

Forgotten Wrecks
of the
First World War



LED BY IWM

May
2018

SS *Western* *Coast*

Site Report





**FORGOTTEN WRECKS
OF THE FIRST WORLD WAR
SS WESTERN COAST
SITE REPORT**

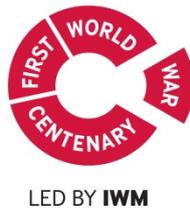


Table of Contents

i Acknowledgments.....	3
ii Copyright Statement	3
iii List of Figures.....	3
1 Project Background	3
2 Methodology.....	4
2.1 Desk Based Historic Research	4
2.1.1 Online information/sources.....	4
2.1.2 Records at The National Archives	4
2.2 Associated Artefacts	5
2.3 Site Visit/Fieldwork	5
3 Vessel Biography: <i>SS Western Coast</i>	5
3.1 Vessel Type and Build	6
3.2 Pre-war Career	6
3.3 First World War Use & Loss	6
3.4 Associated Vessels	6
3.5 People associated with the <i>SS Western Coast</i>	6
3.6 Post-loss activity	7
4 Seabed Remains.....	7
4.1 Site Location and Environment.....	7
4.2 Archaeological Methodology	8
4.3 Description of Surviving Vessel Remains	8
5. Site Significance & Potential Further Research.....	16
6. Bibliography	16
Websites	16
Books.....	16
7. Appendices.....	16
7.1 Site video.....	16
7.2 Crew List.....	17
7.4 Newspaper article	17

i Acknowledgments

The Forgotten Wrecks of the First World War project was generously funded by the Heritage Lottery Fund through their Heritage Grants Programme.

MAT would like to thank all the volunteers who gave up their time to help with research and to dive on the *SS Western Coast*: Alistair Ball, Jim Fuller, Jane Maddocks, Jane Moffett, Rob Morgan, Robert Morgan, Marco Palmer, and Lucy Smith.

MAT staff involved in fieldwork and reporting: Jan Gillespie, Christin Heamagi, Jasmine Noble Shelley, Julie Satchell.

ii Copyright Statement

This report has been produced by the MAT with the assistance of funding provided by the Heritage Lottery Fund through their Heritage Grants Programme. Unless otherwise stated all images are copyright of the MAT.

iii List of Figures

FIGURE 1: <i>WESTERN COAST</i> (IMAGE: WRECKSITE EU - STATES COPYRIGHT UNKNOWN).....	5
FIGURE 2: LOCATION OF <i>SS WESTERN COAST</i>	7
FIGURE 3: GEOPHYSICAL IMAGE OF THE <i>WESTERN COAST</i>	8
FIGURE 4: CLOSER ANNOTATED VIEW OF <i>WESTERN COAST</i> IMAGE.....	9
FIGURE 5: THE PORT SIDE OF THE SHIP IS BREAKING DOWN	10
FIGURE 6: DIVER MEASURING AND PHOTOGRAPHING THE PROPELLER.....	10
FIGURE 7: PROPELLER SHOWING THE PROPELLER BOSS	11
FIGURE 8: PIPES AND STRUCTURAL COMPONENTS	11
FIGURE 9: ENGINE COVER.....	12
FIGURE 10: PISTONS AMONGST STRUCTURAL REMAINS	12
FIGURE 11: HORIZONTAL BOILER AMONGST BROKEN DOWN STRUCTURE	13
FIGURE 12: WINDLESS NEAR THE BOW	13
FIGURE 13: CHAIN LYING ON THE SEABED.....	14
FIGURE 14: POSSIBLE MAST.....	14
FIGURE 15: MARINE GROWTH ON REMAINS OF THE WRECK	15
FIGURE 16: COLOURFUL MARINE GROWTH PRESENT ON THE REMAINS	15
FIGURE 17: ARTICLE IN 'THE GRAPHIC' 6 MARCH 1915 (COPYRIGHTED IN USA AND CANADA).....	18

1 Project Background

Forgotten Wrecks of the First World War is a Heritage Lottery Funded project which is dedicated to raising 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 over 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. The study and promotion of these archaeological sites presents a unique opportunity to better interpret them and improve physical and virtual access.

The project focuses on underwater and coastal sites between Kent and Cornwall, which include merchant and naval ships, passenger, troop and hospital ships, U-boats, ports, wharfs, buildings and

foreshore hulks. These sites, under water and on the foreshore, have been degrading and deteriorating due to natural and human processes for approximately 100 years and, as a result, are extremely fragile. In many cases, this project represents a final opportunity to record what remains on the seabed and foreshore before it is lost forever.

The project aims to characterise the nature and extent of the maritime First World War archaeological resource surviving on the south coast's seabed and around the coast. This will enable an understanding of maritime activity just off our shores during the conflict and provide a window onto some of the surviving sites. While it will not be possible to visit and record all c.1,100 vessels dating to the First World War, lost off the south coast of England, a representative sample of sites have been selected for more detailed study, analysis and interpretation. This report collates information collected during the project, relating to one of the south coast's First World War wrecks, namely that of the *SS Western Coast*.

2 Methodology

General detail on the methodologies employed during the project are outlined within *Forgotten Wrecks of the First World War: Project Methodology Report*, this report section concentrates on approaches and resources relating to *SS Western Coast*.

