

# FORGOTTEN WRECKS OF THE FIRST WORLD WAR

More than 1,000 wrecks dating to the First World War lie off the south coast of the UK. These underwater memorials represent a vital, yet little known aspect of the Great War. Each day of the conflict, people of many nationalities, ages and backgrounds worked, served, travelled and sometimes died on the vessels just off our shores.

Coinciding with the First World War centenary, the *Forgotten Wrecks of the First World War* project will discover and tell the stories behind the loss of the vessels and the people who were on them. The project has been generously funded by the Heritage Lottery Fund. It was devised and is being delivered by the Maritime Archaeology Trust.

## Where?

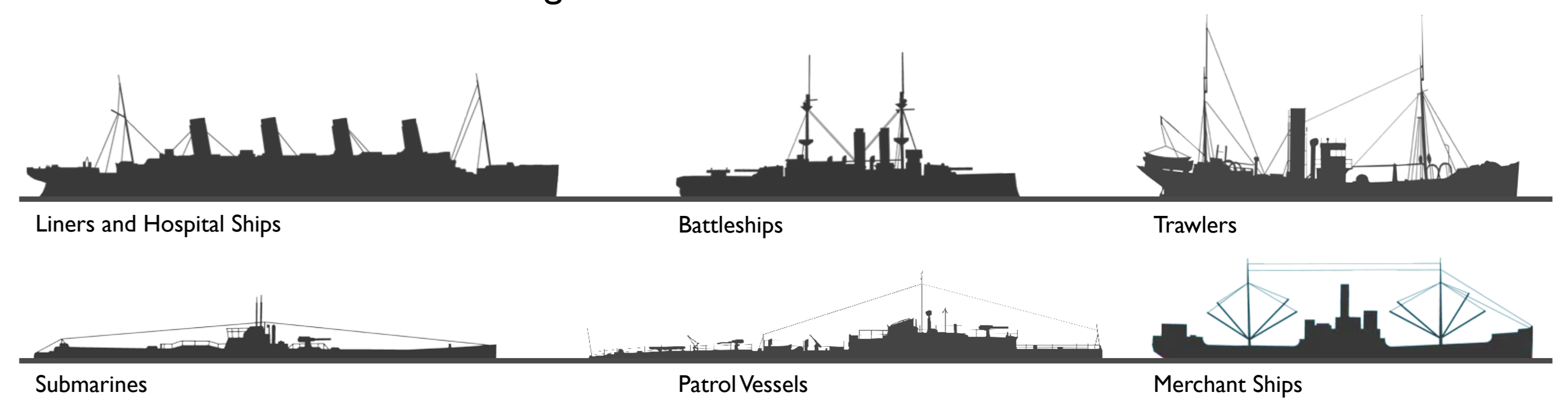
The project is focusing on the UK's south coast from Thanet in the east to beyond the Isles of Scilly in the west.



- First World War wrecks in the project area
- First World War wrecks around the British Isles

## What?

The First World War wrecks of the south coast include just about every type of vessel that went to sea at the time, including:



The majority were sunk by German U-boats or sea mines but many were lost to the everyday hazards of the sea: collisions, poor weather, just plain bad luck or a combination of such factors.

## How?

How do we know the wrecks are there? Wrecks are recorded in a number of databases. We've looked at historic records in English Heritage's National Record of the Historic Environment (NRHE) and potential hazards to navigation in the United Kingdom Hydrographic Office (UKHO) wreck data, focusing on vessels dating to the First World War. These record approximately 3,000 wrecks around the British Isles.

Some shipwrecks are well known to sport divers and have been identified through what remains on the seabed. Some have been tentatively identified through remotely gathered information such as sonar. Others are known to have been lost in a particular location but nothing more has been found of them. Using all the information at our disposal we aim to create an accurate record of First World War wrecks along the south coast.

## Underwater War Graves

Very few of those who died at sea have burial places on land and the remains of the vessels on the seabed are effectively their graves. Time and tide have taken their toll on the ships since they sank and they are falling apart. Unfortunately, some have suffered further disturbance through the inadvertent impact of marine and leisure industries and the deliberate actions of salvagers and divers. In the early decades of SCUBA diving the retrieval of material from wreck sites was a popular pursuit. While this still takes place to a limited extent, today's diving community promotes sustainable diving and encourages a 'look but don't touch' and non-intrusive recording approach to wreck diving.

The Protection of Military Remains Act (PoMRA) administered by the Ministry of Defence protects a small number of vessels that were lost on military service. There are four such vessels within the project area. Two of these are Protected Places, meaning they can be dived but must not be interfered with. Two are Controlled Sites and diving is totally prohibited.

### The four protected wrecks in the project area are:



**Figard II**, Portland Bill, Dorset. Protected Place.  
A former warship that sank in a storm while being towed from Portsmouth to Scapa Flow for use as accommodation. 21 lives were lost including a number of Portsmouth dockyard workers. Top Left: HMS Vanguard, sister ship to Figard II. U.S. Navy Photo 19-N-10586.



