



Text by Rosemary E. Lunn  
Photos by Rick Ayrton

*Dateline: Saturday, 26 May 2018*  
*Destination: SS Kyarra*  
*Chart co-ordinates: 50°34,90N;*  
*01°56.59W*

**“Crikey,” I thought, “one hundred years ago today that German U-boat was awfully close to the English coast.” I suddenly felt a bit vulnerable. World War I happened right here—just off the peaceful Dorset shore, not in some far-off French trench. A century ago today, I could well be on a sinking ship. Or dead.**

In reality, I was sitting, fully kitted up, on *Spike*—a British dive charter boat—waiting for Pete, the Skipper, to yell, “It’s time to dive!” The journey out from Swanage Pier and across the bay had taken 20 minutes, and now we were bobbing up and down over the wreck site, waiting for slack water. I stared across the sea to land and Anvil Point, a mere mile away, thinking about the ship I was about to dive.



# Kyarra Wreck Turns



# 100 Years Old

*“Her name was taken from the aboriginal word for a small fillet of possum fur.”*

Thirty metres (98ft) beneath me lay the once elegant *Kyarra*—a twin-masted, schooner-rigged steel steamer. She had been built at the start of the last century in Dunbarton, Scotland, by William

Denny and Brothers, to a high standard (her deck was made of teak). The *Kyarra*’s passenger accommodation was luxurious; she had 42 First Class Cabins, and her interior and exterior fittings

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Scenes from the wreck (above) of the *Kyarra* (left); Dorset coast (right)



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retrieve them and made the news."

*"The Kyarra became known as the ship made of brass"*

### History

The *Kyarra* was launched on 2 February 1903, and she proved to be a profitable, successful, luxury liner for the Australian United Steam Navigation Company. The 127m (416ft) long ship also had the capacity to trans-

port 7,164 cubic metres (253,000 cubic feet) of general cargo in her fore deck and aft deck holds. She sailed between Fremantle, Western Australia (where she was registered), and Sydney, New South Wales, carrying both fare-paying passengers and cargo.

Her life changed on 6 November

1914. Eleven years after she had been launched, the *Kyarra* was requisitioned and leased in Brisbane by the British Government to be a WWI hospital ship. She became HMAT A55, or "His Majesty's Australian Transports." HMAT ships were used to transport various Australian Infantry Divisions to their respective overseas destinations. When they were not transporting military, HMAT ships would carry goods to Britain and France.

The *Kyarra* was painted white, and red crosses were added to her hull to indicate that she was a hospital ship. Her job was to transport Australian medical units to Egypt, and we know she carried a major contingent of Queensland nurses on one voyage.

Five months later, in March 1915, the *Kyarra* was converted yet again. This time, she served as a troopship and helped land ANZAC expeditionary troops in the Dardanelles. She also saw service in the Gallipoli campaign.

In 1917, the *Kyarra* became a casualty-clearing ship, and had a 4.7in quick-firing



gun mounted on her stern as a defence against U-boats.

On 4 January 1918, the 6,953-ton *Kyarra* was decommissioned—the Commonwealth control lease had ended. Captain Albert Donovan took command of her on 19 January 1918, and readied

the ship for a return to Britain.

In May 1918, the *Kyarra* was in London. She was fully loaded with general cargo worth GB£1,500 (about GB£100,000 in today's money), which was bound for Australia. Items included bottles of champagne, red wine, stout and vinegar, bales



UB-57 CAPTAIN LOHS

The captain of UB-57, Oberleutnant Johannes Lohs, died at sea, aged 29. Lohs sailed from Zeebrugge on 3 August 1918. The last contact he made with base was on the evening of the 14 August 1918. At the time UB-57 was homeward bound. She was believed to be in the area of the Sandiette Bank, east of the Straits of Dover. It is thought UB-57 hit a mine. Lohs' body subsequently washed ashore, and today he is buried in the Ysselsteyn Cemetery, Netherlands.

Between 25 March 1917 and 13 August 1918, Oberleutnant Johannes Lohs damaged 16 ships (89,369 tons) and sunk 77 ships (150,665 tons) during 13 patrols. ■

07.20, another 07.40, a third 08.00 and yet another 08.50. It would be reasonably fair to say she was torpedoed somewhere between 07.00 and 09.00.

There are conflicting reports over the fatalities. One states there were nine fatalities. Another states that six men in the boiler room were killed when it was flooded. A third states that five crew

of silk and cloth, French perfume, rolls of lino, sticks of red sealing wax, medical supplies, cigarettes, silver purses, men's big pocket watches and ladies gold wrist-watches. She was also carrying 35 civilian passengers.

Her captain, William Smith, had orders which stated that the *Kyarra* should sail to Plymouth and embark about 1,000 war-wounded Australian soldiers and repatriate them.

On 24 May 1918, she left Tilbury in Essex and zigzagged down the Channel heading for Devonport, Devon. It was to be her last voyage.

On the morning of Sunday, 26 May, the *Kyarra* had cleared the Isle of Wight and was moving fast through calm seas around Anvil Point (she could do about 15 knots). Sadly, her captain did not know his course was being tracked by German submarine ace Oberleutnant

Johannes Lohs, through the periscope of UB-57.

**UB-57**

UB-57 was part of the Flanders Flotilla, sailing from Zeebrugge. Her captain had some very good ideas on U-boat warfare and new tactics, and in April 1918 Lohs received the Pour le Mérite. Lohs was having a successful patrol. On 22 May, he had sunk the 423-ton steamer *Red Rose*, and on 23 May, he had sunk the P&O Liner *Moldavia* (she had been converted into an armed merchant cruiser of some 9,500 tons). Now the Oberleutnant was stalking the *Kyarra*.

