

# **HMT APLEY - a forgotten wreck of WW1**

## **Project Report**

**Peter Draper - July 2024**

*Supported by the British Sub Aqua Jubilee Trust*



**Leamington & Warwick Sub Aqua Club  
BSAC Branch 217**



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## 1. Background to Project

The background to this project is my interest in my family's history, which I have researched for many years. During the course of this research, I discovered that my 3<sup>rd</sup> cousin, Frederick James Bloxham Walker, had died in WW1. Frederick died, aged just 24, leaving behind his new wife, Grace, and an 8 month old daughter, also Grace.

Further research revealed that he had died at sea aboard HMT Apley on 6<sup>th</sup> December 1917, where he was serving as a member of the Royal Naval Reserve as a Wireless Telegraphist, and that the ship that he had been lost on had struck a mine not far from the Isle of Wight with the loss of 11 of the crew of 17, whose bodies were never recovered.

I discovered that HMT Apley was marked on the charts, lying to the east of the Needles off the Isle of Wight in a charted depth of around 34m. Already a keen diver I pondered at the time whether I would maybe one day be able to dive this wreck, the resting place of this distant relative.

Some years later, with this project, the notion became a reality, and I would lead the expedition to dive the forgotten wreck of HMT Apley.

Name <i>Walker Fredk James B</i>		Rank <i>WT O I R N R</i>		Case No. <i>R.N. 2941</i>																					
Ship <i>H.M.S. "Victory"</i>		Regimental No. <i>196 WTS</i>		W.I.																					
S.A. cards Form 104-88 received <i>21.12.17</i>		Date of notification of death <i>6.12.17</i>		Form 104-76 received <i>5.1.18</i>																					
Date and cause of death <i>6.12.17 Killed when ship in which he was serving was sunk.</i>																									
Widow <i>Grace Travis 57 Edmond Rd</i>		Date of birth <i>18.8.93</i>																							
Children:— <table border="1"> <thead> <tr> <th>Name</th> <th>Date of birth</th> <th>Date of expiry</th> <th>Remarks</th> </tr> </thead> <tbody> <tr> <td><i>Grace Mary</i></td> <td><i>26.4.17</i></td> <td><i>26.4.33</i></td> <td><i>No. for whom S.A. is paid 1</i></td> </tr> <tr> <td></td> <td></td> <td></td> <td><i>J.C. instructed to issue arrears to the widow 22.7.18</i></td> </tr> <tr> <td></td> <td></td> <td></td> <td></td> </tr> <tr> <td></td> <td></td> <td></td> <td></td> </tr> </tbody> </table>						Name	Date of birth	Date of expiry	Remarks	<i>Grace Mary</i>	<i>26.4.17</i>	<i>26.4.33</i>	<i>No. for whom S.A. is paid 1</i>				<i>J.C. instructed to issue arrears to the widow 22.7.18</i>								
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			<i>J.C. instructed to issue arrears to the widow 22.7.18</i>																						
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Date awarded <i>14.6.18</i>		If refused, reason																							
Papers																									
(9 33 108) W30343-566 25,000 9/17 HWV(P1453) G15/251																									

Frederick James Bloxham Walker's WW1 Pension Card



## 2. Acknowledgements

Thanks are due to the following who assisted in preparing and running the expedition. This help included gathering information, helping with the organization, preparation and administration of the project, the diving and diving logistics and also the encouragement, invaluable advice and support I received from many.

Alison Mayor, BSAC NDC Heritage Advisor, Jane Maddocks, BSAC, Martin Davies, BSAC & Fellow of the Nautical Archaeology Society, Dave Wendes, owner of Wight Spirit Charters and our skipper, Andy Goddard, Andark Diving Services.

From Leamington & Warwick Sub Aqua Club, BSAC 217, the dive team of Andy Hay, Helen Hay, Sean McGarr, Steve Brinkworth, Tom Sharpe, Caroline Hay, Andrew Briggs, Shannon Roberts, Norman Barnes, Dave Evans and Steve Dover. Also, from LWSAC Gim Ng for her administrative support and special thanks to Steve Dover who, as well as being a member of the dive team, wrote the piece for the Scuba Magazine.

References have been used from the following sources:

- Forgotten Wrecks of The First World War     Maritime Archaeology Trust
- Dive Wight and Hampshire                     Martin Pritchard & Kendall McDonald
- The Hidden Threat                                     Jim Crossley

## 3. Legal Status

HMT Apley is not on the protected wrecks list.

## 4. Introduction

During the course of this project, I have looked in detail at the history of both HMT Apley and of the role of trawlers in World War 1.

This report includes not only a report on the wreck today and the expedition to dive her but also some history of the ship and her role in WW1. Section 8 gives some insight into the role of trawlers in the minesweeping role and Section 9 gives the history of HMT Apley whilst Section 10 covers her loss.

*continued.....*

Preparation for the expedition, diving activities and the wreck today are covered in Sections 11, 12 & 13 respectively and the expedition achievements are covered in Section 15.

## 5. Aims and Objectives

### Aims

The primary aims of this project were to;

- Locate & dive the wreck at 50°37,02'N 00°56,09W
- To conduct a basic survey of the wreck and attempt to verify her identity as HMT Apley.
- Publicise the results of the project to promote recreational diving in the UK and to promote the activities of both the local branch, Leamington & Warwick Sub-Aqua Club and the national organisation, BSAC.

### Objectives

The project objectives could be listed in 3 categories, those of the project itself, those of Leamington & Warwick Sub-Aqua Club for the benefit of its membership and, through an outreach programme, to promote UK scuba diving to a wider audience.

### Project objectives

- To locate specific features of the wreck to confirm the wreck's identity;
- To measure the extent of the wreck, including position, orientation and overall size of the wreck site.
- To record marine life on the wreck.
- To make a photographic record of the remains.
- To find, record & photograph any artefacts.
- To make a drawing of the wreck site.
- To produce an article for 'Scuba' magazine.
- To engage with local press to publicise the club's achievements and promote the club.
- To update publicly accessible wreck databases with accurate and contemporary facts regarding the wreck and wreck site.

### Branch objectives

- To provide an opportunity to work together as a branch and "dive with a purpose" with a rewarding outcome.

*continued.....*



- To practise and improve diving skills and survey techniques at an individual and team level.
- To use this project as the basis for additional diver training.
- To publicise the results of our work as widely as possible to raise awareness of recreational diving opportunities through BSAC clubs.

### Outreach objectives

- To publicise the results of our work as widely as possible.
- To raise awareness of recreational diving opportunities in the UK generally, especially in our region in the Midlands, where many may not consider diving to be achievable.

## 6. Plans and Approach

The project was developed over several months and involved various elements which are detailed, together with their outcomes;

### Project Plan

- **Establish the feasibility of the Project overall in terms of resources and site location.**  
The wreck site was identified as being suitable for diving and a hard boat charter operator, Wight Spirit Charters, was engaged to undertake the charter.
- **Confirm interest within the Club and support from the Committee.**  
A paper promoting the project was circulated to all members of the Leamington & Warwick Sub-Aqua Club and 11 divers, in addition to the project leader, signed on to take part. The DO was presented with a paper on the project for sign off which was granted.
- **Consult /research best practice and guidance for running a similar project.**  
Alison Mayor, Heritage Advisor on the BSAC NDC, was approached for advice on running such a project and provided advice, support and encouragement.
- **Identify possible sources of funding and support (BSAC Jubilee Trust or alternative options).**  
Partial funding for the expedition was secured from the BSAC Jubilee Trust and the remaining funding secured from the dive team members.

*continued.....*



- **Project Management and Planning.**

A team was established within the membership of Leamington & Warwick Sub Aqua Club and detailed plans covering all aspects of the Project were worked up.

- **Identify additional training requirements.**

Training dives were undertaken at Stoney Cove in June 2024 with team members practicing techniques that would be required for the wreck survey. Additional equipment necessary to execute the plan (surveyors' tapes & slates) were acquired.

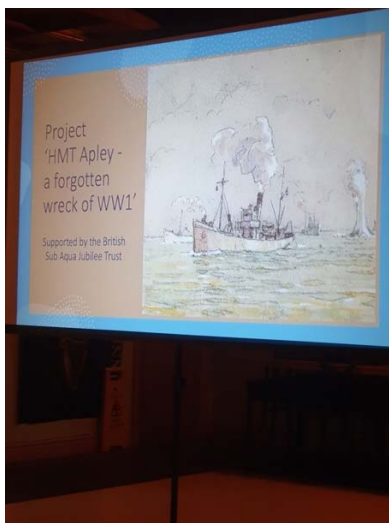


*Members of Leamington & Warwick SAC training for the expedition at Stoney Cove in June 2024 .*

- **Communication and Outreach.**

A presentation on the Project and the wider role of minesweepers in WW1 against the context of naval warfare at the time was given to members of local BSAC clubs by me on 22<sup>nd</sup> April 2024. Local media were contacted and resulted in articles appearing in the local press and I was interviewed live on the local BBC Radio station breakfast programme on 21<sup>st</sup> June 2024. A detailed account of the Project appeared in the October issue of *Scuba* magazine.

Full details of media coverage are included in Section 11.



*Members of Leamington & Warwick SAC attending a presentation by Peter Draper on the HMT Apley Project in June 2024.*

- **Health and Safety considerations.**

A Diving Risk Assessment was prepared in accordance with BSAC guidance. All diving was conducted in accordance with BSAC 'Safe Diving Practises' and completed without incident.