2.1 Desk Based Historic Research

2.1.1 Online information/sources

A range of online sources were searched for information on *SS Western Coast*, with the following being identified:

Pastscape:	http://www.pastscape.org.uk/hob.aspx?hob_id=911882
Wrecksite EU:	http://www.wrecksite.eu/wreck.aspx?80149
Uboat.net	https://uboat.net/wwi/boats/?boat=8
Other URL:	http://www.heritagegateway.org.uk/Gateway/Results_Single.aspx?uid=MES6214&resourceID=1026 http://1915crewlists.rmg.co.uk/document/170137 https://historicengland.org.uk/listing/the-list/list-entry/1430265

Desk based research included studying bathymetric imagery of the wreck of the *Western Coast*. Data was kindly provided by the United Kingdom Hydrographic Office, which had been collected by the Maritime & Coastguard Agency, under the Open Government Licence V2. The datasource used was: H11476 2015-83465 Hastings to Beachy Head.

2.1.2 Records at The National Archives

Documents located at The National Archives (TNA), describe the sinking and occurrences around the event with eyewitness accounts, along with interesting information relating to the request for some recognition for the Captain of the rescuing vessel *SS Osceola*.

What	Ref.	Where	Date accessed
English Channel: Submarines, January - February 1915. Details of loss and letters between the Anglo American Oil Company Ltd, the Admiralty and the Board of Trade	ADM 137-1063	TNA	2015 & 2017
British Merchant Vessels Sunk & Captured by the Enemy. 1914 – 1915	ADM 137/2959	TNA	2015

2.2 Associated Artefacts

While the Forgotten Wrecks project had a non-recovery policy, where possible, the project aimed to 'virtually reunite' artefacts historically recovered from the Forgotten Wrecks. Research within reports of the Receiver of Wreck, and enquires with private collections, museums and exhibitions did not reveal any artefacts that had been recovered from the wreck.

Information on Wrecksite EU states that a decanter inscribed 'Hough lines', and the forecastle bell inscribed 'Liverpool', were recovered from this wreck in the mid-90's (Wrecksite EU, 2001-2016). Their location has not been traced during this project.

2.3 Site Visit/Fieldwork

Forgotten Wrecks funded diving from the dive boat *Dive 125* took place on the wreck of the *SS Western Coast* on 17 July 2017.

Initial dives aimed to assess the condition of the remains and obtain a sketch drawing, then to build on this information with a measured sketch/survey and photographic recording where possible.

Eight divers undertook a total of 392 minutes diving on the wreck. The dive team used self-contained breathing apparatus (SCUBA) with a breathing gas of Enriched air nitrox (EANx) using accelerated decompression procedures.

The diving conditions were very good on the day of the dive with visibility of around four to five metres which allowed good conditions for photography.

3 Vessel Biography: *SS Western Coast*

The steam ship *Western Coast* (Figure 1) was chosen as one of the Forgotten Wrecks case study sites because of its significance through a relationship with the German U-boat U-8 (which was designated a Protected Wreck in 2016), additionally there was little available detail on the condition of the remains of the *Western Coast* and no previous archaeological survey. The vessel represents one of the many cargo ships sunk during the war, as there is no historical information on the 'mixed cargo' being carried, examining traces within the seabed remains can help identify cargo.

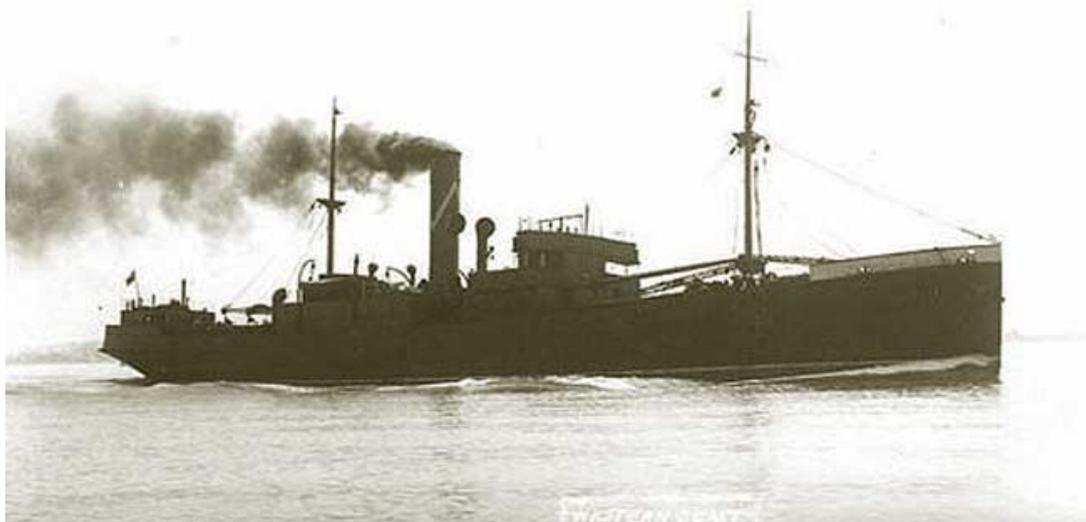


Figure 1: *Western Coast* (image: Wrecksite EU - states copyright unknown)

3.1 Vessel Type and Build

SS *Western Coast* was built by Harkness W & Sons Ltd, in Middlesbrough and completed in 1913. The ship was steam powered and schooner rigged, having a gross tonnage of 1165. The 250ft (c.76m) long ship had a beam of 36 ft (c.11m) and was powered by a three cylinder triple expansion engine with two boilers, a single shaft and one screw (Wrecksite EU, 2001-2015).

3.2 Pre-war Career

The *Western Coast* was a British cargo vessel and was originally named SS *Hopeful* (Kendall McDonald, 1989; Pastcape, 2015). No information has been found detailing the ships career before the war.

