It's not just wrecks that are a forgotten part of the south coast's conflict heritage; many vessels that survived the war bear remembering as well. Throughout the war many vessels did valuable service, only to be broken up in the decades that followed.

HM Yacht *Lorna* was just one such vessel and links two wrecks from 1918. This yacht was requisitioned by the Admiralty in 1914 and patrolled the Dorset coast throughout the war. As well as rescuing survivors, in May 1918 she sank the U-boat UB-74 3.5 miles west of Portland Bill, the only Admiralty yacht to accomplish such a feat.

**HMS Wellholme**

HMS Wellholme was a Q-Ship—a Royal Navy vessel disguised as an innocent civilian ship. Wellholme, a two-masted basting sailing vessel, would have appeared to be a small coastal cargo vessel of a type that was still widely used at the time, but in fact hid a 12-pounder gun on its deck, ready to be uncovered to strike at a U-boat if the chance presented itself.

Q-Ships had proved successful in the earlier years of the war. U-boats, swarming to sacrifice a torpedo unnecessarily, would surface near armed craft and sink them with gunfire. If the target happened to be a Q-Ship, it gave the British crew time to uncover their gun and attack the U-boat from behind. In the later years of the war, U-boat commanders were more cautious and would often try to strike at seaward. So it was with the Wellholme.

Loss

On the morning of the 29th of January in response to reports of U-boat activity near Lyme Bay, Wellholme set sail from Portland Penrith around Lyme Bay her crew saw nothing until, as the sun was setting in the west, a U-boat was spotted on the surface 400 yards away.

But the U-boat had seen Wellholme too and quickly moved east when it was hidden in the rapidly darkening sky just before dawn. The German crew fired four shots in quick succession on Wellholme. One struck the hull at the waterline and Wellholme immediately began to settle. Realising there was nothing to be done the captain ordered the crew on deck and less than five minutes after being struck, the ship headed over and the crew were tossed into the water. A small boat drifted free and the crew were able to climb on board but it was soon realised that three men had been lost.

The U-boat, SM UB-22, had played a clever game, quickly taking advantage of the dimming light and leaving with some to feed. The attacker wasn't seen by the Wellholme's crew again.

*HMS Wellholme* after and can still be seen on ships today. The committee proposed that ships should use lifebelt boxes on deck that doubled as large free-floating rafts. It was adopted soon after and can still be seen on ships today.

**The Wreck Site**

Within weeks the Wellholme’s masts had collapsed and today the remains of the vessel are the wreck below. The ship is now two long white boxes sitting just six metres above the seabed. But view of this last battle site retains of her original structure. (Image courtesy of Colin M Baxter)

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**SS Pomeranian**

The speed with which this ship sank, combined with the cold waters of the Channel in spring, resulted in one of the largest death tolls on a torpedoed merchant cargo vessel in the First World War.

Pomeranian was launched in 1882 at the Grunor Bank in Hull. For years her fate was kept a secret until HMS Wellholme discovered her in the Channel in spring, resulted in one of the largest death tolls on a torpedoed merchant cargo vessel in the First World War.

The Pomeranian was sunk in 1918, but her identity was kept secret by her owners and the Admiralty in the belief that its loss would encourage U-boats to attack other ships. However, in 1927 the Admiralty released information about the wreck and it was identified as SS Pomeranian, a 4,200 ton steamship built in Hull.

The Pomeranian's loss near Portland in 1918 resulted in one of the largest death tolls on a torpedoed merchant cargo vessel in the First World War. For the next 30 years she would sail between Britain and North America carrying passengers, cargo and Royal Mail consignments across the Atlantic.

*Wellholme’s* hull, fired from the submerged UC-77. Water poured into the ship and down below in the engine room, second engineer William Bell waited nervously at his post. As the ship started to list and it became clear that nothing could be done, he climbed into the rigging of the Pomeranian. For the next 30 years she would sail between Britain and North America carrying passengers, cargo and Royal Mail consignments across the Atlantic.

The Wellholme's crew again

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**Background Image:** Claus Bergen 1918

**Image courtesy of Colin M Baxter**