We do know that Lohs torpedoed the *Kyarra* amidships, on her port side just forward of the boilers. There is, however, differing data regarding the time that she was torpedoed. One reference says



View of the deck (above) and interior (top) of the *Kyarra* wreck

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THIS PAGE: Divers on the wreck of the *Kyarra*

that the *Kyarra's* position was 50°34,30N; 01°56.20W. The *Kyarra's* mast was showing but not considered dangerous to navigation.

The *Kyarra* was to lie undiscovered for 48 or 49 years. Again there are conflicting reports that she was found in 1966 and July 1967. At the time of her discovery, it was thought she had sunk closer to St Aldhelms Point. Her position was therefore marked on the chart as a shoal—"a place where a sea, river, or other body of water is shallow".

### First dives on the wreck

She was first dived by two members of Kingston BSAC—husband and wife team, Ron and Linden Blake. Five members of Kingston (Ron Blake, Linden Blake, Adrian Bradley, Bill Foley and Dave Wakeman) and two members of Hounslow BSAC (John Coheagan and Charlie Stoltz) were diving out of Swanage on an inflatable boat looking for the wreck, *Carantan*. The divers picked up what looked like a wreck on the echo sounder

were killed in the engine room and an injured man later died at Swanage Cottage Hospital. Yet, another says that one engineer and four firemen were killed in the explosion, and a sixth man died on shore.

I have found evidence of six fatalities. It is possible that five died on board and one in Swanage. I am not making light of these deaths but it could have been so much worse if the *Kyarra* had been en-route to Australia with the war-wounded.

Again, there are conflicting reports about the attack. One states that a watchman shouted, "Torpedo!" and that it was less than 100 yards away from the *Kyarra*. Therefore, the order for "hard to port" did not have enough time to be actioned.

Another report says that a torpedo was seen, but the enemy vessel was not. A third report indicates that it was thought the

*Kyarra* had struck a mine, and Captain Smith turned her towards Swanage in a valiant attempt to try and beach her. But it was soon realised that she had been torpedoed.

Either way, the order was given to abandon ship, and the surviving passengers and crew took to the lifeboat.

It is reported that seven to ten minutes later the *Kyarra* nose-dived beneath the waves. From the time of the attack to her sinking, it took about 20 minutes. It is reported she sank at 09.08, but with four different torpedo times, it is hard to know if this is accurate. Either way, the beautiful ship was gone.

The survivors and

passengers, including a pilot, were all landed at Swanage. The W/T code books and confidential papers were sunk by the master.

### Location

On 27 May 1918, it was reported



### KYARRA LOSSES

Six crewmen died when the *Kyarra* was torpedoed. They are:

1. BROWN (33), Fireman, HMHS *Kyarra*, Mercantile Marine, †26/05/1918. Born in London. Memorial: Tower Hill Memorial.
2. MACKENZIE, DUNCAN (52), Fireman, HMHS *Kyarra*, Mercantile Marine, †26/05/1918, son of the late Murdo and Catherine Mackenzie. Born at Udrigle. Memorial: Tower Hill Memorial.
3. MCPHUN, LAURENCE ALBERT (16), Steward's Boy, HMHS *Kyarra*, Mercantile Marine, †26/05/1918, son of Mrs. Louisa McPhun, of 12, Tynemouth St., Hull. Born at Hull. Memorial: Tower Hill Memorial.
4. MORLEY, HENRY GARNET WARMLINGTON (28), Trimmer, HMHS *Kyarra*, Mercantile Marine, †26/05/1918, husband of Allison Trent Cook (formerly Morley), of The Shack, Calangir, Western Australia. Born in Australia. Memorial: Tower Hill Memorial.
5. NANLES, JAMES ABBOTT (28), Fireman, HMHS *Kyarra*, Mercantile Marine, †26/05/1918, son of Emily Nanles (nee Wiltshire), of 25, Trinity St. Barking Road, London, and the late Abbott Nanles. Born at Canning Town. Memorial: Tower Hill Memorial.
6. SMALL, WILLIAM, Fifth Engineer Officer, HMHS *Kyarra*, Australian Mercantile Service, †26/05/1918, son of Mr. and Mrs. A. B. Small, of Sydney. Memorial: Tower Hill Memorial. ■

## Kyarra



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KYARRA ARTIFACTS

A vast array of different items have been recovered from the wreck of the *Kyarra*. These include brass padlocks, false teeth, a statue of Prince Albert, carved wooden beads, Sanitas Disinfectant bottles, Worcester Sauce, pens, pipettes and smoking pipes and Trench Art.

A small ceramic pot of Marmite was also found on the wreck. This was sealed with a lead lid. Today, Australians eat Vegemite. One wonders would this have been the case if the *Kyarra* had made it safely to Australia. Would Australia also be a nation of Marmite lovers too? ■

so very similar.

In 1967, Kingston BSAC bought the ship for GB£120, but not the mixed cargo. On 6 May 1969, it was reported that the wheelhouse and the top superstructure had been swept away.

Today, the *Kyarra's* decaying remains stand 18m (59ft) proud of the rocky seabed, and she is probably the most dived wreck in Dorset. She has been adopted by divers under the Nautical Archaeology Society

"Adopt-a-Wreck Scheme," and she is owned by the Kingston and Elmbridge branch of the British Sub Aqua Club.

**My dives on Kyarra**

As some would say, "this was not my first rodeo," diving the *Kyarra*. That occurred on Sunday, 23 August 1992, as part of my PADI Advanced Open Water Course.

I was, frankly, terrified before

and during the first part of my "deep dive" on the *Kyarra*. I calmed down a little when I got halfway down the shot line and was astonished to find the sea was emerald green, as I watched sunbeam shafts dance in the water and lighting up parts of the wreck. The visibility was amazing; I just did not know it at the time, because I had no frame of reference. "So this what wreck diving is all about," I thought, as I followed my instructor across the deck.

This wreck dive had such a profound effect on me that I was back down in Swanage the following weekend, again diving the *Kyarra*. My instructor said I was certified to dive to 30 metres, so I decided to put this into practice. This was the first dive I had ever done without an instructor present.

