



FORGOTTEN WRECKS OF THE FIRST WORLD WAR



Anglia and Asturias Hospital Ships of the First World War

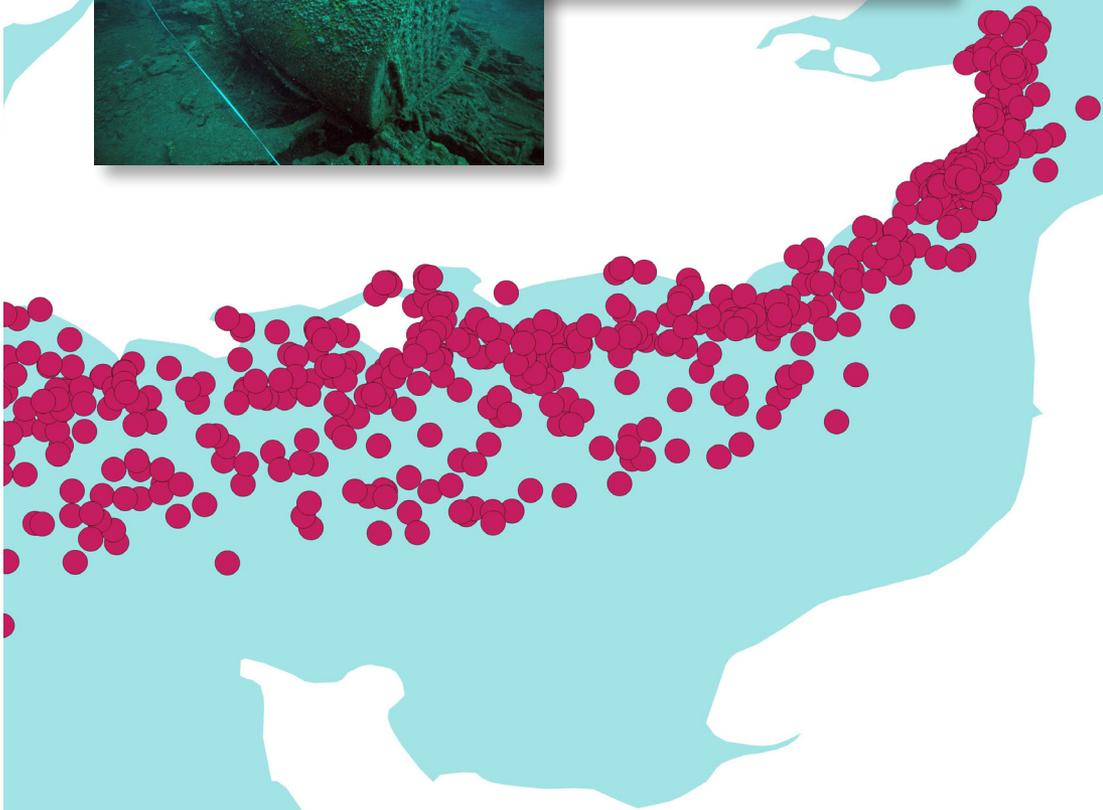
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About the Project

Forgotten Wrecks of the First World War is a Heritage Lottery funded (HLF) four year project devised and delivered by the Maritime Archaeology Trust to coincide with the centenary of the Great War. At the heart of the project is a desire to raise the profile of a currently under-represented aspect of the First World War. While attention is often focused on the Western Front and major naval battles like Jutland, historic remains from the war lie, largely forgotten, in and around our seas, rivers and estuaries.

With more than 1,100 wartime wrecks along England's south coast alone, the conflict has left a rich heritage legacy and many associated stories of bravery and sacrifice. These underwater memorials represent the vestiges of a vital, yet little known, struggle that took place on a daily basis, just off our shores. Through a programme of fieldwork, research, exhibitions and outreach, the project engaged communities and volunteers and provides a lasting legacy of information and learning resources relating to First World War wrecks, for future generations.

The wrecks of the John Mitchell (below) and the Gallia (right), both sunk during the war.



*Map: the c.1,100 First World War wrecks along the south coast of the UK.
Front cover: HMHS Panama, a hospital ship which survived the First World War.*

Hospital Ships before the First World War

The use of ships to transport wounded personnel was not a new idea in the 20th Century. During the Crimean and Boer wars, many passenger vessels were used for transport both to and from the front lines. In 1864, the First Geneva Convention set out rules for the care and treatment of the wounded, and was followed over the next fifty years by several similar treaties which refined and expanded these rules.

By the end of the Boer war, the precedent for using merchant vessels as medical ships had been well set, but the conventions had not quite caught up with maritime warfare, which was a quickly evolving battlefield both in terms of technology and scale.

In 1907, the Hague Convention was laid down in part to rectify this, and to protect hospital ships and the non-combatants they carried. The convention required the ships to:

- be clearly marked with green stripes, red crosses, and white hulls, and carry appropriate identification lights at night,
- help any sick and injured peoples, regardless of nationality
- not be used for any military purposes (such as carrying ammunition or combatants)
- not interfere with or hamper with any combat
- be available for inspection and verification by any parties

In return, as long as they followed the rules, under no circumstances could a hospital ship be attacked or sunk.

During the War

On the outbreak of the First World War, the need for hospital ships heightened: the large numbers of casualties necessitated the requisitioning of ships to deal with the worst cases. The Royal Navy operated 77 such vessels during the War, transporting 2,655,000 British and Commonwealth sick and wounded into British ports.

These vessels were often converted passenger liners, both big and small. Some, such as the *Asturias* and the *Britannic* (sister ship to the *Titanic*) were particularly large and could carry hundreds of bed-bound patients, while smaller vessels like the *Warilda* and the *Donegal* assisted in carrying the walking wounded and were referred to as Ambulance or Hospital Transports (HMT).

During the early part of the War, the Hague Convention was generally respected. Some hospital ships were lost during this time, but they were all mined rather than specifically targeted for attack. In 1917, however, Germany accused England of misusing hospital ships for the transportation of troops and ammunition, and declared a policy of unrestricted warfare. This meant that all ships, including marked hospital ships and other neutral vessels, would be attacked if found.

The first hospital ship to suffer from this policy was the *Asturias*, whose story, along with that of the *Anliga*, can be found on the following pages. Following the German declaration, the British Admiralty announced that hospital ships would no longer be marked or illuminated, and would sail at night with escorts.

Despite reminders from Britain that the hospital ships often carried German POWs, Germany continued their policy until the end of the war, by which time 24 hospital ships had been mined or torpedoed, and sunk with a huge loss of life.

HMHT *Asturias*

HMHT *Asturias*.
Painting by Mike Greaves, ASGFA
(greaves2connections.com)



His Majesty's Hospital Ship (HMHS) *Asturias* was one of thirteen allied hospital ships sunk between 1915 and 1918 as a result of enemy action. Nine were torpedoed by German U-boats and four struck enemy mines. The latter included HMHS *Britannic*, sister ship of the White Star Line's famous *Titanic* and *Olympic*. The Canadian hospital ship, HMHS *Llandoverly Castle*, probably paid the greatest human cost when a torpedo struck the vessel off southern Ireland in June 1918. In this incident alone, over two hundred and thirty people lost their lives, including many nursing sisters (Douglas, 1920).

HMHS *Asturias* was requisitioned from the Royal Mail Steam Packet Company in August 1914 and became one of the largest cross-channel hospital ships (TS 13/46, 1914). The vessel had formerly been employed on service between Buenos Aires and Southampton and had become a fashionable passenger liner, one of the great "modern floating palaces." (Portsmouth Evening

News, 1915). Once called into war service, *Asturias* was painted in hospital colours, distinguished by two wide green painted stripes interrupted by two red crosses and a huge red cross amidships. *Asturias* was refitted to carry swinging cot beds for 1,200 patients and was generally based in Southampton (McGreal, 2008).