- **Financial estimate for the project.**

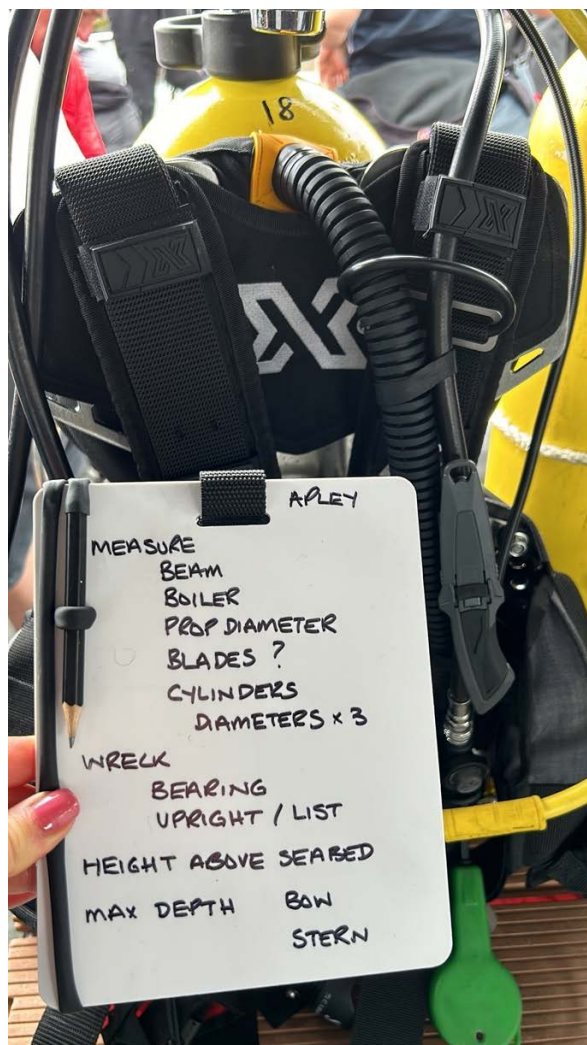
A financial estimate for the project was prepared. See Section 17 for the Financial Report.

- **Prepare applications for funding.**

An application for a grant from the Jubilee Trust was prepared and was successful.

## Diving Plan

- Diving would take place over the weekend of June 29<sup>th</sup> -30<sup>th</sup> 2024. It was planned to undertake warm up dives on Saturday 29<sup>th</sup> June and slack water allowed for one dive on HMT Apley on Sunday 30<sup>th</sup> June.
- A list of primary dive objectives was established. These were:
  - ◆ Measure the beam, boiler diameter, propeller diameter, cylinder heads.
  - ◆ Note number of propeller blades.
  - ◆ Record max height above seabed, max depth at bow/stern.
  - ◆ Record marine life present and take still photographs and video footage.
  - ◆ Record attitude of wreck.

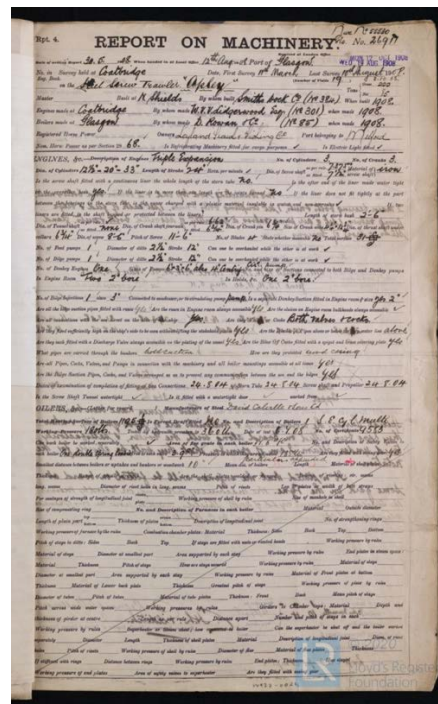
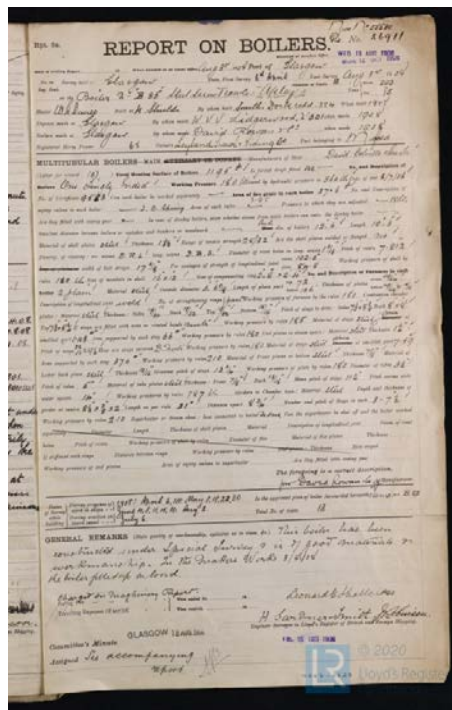
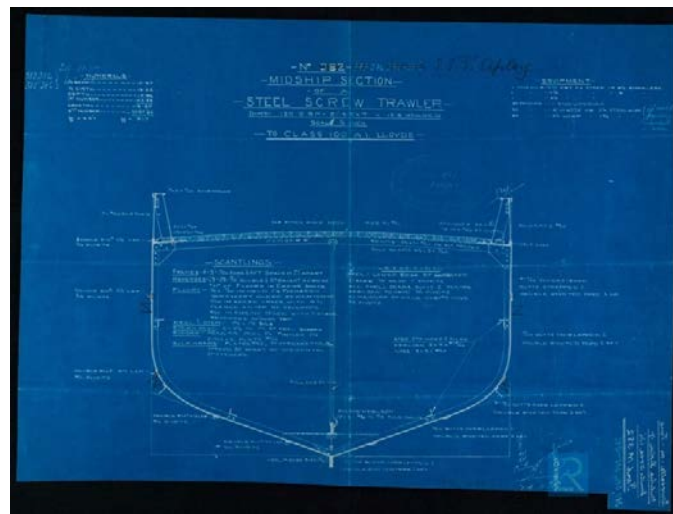


All dive team members were provided with a slate outlining the primary objectives of the expedition.



Significant levels of detail of the construction of the trawler 'Apley', together with comprehensive detail of her machinery, had been garnered from copies of original documents in the records held at Lloyds Register of Ships. This enabled us to produce a set of criteria against which our findings could be compared to aid identification of the wreck, marked on the charts as HMT Apley.

Amongst information contained in these documents is the size of the boiler at 12'6" x 10'3" and the diameter of the cylinders of the triple expansion engine, at 12.5", 20" & 33". We also knew that her beam was 21'6" and that she had a four bladed propeller with a diameter of 8'6".



Some of the documents obtained from Lloyds Register.

## Post Diving Plan - Data Evaluation and Reporting

- Using data from the dives we have been able to confirm with a high degree of confidence that the wreck is that of HMT Apley. We have also been able to produce a basic drawing of the wreck as she is today and to prepare a contemporary account of the condition and orientation of the wreck and to confirm her exact location. See Section 14.
- We have a collection of photographs and video of the wreck.
- We have updated public records, including Wrecksite.Eu ([www.wrecksite.eu](http://www.wrecksite.eu)) and fed our findings back to the Maritime Archeology Trust with a contemporary report on the wreck.
- We have recorded the marine life observed on the site.

## 7. People Involved

The project has involved people from the Leamington & Warwick BSAC club, with 12 divers diving the wreck, together with support from people from BSAC HQ and other BSAC clubs.

These include:

Peter Draper	Expedition Leader & Dive Team	Leamington & Warwick BSAC
Andy Hay	Dive Team	Leamington & Warwick BSAC
Helen Hay	Dive Team	Leamington & Warwick BSAC
Steve Dover	Dive Team	Leamington & Warwick BSAC
Sean McGarr	Dive Team	Leamington & Warwick BSAC
Steve Brinkworth	Dive Team	Leamington & Warwick BSAC
Andrew Briggs	Dive Team	Leamington & Warwick BSAC
Caroline Hay	Dive Team	Leamington & Warwick BSAC
Shannon Roberts	Dive Team	Leamington & Warwick BSAC
Tom Sharpe	Dive Team	Leamington & Warwick BSAC
Norman Barnes	Dive Team	Leamington & Warwick BSAC
Dave Evans	Dive Team	Leamington & Warwick BSAC
Gim Ng	Logistical Support	Leamington & Warwick BSAC
Alison Mayor	Advisor	BSAC Jubilee Trust & Southsea BSAC
Martin Davies	Advisor	NAS & Southsea BSAC

## 8. Trawlers & the Royal Naval Reserve in WW1

When the Royal Naval Reserve (RNR) was first created in 1859 it consisted of up to 30,000 merchant seamen and fisherman who the Navy could call on in times of crisis.

Fishing trawlers were strong, sturdy ships designed to withstand severe weather conditions out at sea, and in 1907 the Commander-in-Chief of the Home Fleet, Admiral Lord Beresford, recognised that trawlers could be used as minesweepers. His recommendation led to the formation of the Royal Naval Reserve (Trawler Section) in 1910, with approval to mobilise 100 trawlers during any crisis period and enrol 1,000 men to man them.

Before the war started there were already 142 trawlers in the Trawler Section of the RNR and 109 skippers enrolled. During the first week of the war in 1914, 94 trawlers were allocated for minesweeping duties, commanded by naval officers who had had a brief training in minesweeping. By the end of 1915 the Minesweeping Service employed 7,888 officers and men.

In August 1914 the Royal Navy began to requisition more trawlers and adapt them for minesweeping duties, fitting them out with heavy guns, machine guns and depth charges. By the end of 1916 the Navy had requisitioned so many trawlers, and the war had such an impact on shipping, that the supply of fish to the UK was severely limited. New trawlers were also built. Between 1914 and 1918, 371 trawlers were built in the Humber shipyards and almost all of them were taken up by the Navy and used as minesweepers, submarine spotters and coastal patrol boats.

## 9. The story of HMT Apley

Official No: 127417 she was a steel side trawler; steam screw, coal burning. Ketch rigged: foresail, mainsail and mizzen with a crew of 9 men. She was registered at Milford in Wales on 16 Oct 1908.