It was my tenth dive ever. Naturally I did it with someone vastly more experienced than I. He had 14 dives. And it was back in the day when octopuses were not mandatory kit. Between us, we had a primary regulator and

and dived it. Ron and Linden Blake descended first onto an unknown mark and experienced what every wreck diver dreams about—an unknown virgin wreck. She was largely intact—her brass portholes still had glass in them—and she was lying on her starboard side.

The divers formed a company called the *Kyarra* Salvage Association, to salvage the wreck. In 1974, the propeller was blown off with help from Fort Bovisand. The propeller was to lie on the seabed for two years, before it was subsequently raised by Dave Wakeman, and the funds were paid into the company accounts.

**Identification**

There are conflicting reports on how the *Kyarra* was identified. One says that the Blakes "read the brass name on the bow of the ship, which at the time was

still intact." Another report says that the *Kyarra* was identified by checking all the manifests of the ships sunk off the Dorset coast.

Eventually, a serial number on a stick of sealing wax matched one found in a hold on the wreck. A report also states the *Kyarra* was identified on 22 May 1966, but I cannot find whether she was identified because of the wax, the bell or the brass name (and if she was found in 1967, where does the date 22 May 1966 come from?)

We do know that the wreck was positively identified by the ship's name in brass letters from the bow and the recovery of the ship's bronze bell in 1977 by Julian Bamford and (again conflicting names) David Weightman or Dave Taylor. It is reported that the bell is held by Dave Wakeman, so one wonders if Weightman and Wakeman are one and the same person, because the names sound



Scenes from the wreck of the *Kyarra* (above and top left); Historical photo of the *Kyarra* (center)



*"I must have dived the wreck hundreds of times over the years but she is still revealing her secrets. Every dive is different. Exploring the wreck is something I never get tired of."*

— Pete Williams, owner of Divers Down and skipper of dive boat *Spike*

decompression sickness. We were very, very lucky.

### Impact of Kyarra

That dive was forever seared into my soul. Its impact echoed across the years and into my diving career. When I became a PADI Pro, I would always ask myself before I signed a student's certification card off, "Am I signing your death warrant?" I never wanted a student of mine to go through what I went through on the *Kyarra*.

It took me a while to venture back and dive the *Kyarra* again. I dived it in 1996 with Mike Thomas. We had spent the Saturday caving on Mendip, Somerset. On the Sunday, we headed for Swanage. Mike was and is a meticulous

diver, but somehow he had left his hood behind and he ended up diving the wreck in a fleece balaclava.

At the turn of this century, I was the Dive Centre Manager at Triton Scuba in Portsmouth. I wanted a benign place to introduce my divers to British sea diving. Swanage beckoned, but not initially the *Kyarra*.

Although I was taken on the *Kyarra* as a trainee, I would not consider this wreck a raw-trainee

dive. Divers really ought to have something like 20 odd temperate water sea dives under their weight belt before tackling the *Kyarra* because the visibility, currents and narrow swim-throughs can make this a suitably challenging dive. It is a good wreck for building up depth experience, and it is a great, accessible and entertaining dive for experienced temperate water sea divers, especially if you are nitrox qualified.

Pete's voice drags me away from my wool-gathering. It is time to dive. It is 09.30, and we are more or less on slack tide. The pool is now open. Exactly 100 years to the day and several minutes after the *Kyarra* sank, I take a giant stride off *Spike* and head down the fixed shot line.

pressure gauge each, and we shared a watch, a depth gauge and the biggest knife we could lay our hands on.

We got down to the bottom of the shotline, and this time, instead of benign, sunlit, emerald green waters greeting us, there was a current running, and it was a pitch-dark night. Neither of us had a torch. Who knew that English wreck diving could be blacker than a black thing? We clung to each other not knowing what to do next, before moving away from the shotline. We promptly lost the safe, fixed line home.

At 15 minutes, we decided it was time to come up. We held each other's arms, Roman handshake style, and started to ascent. We kicked and kicked and kicked and his fins fell off. The next moment, we flumped onto the seabed. I jammed his fins back on. By now, we had done about 25 minutes at 30m (99ft). Our no-decompression time was well and



truly blown. We were off the PADI tables.

We started again. Within seconds, we were surrounded by bubbles, thousands of them. Our noses were almost pressed together, and I still could not see his face for the bubbles. I thought his regulator had gone into free-

flow. My BCD's over-pressurisation valve gunned loudly, rapidly and repeatedly, and suddenly, we were on the surface. We had made a very fast uncontrolled ascent from seabed to surface in a matter of seconds. To this day, I still do not know why neither of us did not have an embolism or get



THIS PAGE: Scenes from the wreck of the *Kyarra* (above and top left); Divers on their way to dive the *Kyarra* wreck (left)



# Kyarra

Memorial wreath (left) for the souls lost on the *Kyarra* wreck (far left and below)



Their silver bodies look as though they are fresh from a BBQ grill. Strong black stripes run horizontally down each fish, as though their scales have been seared over hot coals.

If you care to look, there is quite a lot of life on the *Kyarra*. Patches of vibrant

ceptively begins to pick up. The *Kyarra* is a very tidal wreck and you can only get on her twice a day. It is almost time to head to the surface. A cheeky tompot blenny is in full-on cute mode, as we head amidships to find a quiet area to deploy our delayed surface marker buoys.

As I sit on my safety stop in the brisk current, I wonder when I will next dive the *Kyarra*. It seems I have visited her at key times in my diving career. Each of my dives has been unique on this big wreck—each dive different. And the more I explore her maritime history, the more I am beguiled by her. I surfaced with more questions about her sinking, wanting conclusive accurate answers. ■

ing forty years since the founding of their branch of the British Sub Aqua Club."

### Parting thoughts

As we mooched over broken beams and deck plates, our torch beams picked up a school of bib.

jewel anemones and hydroids coat the structure. Interspersed, are odd clumps of light bulb sea squirts, cup corals, sandalled anemones and deadmen's fingers.

