Merchant vessels make up the majority of wrecks in this stretch of the Channel and most of those were sunk by U-boats. The deep water to the south of the Isle of Wight proved an ideal hunting ground for submarines.

As merchant vessels travelled between Britain and France, U-boats of the Flanders Flotilla that had slipped through the Dover Straits, lay in wait for them. Losses escalated throughout the war until 1917 and 1918, when ships were lost on an almost daily basis.

SS Londorien

A lucky spot on a dark night led to the loss of the Londorien.

Loss

The Londorien was a British built, Belgian-owned ship that had been chartered by the French government. In 1918 she was employed carrying cargo from Britain to France and on the 12th March, 1918, was returning to Bristol from Caister.

In the early hours of the 13th March, as she passed south of the Isle of Wight, the Londorien was torpedoed by SM UC 71. The ship began to founder immediately, there was no time for the crew to don the dark gear or radio essential remarks. The ship sank at the bow, raising the stern vertically in the air. Within minutes she had slipped beneath the surface.

The Wreck Site

The wreck of the Londorien is in 40 metres of water, approximately 8 miles south of the Isle of Wight. Although the ship’s hull has collapsed, the engines and deck guns are still clearly identifiable. While 11 men died on the deck, this wreck is its final resting place. Due to the wreck’s size, there is a lack of official designation for maritime class. Only military vessels benefit from the Protection of Military Remains Act.

The Survivor

Bart Hunter survived the war and in the months and years that followed he received numerous letters from the families of his crewmates desperately seeking information about their loved ones.

Confusion

In a later investigation, the Admiralty suggested that the Londorien may have been shrouded by the light of St Catherine’s Point Lighthouse, reducing its visibility for the U-boat. They were also surprised to learn that the ship's master believed the Landerer was under the protection of Rapid-553 due to the device’s range. In fact no record exists of this in the Admiralty.

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