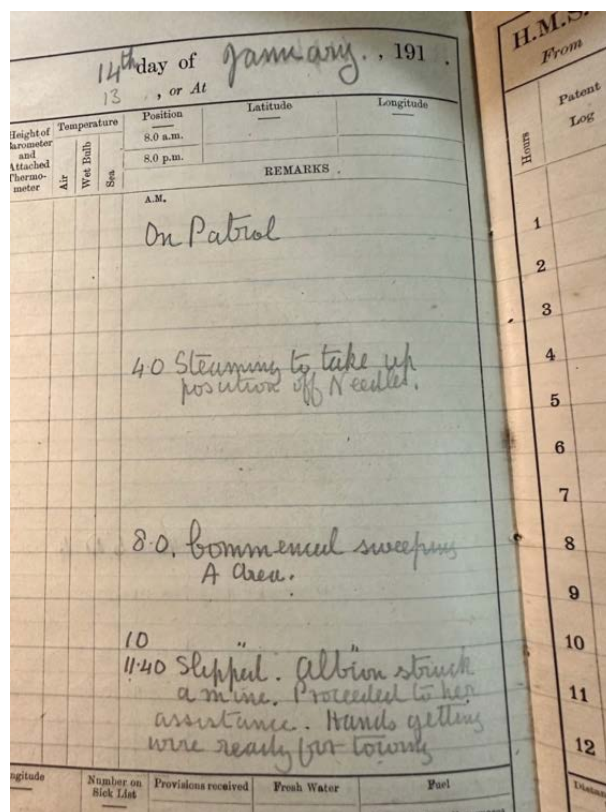
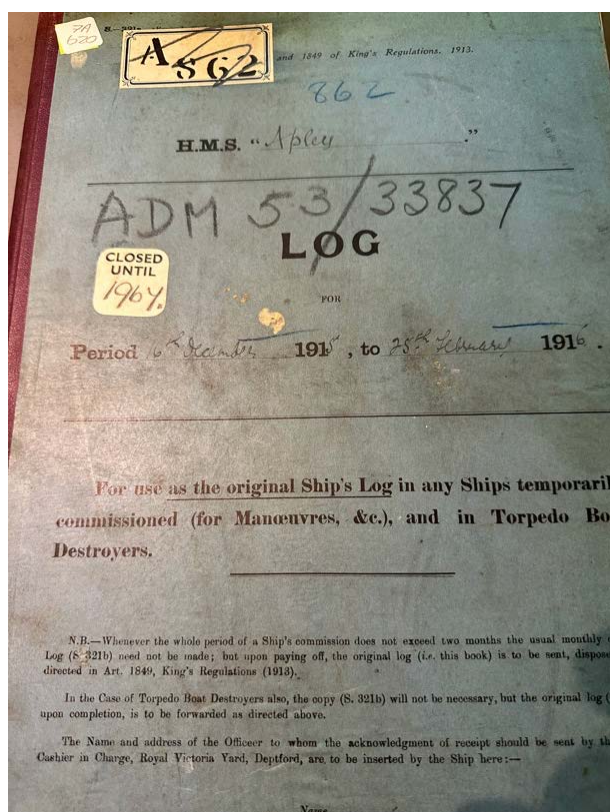
She was built in 1908 by Smith's Dock Co., N. Shields. (Yard no.384) and had a tonnage of 221.88 gross, 84.85 net. She measured (length / breadth / depth in feet): 120.5 / 21.6 / 11.6 and she was fitted with a 3-cyl. 68 hp. Steam engine 1908, by W.V.V. Lidgerwood, Coatbridge, Glasgow.

*continued.....*

The boiler was by David Rowan & Co., Glasgow. She had a top speed of 10 knots.

She was owned by the Neyland Steam Trawling & Fishing Co., Neyland, Pembroke whose chairman was Sir Charles Phillips of Picton Castle. The Apley operated out of Neyland from 1908 until 1914. In August 1914 she was requisitioned by the Admiralty and converted to a minesweeper, fitted with a 3-pounder gun.

On my first visit to the National Archives in Kew I was able to look at two surviving ships logs for HMT Apley which painted a picture of their mine sweeping duties; long days of routine work keeping the War Channels clear of mines when a lost bucket overboard might be the highlight of the log entries, interspersed by moments of high tension with a mine caught in the sweep and the occasion when HMT Albion struck a mine and was lost, thankfully without loss of life.



Copies of entries in HMT Apley's logs from the National Archives



Number on Sick List	Provisions received		Fresh Water		Fuel	
	lbs.	Tons	Received	Expended for all purposes	Tons	
Noon	Fresh Meat		Distilled	Coal	Oil	
	Vegetables		Expended	Coal	Tons	
	Bread		Remaining	Oil		
P.M.						
0/30 "Albion" sunk						
1.15. Resumed sweeping mine area.						
4.0 Slipped Dolphin Bank. Rec'd orders to proceed Sandown for night						
8.0 ⚓ Sandown Bay.						

SICK LIST	lbs.	Tons	Expended for all purposes	
			Coal	Oil
Fresh Meat		Received	Remaining	
Vegetables		Distilled	Tons	
Bread		Expended		
		Remaining		
P.M.				
1.10 Commenced to sweep Mine by gun fire				
2.45. Ceased fire mine invisible expended 24 Hotchkiss & 20 rounds of Mark VII rifle ammunition gun was fired 3 times Breach kept closed for 15 minutes Cartridge had been struck. Ordered to be thrown overboard.				
3.0. Resumed sweeping Mine Area				
5.0 Slipped on Dolphin Bank.				

Copies of entries in HMT Apley's logs from the National Archives

## 10. The Loss of HMT Apley

On the 6 Dec 1917 HMT Apley was carrying out mine clearance operations between the Isle of Wight and the Owers Lightship when she struck a mine that had been laid by UC-71 (Oberleutnant zur See Ernst Steindorff).

HMT Apley was blown up and 11 crew were lost, 10 of whom were Royal Naval Reservists and one, James Lancaster, from the Royal Naval Canadian Volunteer Reserve. 6 survivors were picked up by other trawlers involved in the sweep.

A second visit to The National Archives at Kew turned up the telegrams from the archive, 'Home Waters General Operations Telegrams' for the period December 4<sup>th</sup> to 6<sup>th</sup> 1917, indicating that there was a U-Boat in the area and mines had been spotted and the telegram of 6<sup>th</sup> December 1917 reporting the loss of the Apley.

S. 636 1

*Home Waters.*

*General Operation Telegrams.*

**1917.**

*December 4<sup>th</sup> to 6<sup>th</sup>*

330

**COPY OF TELEGRAM. IN**

From Culver. Date 5.12.17  
 To Admiralty. Sent 12.42am  
 Recd. 1.0am

2. From HUNSDON (begins)  
 Submarine reported 50.33. 00.33.west. (ends)  
 0004.  
 Portsmouth and Aberdeen informed.

D.C.2  
 D.I.D.  
 D.M.M.2  
 A.S.D.  
 F.M.A.  
 D.M.S.

*500*

for D.O.D.  
 5-DEC-1917

D.O.D.  
 5-DEC-1917

DUTY CAPTAIN

*54°E true  
 25 miles from Portsmouth*

DUTY CAPTAIN

A.M. D. 020017

441

**COPY OF TELEGRAM. IN**

N.O. Portsmouth Date 5.12.17  
 Admiralty. Sent --  
 Recd. 10.53 pm

259 Three floating mines reported about 10.30  
 in 50.36 N. 1.0 W. (ends) 1240.

DMS  
 DC 2.

*for D.O.D.  
 5-DEC-1917*

*E 15  
 7 miles  
 from base  
 (P. 14)*

D.O.D.  
 5-DEC-1917

**COPY OF TELEGRAM. IN**

Admiral Portsmouth. Date 5.12.17.  
 Admiralty. Sent  
 Recd. 5.21. pm.

Area 2 miles round latitude 50 36 N. longitude 1 0 W  
 is dangerous on account of mines request Q message.  
 H.M.S. CLANG is Senior Officer's ship  
 (1514)  
 of Devonport escort for H.M.S. 27 also for G.D. 32.  
 Sent to Admiralty 14 17 20 31 07.

(1512)

D.C.2  
 D.M.M.2  
 D.M.S.

*for D.O.D.  
 5-DEC-1917*

D.O.D.  
 5-DEC-1917

Copies of Admiralty telegrams from the National Archives reporting mines in the area where HMT Apley was lost.





No official enquiry into the loss was requested as it was found that the Apley and her crew had been acting in accordance with all procedures and orders.

Those that died were:

- *William Walter Berryman, Deckhand*
- *Ernest Alfred Constant, Deckhand*
- *Alexander S Crawford, Deckhand*
- *Edward Haddican, Skipper*
- *Charles Benjamin Lake, Second Hand*
- *James Lancaster, Ordinary Seaman*
- *James Mather, Trimmer*
- *Frederick William Moody, Lieutenant RNR*
- *William Walter Payne, Engineman*
- *Frederick James Bloxham Walker, Wireless Telegraph Operator*
- *John Watson, Trimmer*

The survivors were:

- *John Johnston, 2<sup>nd</sup> Engineer*
- *Richard C Jenkinson, Deckhand*
- *Valentine Ritchie, Seaman*
- *Frank Neighbour, Signals Boy*
- *John Hill, Deckhand*
- *Harry Blight, Ordinary Telegraphist*



*The inscription on the Plymouth Naval Memorial to W T Operator F.J.B.Walker*

## 11. Promotion & Publicity

### Pre-expedition Publicity

Local media outlets were notified of the expedition and, as a result, articles appeared in the local press in both their digital and printed media.

On the 5<sup>th</sup> of June 2024 Warwickshire World featured a digital article about the project. Extracts of which are shown below.

People

## Leamington diver to lead expedition to wreck of First World War ship on which his distant relative died

---

**A Leamington diver will lead an expedition to the wreck of a First World War ship on which his distant relative died.**

---

Peter Draper and a group of 11 other members of the Leamington & Warwick Sub-Aqua Club are heading to Gosport at the end of June where they will dive 30-metres down to the seabed off the Isle of Wight to the wreck of the minesweeping trawler HMT Apley.

The Apley was lost on December 6, 1917, when she struck a mine laid by a German U-boat.

The expedition, funded by the British Sub Aqua Jubilee Trust, will attempt to confirm that it is indeed the Apley and provide a contemporary description of the wreck today.

The findings from this expedition will be fed back to the Maritime Archaeology Trust whose Heritage Lottery Fund supported project, 'The Forgotten Wrecks of the First World War', has produced an accessible database that provides information regarding these shipwrecks.

The findings from the Leamington club's expedition will be used to update this database.