Among *Asturias's* most famous passengers was the then unknown 2nd Lt. J.R.R. Tolkien, of the 11th Lancashire Fusiliers, 74th brigade. Tolkien had recently taken part in the Battle of the Somme, surviving unscathed only to be struck down by a severe case of Trench Fever after his regiment had been ordered to Beauval. He was conveyed to Le Touquet by hospital train and then sailed home on the *Asturias*, while the rest of his regiment was sent onward to Ypres. He safely disembarked in Southampton on Thursday, November 9th, 1916 (Garth, 2011).

While Tolkien was on board *Asturias*, he may have borne witness to “improper” behaviour by Royal Army Medical Core (RMAC) staff. At the time Tolkien made his voyage, these personnel were under investigation for carrying out illicit trade in drink and “picture” postcards—the exact nature of which remains undisclosed—for which they were accused of charging “exorbitant” prices (MT 23/597, 1916).

On the 1st February 1915, *Asturias* became the victim of the first recorded act of aggression towards a hospital ship. *Asturias* was steaming fifteen miles north-north-west from the Havre lightship, under a clear sky, when crewmembers realised they were under attack. A.N. Thomson, Second Officer, became aware of the danger when he spotted a “smooth in the water about two points abaft the starboard beam 500 yards away. About 150 feet from



J. R. R. Tolkien, photographed in 1916 at age 24.

the smooth I distinctly observed the track of a torpedo which passed us close under our stern.” Thomson was far from the only witness. Charles Law, Ship’s Master, was alerted to the torpedo’s presence by a cadet who spotted it passing astern. Instructions were sent to the engine room to give the ship all steam possible, and evasive manoeuvres were taken in the form of a zigzag course (MT 23/365).

Just over two years after this near miss, *Asturias* and her crew were not so lucky. At the start of February 1917, the German government accused British hospital ships of violating the Hague Convention by carrying troops and munitions. From this perspective, hospital ships became legitimate targets as part of Germany’s widening policy of unrestricted maritime warfare. All vessels on course in a vast swathe of ocean between Flamborough Head to Terschelling on the one hand, and Ushant to Land’s End on the other were now liable to be attacked and sunk by U-boats. In response, the British Foreign Office promised to avenge any attack against a hospital ship with immediate reprisals (The Times, 1917).

On the night of 20th to 21st of March 1917, *Asturias* was returning from discharging patients at Avonmouth to her base in Southampton. German



HMHT Asturias.
Image © Lords Commissioners of the Admiralty

submarine UC-66 — commanded by Oberleutnant zur See Herbert Pustkuchen — attacked without warning. As before, *Asturias* was clearly marked as a hospital ship. She steamed “with all navigating lights on, and with all the distinguishing Red Cross signs brilliantly illuminated.” (Western Times, 1917) One (or possibly two) torpedoes, struck the ship starboard, destroying one of her propellers and the rudder, as well as flooding the engine room (Western Gazette, 1917).

The ordeal of the crew and the male and female RAMC staff on board is vividly captured in the account of Cardiff doctor, William Townsend Dobson. Dobson had served as a medical officer on *Asturias* for eight months and was awakened by the explosion. He dressed and got on deck as quickly as he could. “*There was an entire absence of panic,*” said Dobson. “*Everyone went to their stations and awaited orders. Presently several RAMC orderlies and members of the crew arrived with bandaged heads, suffering from the effects of the explosion. It was then I noticed that the lights were getting weaker and about ten past midnight they went out.*” (Western Mail, 1917)

At this stage, the ship was crawling toward the coast at a rate of eight to ten knots and sinking slowly (ADM 116-1586, 1917). An attempt to launch the lifeboats reaped tragic results. As Dobson’s boat was lowered, with about twenty-six people on aboard, it tipped and threw three men into the water, crushing them between the boat and the sinking vessel. Then, as the lifeboat was about to push off, it capsized, throwing all passengers into the freezing waters, where it was “*too dark to see.*” (Western Mail, 1917)

Dobson, a self-avowed strong swimmer, was fortunate. Realising he was in danger of being sucked into one of *Asturias*’s propellers, he managed to struggle clear of the wreck. Seeing the lights of a small ship, he shouted to others to follow his example and swam toward it. He still remained in the water for over an hour, with the lights seeming “*as far away as ever.*” Then, in a strange twist of fate, he was rescued by a man he knew. The hand that stretched out and helped him into the boat belonged to Albert Beck, one

of Dobson's patients before the war, who was now serving in the Navy. (Western Mail, 1917)

For survivors struggling in the water near the wreck, the conditions were atrocious. Not only was it a cold night, but, so press accounts claimed, the explosion had taken place in "*an area of the ship where disinfectants were kept, and that region was rendered dangerous by the fumes of the chemicals.*" (Western Daily Press, 1917) Once rescued, survivors were cared for by local people, who donated blankets and warm clothing and treated the more minor injuries. Not only humans were saved from the foundering hospital ship and welcomed by the people of Devon. According to The Western Times, one member of the crew had salvaged two cages of canaries. Another crewmember kept a grey Persian kitten under his coat, which was claimed to have "slept securely there during those terrible hours." (Western Mail, 1917)

Asturias had beached off Salcombe, Devon, beneath the cliff on Great Eelstone Rock, upon a combination of sand and rock. (Western Gazette, 1917). In the following days, the secretary of the Admiralty announced that eleven military personnel had been lost along with twenty members of the crew. An additional eleven of those on board were still unaccounted for, including one female staff nurse and a stewardess (Exeter and Plymouth Gazette, 1917).

The target for British vengeance was Freiburg. Because of its location in South West Germany within access of French airfields, this German city became the victim of twenty-five allied air-raids during the war, of which the revenge attack of Saturday 14th April 1917 was the worst. A large squadron composed of British and French aeroplanes launched the raid in daylight when the city centre was crowded. Twelve people were killed, and the university's Anatomical Clinic was destroyed. Leaflets were dropped amid the bombs, explaining this was a reprisal for the attack on *Asturias* (Geinitz, 2006).

Salvage experts reached HMHS *Asturias* within days of her sinking and assessed the condition of the hulk, which remained beached on sand and rock.

Although the engine room was badly damaged, and water inside ebbed and flowed with the tide, an attempt at salvage was recommended, dependent on the weather (ADM 116-1586, 1917). *Asturias* was successfully floated and ultimately towed to Portsmouth, where the Admiralty used her as an ammunitions hulk (McGreal, 2008).

However, the ship's glory days were not over. The Royal Mail Steam Packet Company purchased the remains of their once-glamorous vessel in 1919. After an extensive refit, *Asturias* was re-launched as *Arcadian* in 1923. *Arcadian* sailed on for a further ten years, taking passengers on luxurious Mediterranean and Scandinavian cruises, and was considered the “largest steamer in the world solely devoted to pleasure travelling.” Her “handsomely tiled” swimming baths were rated as amongst the finest ever installed aboard ship (Dundee Courier, 1923).



Sources and where to find out more

This article was written by MAT volunteer Kathryn Beresford.

The following sources and websites have been used during research to create this booklet.

