crew list, Commonwealth War Graves Commission, survivor's reports and medal cards (see also the Live of the First World War site set up by the Imperial War Museum which can be found here https://livesofthefirstworldwar.org/community/1126);

Those who survived:

Henry Bedford – Fireman John Clark – Master Herbert Cole – Chief Engineer Ernest Gardner – Mate Frank Gleadhill – Able Seaman John Turner – Able Seaman

Those who were lost:

Owen Aldis – Engineer
Wilhelmina Burton – Stewardess
Edith Cochrane – Stewardess
Frederick Coles – Fireman
John Davies – Second Officer
William Day – Fireman
R. Deathe – Steward
William Fielding – Able Seaman
Maxwell Frame – Leading Seaman
Joseph Gomes – Fireman
Charles Hartley – Able Seaman
Fancious Langlois – Passenger
Joseph Landrac – Passenger

Yves Marie Le Gac – Pilot, Passenger Edward Le Page – Able Seaman Albert Littlejohns – Passenger B. McCarthy - Steward Frederick Miller – Chief Steward Ellen Newman – Passenger Horace Newton – Deck Boy Geroge Parsons – Carpenter John Platt – Able Seaman J. Short – Steward Harry Strange – Steward James Sweetingham – Cook Frederick Thorn – 2nd Steward Albert Welsh - Able Seaman Robert White - Able Seaman William Williamson - Fireman