3.3 First World War Use & Loss

SS *Western Coast* was owned by Coast Lines Ltd, Powell, Bacon and Hough, Liverpool, and was operated at the time of loss by Powell, Bacon and Hough Lines Ltd (official number 135502). At the time of the sinking the *Western Coast* was on route from London bound for Liverpool via Plymouth under the command of J Ratcliffe, and was carrying a general cargo (Wrecksite EU, 2001-2015).

On the 24 February 1915 at 15.30hrs, when the ship was eight miles south east by east from Beachy Head, it was hit by a torpedo fired from the German submarine U-8. The second officer was on watch and had just sighted a steamer on the port beam sinking by the head when a violent explosion occurred on the port side of the bridge almost abreast of no. two hatch. The master rushed to the bridge and stopped the engines, he then gave the orders to lower the boats which had previously been swung out ready for an emergency. The ship sank in a few minutes with no casualties amongst the crew of 18 plus the pilot, but one man had his fingers crushed while assisting to launch the boats. The ship went down with all the ships papers and all the effects of the officers and crew apart from the pilot and chief officer who each had a small handbag. No submarine was seen, or the wake of any torpedo.

Captain T Atkinson, master of the nearby ship *Osceola* reports that it was around eight minutes from the *Western Coast* being hit, until it sank. He went to the rescue and took all of the crew on board landing them at Portsmouth. He reports that the other ship sighted was the SS *Rio Parana* (TNA, ADM 137/2959).

3.4 Associated Vessels

The *Western Coast* was sunk by a torpedo fired from the German submarine U-8 under the command of Kapitän-Leutnant A. Stoch. The U-8 was launched on 14 March 1911 and sank five ships (15,049 tons), it was the first confirmed U-boat to be sunk in the First World War in English coastal waters. As the submarine was passing westwards through the Dover strait on 4 March 1915 it ran into the defensive nets of the Dover Barrage. It was forced to the surface by British destroyers from the Dover Patrol after HMS *Gurkha* lowered an explosive sweep. It was finally abandoned and subsequently sank, but not before HMS *Gurkha* and HMS *Maori* had opened fire (Uboat net, 1995-2018).

The U-8 is reported to be sitting upright on the seabed in very good condition with periscopes and radio masts still present (Historic England, 2016). In June 2016 the U-8 was designated under the Protection of Wrecks act 1973, key reasons for its significance being: its status as one of only four Type U-5 boats ever built, being a rare example of a pre-First World War German-built submarine and the earliest U-boat wreck in English waters. There were also concerns about the vulnerability of the wreck from uncontrolled salvage with the propeller having been taken by divers (but later recovered).

3.5 People associated with the SS *Western Coast*

The crew of the *Western Coast* were all British except one who was Norwegian (National Maritime Museum, no date). The list of crew names can be seen in Appendix 7.2.

The Anglo American Oil Company Ltd wrote to the Admiralty requesting some recognition for Captain Atkinson of the rescuing ship SS *Osceola* as they had exposed themselves to considerable risk of

meeting the same fate as that suffered by the *Western Coast* while engaged in the rescue. The Admiralty wrote back to say that although the Master of the *Osceola* was creditable for his humanity and courage, it was a direct contradiction to the instructions of 10 February which expressly state that no ocean going British ship is permitted to proceed to the assistance of a vessel torpedoed by a submarine. In these circumstances it could not commend his action or be party to any reward. The Anglo American Oil Company stated that Captain Atkinson had been told that the instruction of 10 February did not apply to his vessel on account of its size and the incident was brought to the attention of the Board of Trade. The Board of Trade decided to award the Captain a 'piece of plate' in recognition of his services on the occasion but it was desired that the award not be generally known as 'otherwise Maters may be inclined to ignore the Admiralty instructions'. No notice was to be issued to the press in respect of the award (TNA, ADM 137/1063).

3.6 Post-loss activity

No record of any salvage of the wreck has been found. The site has often been confused with that of the *Rio-Panrana*, a much larger collier which it is now known to have sunk in the mid Channel, a considerable distance from its reported sinking.

4 Seabed Remains

4.1 Site Location and Environment

The wreck of the SS *Western Coast* sits upright on a sandy/shelly seabed South East of Beachy Head in position 50.64056 0.3977 WGS84 (UKHO) (Figure 2), it's orientation is NW/SE. There is slight scour occurring around the starboard side of the midship to after section of the wreckage, and the surrounding seabed is flat, composed of shelly sand with sand waves in evidence.