We have almost made it to the rudder as the current in per-

After diving the inland quarries over the winter months, the sea temperature is welcoming. It is a balmy 16°C (60°F) on the surface. This promises to be a good dive. A hint of the wreck begins to appear. As I fin down the line, the smudgy shadow gets stronger and the outline more defined. Three breaths later, we are over the bow area, and the temperature has dropped to 16°C (53.5°F). I am happy and snug in my O'Three drysuit.

This morning, we have good light and great visibility on the *Kyarra*. We have no goals for this dive—our mission is to bumble and enjoy the entire experience of the wreck. We cruise over the holds and the obvious swim-throughs, and fin along her plates. Ahead of us are rows of naked window holes, stretching out into the distance. The brass portholes were recovered long ago.

The once-beautiful ship is show-

ing her age, but then she has spent a century at the bottom of the English Channel, being swept by vicious currents. She is still largely intact and recognisable as a ship, although she has evolved into flat-pack wreckage.

Get your eye in and you can start identifying deck fittings from the jumble of metal. Obvious objects include various pairs of bollards, the mast, a large winch and a boiler, complete with a resident curious conger eel (*Kyarra* had four boilers). Some objects are less obvious—random bits of the engine mechanism, a capstan and the propeller shaft.

### Memorial

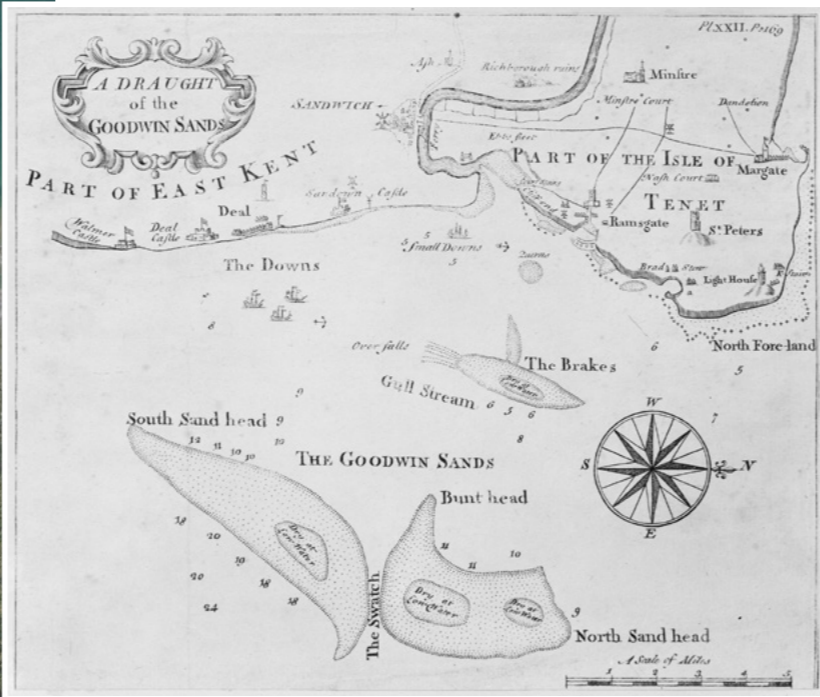
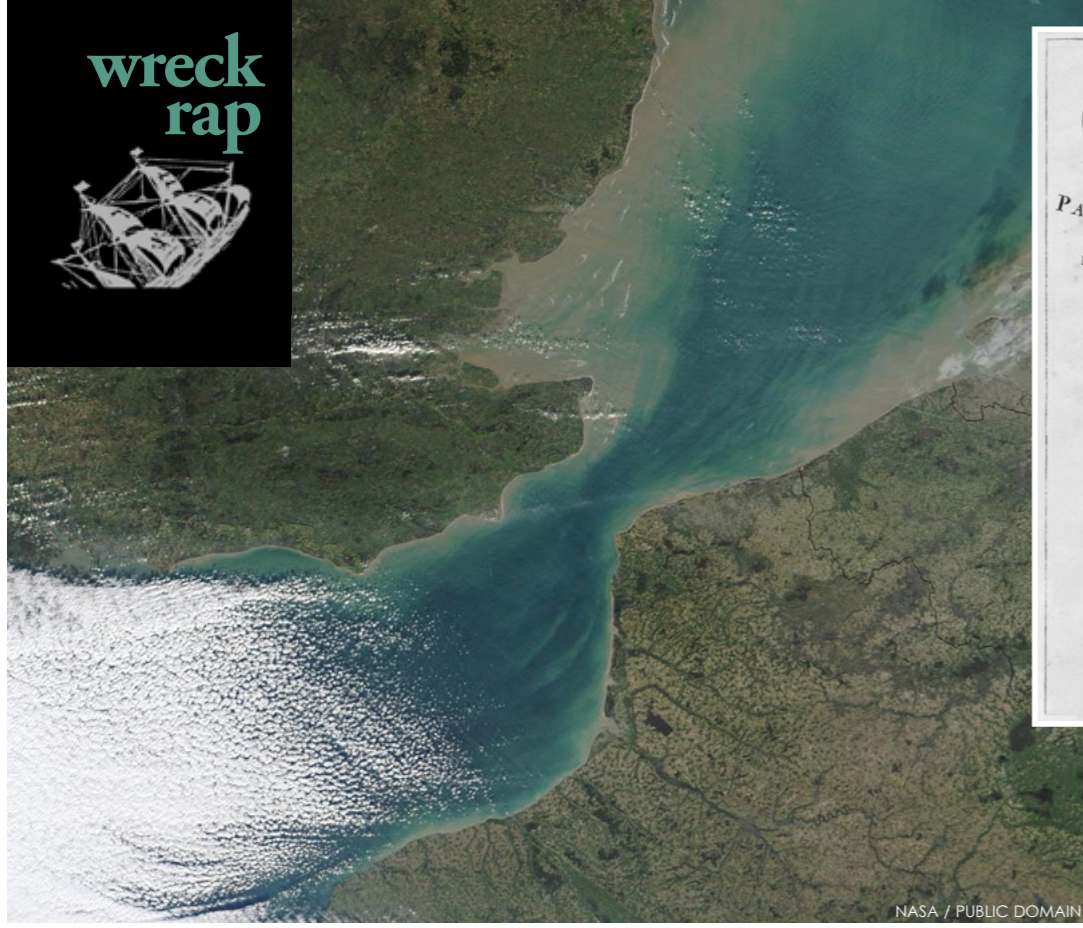
A pair of divers pass us, mission-focused, heading for the boiler. Today, Divers Down (the oldest dive school in the United Kingdom) has teamed up with the Isle of Purbeck Sub Aqua Club (IPSAC) to lay a wreath on the wreck. Nick