*continued.....*



On the 10<sup>th</sup> of June 2024 the Leamington Observer carried a similar article about the expedition in both digital and print format.

On the 21<sup>st</sup> of June 2024 I was interviewed live on the BBC CWR (Coventry Warwickshire Radio) Breakfast Show. In the introduction to the interview the show's host said; "Peter is from the Leamington & Warwick Sub Aqua Club, who knew there was such a thing in Leamington and Warwick?"

The answer - a lot more people by the time the radio interview had finished some 8 minutes later!

continued.....

## Post Expedition Publicity

On 14<sup>th</sup> of November 2024 an extensive article, penned by expedition team member Steve Dover, was published in the December 2024 issue of *Scuba* magazine.



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Meet Torbay BSAC, the Devon club with its own hardboat

**BSAC**  
Conference  
full report





# Never Forgotten: The Apley Project

**Steve Dover** reports on Leamington & Warwick BSAC's expedition to locate, dive and identify a Navy Trawler sunk by a WW1 mine off the Isle of Wight



**At 9am on 6 December 1917, a telegram from Admiral at Portsmouth to The Admiralty read:**

*Regret to report that Trawler No. 143 APLEY was blown up by a German mine this morning Thursday in position Lat 50.36 N Long 0.55 and a half West. List of casualties will be reported later. Request a wireless Mine Sweeping Trawler be sent to replace APLEY with an Officer trained in Mine Sweeping in Command.*

As with so many of these communications it is purely factual, almost completely bereft of emotion and seeking to plug a gap in defences caused by the loss of a ship. After enduring three years of the savage 'War to end all Wars' we can only imagine how the loss of lives had numbed the minds of those closest to the action. There was simply no time to dwell on the human loss. Just an imperative to keep fighting and defending. Six men survived, but 11 lives were lost.

## Relatives and research

On board His Majesty's Trawler (HMT) Apley was Royal Naval Reservist (RNR) Frederick James Bloxham Walker, the ship's wireless telegraphist. He was the 3rd cousin of one of our divers – Peter Draper. As well as a keen BSAC diver, Peter has a passion for researching his ancestry and it was while following one thread of the family histories, with the cause of death stated as: "Killed when ship in which he was serving was sunk". The date on the certificate was 6 December 1917.

In that moment of realisation, the seed of the Apley Project was sown in Peter's mind. Perhaps he could find the wreck of the ship, and perhaps it was at a depth that could be dived? With the help of his BSAC club and its members, he could resurrect the story of the Apley, his third cousin and the others who were lost in a spirit of remembrance.

Additional trips by Peter to the National Archives at Kew surfaced a wealthy seam of interrelated information. This included some entries in HMT Apley's log factually recording arduous sweeping duties; the odd order received from Portsmouth Admiralty and a single line, "Albion sunk", recording the loss of another trawler in the flotilla that swept the busy shipping lanes between the Owers Lightship and the Isle of Wight.

Peter's other research uncovered that the mine that sunk Apley was from the German submarine UC-71 under the command of Oberleutnant Ernst Steindorff. Four months after the sinking of HMT Apley, UC-71 torpedoed and sank the SS Highland Brigade and SS Luis, carrying general cargo and anti-personnel munitions.

With Apley as the focal point and UC-71 as a common denominator in the demise of all three vessels, a plan was drawn up to dive Highland Brigade and Luis on the Saturday, and then the Apley – being the deepest – on the Sunday.



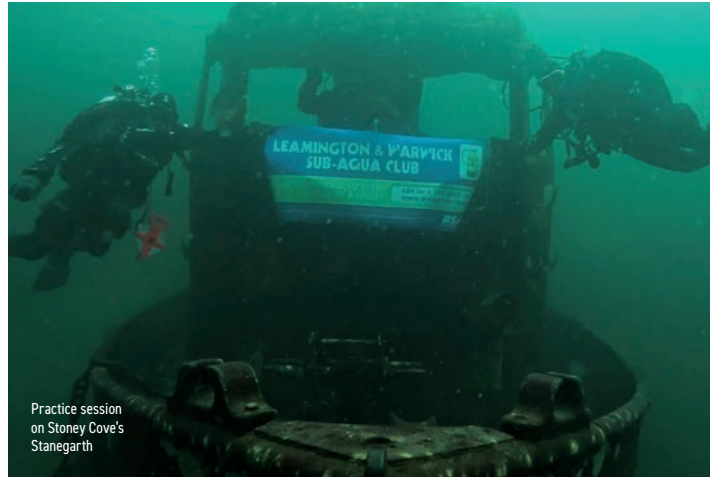
## Practice and preparation

Peter provided a detailed presentation of the story of HMT Apley for our members at the Leamington & Warwick clubhouse at the end of April, asking for suitably qualified members to help find the wreck. As with any of these wreck search ventures, there was no guarantee Apley would be found, let alone identified. Nevertheless, 11 signed up and the 12 strong team was confirmed.

I'd pointed Peter in the direction of the BSAC's then Wrecks and Cultural Heritage Advisor, Jane Maddocks, who was full of enthusiasm for the proposal. She in turn referred us to Alison Mayor, who Peter met at the Go Diving Show in Warwickshire. She provided a plethora of positive advice and guidance and pointed Peter at the BSAC's Jubilee Fund who, after careful consideration of the aims and objectives of the Project, generously awarded us £1,590 towards financing the logistics.

Peter had also spoken to an excellent and knowledgeable charter skipper – David Wendes from Lymington – and persuaded him to operate for us from Haslar Marina in Portsmouth for the planned weekend of the diving in June. Andark Diving at Southampton agreed to open late on the Saturday for air fills. The dominoes of detailed planning and prep were falling nicely into place.

Now many of those who put their eager hands up had not been involved in wreck survey and identification. So, it was decided to set aside several weekend days at the beloved Stoney Cove to both develop and practice survey techniques whilst incrementally building depth resistance. This built the necessary confidence in the use of measuring devices – mostly across the wreck of the Stanegarh – and depth familiarisation with many dropping into the turbid pit at 35m. It also gave those using



Practice session on Stoney Cove's Stanegarh

twin 12s for the first time, time to become proficient with these rigs in moderately dim conditions. By the time the dive weekend came to a close, the team were ready.

## The dives

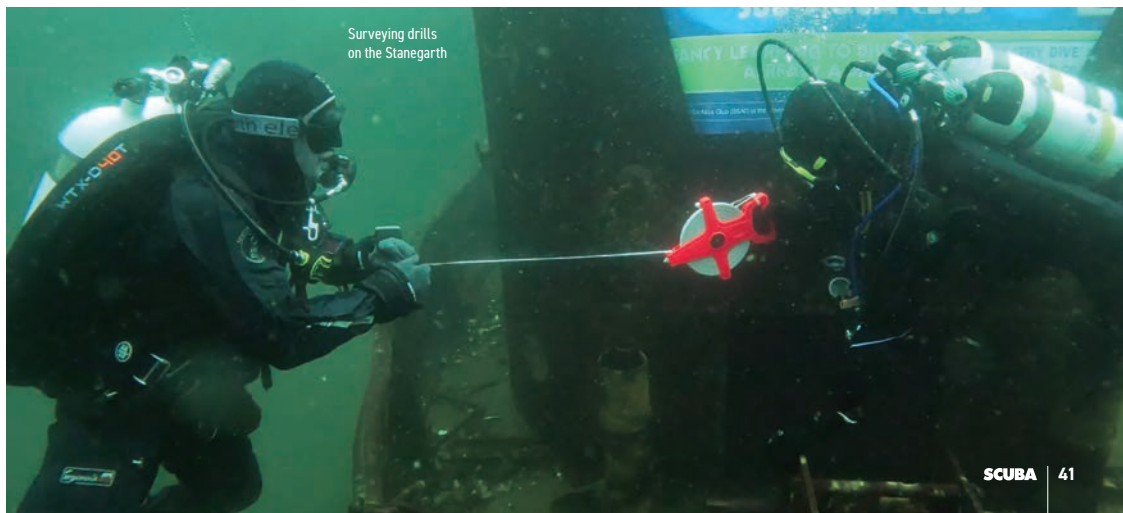
We all arrived at the excellent accommodation at Haslar Marina on the Friday evening. On the Saturday morning we trolled our gear to the charter boat which was berthed at probably the furthest point in the marina from where we were. Exercise at 7.30am on a weekend is something I no longer aspire to but needs must, I suppose. The weather was amazing with flat calm waters as we chuffed out of Portsmouth harbour on a sparkling sea, past the lonesome and dilapidated Bembridge Martello forts.

**Saturday:** SS Highland Brigade and SS Luis. Depths were 26 and 20 metres respectively. While the weather was perfect topside, the story below the surface was quite different. Visibility was a dim to dark 1 to 2 metres on both wrecks, caused by a very soupy thick

plankton bloom. At 26m it was 2000 lumen lamp country and even then, it was tricky to discern any part of the Highland Brigade other than the boilers, where Dave Wendes had expertly placed the shot. The SS Luis was minimally brighter at 20m.

If I extrapolate the amount of life we encountered in the poor visibility on both these wrecks to the full size of the sites, it's clear that they are teeming with shoals of bib. The wreckage also provided feeding grounds for large and colourful wrasse, and was home to various crustaceans. On both wrecks we encountered several big old conger eels.

In good visibility, these wrecks would be a sheer delight. As it was, we still enjoyed our gloomy dives. On the Luis, my buddy and I found ourselves in the hold that must have contained the anti-personnel munitions, as the seabed was covered in literally thousands of lead shot – all a uniform 12mm diameter. These were destined for the Western Front, packed around high explosive shell heads to be fired at the German trenches and timed



Surveying drills on the Stanegarh

SCUBA 41

## UK DIVING

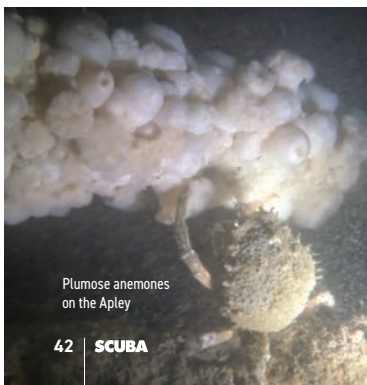
to explode above the heads of the soldiers such that the deadly lead balls would inflict many injuries. It was a useful find for me, as packing a load into each of my BC pockets compensated for a weight I'd forgotten to add to my belt!