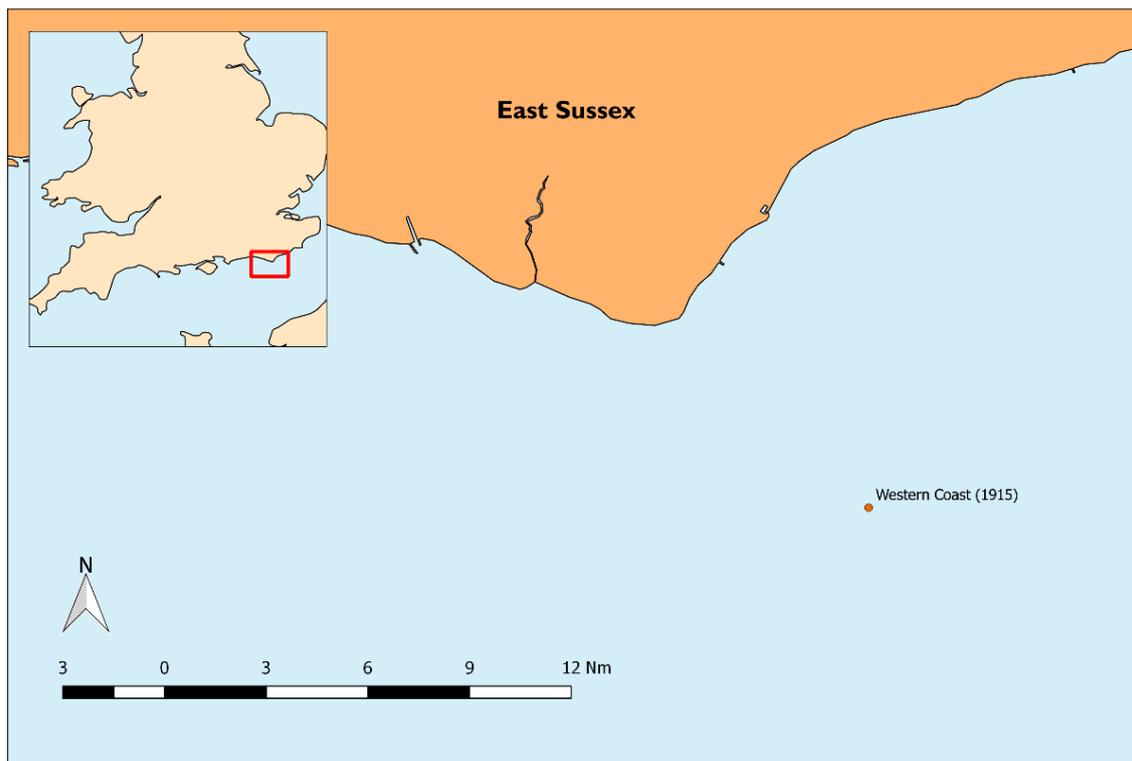


Figure 2: Location of SS *Western Coast*

4.2 Archaeological Methodology

Photogrammetric recording took place around the stern and propeller area of the vessel with divers crossing from starboard to port moving forward as far as the boilers. Photographs were taken with a Nikon D700 DSLR camera in a Sealux CD7000 camera housing with one Orcalight Seawolf 1860 diving light in a rugged casing. The propeller and other relevant features were also photographed in detail by another diver.

Other divers recorded length of the vessel and details of notable features paying particular attention to observing if there were any signs of the cargo the ship was carrying. The piston head diameters were measured along with the propeller blades.

4.3 Description of Surviving Vessel Remains

The geophysical image of the *Western Coast* shows that the amidships section of the wreckage is fairly intact with the port side of the wreck being quite collapsed (Figure 3). The two boilers can be seen in their orientation in the middle of the wreck site. Scour is apparent from amidships forward on the starboard side of the ship. A closer annotated view is shown in Figure 4.