Reed (Training Officer) and Chris Dunkerly (Chairman) of IPSAC will place the wreath to commemorate the six men killed a century ago today.

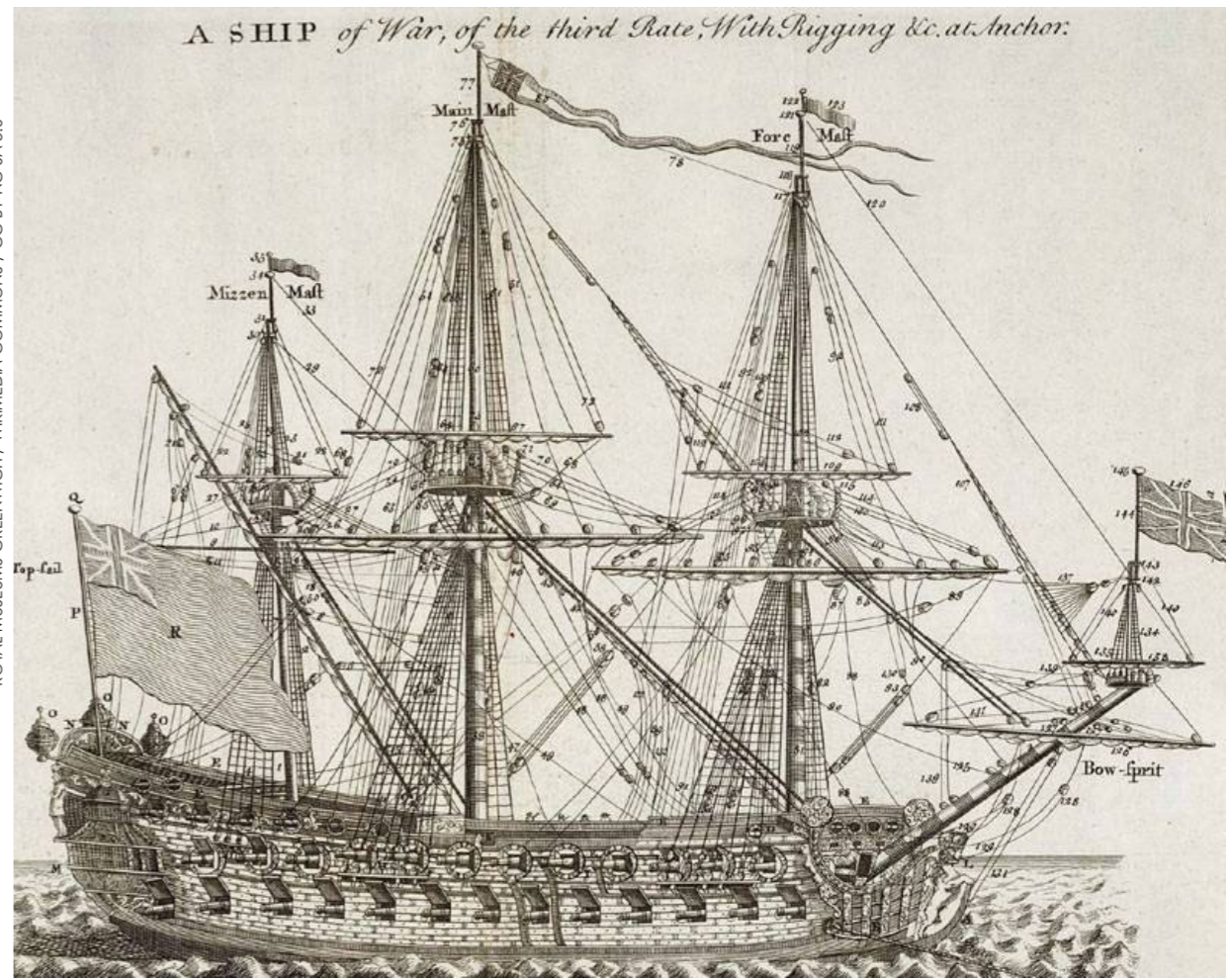
Pat Collins, co-owner of Divers Down and secretary to the Friends of Swanage Pier, said: "The *Kyarra* is one of the most iconic wrecks on the south coast. Divers use our boats to visit the wreck throughout the summer and we felt it was important to mark the 100th anniversary of her sinking by remembering the six men who died on that May morning in 1918. The *Kyarra* can only be dived at certain states of the tides due to the fast currents so we are lucky that we will be able to dive the wreck within an hour of the actual sinking time.

"The commemoration is even more special as this year we celebrate 60 years of Divers Down. Our friends in the Isle of Purbeck Sub Aqua Club are also celebrat-





The Goodwin Sands (left) are one of the most important marine archaeological areas around England; Printed chart from 1750 of the Goodwin Sands (above); Historical illustration of a ship of the line (right)—or 17th-19th century warship—similar to the HMS *Restoration*



## Historic wreck sites in the English Channel face eradication as controversial dredging project gains approval

**The Goodwin Sands, a sandbank off the East Kent coast, have the highest density of historic wrecks designated under United Kingdom's Protection of Wrecks Act 1973.**

The Goodwin Sands are located approximately 13 miles from the Dover Straits—the narrow, historical and important sea route. Hence, it is quite possible that the considerable expanse of shifting sand has claimed at least 2,000 ships over the centuries. The first documented ship wrecked upon the Goodwin Sands dates from 1298. The Sands have the highest density of historic wrecks designated under the Protection of Wrecks Act 1973.

