Although her design had been rendered obsolete by HMs with the Channel Fleet from 1908, after a stint in the Mediterranean. November 1898 and commissioned on 10th October 1901, she served. Q-Ships and their Story by E Keble Chatterton, published in the to bear on an enemy target in a matter of seconds. Originally pulled aside, allowing the hidden 12-pounder gun to be brought disguised its true purpose. This dummy boat can be quickly These two photographs show how Penshurst expertly during the early stages of the war HMS Formidable served with the 6th Battle Squadron. The squadron was based in the English Channel to guard against possible German invasion and, after a period at Sheerness, they relocated to Portland in December 1914. On Thursday 31st December 1914, the squadron was conducting firing exercises off the south coast. Unknown to them, they had been spotted by Rudolf Schneider, the commander of the German U-boat UB-19. The Wreck Site For today, the wreck of Formidable is the subject of a Controlled Site under the Protection of Military Remains Act 1986, meaning that diving on it is prohibited. To an untrained eye, the 1,191 ton Penshurst looked like many other merchant ships that transported vital goods to and from the UK during the Great War. In reality however, Penshurst had multiple identities and a hidden secret. Sometimes going by the name of Manford Penshurst, it is not Q-7, a Mystery Destroyer or Q-Ship intended to lure U-boats to the surface where they could be attacked and destroyed. Q-Ship operations around the British coast throughout the First World War. Disguised as merchant seamen, their officers and crew had a carefully rehearsed performance for approaching U-boats which involving building a ‘panic party’ into the ship, but one away from the Q-Ship. While it is suggested that the vessel had been abandoned, in fact, more men and armaments were hidden within the ship. They had the unenviable task of waiting in hiding, often under fire, until the U-boat was close enough, before revealing themselves and their weaponry to attack the submarine. The Wreck Site Formidable lies upside down on the seabed, almost in half by a large hole towards the bow. However, the wreck’s true doom means that most of the hull is still intact. The wreck is designated as a Controlled Site under the Protection of Military Remains for 1986, meaning that diving on it is prohibited. The danger posed by the U-boats was graphically illustrated in 1915 with the loss of HMS Formidable. The Royal Navy realised that battleships weren’t a suitable weapon with which to fight back, and a new type of warship began to appear in the Channel. HMS Formidable HMS Formidable was a pre-dreadnought battleship. Launched on 17th November 1899 and commissioned on 10th October 1901, she served with the Channel Fleet from 1908, after a stint in the Mediterranean. Although her design had been rendered obsolete by HMs Dreadnought, she was still a powerful vessel and the lead ship of the Formidable class. Loss During the early stages of the war, HMS Formidable served with the 6th Battle Squadron. The squadron was based in the English Channel to guard against possible German invasion and, after a period at Sheerness, they relocated to Portland in December 1914. On Thursday 31st December 1914, the squadron was conducting firing exercises off the south coast. Unknown to them, they had been spotted by Rudolf Schneider, the commander of the German U-boat UB-19. Bating her time to struck the squadron at 2.20am. New Year’s Day 1915, torpedoes struck Formidable and she immediately began to take on water. Standing orders dictated that if submarines were detected, unfortified vessels must note that port as immediately and Formidable’s sister ships made for Portland. The two light cruisers, Thames and Diamond stood by to take survivors, but any hopes that the ship might be saved were dashed when a second torpedo struck her after 2am, sinking Formidable’s bow. The crew abandoned ship but in rough weather several of the ship’s boats were lost. It was alleged that a piano was thrown overboard as a makeshift raft. HMS Formidable finally sank at 4.45am. Most survivors were picked up the following morning or at, although one was later found for 22 hours. Some boats managed to row to shore, but many men died of exposure before they could be rescued. Off the 780 strong crew only 233 survived. Among those lost were Captain Loxley and his dog Bruce who were last seen at the bridge. Bruce’s body was later washed ashore and is commemorated by a headstone in Abbotsbury Gardens in Dorset. SM UB-19 The story of how UB-19 became one of the Forgotten Wrecks provides an interesting insight into the complex network of anti-submarine activity off our shores during the First World War. To an untrained eye, the 1,191 ton Penshurst looked like many other merchant ships that transported vital goods to and from the UK during the Great War. In reality however, Penshurst had multiple identities and a hidden secret. Sometimes going by the name of Manford Penshurst, it is not Q-7, a Mystery Destroyer or Q-Ship intended to lure U-boats to the surface where they could be attacked and destroyed. Q-Ship operations around the British coast throughout the First World War. Disguised as merchant seamen, their officers and crew had a carefully rehearsed performance for approaching U-boats which involving building a ‘panic party’ into the ship, but one away from the Q-Ship. While it is suggested that the vessel had been abandoned, in fact, more men and armaments were hidden within the ship. They had the unenviable task of waiting in hiding, often under fire, until the U-boat was close enough, before revealing themselves and their weaponry to attack the submarine. Loss On 29th November 1916, a seaplane, under Commander H.G. Grenfell, R.N., had a close encounter with a U-boat and bearing its identity compromised, the crew charged the westwards appearance, overflying one of their three masts and repairing parts of the ship. On 30th November, the new-look Penshurst observed a British seaplane from Portland carrying out anti-submarine duties from above. The Q-Ship sighted for the seaplane to come alongside and Grenfell agreed with the airmen that the plane would act as a ‘spotter’ and the ship would drop depth charges as the indicated position. Unfortunately, two men were later picked up off the seaplane crashed back into the water. As Penshurst’s crew rescued the airmen, UB-19 commenced a surface attack. The plane had to be abandoned and must therefore be another of the south coast’s Forgotten Wrecks. The Wreck Site Today the wreck of UB-19 lies in approximately 65 metres of water near the mouth of the English Channel, south of the Dover/Dorset border. A survey by Dr Iain McInnes in 2004 established that, while the wreck of UB-19 had deteriorated significantly since 1916 it can be seen that the worm hull formation is quite clear and the ship’s appearance in the reconstructed position. Background image: L.A. Shafer, 1918