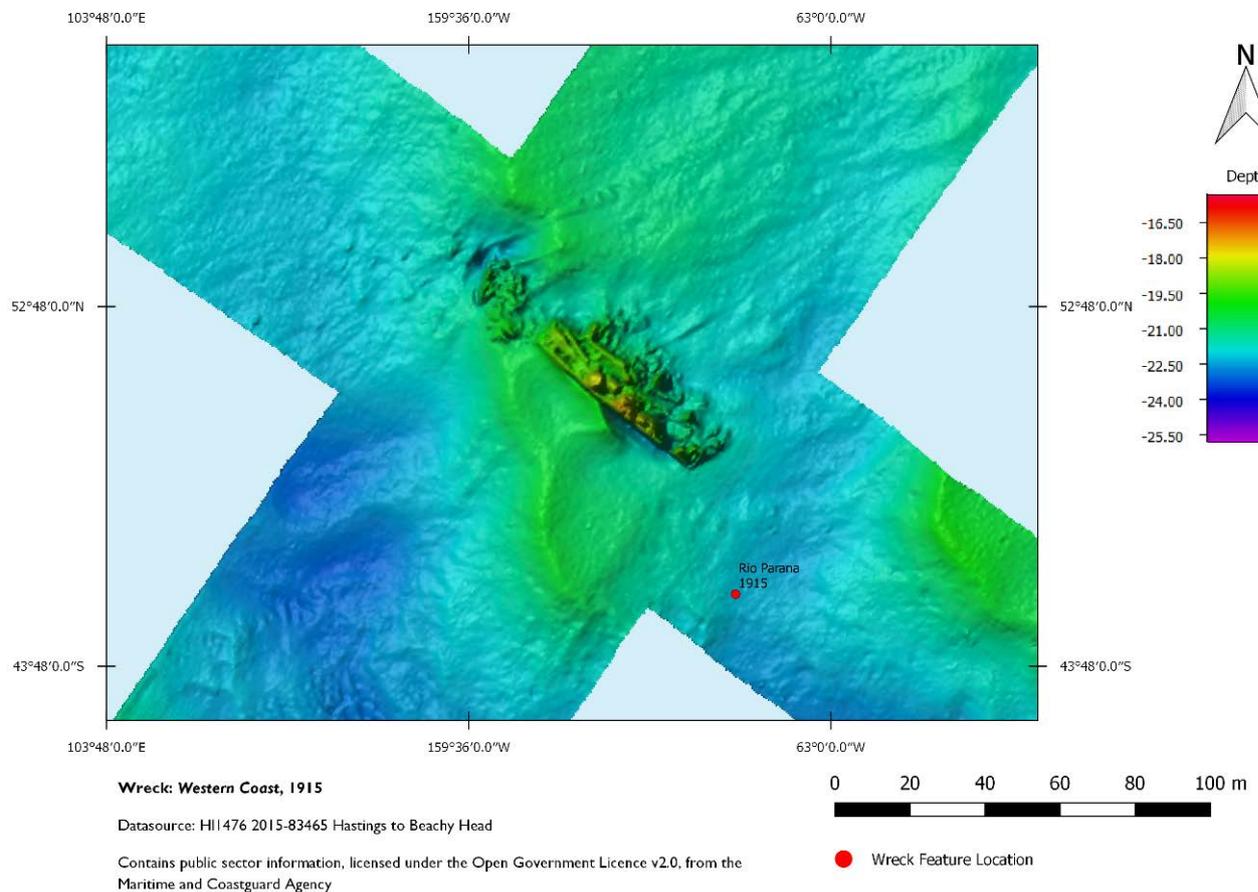


Figure 3: Geophysical image of the *Western Coast* (Maritime and Coastguard Agency' data source: HII476 2015-83465)

Figure 4: Closer annotated view of *Western Coast* image

The SS *Western Coast* lies in around 28m of water and is partially broken down with the highest part of the wreck standing around 12m high. There was some confusion over the identity of the wreck as it was charted in Dive Sussex as the *Rio Parana* (also a cargo vessel sunk in 1915 on the same day) but it is now generally accepted that these are the remains of the *Western Coast*, as the *Rio Parana* is confirmed in another location mid channel and all other evidence fits the description for the *Western Coast* (Dive 125 pers. comm July 2017; Wrecksite EU, 2001-2016). By way of further evidence, as mentioned above, a decanter inscribed 'Hough Lines' and a forecastle bell inscribed Liverpool was also recovered from the site in the mid 1990's.

The starboard side of the ship is quite intact and upstanding whereas the port side has broken down with some upstanding frames visible but other areas considerably collapsed (Figure 5). A measurement taken of the wreck remains is 85m from bow to stern.



Figure 5: The port side of the ship is breaking down

The propeller stands up at the stern with the rudder having collapsed onto the seabed on the port side. The length of each blade of the three bladed propeller is 180cm by 90cm wide with the central section (boss) having a diameter of 65cm (Figure 6 and 7).



Figure 6: Diver measuring and photographing the propeller



Figure 7: Propeller showing the propeller boss

Moving further forward along the wreck, the starboard side is a mixture of plates, pipes and structural remains, divers did not find any evidence of the general cargo the ship was carrying (Figure 8).



Figure 8: Pipes and structural components

The propeller shaft is present running forwards from the propeller, reaching a muddle of machinery in the centre of the wreck until 25m from the stern where the three cylinder triple expansion engine is located. Two small heads are exposed, the length of the cover of the pistons is 139cm with the diameter of the pistons measuring 27cm. The exhaust steam pipe is present which leads to the condenser (which is missing) (Figure 9).



Figure 9: Engine cover

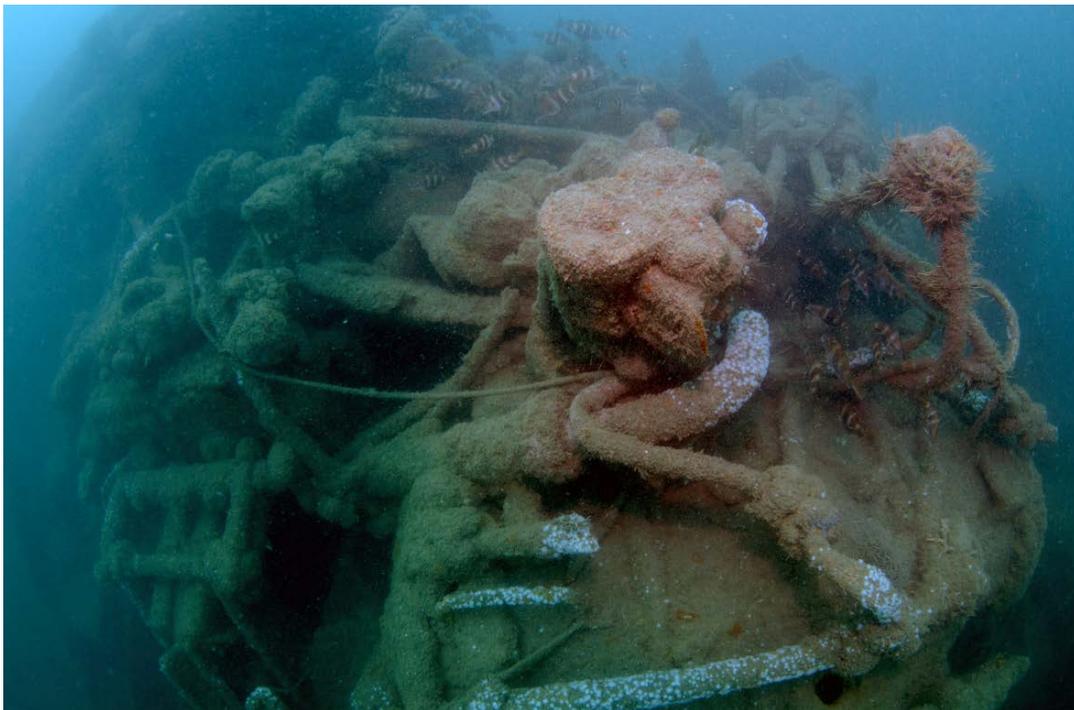


Figure 10: Pistons amongst structural remains

Just in front of the engine one of the boilers lays horizontally amongst broken down fittings (Figure 11). The second boiler stands vertically near, and to the side of it measuring 4.26m in diameter and being around 32m from the stern of the vessel.