Designation is not given lightly; each wreck must be of national or international significance. A good example of this is the *Rooswijk*. This armed Dutch East Indiaman was found in 2004. She had been wrecked in a storm in January 1740 whilst carrying a large cargo of silver. All 250 crew and passengers perished.

The *Rooswijk* has been very carefully excavated by Historic England, the Cultural Heritage Agency of the Netherlands, and a team of Dutch and British underwater archaeologists. In January 2007, the UK government announced that it was going to designate the *Rooswijk* as a protected site.

Other significant designated historic wrecks include HMS *Stirling Castle*, HMS *Restoration*, HMS *Northumberland* and *The Admiral Gardner*.

### Souls lost

Ships are not the only victims of this hazard. Tens of thousands of mariners and scores of servicemen from both World Wars have lost their lives on the Goodwin Sands. In 1940 alone, research has shown that 60 planes and 80 aircrew from Britain, Poland and Germany perished in this area of the English Channel. Only one plane, a Dornier 17, has ever been recovered.

### Sand and gravel

The Goodwin Sands are solid at low tide; in fact, cricket matches have been played on the sandbank since 1824. But as the waters return, the Sands become sticky

and cloying quicksand. At high tide, the Sands are covered by just a few feet of water.

At first glance, harvesting the Goodwins for sand and gravel for construction seems a sensible solution because it is a conveniently-placed, low-cost sand supply, ripe for exploitation. On 19 January 2016, *The Guardian* reported that Dover Harbour Board "was considering dredging for sand and gravel from Goodwin Sands", to expand cargo facilities and build a marina at Dover Port.

Following a two-year public consultation, the Marine Management Organisation (MMO) granted Dover Harbour Board (DHB) a licence to dredge three million tonnes of aggregate

from the Goodwin Sands on 26 July 2018. DHB proposes to extract a maximum of 3,000,000 dry tonnes of sand and gravel aggregate over a period of two years, using a trailer-suction-hopper dredge.

### Strong voices say, "No!"

In August 2017, Jane Maddocks, Wrecks and Underwater Cultural Heritage Adviser to the British Sub Aqua Club, stated:

"As the governing body for the sport of sub aqua diving and snorkelling in the United Kingdom, we feel that part of our role is to support the protection of our underwater cultural heritage (UCH) whenever we feel it may be threatened. The dredging proposals for the Goodwin Sands concern us."

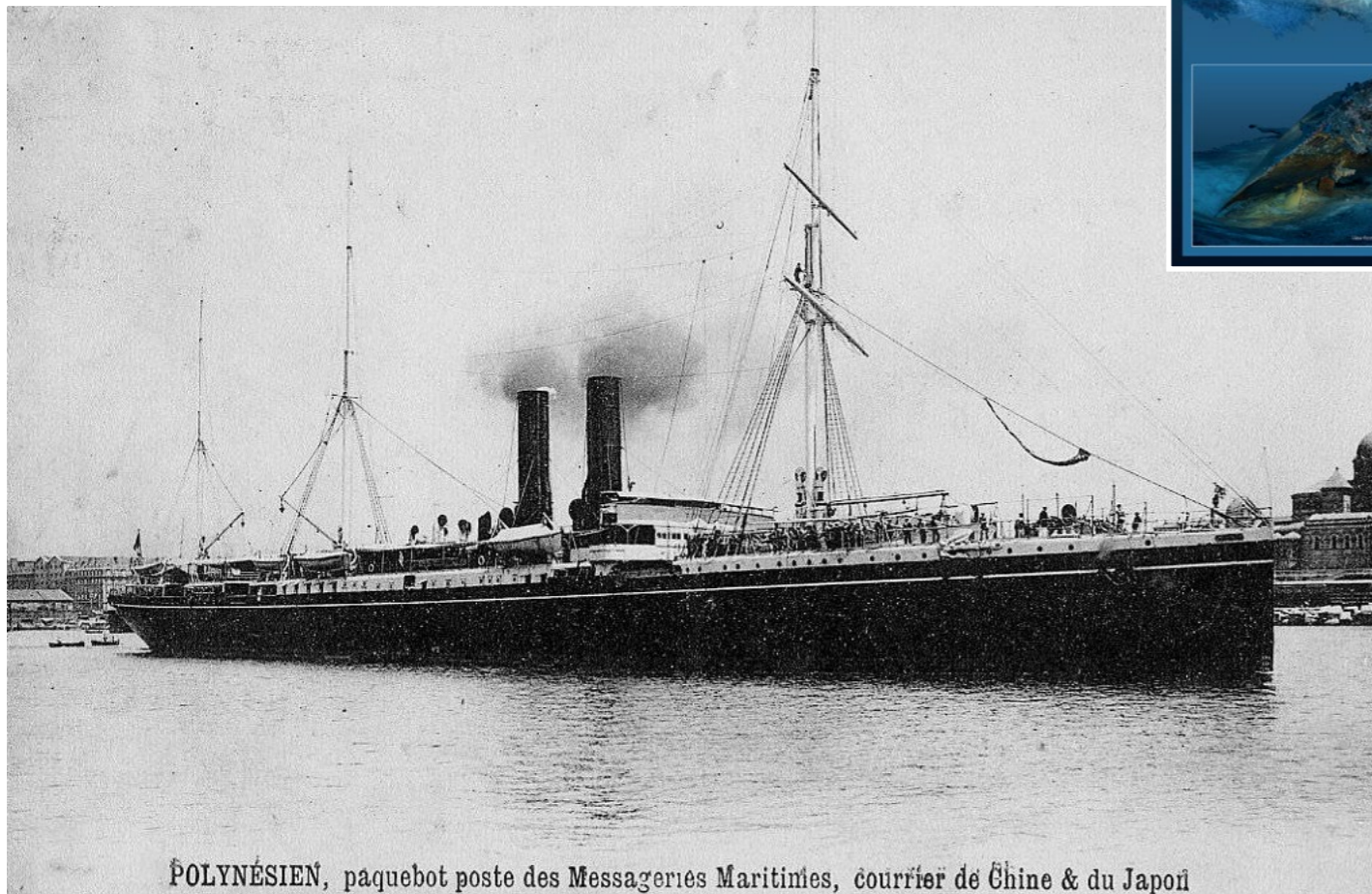
The Prince of Wales Sea Training School in Dover also voiced its concern about harvesting the Goodwin Sands to use as building materials: "For the thousands of seafarers and WWII airmen who lost their lives on these sands, the Goodwin Sands, through the timeline of our nation's seafaring history, 'is a known grave;' the evidence is overwhelming, as the charts and our history show, so let the sands become their memorial."