**HMS Ghurka**, Dungeness, Kent. Protected Place.  
A Dover Patrol vessel that was mined with the loss of 74 lives.

**HMS Formidable**, Torbay, Devon. Controlled Site.  
A Royal Navy battleship, torpedoed on 1st January 1915 with loss of more than 540 men.

**UB-81**, Isle of Wight. Controlled Site.  
A brand new German U-boat that struck a mine and was hit by a patrol boat and sank with the loss of 29 lives. Bottom Left: UB-148, sister ship to UB-81. U.S. Navy Historical Centre Photo NH 52617.

## Why?

The remains of the sites, both under water and on the foreshore, are extremely fragile; in many cases this will be the last opportunity to record them before they are lost forever.

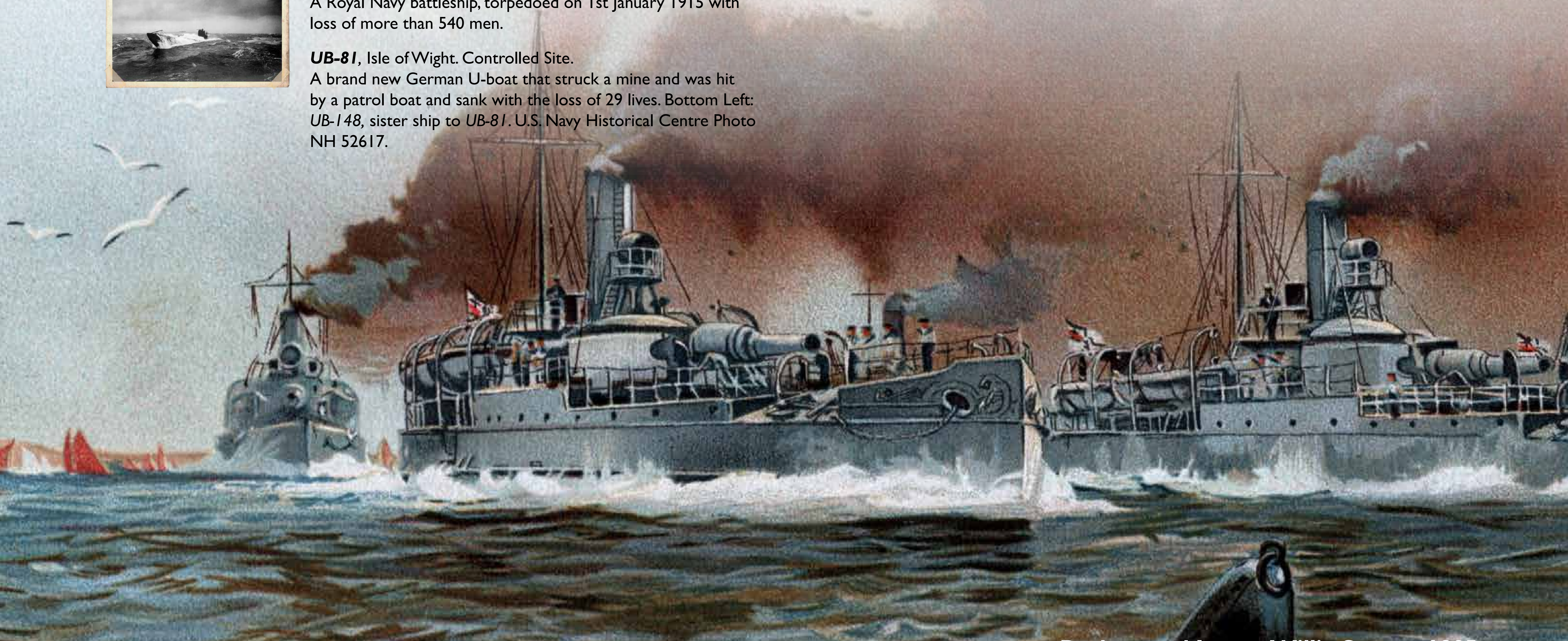
During the course of this project, wrecks from the First World War era will become 100 years old, at which point they are automatically afforded protection under the UNESCO Convention on the Protection of the Underwater Cultural Heritage. Although the UK has not yet ratified this convention, the increasing importance of the forgotten wrecks sites is highlighted by their change in status in the eyes of UNESCO.

100 years also marks the centenary of the First World War. This is a chance to commemorate and to remember, and in an increasingly volatile international political climate, perhaps reflecting on the past has never been more pertinent.

## This project will:

- Involve as many people as possible through our volunteer programme.
- Research the vessels and the stories behind their loss.
- Record remains on the seabed/foreshore and relevant artefacts in collections.
- Raise the profile of the wrecks via website, exhibitions, schools resources, geocaches, audio-articles and publications.

To find out more visit [www.forgottenwrecks.org](http://www.forgottenwrecks.org)



Background Image: Willie Stower, 1895



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