Figure 11: Horizontal boiler amongst broken down structure

Near the bow there is a winch or windlass (Figure 12), and an anchor is evident amongst the piles of broken down plating scattered around. A chain is also present lying on the seabed around the bow area (Figure 13).

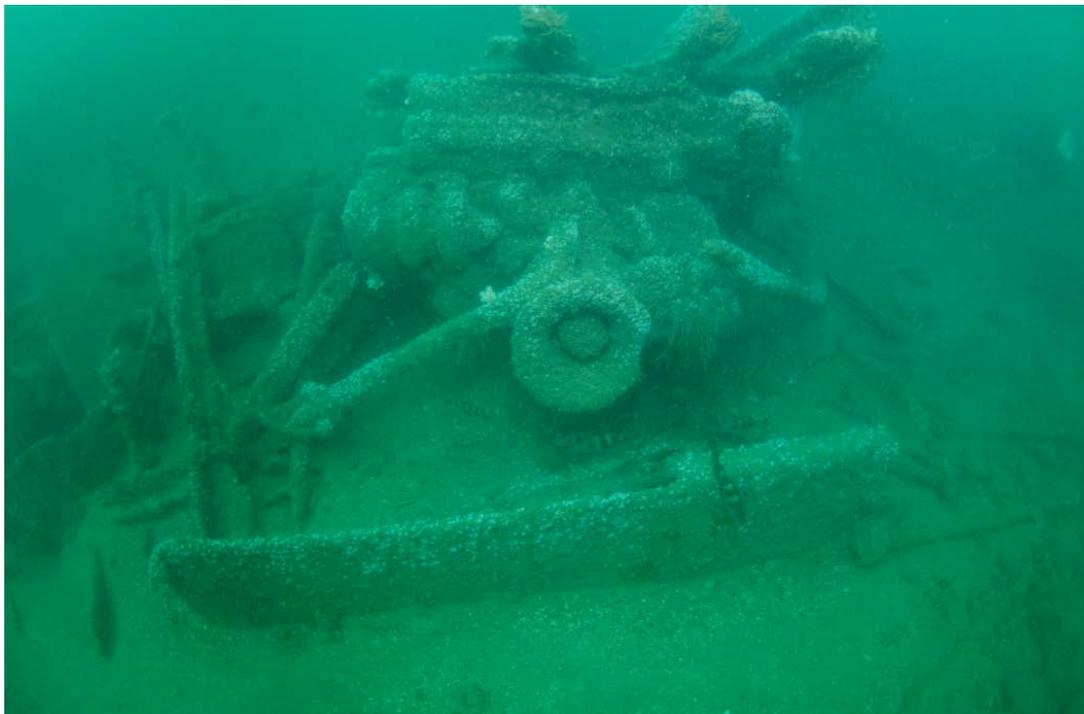


Figure 12: Windless near the bow

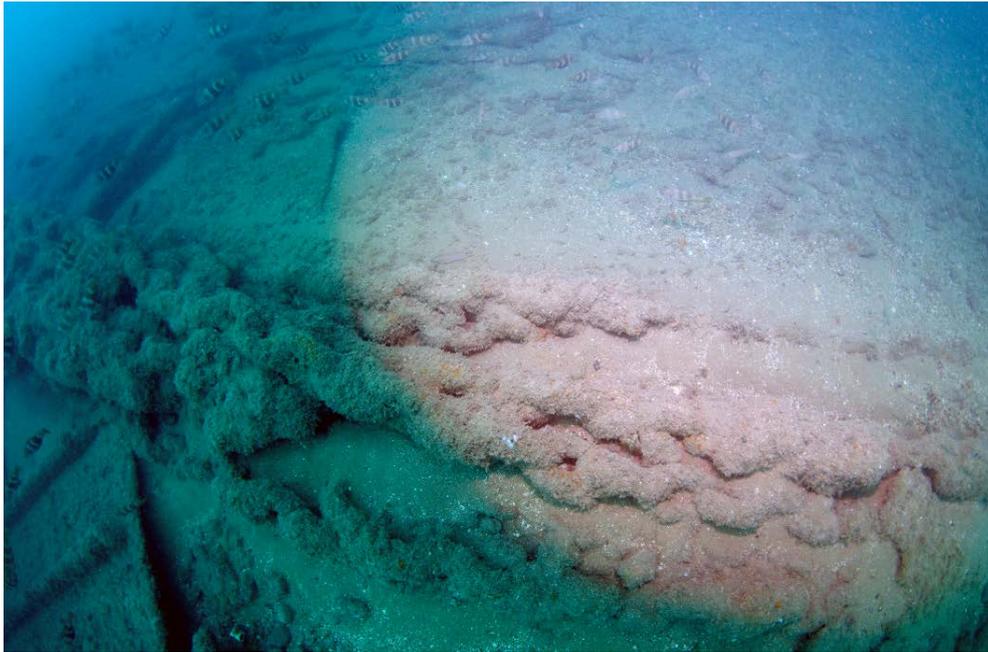


Figure 13: Chain lying on the seabed

Aft of the windlass is an object lying horizontally which appears to be a possible mast with crow's nest (Figure 14). The bow has broken down and is level with the seabed and there are bollards amongst the wreckage in a range of sizes.



Figure 14: Possible mast

The condition of the *Western Coast* is consistent with what might be expected of a wreck that has survived the natural processes under water for nearly 100 years. Although the remains are partially broken down many aspects of the ship are still moderately preserved. A large amount of marine growth has colonised the remains such as sponges and anemones (Figure 15 and 16).