On 27 September 2017, Historic England—the government's statutory adviser on all matters relating to the historic environment in England—wrote to the MMO and said, "We recommend that you do not issue a marine licence for this proposed project (Goodwin Sands aggregate dredging project)." ■





A centenary should always be acknowledged and marked. Maltaqua, Marcus Blatchford and Steve Jakeway have therefore collaborated to create two limited edition fine art prints, and a full colour poster showing detailed 3D images of the wreck of SS *Le Polynésien*.



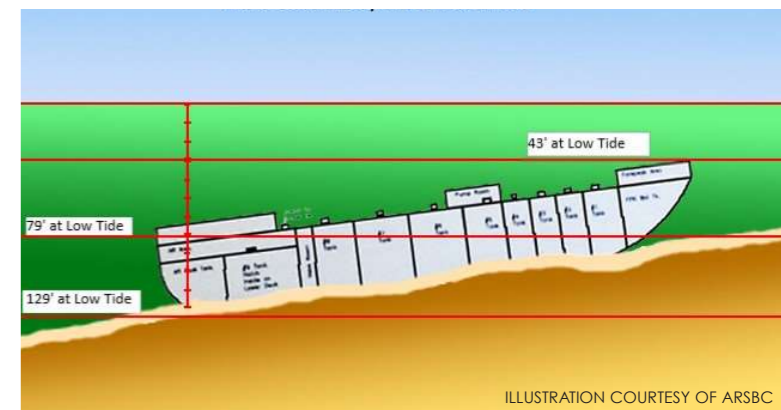
Built in 1890, SS *Polynésien* was a French passenger ship that served on the France-Australia line. She was sunk on 10 August 1918 in the Mediterranean Sea, seven nautical miles (13km or 8.1mi) off Valletta, Malta, and sent to a watery grave by a torpedo launched by the German U-boat SM UC-22, captained by Eberhard Weichold. In 15 patrols, UC-22 was credited with sinking 23 ships, either by torpedo or by mines laid. UC-22 was surrendered to France on 3 February 1919, and was broken up at Landerneau in July 1921.

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## British Columbia gets another artificial reef as ARSBC sinks YOGN 82

The Artificial Reef Society of British Columbia, Canada, partnered with local manufacturer Catalyst Paper to clean and sink the YOGN-82, a US Navy barge from WWII, creating a new artificial reef and dive attraction off the coast of Powell River.

Made of cast reinforced concrete, the vessel—which was built in 1943 by Concrete Ship Builders in National City, California—measures 112m long and weighs 4,400 tons. To clean and sink YOGN-82, Catalyst Paper contributed CA\$500,000.



Placement depth of YOGN-82

down . . . She is on the bottom, fully intact and sitting upright."

Over the next five years, three more ships will be reefed, including *Emile N. Vidal*, *Quartz* and *SS Peralta*. Reached only via watercraft, these giant ships will be placed in a group formation at different depths from around 25 to 35m, within easy scuba swimming distance from one another.

■ SOURCE: ARSBC

ARSBC Vice President, Rick Wall, said the sink went as planned: "It took 11 minutes to sink and go

# SS Le Polynésien sank 100 years ago

One hundred years ago—on 10 August 1918—Captain Eberhard Weichold ordered the crew of SM UC-11 (a minelaying submarine) to torpedo the *Polynésien*. The 152m (498ft) French steam- and sail-powered passenger liner was hit on the port side near the engine room and sunk within 20 minutes. A number of reports state that 11 crew members and six passengers died.

One century on, and this massive wreck now lists to port, in an area where salvage is illegal. The *Polynésien* is still very much intact and in great condition. She is deep enough to miss most storm surges; hence, it is possible to see exactly what is actually happening as the structure degrades.

### "Plate ship"

Locally known as the plate ship due to the number of ceramic

plates visible on the wreck itself, this wreck is very much intact and easy to penetrate. However, not every diver will be able to visit this beautiful wreck—she is a technical dive because she lies at 43 to 65m (141 to 213ft).

