



# FORGOTTEN WRECKS OF THE FIRST WORLD WAR

## SS *Coonagh*

**Built:** 1904

**Lost:** 1917

**Reason for Loss:** Torpedoed by U-Boat.

The SS *Coonagh* was a 1412 gross registered tonnage general cargo ship built by Sir Raylton Dixon & Co. Ltd., in Middlesbrough, launched 30th May 1904. Her first Owners were Tasso Steamship Co. Ltd., (MacAndrew Robert & Co.) and in 1907 she was purchased by Almargo Steamship Co. and she was renamed SS Almargo. In 1915 she suffered a fire on board and ownership was transferred to Limerick Steamship Co. Ltd., of Limerick Ireland. She was once again renamed as SS *Coonagh* after a small village in Ireland.

SS *Coonagh* was a typical cargo ship of her day. She was 80 metres long by 10.9 metres beam with a draught of 3.7 metres, with a typical configuration of poop deck, bridge deck and forecastle. She was engined with a single boiler and a single three cylinder triple expansion reciprocating steam engine by North Eastern Marine Engineers Ltd., of Sunderland with a single shaft and screw and was capable of 8.5 knots.

The SS *Coonagh* sailed from Middlesbrough on 10th March 1917 with a cargo of steel billets and iron ore each of one metre length. She was bound for Rouen in France on the River Seine. The ship's Master was Alfred Edgar Clarke a 60 year old man from Middlesbrough. His crew of 16 consisted of men mostly from the North East of England, with two Japanese men working in the Engine Room as fireman and donkeyman. The 1st and 2nd Mate were from Liverpool and one Able Seaman was Swedish. Then on the 14th or 15th March 1917 the SS *Coonagh* was struck by a torpedo delivered from the German U Boat submarine UC-16 off St. Valéry en Caux in the department of Siene-Maritime on the North French coast. The ship and all hands were lost. The Captain of the U Boat was Ergon von Werner. Six months after the sinking of the SS *Coonagh* the British destroyer HMS *Melampus* wrought vengeance on the responsible U Boat, UC-16 and dispatched the offending Boat to the bottom of the sea never to surface again.

The wreck of SS *Coonagh* lay undiscovered for 63 years and was not positively identified until 1994. In the early 1980's a wreck was discovered off the northern French coast at St. Valérie en Caux by a fisherman, Jean Claude Gauthier. Subsequently divers from Paluel located the wreck and found her to be resting on the sea bed in 25 to 30 metres of water in a fair condition with the bow straight, the anchor in place and a tear in the mid-section consistent with the torpedo impact. The main structures of the ship were found to be intact and boiler, engine and propeller were clearly visible. In the holds the cargo of ingots were found to be cluttered in some areas but in order in others. The propeller was landed on 16th September 1989 on the foreshore at St. Valérie en Caux where it now adorns the



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marina as a special feature. In 1994 two divers from Cany Barville discovered the ships bell and once cleaned the name SS *Coonagh* was revealed and the ships identity established.

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## Sources

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