Figure 15: Marine growth on remains of the wreck

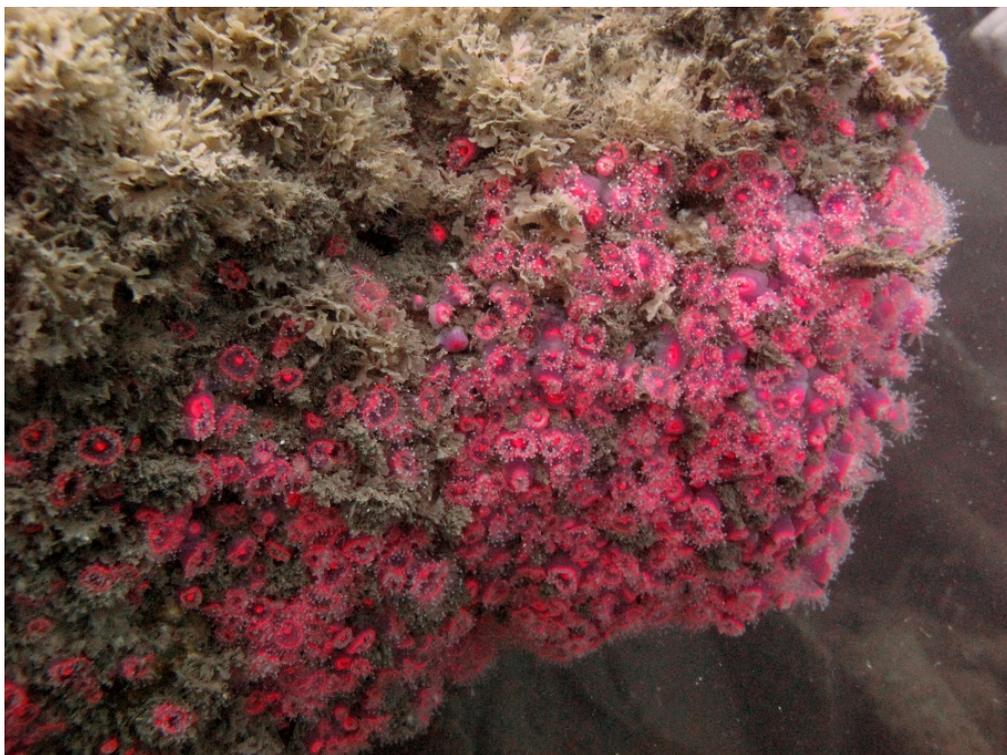


Figure 16: Colourful marine growth present on the remains

5. Site Significance & Potential Further Research

The SS *Western Coast* is a little dived wreck. It was originally thought to be the wreck of the *Rio Parana* but is now generally accepted to be that of the *Western Coast* as another wreck has now been identified as the *Rio Parana* further out in the English Channel. There was no evidence found of the general cargo carried by the ship so further investigation is necessary to try to identify what the ship was carrying and also to find more information to help understand and inform the record that these remains are that of the *Western Coast*.

6. Bibliography

Websites

Heritage Gateway (2012). East Sussex HER, Western Coast. Available at:

http://www.heritagegateway.org.uk/Gateway/Results_Single.aspx?uid=MES6214&resourceID=1026

Accessed (11/12/15)

Historic England (2016). Historic England. Available at:

<https://historicengland.org.uk/listing/the-list/list-entry/1430265> Accessed (6/3/2016)

National Maritime Museum (No date). Crew List Document for vessel *Western Coast*. Available at:

<http://1915crewlists.rmg.co.uk/document/170137> Accessed (6/3/16)

Pastscape (2015). Western Coast. Available at:

http://www.pastscape.org.uk/hob.aspx?hob_id=911882 Accessed 1/12/15

Uboat net (1915-2015). U8 Available at: <https://uboot.net/wwi/boats/?boat=8> Accessed (1/12/15)

Wreck Site EU (2001-2015). Western Coast +1915. Available at:

<http://www.wrecksite.eu/wreck.aspx?80149> Accessed 1/12/15)

Books

McDonald, K. (1989) *Dive Sussex: a diver guide*. Wreck No 331. p. 180

7. Appendices

7.1 Site video

Publishing date:	None published	Publisher:	Raw video – Maritime Archaeology Trust.
URL:			
Last accessed:		License:	
Length:	38 mins 30 secs	Description:	Dive footage
Notes:			
Video 1 (From Stern towards midships - 17 mins)			
3 mins – wreck reached and baseline already laid			
5 mins – stern, with divers measuring and photographing the propeller			
14 mins – deck winch on the seabed			
Travelling over the top of the wreck and back again – muddled remains			
16 mins – moving along the side of the hull			
Video 2 (Moving forward from midships – 17 mins)			
3 mins – moving along the hull – then along the top of the wreck			
7 mins – midships jumble in engine area			
11 mins – chain on seabed – then back and forth over the top of the wreck			
12 mins – muddle inside the wreck (from above) including a ladder			

Video 3 – (4mins 30secs)

Over the top of the wreck showing a mishmash of pipes, around midships

7.2 Crew List

All but one of the crew were British, he was Norwegian (National Maritime Museum, no date). The list of names is below:

