

FORGOTTEN WRECKS OF THE FIRST WORLD WAR

HMT *Albion II*

Built: 1907

Sunk: 1916

Sunk: by a mine laid by UC-5

Loss of life: None

Before being requisitioned and converted into a minesweeper by the Admiralty, HMT *Albion II*, like many others, was originally a small fishing trawler. Even before the outbreak of war the skill and knowledge of fishing boat crews had been recognised as a valuable asset by the military. Fishing trawlers, such as *Albion*, were particularly suited for many naval requirements because they were robust boats designed to work heavy [trawls](#) in all types of weather and had large clear working decks. One could create a [mine sweeper](#) simply by replacing the trawl with a mine sweep (1). Great Britain used these vessels to maintain control of seaward approaches to major harbours. No one knew these waters as well as local fishermen, and the trawler was the ship type the crew understood and could operate effectively without further instruction (2).

Built at Smith's Dock Co. in North Shields, *Albion II* (original name *Albion*) was bought by Pater Steam Trawling Co Ltd, Milford Haven. During her seven years as a fishing trawler, sometimes working in Moroccan and Portuguese waters, she made the local news several times due to her hefty and valuable catches. But apart from this occasional courting of the press, very little information can now be found about her. In 1914 she was requisitioned and worked as part of the Portsmouth fleet. Two years of military service were completed before her end came when, during routine mine clearing duties she stopped to untangle her sweep gear. As she did so, a mine caught up in the wires exploded five feet from her port side and blew a hole in her hull (3). It was an ironic fate which befell many mine sweepers. The ordnance was laid by U-boat *UC-5* (Oberleutnant zur See Ulrich Mohrbutter). Fortunately, all nine crew were rescued by her sweeping partner HMT *Zena Dare*.

The vessel now lies off St. Catherine's Point at a depth of around 24 metres (50 26.37N 001 34.44W). Finding an existing photograph of *Albion II*, or the wreckage, has proved fruitless so far, however, Dave Wendes, who has visited the wreck many times, was able to provide a rough sketch which demonstrated the extent of the decay, which is substantial (4). If one wished to gather an idea of its current condition, looking at the wreck site of *HMD John Mitchell* (another ship listed in the *Forgotten Wrecks* project) would perhaps be not too dissimilar. Not surprisingly for a vessel that has lain on the seabed for one hundred years, not much remains of her now, having either rotted away or been buried in the shifting sand. As with many wrecks of this age, the boiler and triple expansion engine have survived the longest. A small section of the stern and bows, and various other bits of debris sit just proud above the seabed of sand, shingle and mud. (Artefacts recovered?) Certainly, it won't be long before it vanishes completely into the annals of memory.

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Its gradual physical disappearance is in some way metaphorical; with so much loss in WWI, a small fishing trawler with a crew of nine does not stand out as a story of great importance; individual tales such as this have not the impact of the *Lusitania* or the Somme, but these folk, like countless others, many of them whose fate is unknown, went about their tasks bravely and stoically, answering the call to duty when their once peaceful country was plunged into war; a war based on reasons which were possibly largely unclear to them. To imagine the constant danger and threat faced by them, for most of us, is impossible. They were frightened, worried and living with the continual prospect of a harrowing death. History tells us that their daily lives were hard even without war. They were sons, fathers, husbands, grandfathers and brothers; missed by their relatives and longing for home. Our lives are blessed with a standard of comfort and security that borders on paradise; and it is in no small part owed to the service of crews such as that of HMT *Albion II*. As the metal and wood corrodes and decays on the seabed, her debt can, if not be repaid, at least be honoured and brought back into the public psyche with projects such as *Forgotten Wrecks*. A century later, technology can thankfully preserve a precious moment as the unremitting passage time takes its toll.

In April 27th 1916, the culprit of the sinking, *UC-5* - after notching up an impressive 37,231 tons of sunken ships (including 2 war ships) ran aground on the Shipwash Shoal. After a failed attempt to scuttle the submarine she was captured by the allies. For propaganda purposes it was displayed, first at Temple Pier on the Thames, then New York's Central Park.



UC – 5 Central Park, New York



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Researched and written by Duncan Ross, MAT Volunteer.

Sources

- [1] https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Naval_trawler
- [2] *uboot.net, A/S Trawlers*
- [3] Martin Pritchard, Kendall McDonald 2001 A Diver Guide, Dive Wight and Hampshire, Second Edition, 2001, No. 22 Page(s)38
- [4] Sketch by Dave Wendes