### Poster and models

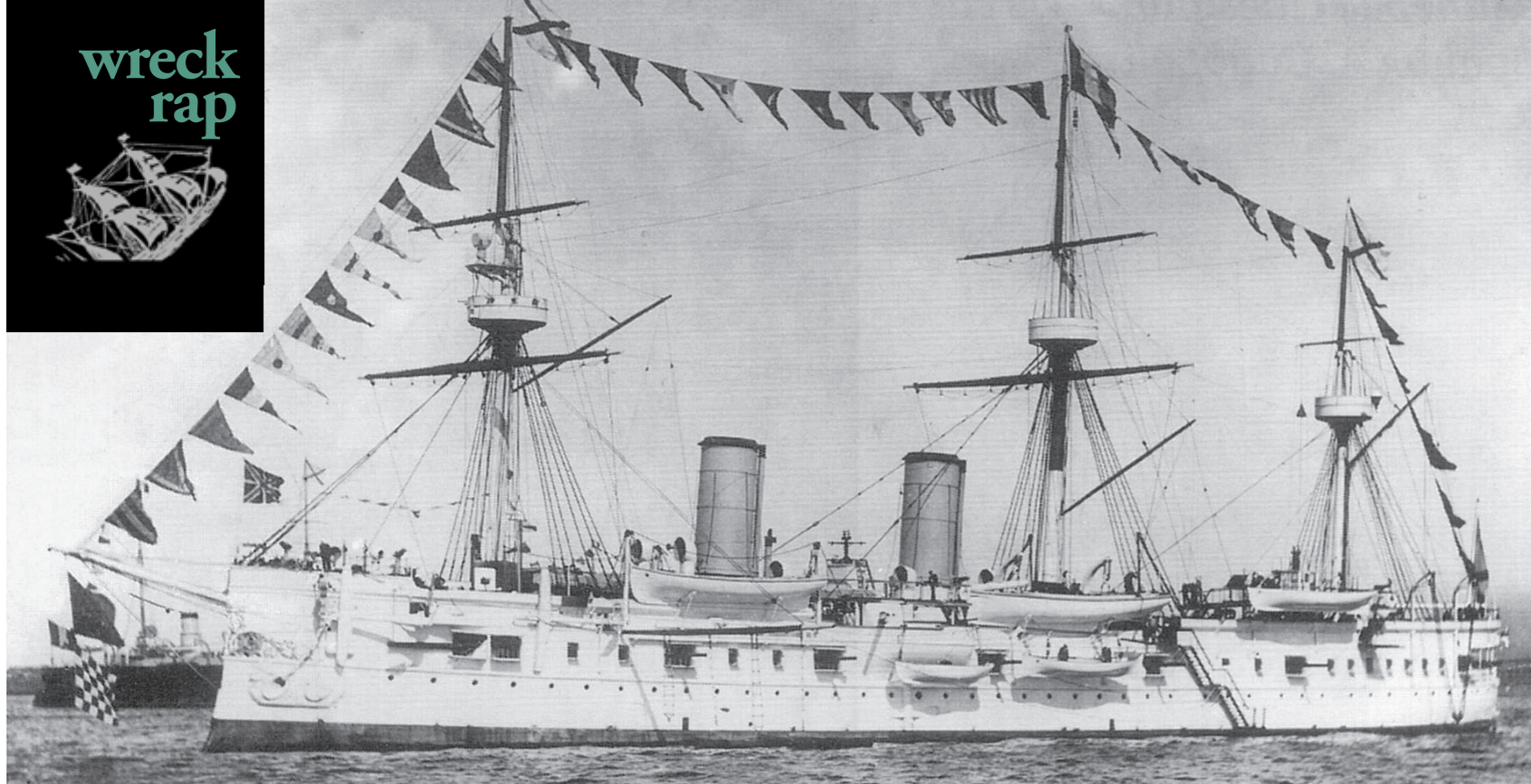
Marcus Blatchford, a British underwater photographer, has been using photogrammetry to document a number of Maltese

wrecks, including the MV *Rozi*, Schnellboot S-31, HMS *Hellespont* and the bow section of HMS *Southwold*. The most interesting Maltese wreck however is the mighty SS *Le Polynésien*, and Blatchford has been involved with a project to record this wreck in high definition 3D (if you click on this [link](#) you will see four models: the stern gun, the anchor windlass and two models of the complete wreck). ■



WWII-era US Navy barge YOGN-82 being sunk off the coast of Powell River, BC

PHOTO COURTESY OF ARSBC



Discovered by an international team comprising British, Canadian and South Korean experts, the Russian Imperial Navy cruiser *Dmitrii Donskoi* was found about a mile off the South Korean island of Ulleungdo.

# Mystery surrounds wreck of Russian warship found off South Korea

Police in Seoul have raided the offices of a South Korean company, which declared it had found billions of dollars worth of gold aboard the sunken Russian warship and is now investigating the case as a potential fraud linked to a new cryptocurrency.

South Korean police also requested an international arrest warrant for the founder of a Singapore-based firm after launching an investigation into the Korea-based Shinil Group over false claims regarding the long-lost Russian "treasure ship".

The Shinil Group announced in July that it had discovered the wreck of the *Dmitrii Donskoi*, and that 200 tons of gold in bullion and coins worth US\$133 billion were likely still aboard.

The ship was damaged in 1905 during the Battle of Tsushima in the Russo-Japanese War, and a decision was made

to scuttle the vessel. The fact the *Dmitrii Donskoi* was deliberately sunk fuelled speculation that it was carrying gold. But the sinking of damaged warships by their own crew was and still is a common practice to prevent them and their secrets from falling into enemy hands.

The Shinil Group stated they intended to raise the wreck in October or November. It agreed to hand over half the gold to the Russian government, (which Russia is entitled to anyway!) with some ten percent to be spent on tourism projects on Ulleungdo Island and development in northeast Asia. Another ten per cent would be invest-

ed in a new cryptocurrency system that it would be establishing.

However, 200 tons of gold is nowhere near worth the reported US\$133 billion but less than US\$8 billion (gold price as of 22 Aug is US\$ \$38.41 per gram).

The Korea Herald reported Shinil Group has denied it has any ties to the cryptocurrency outfit, though it was apparently advertising the cryptocurrency on its website. Shinil has since shut down its own website and the Shinil Gold Coin cryptocurrency project has also vanished. ■

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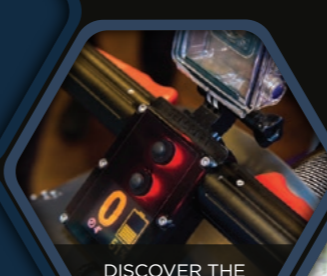


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