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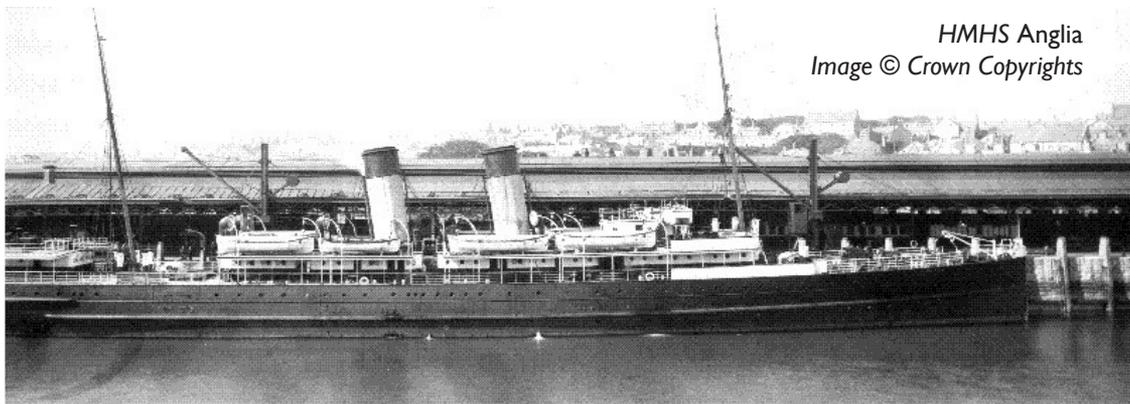
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Dundee Courier, 15th June 1923.

HMHS Anglia



HMHS Anglia
Image © Crown Copyrights

This article is dedicated to the memory of the brave souls connected to the sinking of HMHS *Anglia*. The author (volunteer Duncan Ross) has striven to dig as deep as possible to present the facts, but secondary source accounts do vary and the exact details of a sinking which occurred a century ago are inevitably difficult to corroborate. One can but apologise for any individual tales that are not hereby covered, of which there will of course be many. In a short article it is simply not possible to include everything, but clearly no one story is more important than another. It is the sad way of war that some tales of heroism will only be known to those who were present at the time.

17th November 1915

Few tragedies demonstrate the unforgiving nature of war as the sinking of a hospital ship. On a day when, amongst thousands of others, war poet Siegfried Sassoon, the recently-disgraced Winston Churchill, and footballer Walter Tull were heading across the Channel to their new postings, HMHS *Anglia* was sailing the opposite way. A mile from Folkestone Gate, after sailing from Boulogne loaded with wounded from the Battle of Loos, she struck a mine laid by UC-5. Perhaps thinking themselves in relative safety, men who

had already paid a hefty price on the battlefield were forced to endure yet another hellish ordeal. For some it would be the end.

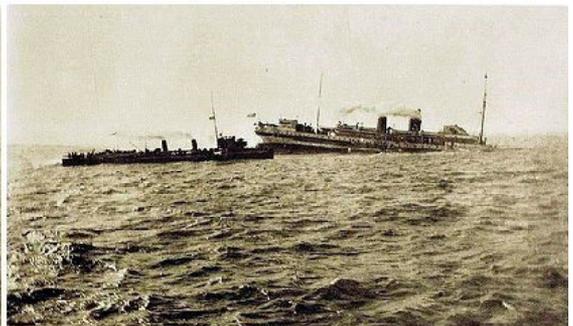
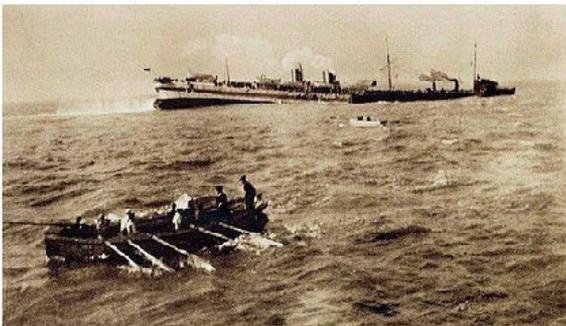
At around 12.30 pm the explosion occurred well forward on the starboard side. The wards at the bow were almost immediately under water giving anyone in that area no chance of escape. Through the organised and quick thinking of the nurses and crew, fifty souls were able to get away in a lifeboat but the ship was going down so quickly there was no time to lower another. During the inquest into the death of Chief Steward Richard Roberts, the personal account of Captain Lionel John Manning M.B.E. painted a startling picture.

“There was a very loud explosion, apparently under the port side forward of the bridge. It blew the bridge to smithereens, and I was blown on to the lower deck. I ran to stop the engines, which were running, but found the speaking tube and telegraph had been torn away. I ran up to the wireless room to order the ‘S.O.S.’ call to be sent out, but found the operator coming out with blood on his face. He stated that the instruments had been burst to pieces. Then I went with Chief Officer Horner to help in getting out the boats on the port side, which was the only side available. The vessel had a heavy list, and was down by the head very much. We got the first boat away with about fifty people all safe. The engines were racing I went to the bridge to stop them from there, but the gear had been destroyed. Chief Officer Horner went down the weather side of the ship to help Dr Hodson get the wounded up, and I went along the lee side to do what I could, but the sea was rushing along there.”

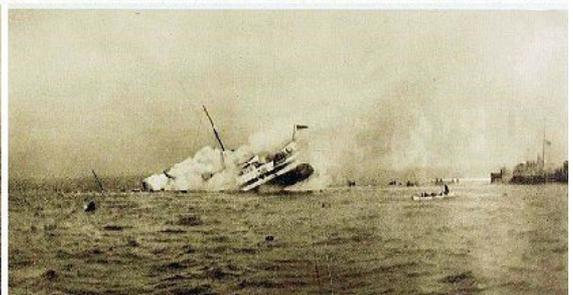
The Manning family of the Isle of Holyhead like so many others gave above and beyond in the Great War. Apart from the Captain’s sterling service, both of his sons served with distinction and were killed in France in 1918. After the war Captain Manning continued to work the Irish ferry route until his retirement (Anglesey Information, 2016).

The Rescue

SS Lusitania (not the passenger vessel that was famously sunk off the coast of Ireland) was on the scene within minutes along with *HMS Hazard*, *HMS Ure*, *HMTB No.4*, *SS Channel Queen* and various other craft. The evacuation and rescue began but before too long *Lusitania* also struck a mine and began to sink, leaving some to fight for their lives a second time. As *Anglia* went down at the bow her stern reared up. The propellers continued to spin but due to the heavy list the still-submerged port screw began to steer her in a circle adding even more difficulty to the rescue attempts. The starboard propeller was now clear of the water and spinning fiercely, but even so a rescue boat passed beneath and managed to pick up forty men. The majority of survivors were rescued by the four-funnelled British destroyer *Ure*, who due to her shallow twelve-foot draft, at one point sailed over the submerged bows to rescue survivors (McGreal, 2008). Within 15 minutes *Anglia* was gone, just the tip of her masts left above the waterline as she settled upright on the bottom.



Sinking of HMHS Anglia in 1915. Image ©
The National Archives ADM1/8443/367.



Casualties

Accounts vary but there may have been as many as 500 patients (mainly British and some Canadian) onboard, plus crew and nursing staff. Exact numbers, however, are not known; most available sources cite slightly different figures, the most common total being 390 patients plus crew and nursing staff. It must have been a nigh impossible task to keep accurate records with the volume of wounded men being shipped back from the front. One only has to think of the colossal Thiepval Monument to the Missing to realise the scale of the issue and the logistical nightmare of keeping track of troops in a war with such staggering daily casualties. Such was the way of things that some poor souls must have gone anonymously to their end on *Anglia*: one can only hope that they are listed somewhere, their sacrifice honoured. In the excellent book by Stephen McGreal, *The War on Hospital Ships 1914 – 1918*, a comprehensive list cites 159 known casualties who died due to the initial explosion and subsequent sinking. This included six military officers, one nurse, plus soldiers and crew. It is said that around eighty of those that perished were stretcher cases below deck that could not help themselves.