**Sunday:** From the chart, it looked like the wreck of HMT Apley would lie at around 37m at low water slack. I felt it only fair to warn the others that as this was at least 10m deeper than the dim diving we'd done the day before, it was likely to be very dark down there. At 20m down the shot I put my torch on. This lamp chucks out 2000 lumens and it was clear that there was a LOT of plankton swirling about. I'd warned my buddy to stick to me like glue and keep up on the descent – which he did, bless him.

At 30m it was pitch black. At 37m where we hit the wreck it was, if possible, blacker still and the vis was a marvellous 0.5m at best. We filmed as much as our lamps would reveal. I have to say that having reflected through all my diving experiences across 44 years, this was the darkest I've ever done and that includes night dives. It was darker than the tumbling Cleddau River drift dive I did in Wales in 1983 and even the 40m "Pottery Wreck" off Eastbourne. Those were bright sunlight in comparison.

At one point I realised that the wreckage was actually upside down and we had entered the upturned hull. That put my air consumption up a tad and I quickly turned us around to crawl out through the silt. By the time we'd finished, we had decompression of eight minutes at 9m, then 18 minutes at 3m. I was quite comfortable with that, as we both had twin 12s and plenty of air. It was a relief to rise out of the deep dark to dim greenish gloom at around 20m!

Those with cameras did manage to film a few key and defining features, despite the deep darkness. And there were some fleeting glimpses of large bib and some close-up spider crabs. Each that I encountered looked a little lost and bewildered, flitting fearfully away from the beams of our clouded lamps.



## Conclusions

Well – we have compared video footage and stills to the engineering plans of trawlers of Apley's class and one buddy pair actually managed a quick measure across the upturned hull, which corresponds with the plan dimensions of the class of trawler that Apley was. Some of the defining attributes are

- The staggered bilge keels running in parallel curves down the upturned hull
- Evenly spaced bulkhead structures identical to the spacing of the original fish holding tanks

■ The hull measurement taken and the prominent curved trawl winch cable stay structures, positioned port and starboard at the bow and stern of the vessel

From these, we are certain we found HMT Apley. We had discovered and recorded an important maritime find attached to one of the most brutal conflicts in human history and have registered her with the Nautical Archaeology Society (NAS) and the Maritime Archaeology Trust (MAT) to update their Forgotten Wrecks of WW1 Project.

## Postscript: The fate of UC-71

A team of divers from the University of Dundee recently solved the mystery of the sinking of UC-71. En-route from Germany to Britain on 20 February 1919 to surrender the submarine to the British navy, the commander and crew decided to scuttle UC-71 to keep her from British hands. The sub sits at 22m on the shallow banks of the Heligoland archipelago, in the North Sea. ◉





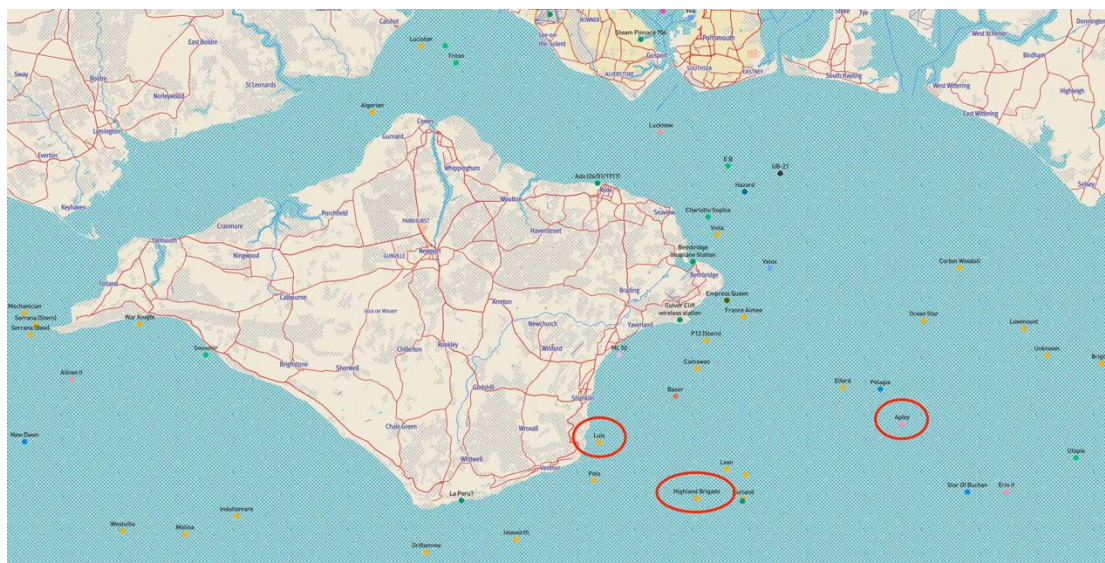


The 'Highland Brigade' was a 5,669 ton, defensively armed British Passenger/Cargo Ship of 5,669 tons built in 1901 by Wm Beardmore & Company Govan for the Nelson Line (Liverpool) Ltd, Liverpool. On the 7th April 1918 when 6 miles S by E from St Catherine's in the English Channel she was torpedoed without warning and sunk by submarine German submarine UC-71 when on route from London for Buenos Aires. The 'Highland Brigade' lies to the East of Ventnor, Isle of Wight, in approximately 28m.



The SS Luis was a 2,484 ton British steamer, built 1916. 380ft x 53ft. Armed on stern. Carrying a cargo of 7,000 tons flour, oats, timber and anti-personnel artillery shells, from Halifax, Nova Scotia to Portsmouth. She was sunk on 12 April, 1918, when hit in her port side by two torpedoes from UC-71 near St Catherine's Point, Isle of Wight, finally sinking in Sandown Bay. Four crew died.

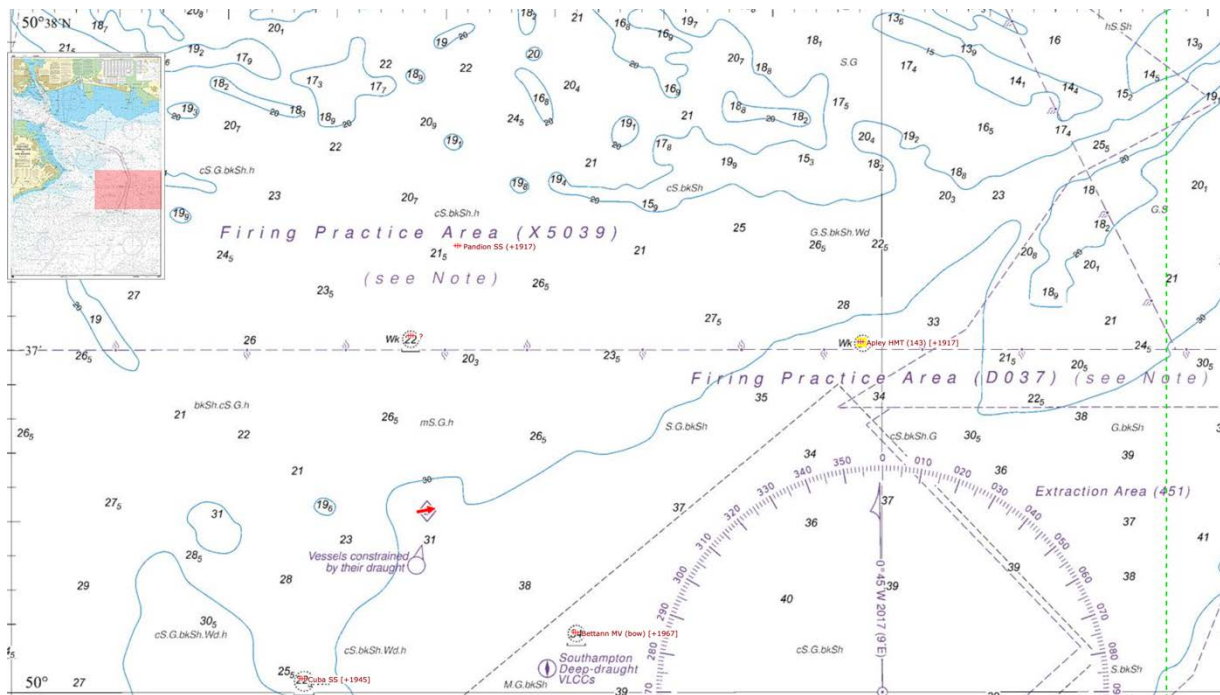
These WW1 wrecks were chosen as they were both torpedoed and sunk by UC-71, the U-Boat responsible for laying the mine which sank the Apley.



*Map showing the locations of the wrecks of the SS Luis, SS Highland Brigade & HMT Apley*

Sunday 30<sup>th</sup> June 2024

HMT Apley is marked on the charts as lying at 50°37,02'N 00°56,09W with a charted depth of 33m.



Enquiries of BSAC clubs local to the Solent area and charter operators and skippers in the area have failed to come up with anyone who has any experience or memories of HMT Apley having been dived in recent times. There is a brief mention of her in the book 'Dive Wight and Hampshire' published in 1987 and written by Martin Pritchard and Kendall McDonald. The entry gives a very brief description of the vessel and its loss and states that '...she is now upright six metres proud on the seabed of shingle. The mine explosion has caused a great deal of damage to her bow, and she lies east-west.'

Further information from the Wrecksite.Eu database gave conflicting information on the state of the wreck. A report dated 10.10.06 states that she was 'dived 14.9.02 and was found standing 4-5 meters from the seabed, estd. Length 20m, width 6-7m. No scour, lies E-W. Small debris field at NE corner, appeared to have no bow or stern and is partially buried. Intact with list of approx. 60° to the S. Appears to have a bulkhead in the centre of the ship'. Another report from the same database dated 09.16 stated that the wreck was lying upturned.

*continued.....*



The wreck was located at 50 degrees 37.018-025 minutes north, 000 degrees 56.087-105 minutes west. She was lying at a depth of between 36m-37m, considerably deeper than the chart had suggested.

