

FORGOTTEN WRECKS

PAINTING THE WAR AT SEA

A common problem with visualising the loss of a ship is a lack of images. Generally, the everyday ships that make up so many of the First World War's Forgotten Wrecks have not been represented in art and for cases where photographs exist, they are typically black and white.

Maritime Archaeology Trust volunteer Mike Greaves has become the project's Artist in Residence, helping us depict the Forgotten Wrecks and the work of the project, through a series of paintings.

Paddle Steamer *Empress Queen*

Launched in 1897, the *Empress Queen* was one of the fastest and most powerful paddle steamers at sea at the turn of the century. Named in honour of Queen Victoria's Diamond Jubilee, she was owned by the Isle of Man Steam Packet Company and provided many years of reliable service in the Irish Sea.

In 1915 she was requisitioned by the Admiralty and converted into a troop carrier. For the next year she ferried British troops from Southampton to French ports, once again proving her reliability and strength in the English Channel. Not once was the ship stopped by mechanical problems or the weather.

But wartime service put extra pressures on ships, forcing them to sail when, in peacetime, they may not. At 5am on the 1st February 1916, in thick fog, *Empress Queen* ran onto rocks approximately 1/4 of a mile off Bembridge, Isle of Wight. Fortunately the sea was calm and the ship remained upright. Distress signals drew several ships to help and throughout the day they unloaded the 1,300 troops on board, who were returning to Britain from France.

Expecting that the vessel could be easily refloated the crew remained on board, but by the evening of the 2nd, she was still stuck fast. That night a storm blew up and early the next morning the Bembridge lifeboat *Queen Victoria* came to assist. Owing to the storm, it took all day to safely take off the crew in the lifeboat and ship's boats, but eventually all 120 men, plus the ship's dog and cat, were rescued.

The ship was not so lucky. The following morning found her battered and quite beyond salvage on the rocks. She remained there for several years until she finally broke up in a storm in 1919.

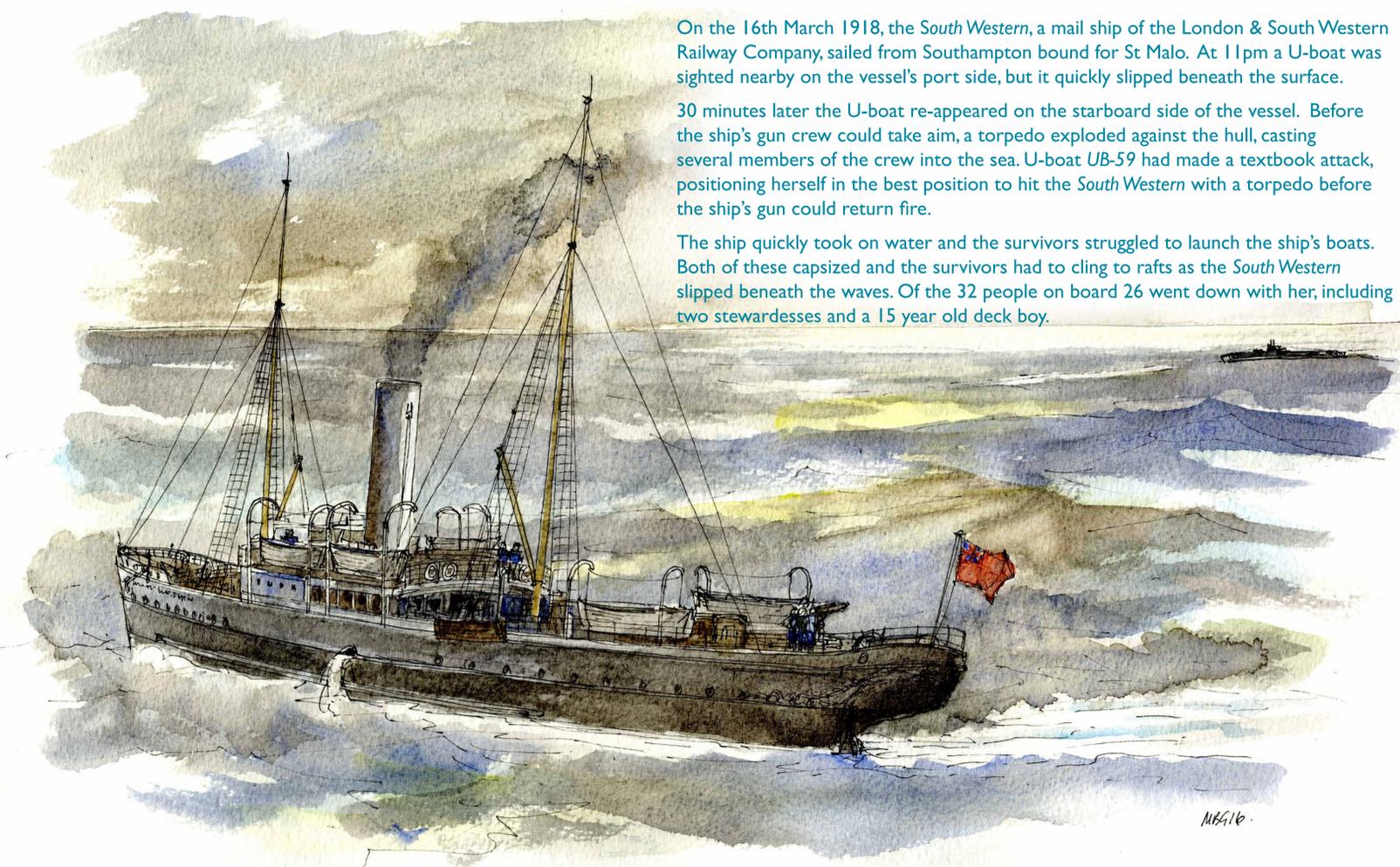


South Western

On the 16th March 1918, the *South Western*, a mail ship of the London & South Western Railway Company, sailed from Southampton bound for St Malo. At 11pm a U-boat was sighted nearby on the vessel's port side, but it quickly slipped beneath the surface.

30 minutes later the U-boat re-appeared on the starboard side of the vessel. Before the ship's gun crew could take aim, a torpedo exploded against the hull, casting several members of the crew into the sea. U-boat UB-59 had made a textbook attack, positioning herself in the best position to hit the *South Western* with a torpedo before the ship's gun could return fire.

The ship quickly took on water and the survivors struggled to launch the ship's boats. Both of these capsized and the survivors had to cling to rafts as the *South Western* slipped beneath the waves. Of the 32 people on board 26 went down with her, including two stewardesses and a 15 year old deck boy.



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