Testimonies

Most astonishing are some of the eyewitness accounts which describe the horrifying turn of events, stoicism and the selfless humanity shown in the face of death.

A soldier's account:

"I was aboard the hospital ship 'Anglia'. We left Boulogne at 11 a.m., and all went well until we sighted the cliffs of Dover. It was then 12.40 p.m. About a minute later a very loud explosion occurred. We knew what that meant. Everybody did what they ought not to have done: run about and do all sorts of things. Meanwhile the ship took a very nasty tilt; the front part was already under water. Everybody rushed for the boats, but alas! they did not know how to manipulate one until two of the

seamen went up, and lowered one full. There was a bad swell on at the time, so half of them got tipped out into the water. As far as I remember there was only this one boat lowered. Coming towards us at full speed was a gunboat. She ran right alongside of us, and some of the lucky ones managed to jump on to her as she went by. She came back, and floated about twenty or thirty yards away, and anybody who could swim, swam to it. Of course, there were a great many of us who could not swim, so we stuck to the ship, and watched those who could. The ship gave another nasty tilt, and she now had her stern high in the air. Well, I managed to get a life-belt, and slipped this on. I thought if I could not swim I would float. It was a terrible sight to see the wounded men crawling up the gangway on to the deck, lying there to go down with the ship, some with legs off, others with arms off. We could not help them. As luck would have it I saw a lot of life-belts in a cabin, so I started dashing these out to them. Meanwhile, another boat had come quite close, and started picking some up. She managed to save quite a lot, when, just as she was breaking all records, up she went. In my opinion we were both torpedoed.”

Escapes

Some miraculous tales of escape are highlighted in this report.

“One young Canadian was in the water three times. He jumped into the water from Anglia, was picked up and taken to the Lusitania, which blew up as soon as he got on her deck; he was thrown into the water once more, and was presently picked up by a boat which immediately capsized. Little wonder that he did not feel safe till he was in an ambulance train. Another man, pointed out as a hero who had helped to provide lifebelts for many of the men, told me that one of those had both legs in splints, but he was picked up by a boat and brought safely to hospital.

A man who was carried on to the ship in a state of exhaustion, the result of three weeks’ pneumonia and pleurisy, told me how he dragged himself up to the deck and clung to the rail, hesitating to take the fatal plunge into the icy water. The doctors at Epsom were astounded to find how little harm the immersion had done him.

A severe rheumatic case who had escaped in the scantiest attire declared that the experience which should have killed him had almost done him good.” (The Nursing Times, 1915)

Nursing Staff

“Survivors’ Stories of Nurses’ Heroism. (From a Correspondent)

The stories told by the wounded men who were saved from the Hospital ship ANGLIA show that the four nurses on board displayed the greatest courage and devotion.

The horror of that first moment must have been indescribable when the doomed vessel plunged her bows into the water at an angle which suggested her instant death, and the staff were faced with the problem of getting nearly 200 cot cases up from wards and lower wards in almost impossible conditions.

The water at once rushed into the lowest wards, and the orderlies who went to investigate reported that it was up over their heads. From the other wards every man who could move himself scrambled as best he could to the deck, and some of the wounded, officers and men alike, did all in their power to save the others, hunting out lifebelts for them and fastening them on.

All the time the Nurses were working steadily, chiefly concerned with the lifebelts, but bringing up all the wounded who could be moved along those slanting corridors.

“They were wonderful“, said the men.”They worked like slaves, and they would not think about themselves. I believe they, with the R.A.M.C. officers and the Captain, were the very last to leave the ship.”

“The Nurses worked magnificently”, said another, “but you have no idea of the difficulty of their task. Imagine, there was no place on deck where the wounded could be safely put except just beside the rail.”The men mention each sister by name, the Matron, Mrs. Mitchell, Nurse Walton, Nurse Meldrum, and Nurse

Rodwell, each as having been conspicuously brave. They would not use the lifebelts themselves, but insisted on giving them to the men, and when the destroyers came hastening out from Dover to take the wounded to safety, the Nurses refused to leave the ship. They would stay with their men, they said. Nurse Rodwell had been injured in the explosion and was drowned.

“I offered to help one Nurse “, said a soldier, I said “You come with me and I’ll get you to safety. I am a very strong swimmer. You’ll be safe with me. But she shook her head and said she could not leave her men. So she was with them to the last.”

After all, of course, the strongest testimony to the pluck and efficiency of the Nurses and R.A.M.C. staff is the lengthy list of “saved.”

The Matron, with R.A.M.C. officers went through all the wards that were not submerged, and assured themselves that no living man was left. The rescue of so many wounded was a most marvellous achievement.

Mention should be made of the sisters in the Hospital ship -name not given- which was lying at Dover freshly filled with patients. The Anglia men were brought here to wait for the hour and a half before the ambulance train arrived, and when the men snugly tucked up in cots were asked if they would give them up to the Anglia company they “ eagerly crawled out of their beds.” That naturally meant a great deal of work for the ship’s staff, but, needless to say they too worked like Trojans, delighted to have the chance of helping their poor guests.

Private Finnar, speaking to a representative of the Weekly Dispatch, said, “ In my ward there was one Sister and two orderlies. The Sister worked like a lion. As long as I live I shall never forget her. In about 7 minutes she had me extricated. When I got on deck I saw two Sisters and the Matron fastening on lifebelts and assisting the helpless men. They never gave a thought for themselves. They moved about with quick, workmanlike movement, no flustering- not for a moment did they lose their heads. They presented a sight I shall never forget -faces white as death, hair blowing loose in the bitterly cold wind, and their hands and aprons literally covered with the blood of the men they were helping.

“I begged the Matron and two Sisters to get into the boat which had come alongside.

They wouldn’t hear of the suggestion. Not until the water was lapping over my feet did I slide off, and up to then not a single Nurse had left her post in the sinking ship.

It was heartrending to see their single-minded devotion to the wounded chaps under their care. “No!”, said the last Nurse I spoke to aboard Anglia, “Our duty is to see you men off safe- we have the right to be last this time!”

- From The Nursing Times, 1915

Mary Rodwell

The nurse ‘with them to the last’ who is alluded to in the above report is suffragette Mary Rodwell. She was the only nurse to go down with the ship, refusing to leave the helpless men, choosing instead to comfort them in their final moments. The last time she was seen was on deck fetching warm woollies for the casualties below, a selfless and futile gesture that she must have chanced would lead to her death. There was no way off the boat for her patients and she was unwilling to let them die alone. A braver soul one could not imagine. To think that women such as she were still fighting for the right to vote is nothing short of astonishing.

A friend of Mary Rodwell wrote: *“Her patients filled her whole heart and soul. I never met a more lovable, unselfish woman.”*



Mary Rodwell
Image © IWM (WWC H21-23-1)

And in a letter to the British Journal of Nursing Miss Elma Smith, the matron at Hendon Infirmary where Mary had trained from 1901 to 1904, said: “*We all knew what a keen sense of duty she possessed. Nothing was ever a trouble to her where her patients were concerned.*”

Mary Rodwell’s name appears at the church in Ditchingham, Norfolk. On 2nd July 1920 a memorial bronze plaque was unveiled at Colindale hospital, it was stated that the memorial would remind “*nurses who come after, of their courage, self-abnegation, and devotion to duty when the hour of trial came*” (The Nursing Times, 1915).

Alice Meldrum

Alice Meldrum, QAIMNS (Queen Alexandra’s Imperial Military Nursing Service) Reserve, 25 years-old at time of sinking, penned a striking account from which the following excerpt is taken:

‘There was no panic whatever, and when one realizes that in the majority of cases they were suffering from fractured limbs, severe wounds and amputations, it speaks volumes for their spirit, their grit and real bravery, for they must have suffered agonies of pain.’