Diving conditions were challenging with a great deal of particulate in the water making it very dark at depth, with limited visibility.



*The report's author on the upturned hull of HMT Apley*

The slack water window was around 45 minutes. All 12 divers successfully completed the dives. Following comprehensive debriefs and study of video footage taken of the wreck the team were able to provide a contemporary report of the condition of the wreck today, clearing up the conflicting descriptions that had existed up until that point.

### **Divers accounts:**

#### **Andy Hay**

'...we landed on the wreck at 33.5m on the side of the hull, slight current running left to right , found what we thought was the keel approx. 2.5" wide and 1.5" high , we followed this to the right, and this eventually disappeared into the seabed at approx. 35.8m. The hull curved down into the seabed, what we assumed to be the stern, as the mine hit the bow. What we saw was intact with no obvious damage.'



### Steve Dover

‘...I think she is part buried if not upside down and certainly broken in two parts at least. We were looking at an upturned or partially upturned hull I think by the bilge strakes but if it was the stern section I would have expected to run into considerably more machinery and jetsam when I went partially inside but all I saw were the arching ribs of the hull.’

### Norman Barnes

‘...when Dave and I had to tie off the shot we tied it to a pipe. Looking at some of the First World War trawlers I believe it to have been the rigging bar for the mast which means if it was , then she is laying on her starboard side partly buried.’

### Peter Draper

‘...we dropped down the shot and then to the seabed at 36m then up over the upturned hull to the top of the wreck at 32m, following what appeared to be a bilge strake along the hull until we reached the point where the hull had broken in two. This was a very clean break with no sign of blast damage. The bow appeared to be totally missing. We again dropped to the seabed at 36m at this point.’



*The diving team on board 'Wight Spirit'*

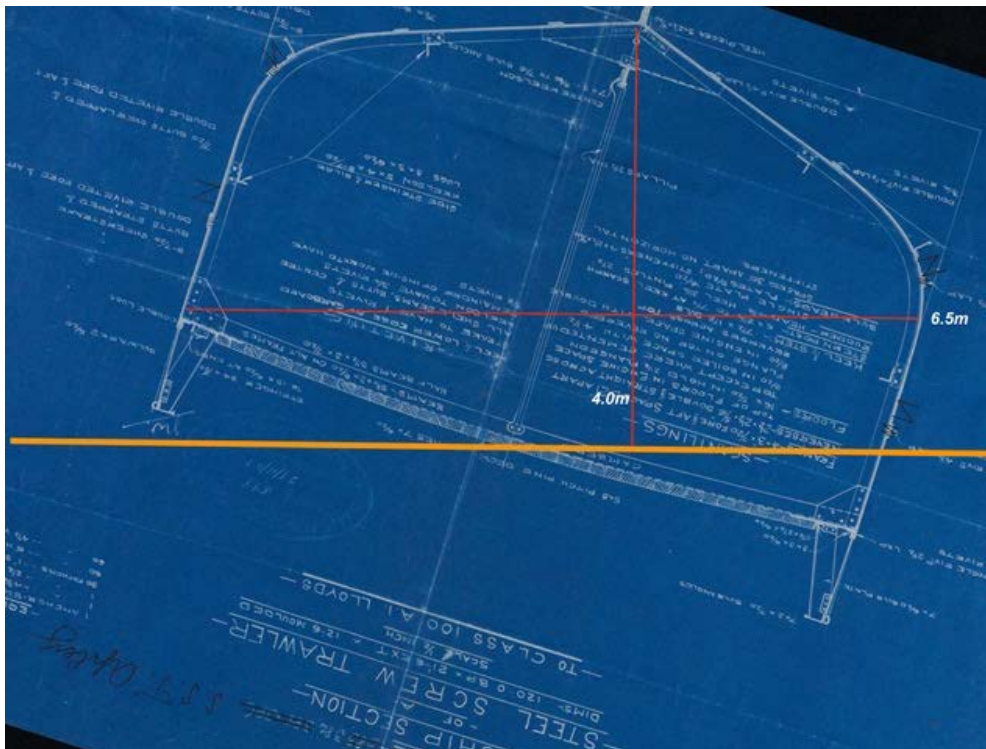
### 13. The Wreck Today

Based on extensive discussions post dive the team were able to compose a description of the wreck and wreck site that was consistent with everyone's findings.

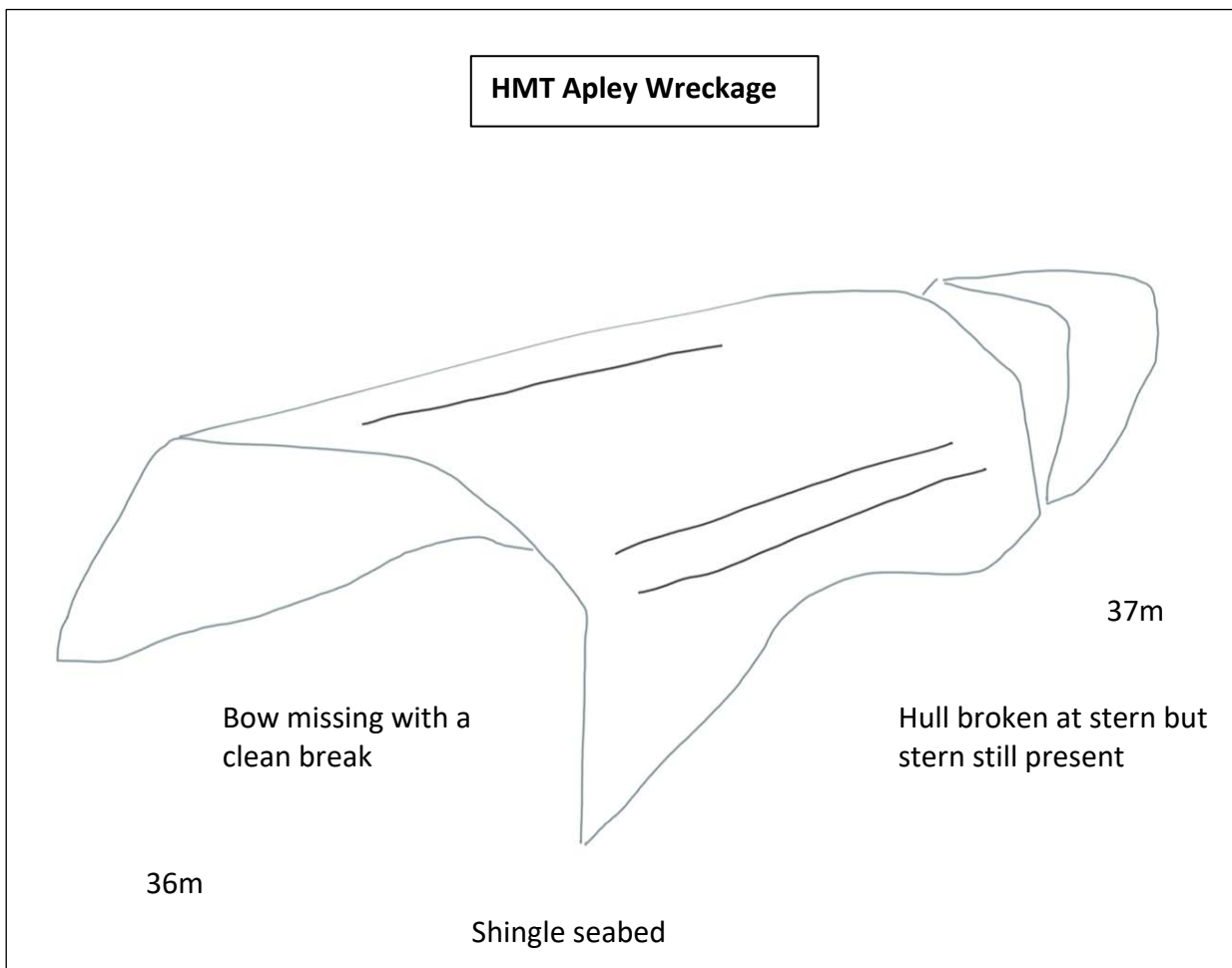
*The wreck lies in 36-37m and stands 4m proud of the seabed. The hull is upturned and lying slightly over on her starboard side. The hull has broken in two at the bow, with a clean break with no blast damage. The bow was not found. The hull also appears to have broken at the stern although the stern is still present.*

*There is high confidence, based on the wrecks position and the size of the wreck and measurements taken, that this is the wreck of HMT Apley.*

Using a drawing of the cross section of the hull of HMT Apley it has been manipulated to show how it is thought that the upturned hull is lying on the seabed.



A sketch of the wrecksite has been produced.



*Underwater images of HMT Apley captured from video footage taken*







## 14. Post Expedition Activities

[www.wrecksite.eu](http://www.wrecksite.eu)

The dataset on this publicly accessible database in respect of HMT Apley has been extensively updated and enhanced.

### The Wreck today

[Draper Peter](#) 25/07/2024



Dived 30 June 2024 at 50 degrees 37.018-025 minutes north, 000 degrees 56.087-105 minutes west. The wreck lies in 36-37m and stands 4m proud of the seabed. The hull is upturned and lying slightly over on her starboard side. The hull has broken in two at the bow, with a clean break with no blast damage. The bow was not found. The hull also appears to have broken at the stern although the stern is still present.  
Peter Draper. Leamington & Warwick BSAC

ref. used: [Peter Draper](#)

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[Jan Lettens](#) 06/08/2007

Stands proud, bows damaged.

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[Jan Lettens](#) 17/08/2019

\*\* H2537/28 18.2.28 NDW IN APPROX 503600N, 005530W. (AUTHORITY NOT STATED).

\*\* H1098/37 8.3.37 CHART AS NDW PA IN 503600N, 005530W. (AUTHORITY NOT STATED). NC F016.

\*\* H7588/37 20.11.37 AREA SWEEPED CLEAR TO 10FMS. NOTHING FOUND. (HMS FLINDERS, 11.11.37).

\*\* 1.4.52 NOW CHARTED AS NDW. (AUTHORITY NOT STATED). NC 2045.

\*\* H5808/55 27.2.56 NOW CHARTED AS NDW PA. (AUTHORITY NOT STATED). NE 2045.