T Brookes - Assistant Steward Age 21
W J Brookes - Steward Age 25
W Byrne - Able Seaman Age 40
J Callaghan - Fireman Age 48
A Carnie – Able Seaman Age 35
J Carroll – Fireman Age 40
L Carthy – Able Seaman Age 42
T Cassell – Able Seaman Age 33
JC Clancy – Able Seaman Age 36
D Donaldson – 1st Mate Age 46
John Ferguson – 2nd Mate Age 38
Joseph Ferguson – 1st ? Age 38
Thomas Fitzpatrick – Able Seaman Age 48
T W Gardner – 2nd ? - Age 42
Thomas Genre (Norwegian) – Able Seaman Age 24
John Gitts – Fireman Age 50
C Groom – 1st Engineer Age 35
D O Hare – Fireman Age 45
George Hay – Able Seaman Age 32
E Jones – Able Seaman Age 30
John Jones – Able Seaman Age 55
P Linnott – Fireman Age 36
J McCarthy – Donkeyman Age 46
John Moore – Able Seaman Age 53
James W Ratcliffe – MASTER FROM CONNAH'S QUAY - Age 44
Stowell – Able Seaman Age 24
S Straker – 2nd Engineer Age 27
J L Thomas – 2nd Engineer Age 50
John Williams – 1st Engineer Age 43

7.4 Newspaper article

An interesting article was discovered in 'The Graphic' dated 6 March 1915. The article states 'Copyrighted in the United States and Canada' (Figure 12).

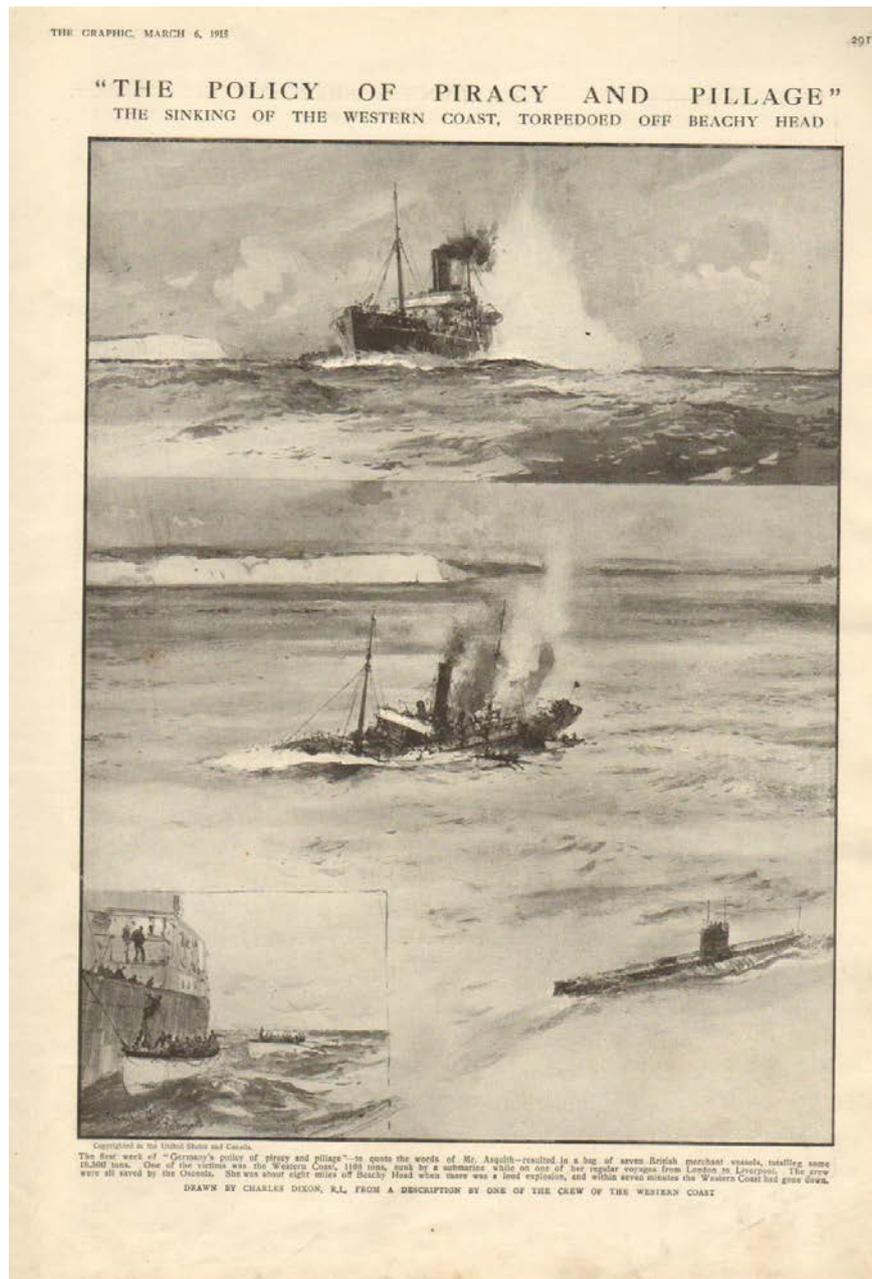


Figure 17: Article in 'The Graphic' 6 March 1915 (copyrighted in USA and Canada)

The caption underneath the newspaper image in Figure 12, reads:

“The first week of “Germany’s policy of piracy and pillage” – to quote the words of Mr Asquith – resulted in a bag of several British merchant vessels, totalling some 18,500 tons. One of the victims was the *Western Coast*, 1165 tons, sunk by a submarine while on one of her regular voyages from London to Liverpool. The crew were all saved by the *Osceola*. She was about eight miles off Beachy Head when there was a loud explosion, and within several minutes the *Western Coast* had gone down. (Drawn by Charles Dixon, R.I., from a description by one of the crew of the *Western Coast*).