Nurse Alice Meldrum was awarded the Royal Red Cross 2nd Class for her services and devotion to duty (the war on hospital ships) during the sinking. Alice also wrote and published a small booklet of her experience of life on a Hospital Ship.



Alice Meldrum
Image from the Birmingham
Medal Society

Draft Army Order.

Loss of Hospital Ship "Anglia".

The Army Council desire to place on record their appreciation of the presence of mind and devotion to duty shown by the Royal Army Medical Corps personnel on the occasion of the sinking of the Hospital Ship "Anglia" which struck a mine on the 17th November 1916.

Through the courage and presence of mind of the Matron, Mrs. Mitchell, and the devotion of the Nursing Sisters most of the cot cases were evacuated from the ship. In this work Lieutenant P.L.T. Bennet aided by Lieutenant H.W. Hodgson were conspicuous, and, aided by Privates Darwen and McGuire of the Royal Army Medical Corps, they succeeded in saving wounded from the lower wards when they were awash and almost submerged.

The Army Council also desire to express their appreciation of the assistance in the work of rescue rendered by H. M. Torpedo Boat No. 4, Lieutenant-Commander H.P. Boxer, R.N., H.M.S. "Hazard", Lieutenant Commander L.A.D. Sturdee, R.N., H.M.S. "Ure", Lieutenant Commander Evelyn H.B.L. Scrivener, the s.s. "Lusitania" and the s.s. "Channel Queen".

2
✓ Assistance
to Hospital Ship
"Anglia"

An army draft order praising
the efforts of the medical staff.
Image from the Birmingham
Medal Society.

Aftermath and Survivors

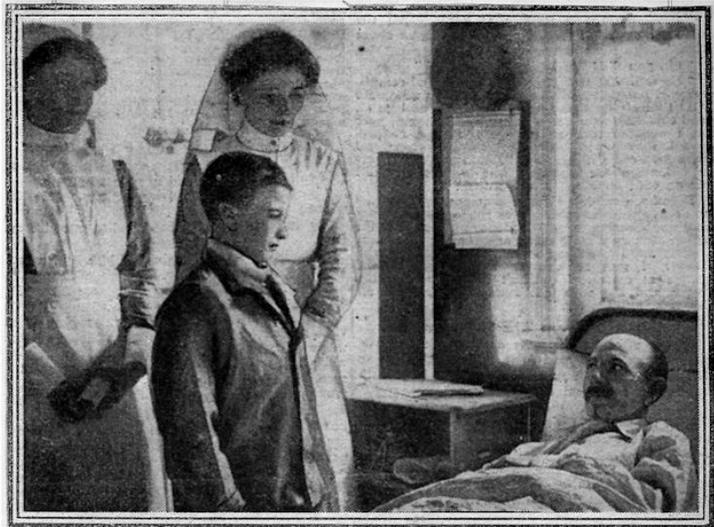
The survivors were taken to Horton (county of London) war Hospital, Epsom to be treated. Formerly a psychiatric asylum, Horton was taken over to cater for war wounded, its patients moved elsewhere.

War, Law, and Propaganda

Although it was a heavy loss of life, contemplating the outcome had they been further from shore and assistance, or had it been night time, is a sobering thought indeed. With the ship sometimes making two crossings a day during heavy fighting, it seems a miracle that it operated so long without incident. In early 1915 German submarines were not officially operating under the rule of unrestricted warfare although the deliberate sinking of RMS *Lusitania* in May 1915 shows the lines were already blurring.

Hospital ships, the Geneva Convention stated, should be clearly marked with specific colours and red-cross flags and exempt from attacks. The sinking of HMHS *Anglia* was not a direct attack by torpedo, a floating mine being the weapon of use. It is thought, however, that the mines were laid deliberately in the path of *Anglia* in a clearly marked channel that other ships were not allowed to enter. She was the first hospital ship of the war to be sunk with patients on board. The naval blockade of Germany which was driving the country to starvation is thought to be what instigated such actions. In a desperate act, on 2nd February 1917 Germany would officially declare war on all allied shipping including hospital ships, citing that they were being used for military purposes.

UC-5, under the command of Oberleutnant zur See Herbert Pustkuchen was responsible for laying the mine which sank *Anglia*. Pustkuchen was the first commander to penetrate the English Channel and from August to December 1915 wreaked havoc in the area. It is said that HMS *Falmouth III*, sunk only two days later on 19th November 1915 by a mine also laid by UC-5, came to



Herbert Scott, a 14-year-old boy, from Barking, assistant steward on board the London collier Lusitania, was the last to leave the ship when she was struck by a mine, while sending boats to the rescue of the sinking hospital ship Anglia. He is seen at the bedside of Private Reynolds, Durham L.I., one of the survivors.



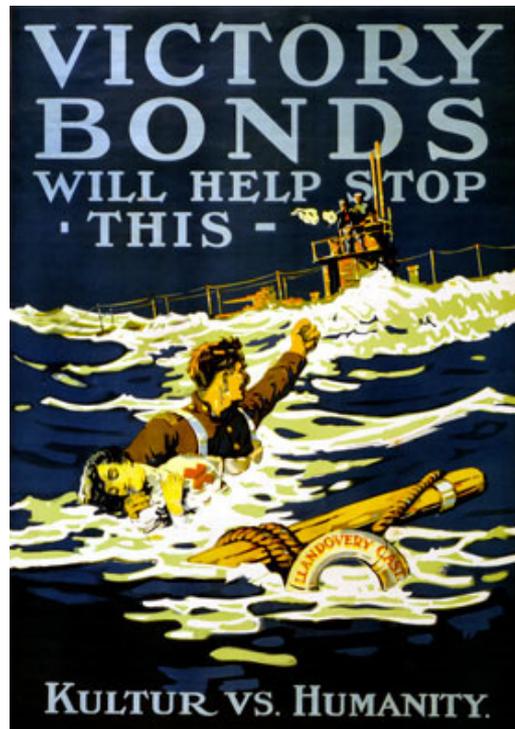
Some of the men who were wrecked in the Anglia in hospital. A night's rest, excellent nursing, and the wonderful constitution of the British soldier had soon brought them round. To them the narrow escape from death in the sea was no more than their everyday risk in the trenches.

Daily Sketch 20 November 1915



rest on top of the wreck of *Anglia*. After a gale she was later dislodged. Although Pustkuchen's impressive tally of boats sunk would have no doubt terrified the allies one can only assume that on the flipside morale must have been soaring in Germany with the commander a national hero. In the Spring of 1916, after 29 successful patrols, UC-5, now under the command of a different skipper, was finally captured and put on display at Temple Pier on the Thames and later in New York's Central Park to rally support for the war effort (pictured above). No doubt this was viewed as a real 'scalp' taken by the British and the end of a reign of terror.