\*\* H6667/57 28.4.61 ASDIC CONTACTS ABOUT 0.5M

ref. used: [UK Hydrographic Office](#)

[insert wreck site info](#)

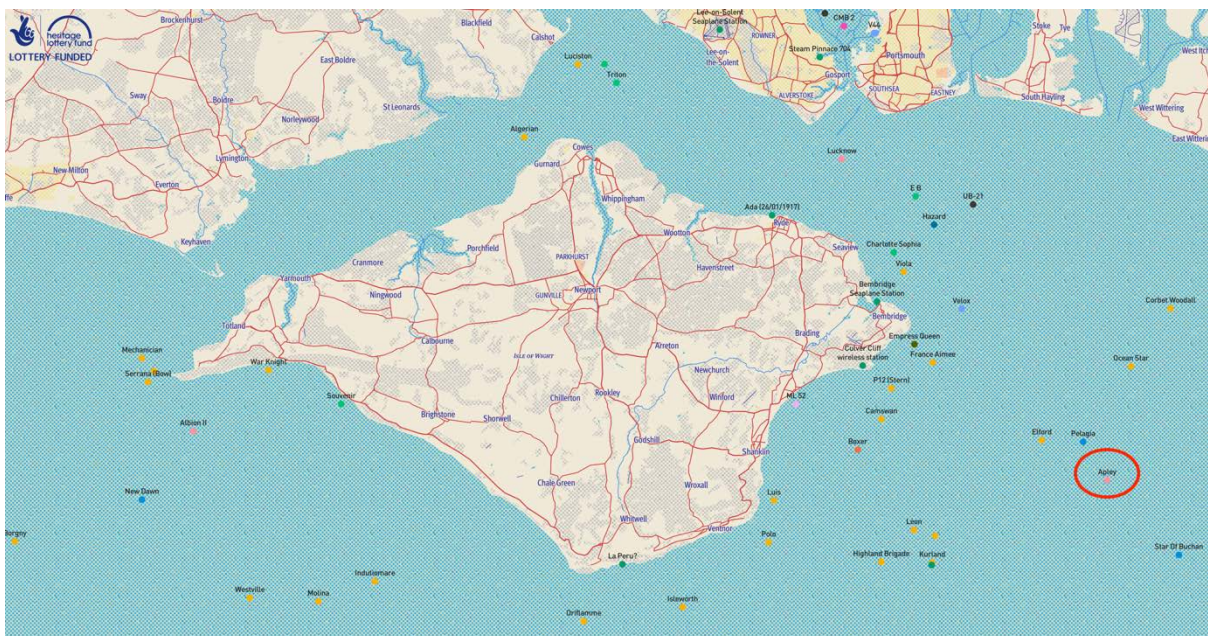
Maritime Archaeology Society - The Forgotten Wrecks of the First World War Project. [map.forgottenwrecks.org](http://map.forgottenwrecks.org)

The project team engaged extensively with Julie Satchell, Head of Research at the Maritime Archaeology Trust. Between 2014 & 2018 the MAT had undertaken an extensive project which aimed to provide a lasting legacy of information and resources relating to the First World War wrecks of the South Coast.

The final result of the project was an accessible database which provides information regarding the individual shipwrecks.

Information gathered during Project Apley, including our research, images and video of the wreck, description of the wreck and sketch of the wreck site was used to update and significantly enhance the data held on HMT Apley on the Forgotten Wrecks of The First World War database.

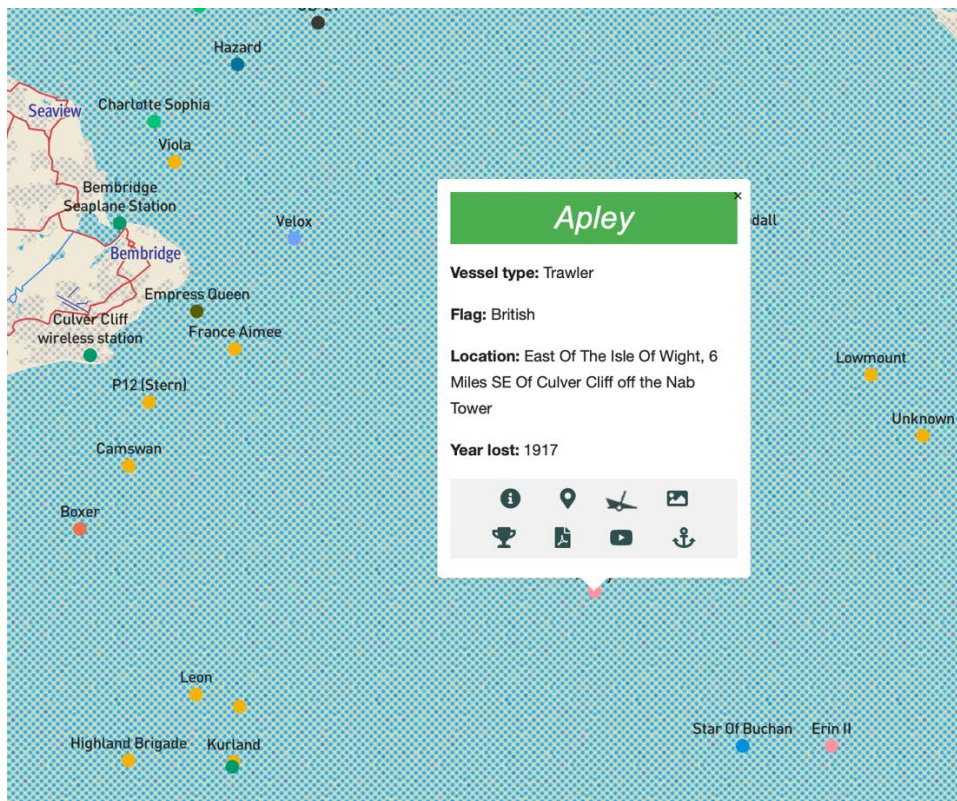
Below are screenshots taken from the MAT publicly accessible interactive web page, showing the enhanced data for HMT Apley resulting from the material submitted to MAT by the expedition team.



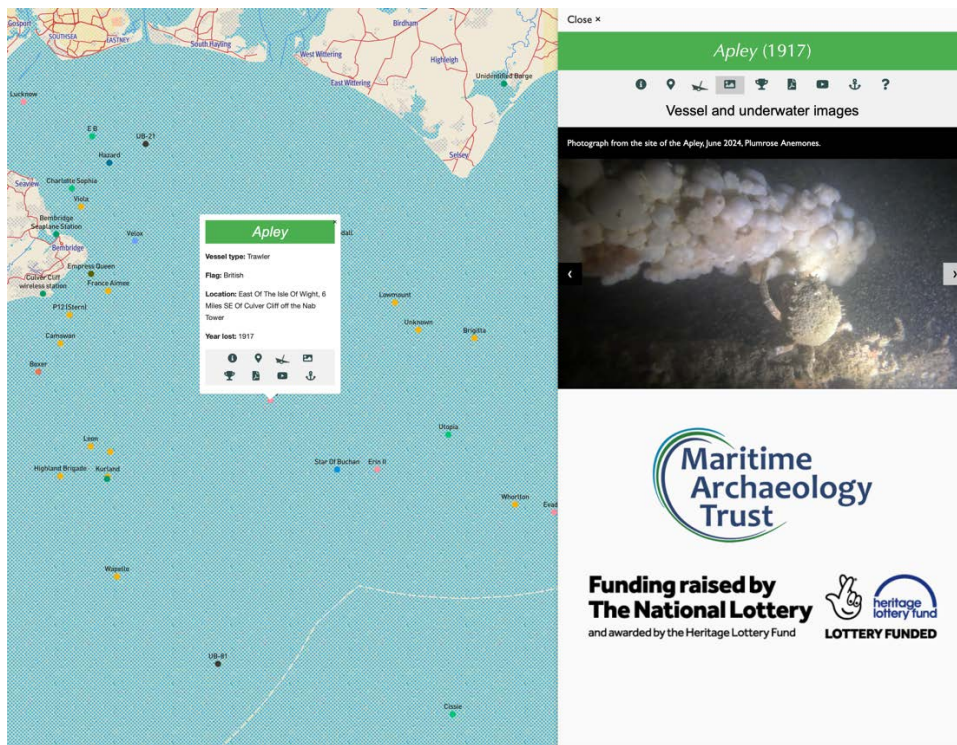
*Landing page of the MAT Forgotten Wrecks of The First World War website, with HMT Apley circled.*



Sequential screenshots showing elements of the material provided from the expedition.



Photographs





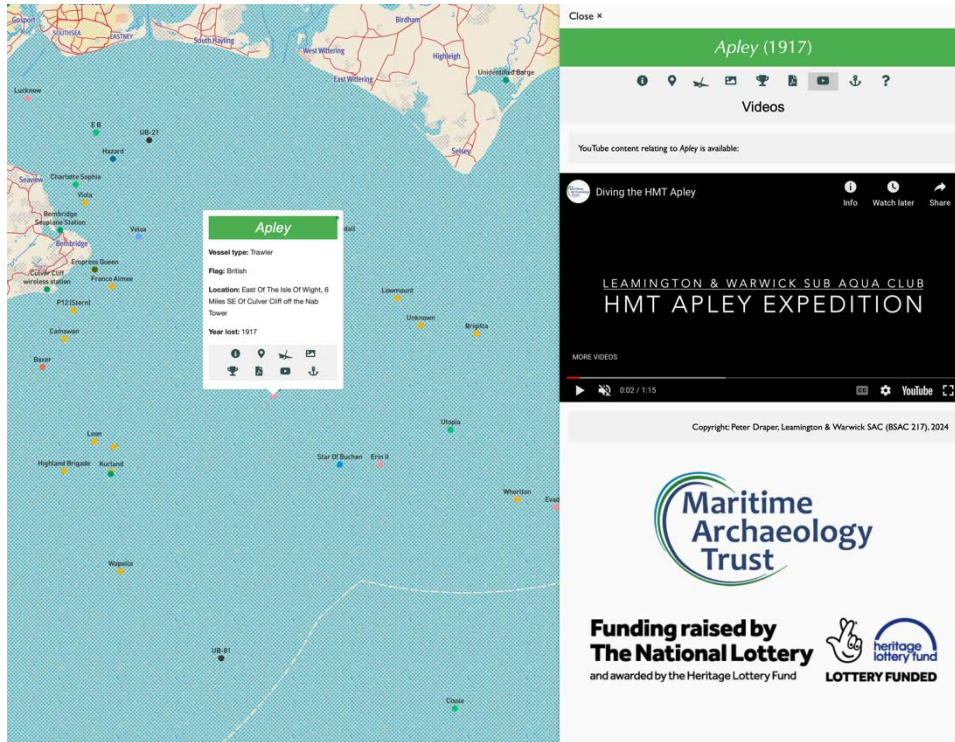
A link to the Apley team's research document is embedded in the database