Because of *Anglia's* function as a hospital ship, the sinking was



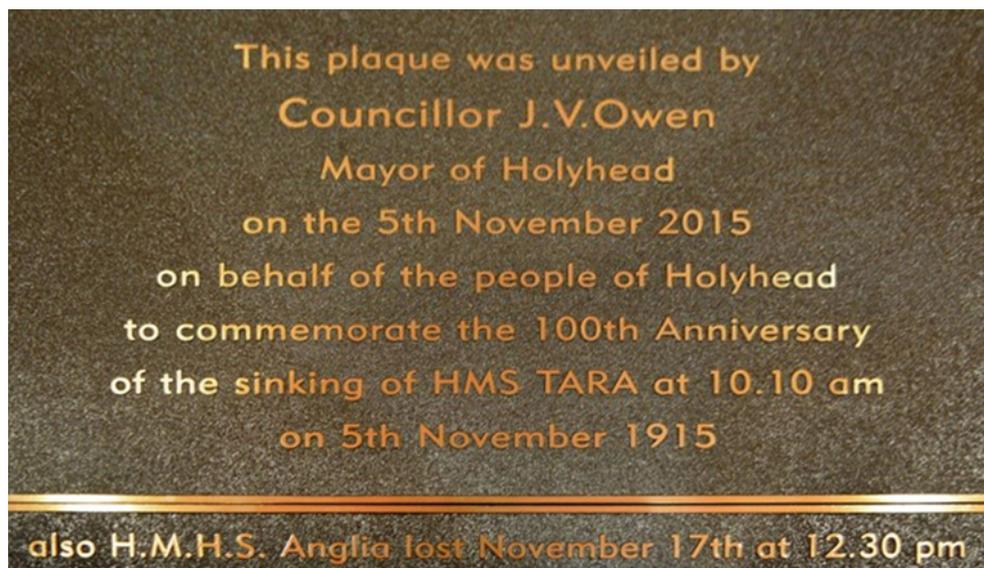
Canadian propaganda poster using the sinking of Llandoverly Castle.

extremely high-profile news at the time, and maybe even more so because King George V had once been a passenger on the vessel after being injured while visiting troops in France. Not surprisingly such dreadful incidents were used as propaganda tools to encourage men to enlist into the army and people to buy war bonds. To give an example the sinking of the hospital ship HMHS *Llandoverly Castle* was used in this Canadian poster to rally support.

Pre-war service and Holyhead men

Built by WM Denny & Bros. Dumbarton in 1900 for the London and North Western Railway Co., Dublin (Pastscapes, 2018), *Anglia* was formerly a ferry sailing the Holyhead to Dublin North Wall route and then the Holyhead to Dunlahorie route (Anglesey Info, 2016) until she was requisitioned at the outbreak of war. Because of this, 34 of her 56 crew were from Holyhead, 23 of whom perished in the incident. Speaking specifically of the crew only days after the disaster, Anglesey Reverend A. Rees Morgan put it best when he compared their conduct to that of the heroism displayed in the trenches. It was stated on very good authority that had they only thought of their own safety they could have all easily been saved (North Wales Chronicle, 1915).

Only one Holyhead crewman's body (37-year-old Steward Richard Roberts) was recovered and transported back home to be buried. He is the only Holyhead fatality with an individual headstone. The rest are commemorated at the Tower Hill Memorial, London and also on the cenotaph in Victoria Square, Holyhead. The loss of the *Anglia* was the second blow the Holyhead community had suffered in less than two weeks. The tragedy occurred only 12 days after the sinking and subsequent ordeal of the crew of HMS *Tara*: a truly remarkable story in its own right.



This plaque was unveiled during a service held at Holyhead to mark the centenary of two maritime tragedies that befell the community during the same month in the First World War.

Memorials

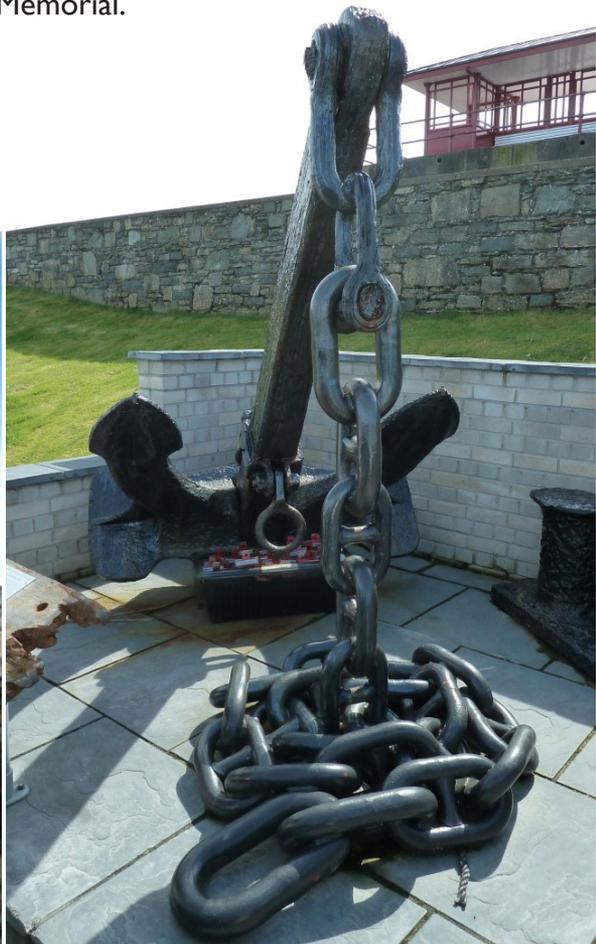
Four main memorials exist at Southampton, two at Holyhead, and the aforementioned Tower Hill, London, along with many individual and lonely entries on Roll of Honour plaques in towns and cities up and down the country. The Hollybrook Cemetery, Southampton commemorates by name almost 1,900 servicemen and women of the Commonwealth land and air forces whose graves are not known, many of whom were lost in transports or other vessels torpedoed or mined in home waters. The Tower Hill Memorial commemorates men and women of the Merchant Navy and Fishing Fleets who died in both World Wars and who have no known grave (Angelsey Info, 2016).

HMHS *Anglia's* anchor was recovered and brought back to Holyhead in 2008. It now takes pride of place outside Holyhead Maritime Museum. It has a replica chain which has been welded in place in order to prop it up. Next to the anchor is a piece of the deck from RMS *Leinster*, which was sunk by a German submarine in 1918 with the loss of over 500 lives.

In 2014 mayor of Holyhead J.V. Owen placed a wreath at the unveiling of the HMHS *Anglia* and RMS *Leinster* Memorial.

Left: Holyhead Cenotaph.

Right: *Anglia's* anchor at Holyhead.



Museums

HMHS *Anglia* ship's bell on display at the Holyhead Maritime Museum (with permission of the Receiver of Wreck). Photograph taken with kind permission of Holyhead Maritime Museum. The ANGLIA inscription is still visible after nearly a century on the seabed. The shifting sands kept the bell free from marine growth but nearly wore away the name.



Individual stories of casualties and survivors from Holyhead

With the passing of time our links to the past inevitably disappear. There are no longer any soldiers alive who served in The Great War, but some descendants have been kind enough to share what information they have.

Chief Steward Richard Roberts

The previously-mentioned Richard Roberts was the only casualty from Holyhead whose body was recovered. Because he was classed as a civilian an inquest was held in to his death. During the trial injuries found on his body, notably his face, were brought in to question. It was thought that he may have been struck by a person but the testimonies of his crew were universal. After helping as much as he could he jumped from the ship and this is where he met his unfortunate end; probably striking something in the water. In the hearing Captain Lionel John Manning shed as much light on the last moments of Richard Roberts as he could:

‘Apparently what occurred was he jumped into the water to get a boat that left then, and missed it. I saw a man in uniform jump, and I believe it was he. As the ship sank, I and the chief officer, slid into the sea from the deck. I was unconscious when picked up. My own watch and the deceased’s watch stopped at 12.50, which was evidently the time the ship sank.’



*Left: Richard Roberts
Right: Roberts’ watch,
stopped at the time the
ship sank.
Images courtesy of
Barry Hillier/Richard
Vaughton*

It can be imagined that as the only recovered crew member of the Holyhead casualties, his funeral became something of a focal point for everyone touched by the tragedy. He was, according to his grandson and namesake Richard Vaughton, apparently a well-liked man about town, and this is very much echoed in the newspaper report of the time. He had worked for the LNWR for twenty-two years so one can picture the friends and ties he would have built up.

'...Universally liked, he was always ready to assist those less fortunately placed than himself. By his death the officers and crew of the company's fleet of steamers lose a staunch friend and loyal comrade...' The Chronicle November 26th 1915

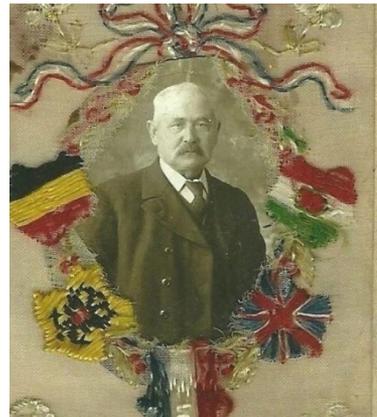
He left behind a widow and three children. To think how many times this story is multiplied around the world for this war alone boggles the mind. He was one of millions of ordinary men who stepped up to the plate and gave their life in order to provide a safe future for us all.

Boatswain George Bagnall

The Great War usually makes us think of young men serving their country, but Boatswain George Bagnall was 61 years old at the time of the sinking – not exactly elderly by today's standards, but a fair age to go through such an ordeal. By good fortune he managed to survive the event and is mentioned in the statement of Mr William William:

'I crawled along the davits clinging to the ropes.....I went back pushing Mr George Bagnall in case he should fall into the sea.'

This could have been the deciding factor which kept him alive. He was one of the lucky



George Bagnall

ones who emerged from a chaotic fifteen-minute lottery where fate would pick and choose who was to live and who was to die. We can use the word 'lucky' with hindsight but with our modern understanding of 'survivor guilt' and PTSD we can be sure it would be the last word any survivors would attribute themselves. George Bagnall was awarded four Great War medals - 1914-15 Star, British War Medal, Victory Medal and also the Mercantile Marine Medal.

Purser Nathaniel Joseph Campbell

In the words of descendant Felicity Campbell:

'Thank you for remembering the HMHS Anglia. My grandfather - Nathaniel Joseph Campbell was purser aboard the ship and lost his life. My father was very young and lost him before he could remember him. The First World War and this episode have had a profound effect on my family. It is wonderful that the ship is being remembered.'

Mr H. Thomas, 10, Leonard-st., Holyhead, steward said:—When the "Anglia" struck the mine I was just leaving the smokeroom, where, with my mate, Mr Fenelley, I had been attending to nine of the wounded soldiers. When the explosion took place, everything on the table was scattered, and we all got a severe shaking. When I reached the deck, I saw some of the soldiers and crew in No. 8 boat, which was just leaving the 'Anglia,' as the men expected to be picked up quickly. How it happened that she sank I cannot say. I looked round again and saw No. 2 boat being swung out. I saw the purser, Mr Campbell, Mr H. Pierce, the second engineer, and Mr Hugh Williams, the fourth engineer. They were on the rubber of the vessel. When I got on to the rubber first, I saw Mr Campbell coming out of the port hole and scrambling on to the deck. He then went aft, and Mr James Higgins, one of the seamen, told me afterwards that Mr Campbell and himself assisted in throwing the floating rafts into the sea, after which Mr Campbell said: "I am going to make for the buoy now, Higgins," and with that he jumped off. Higgins threw him a floating raft, but saw no more of him.

The final moments of Nathaniel Campbell in the words of one of his crewmates.

Third Engineer Joseph Williams

In the words of descendant Gavin Williams:

Joseph Williams was my mother's uncle and was 32 when he went down with Anglia. He was one of eleven siblings and lived at 8 Upper Park St with his parents, Mr and Mrs Samuel Bennion Williams and was never married.

The family were well known in Holyhead and were leading lights in the Presbyterian chapel. His father was a coal merchant and chandler and a town councillor.

Joseph was a third engineer on the Anglia and had also served on a dredger in the Mersey. I think he completed his engineering apprenticeship in the marine yard.

I remember seeing the War Ministry telegram notifying the family of his death, unfortunately this has been lost.

Other stories of note

The reality of war is that decisions are made by distant heads of state and the battles are fought by friends, neighbours, brothers and sisters. Human lives are grossly relegated to figures and statistics. It is the day-to-day folk that are left with the uncertainty, the confusion and the broken pieces to cobble back together. The two following stories exemplify the ground-level fallout of such a tragedy.

A Son of England

Historian Ian Friel has researched a particularly sad story about his great-uncle Joseph Walker who first succumbed to trench foot and had both legs amputated, then went down with *Anglia*. Even though he was fitted with a life vest he perished and two months later his body unceremoniously washed up on the Netherlands coast. Joe was only 24 years old.

This drawing (right) by internationally-famous Dutch cartoonist of the time Louis Raemakers captures the stormy day when Joe's body was interred in foreign soil so far away from his English home. Mr Friel's poignant article is very moving and cannot be done true justice in this short passage, but can be read in its entirety at his webpage (see page 41).

The Enemy Amongst Us?

Another notable story is the sad tale of a Welsh speaker who was mistaken for a German sailor. The survivor's account is featured in the book by J.R. Lord; *The Story of the Horton - Co. of London - War Hospital: Epsom. Heinemann, 1920.*

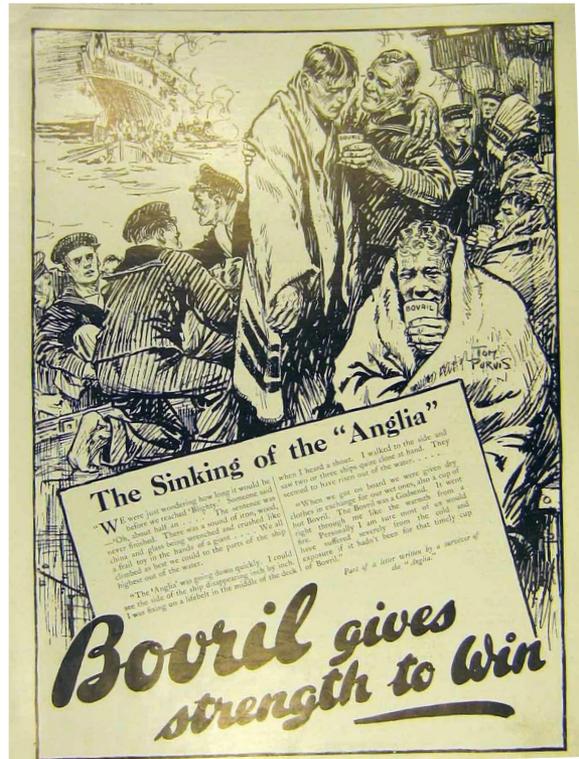
The "unknown" was suffering from a fractured skull, and in his delirium uttered words which belonged to no language we were acquainted with. I suspected paraphasia, but on the night of admission it was rumoured he was a German from his appearance and language, and some ugly threats were heard from other patients in the ward, who were highly incensed at the whole affair, especially as the survivors were convinced that the ship had been torpedoed. The story was that the Anglia had been dodged (sic) by a strange foreign-looking vessel, which had done the dastardly deed, and that the "unknown" speaking the foreign language had fallen overboard and been rescued with those from the Anglia. It was known there were no German prisoners on board the Anglia. However, though the story was scarcely credible, I wished to avoid any trouble with the other patients, so I had the patient moved to a wing of "A" hospital, and put in safety under an armed guard from a neighbouring camp for a few days, and set about the work of identification. It took some days, and several missing soldiers' relatives were sent for without success. At last, however, the right relatives were found and he was correctly identified. We had good ground for our mystification regarding his language, for he was a paraphasic



Welshman trying to speak his native tongue. He never regained consciousness, in spite of every effort to repair his skull, and died on December 7th.