The screenshot displays a maritime database interface. On the left, a map shows the location of the Apley wreck. A popup window provides details: **Vessel type:** Trawler, **Flag:** British, **Location:** East Of The Isle Of Wight, 6 Miles SE Of Culver Cliff off the Habb-Tower, **Year lost:** 1917. On the right, a panel titled "Apley (1917)" lists "Related documents". The entry "HMT APLEY - a Forgotten Wreck of WW1 Report" is circled in red. Below the map is a thumbnail for a document titled "HMT APLEY - a forgotten wreck of WW1" by Peter Draper, dated July 2024, featuring a photograph of the ship. At the bottom right, logos for Maritime Archaeology Trust, The National Lottery, and the Heritage Lottery Fund are visible.

Video

This screenshot shows the same maritime database interface as above, but with the "Videos" section highlighted. The "Videos" section lists "YouTube content relating to Apley is available:" and features a video thumbnail titled "Diving the HMT Apley" with a red play button icon. Below the thumbnail, the copyright information "Copyright: Peter Draper, Leamington & Warwick SAC (BSAC 217), 2024" is displayed. The Maritime Archaeology Trust, National Lottery, and Heritage Lottery Fund logos are also present at the bottom right.



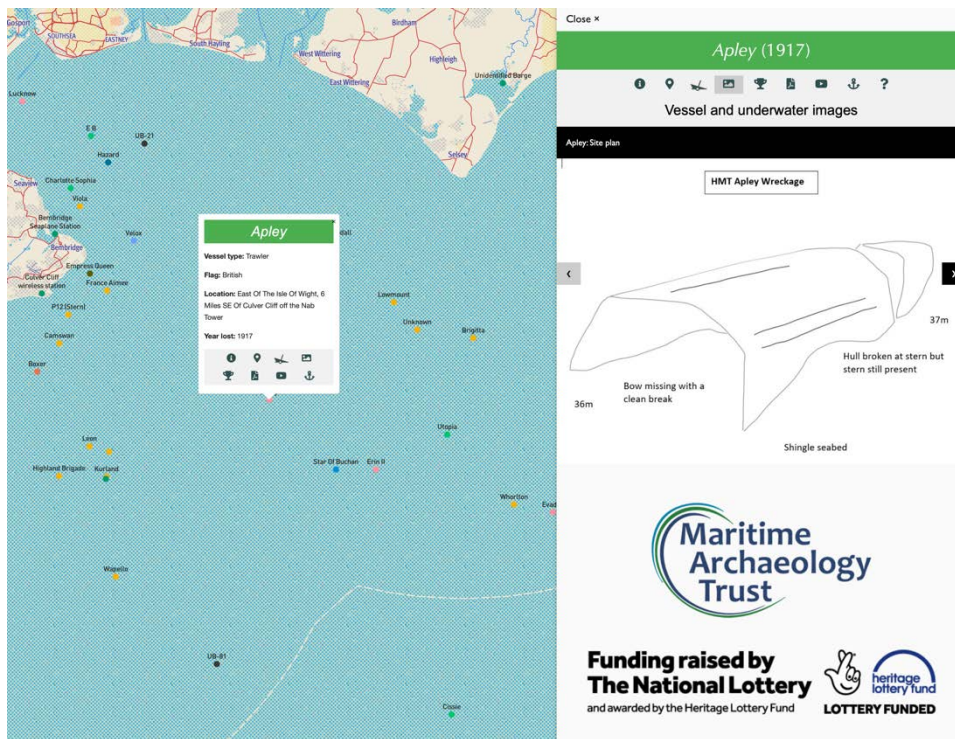


Video taken by expedition members of the wreck is now hosted on the Maritime Archaeology Trust YouTube channel.



<https://youtu.be/AIW0luZOLMQ>

### Site Map



## 15. What Has Been Achieved

Our aims and objectives could probably best be summarised as:

1. To dive the wreck, attempt to verify its identity as HMT Apley and be able to update what is known and recorded about the wreck today.
2. To publicise our expedition to raise awareness of our club, of BSAC and of recreational diving opportunities in the UK.
3. To work together as a club to achieve something of which the club could be proud of and to go diving with a purpose.

In terms of what has been achieved I believe that all of the projects aims and objectives were clearly met.

Our first objective was to update what we know about the wreck and to attempt to confirm her identity. We have a very high degree of confidence, based on our finding, that the wreck was indeed that of the Apley and we have been able to provide a much clearer picture of the wreck's condition than was available before.

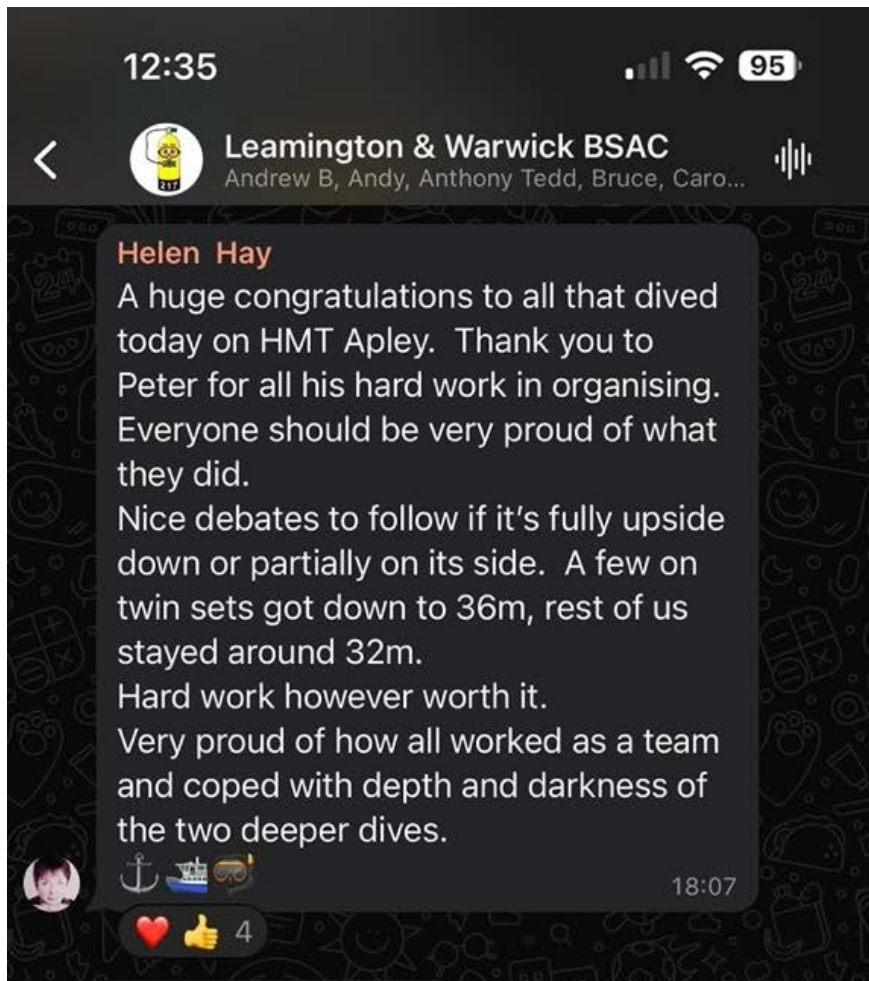
Secondly, we wanted to publicise our club and our sport. We raised awareness of recreational diving and the Leamington & Warwick SAC through articles in the local press, both printed and digital and in a BBC CWR radio interview I was able to further promote the local club, BSAC and UK diving.

This is an extract from part of the live radio interview:

*'...we will be a team of 12 divers from the Leamington & Warwick Sub Aqua Club, which is part of the British Sub Aqua Club, the governing body for recreational diving in the UK, a big active body of divers that dive all around the UK coast, a fantastic coastline for diving, not just for wrecks of which we have thousands, but also fantastic marine life....'*

During the radio interview I was also able to mention the BSAC Jubilee Trust and the support we had received from them.

Our final objective was around the club members working together, doing something different and of which they could be proud. After the expedition our club DO put this message on the club's WhatsApp char, which I think says it all.



## 16. Financial Report

The project spend was in line with the budget presented in the grant application.

Item	Budget	Actual	Variance
'Wight Spirit' 2-day charter	£1,350	£1,350	£0
Accommodation at 'Rooms at Haslar Marina' 6 x twin rooms for 2 nights	£2,004	£2,004	£0
Gas fills, 24 x 12ltr air fills @ £10 ea. Price from Andark Diving & Watersports who will be providing gas fills during the expedition.	£240	£160	£80
<b>Total</b>	<b>£3,594</b>	<b>£3,514</b>	<b>£80</b>
<b>BSAC Jubilee Trust Funding</b>	<b>£1,590</b>		

*continued.....*

The cost of air fills for the first day's diving, accommodation costs, all meals and subsistence over the weekend and the cost of travel to and from Gosport were met by the team members from their own resources.

## **17. Possible Future HMT Apley Projects**

Now that we have an understanding of how the wreck lies today it would be very useful to undertake some more dives on the wreck with divers given focused taskings.

Aims could include:

- Conducting a more detailed examination of the stern.
- A sonar search for the missing bow with follow up dives if located.
- A further examination of the hull at the broken bow area.
- A measurement of the length of the upturned hull.

This would enable an even fuller picture of the wreck of HMT Apley to be developed.