Leaving a bitter taste

Rather bizarrely, Bovril used the sinking as a hook in one of its adverts of the time; the survivors on a rescue ship enjoying a warming cup of the beverage and talking of their close shave. It is nothing unusual for advertisers to straddle the lines of decency, but this feels like a shameless example indeed. To make a modern day comparison would perhaps be to portray dust-covered survivors of the Twin Tower's attacks enjoying a well-known refreshing soft drink; unthinkable. But in the context of the era its crassness may not have been so obvious. At a time when it was deemed acceptable to hand out white feathers to men of army-serving age to denote cowardice, and every poster, poem and pastor was encouraging young men to march willingly to certain death, it may not have seemed too outlandish. The world hadn't yet woken up; but it certainly would. In some naive way the advert was possibly seen as morale boosting and patriotic, showing the doughtiness and resolve of the British armed forces. From a cynical viewpoint, though, it is hard to disagree that the aim of selling a brand to consumers lies at its core.



Diving

The wreck, which lies in the Straits of Dover at the coordinates 51° 02'N, 1° 19'E is advertised by a few dive clubs as a site that can be visited. On 24th November 2015, nearly 100 years to the day after the sinking, divers from local clubs and some retired servicemen laid a commemorative wreath at the site.

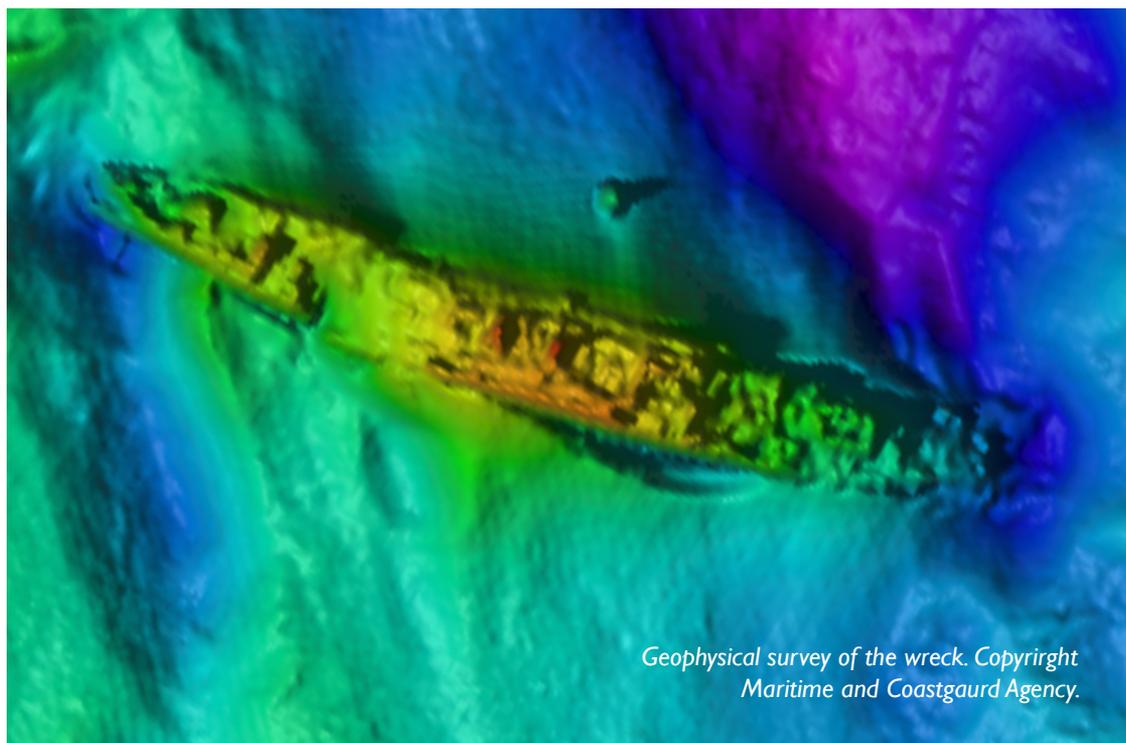
Diver Brian Robinson, one of the team involved, was kind enough to share some comments about his first-hand experience diving *HMHS Anglia*.

HMHS Anglia is a good dive for trainees as it is not very deep but the viz (visibility) where it is can be demanding and in that case trainees would not be put on it for safety reasons. The wreck is fairly intact but there is no superstructure as it has been salvaged. The biggest part of the wreck is now buried in the sea bed.

Protection

Over the years, the wreck of *HMHS Anglia* has received some high profile media attention as being vulnerable to salvage and disrespectful access. In 2014 it was the topic of a BBC South East Inside Out documentary and much public outcry. In 2017 the wreck was designated as a Protected Place under the Protection of Military Remains Act 1986. This means people can still dive on the wreck but it is an offence to penetrate the wreck, interfere with, disturb or remove anything from the site unless licensed to do so by the Ministry of Defence. For further information about different forms of protection for First World War wrecks, see the Maritime Archaeology Trust's companion booklet: *War Graves of the Sea: Protecting Shipwrecks of the First World War*.

It is not possible to determine where all of *Anglia's* salvaged artefacts now reside but some finds that have been reported to the Receiver of Wreck are listed on Pastscape (see references at the end of this section).



Geophysical survey of the wreck. Copyright Maritime and Coastguard Agency.

What can be gleaned from the debate about the *Anglia* and its protection is that the wreck means many things to many people and that there is a genuine concern felt by all parties. 'Lest we forget', poignant words etched on war memorials from John O' Groats to Land's End, seems to be equally relevant in relation to HMHS *Anglia* which is by no means forgotten. Keeping the story of this and other First World War vessels alive and passing them on to younger generations is vital and this booklet, and indeed the whole *Forgotten*

Wrecks of the First World War project, aims to contribute towards this. Stories such as that of the Anglia can serve to remind us of our human spirit and give us hope.”

Sources and where to find out more

This article was written by MAT volunteer Duncan Ross. Special thanks to Holyhead Maritime Museum and in particular Peter Scott Roberts, Barry Hillier, John Bagnall, Richard Vaughton, Felicity Campbell, Gavin Williams, Brian Robinson, the late Mac Gregory, Ian Friel, Graham Scott (Wessex Archaeology) and Mark Dunkley (Historic England) for resources, and dedicating their personal time to help aid my research.

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Back cover: The Grand Fleet in the North Sea. Copyright IWM (Q 68709)

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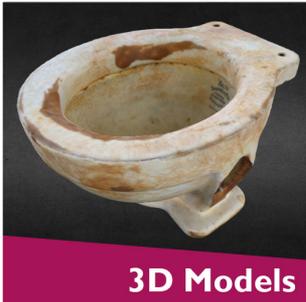
About Us

The **Maritime Archaeology Trust** is a registered charity with more than 25 years' experience in research, investigations and pioneering techniques for the study and promotion of marine cultural heritage. Originating in the south of England as the Hampshire and Wight Trust for Maritime Archaeology, the MAT has grown from regional roots to an internationally renowned authority on maritime archaeology.



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www.museum.maritimearchaeologytrust.org





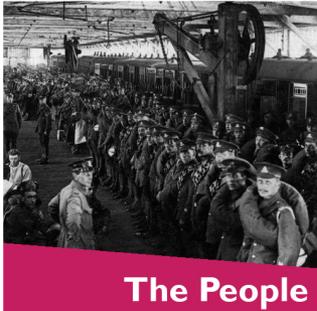
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www.maritimearchaeologytrust.org/diving-resources

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