Volunteering Matters
Commemorating the Forgotten Wrecks of the First World War

WWW.FORGOTTENWRECKS.ORG
Forgotten Wrecks of the First World War is a four year centenary project funded by the Heritage Lottery Fund and devised and delivered by the Maritime Archaeology Trust.

While the project is focusing on sites off the south coast of England, work to uncover and share the stories behind the First World War’s forgotten wrecks is taking place under water, in archives, dive clubs and museums, in rivers and estuaries, ports and harbours, in MAT offices and households all over the country. Hundreds of volunteers have been contributing, from Scotland to the Isle of Wight.

This booklet shows how all the various strands of diverse activity fit together to contribute to the whole project and its legacy.

Volunteers have been working to:

- Collect information from the sites themselves
- Collect information about the forgotten wrecks from archives, divers’ collections and online
- Collate and process information
- Share what we have learnt
- Commemorate those associated with the forgotten wrecks, and
- Enhance Heritage Records
Some of the forgotten wrecks. Artwork by Mike Greaves (www.greaves2connections.com)
The Forgotten Wrecks project is an opportunity for volunteer divers to join the MAT’s professional dive team to dive on, examine and record vessels off the south coast that sank during the First World War. MAT’s volunteer divers have sport diving qualifications (some have commercial qualifications as well) and experience of diving in conditions they are likely to encounter on the forgotten wrecks.

Some volunteers have been involved in researching the wrecks prior to diving on them and some have dived the sites in the past, others bring skills in underwater video or photography and all this knowledge and experience is invaluable.

Once at the site all divers are briefed with underwater tasks. These can include archaeological survey to assess the nature and extent of remains, recording of diagnostic features, as well as general photography and video as a baseline for future monitoring and to produce digital 3D models of features or sites.

A typical dive can last anything from 30 minutes to an hour and a half. The deeper the site, the shorter the time on site. Divers work in pairs, taking photographs, video and measurements with a plastic open-reel tape, and making notes and sketches with a propelling pencil on waterproof paper taped to a board. Conditions vary from warm with excellent visibility, to cold, dark and disorientating. Although the dives are relatively short and only two would take place on a single day, travel time (by car and boat), briefings, preparing and cleaning equipment and writing-up notes generally fills a long day.

Non-diving volunteers with good sea-legs have been busy on the dive boat as support crew, helping with ‘topside’ photography and producing social media tweets and posts. This volunteer activity is very important, enabling those who are following the project to stay up to date with the most recent happenings as they progress.
Meanwhile, many divers, dive clubs and dive shops who are already diving on some of these sites, have been willing to share their knowledge and experience with the project. This has been in the form of data from their websites, records in diving logbooks, underwater photographs and video, sometimes taken at the same site over many years. Divers have also been generous in sending photos or allowing us to record artefacts that they have recovered in the past from First World War south coast wrecks.
Forgotten wrecks on the coast

Volunteers have also been helping to research and record maritime First World War sites on the coast. These can include hulked vessels that were abandoned on shores and in rivers and estuaries in the years following the war, as well as buildings and infrastructure associated with the forgotten wrecks: ports, harbours, piers, wireless stations, airship bases and seaplane stations.

In small groups, led by MAT staff, volunteers are using site recording forms, measured survey, site sketches, photography and video to record surviving remains on the coast and foreshore. In some cases this has involved using a drone for collecting aerial video and photographs for photomosaics and digital 3D models. Intertidal sites often involve a lot of mud, and time on site is limited to the few hours around low water on specific days.

In the south east, we have been working with the CiTIZAN project, providing site information and background for their use, while their project volunteers have kindly used our recording forms to feed site information back into the Forgotten Wrecks project database.
Marine geophysics

Seeing the wrecks through sound

A relatively small proportion of the 1,100 forgotten wrecks can be visited during the course of the project, so other datasets are being examined. Many marine industries collect data about the nature, shape and structure of the seabed. The Maritime and Coastguard Agency, for example, collect bathymetric (depth) data for the seabed around the UK that has kindly been made available via the United Kingdom Hydrographic Office for us to examine in relation to the forgotten wrecks. In addition, aggregate companies which are members of the British Marine Aggregate Producers Association (BMAPA) regularly survey the seabed at sites where aggregate extraction takes place. Some of these surveys include First World War wrecks and we have been fortunate enough to be able to study these data.

Project volunteers have been matching reported wreck positions and identities to seabed geophysical abnormalities. In some cases, the resolution of the bathymetry is so good that, not only can a vessel and its dimensions be identified, but distinct features, including hull damage caused by mines or torpedoes, can clearly be seen.
What happens to the information

Now and in the future

Information collected from the forgotten wrecks, through diving, intertidal fieldwork and examining geophysical datasets, enables us to clarify what is left of vessels on the seabed, their position, orientation and condition. This information can be used to inform future site management.

In some cases, data collected from these sites has helped to positively identify (or disclaim) the whereabouts or identity of a vessel. Similarly, diver examination and recording of diagnostic features has reinforced or contradicted historical sources, for example reporting where on a vessel a mine or torpedo struck.

Where appropriate, measurements, site records, images, plans and other data are being incorporated into forgotten wrecks site reports. These reports give more in-depth information about specific sites, how they came to be there, their relevance to the maritime First World War and details about their construction and loss that can inform about the period and site/vessel type. Forgotten wrecks site reports will be sent to relevant Historic Environment Records and lodged with the Archaeological Data Service, ensuring they are fully accessible beyond the life of the project.
The photos, video and geophysical imagery on the forgotten wrecks sites that are being collected and examined by staff and volunteers, are being used to raise the profile and tell the stories of these little-known sites. The aim is to reach as many people as possible, through a range of media and approaches including the internet, 3D digital models (online and at events with our touring Virtual Reality headset), with exhibitions along the south coast, audio articles, and face-to-face via public talks and events with our Discovery Bus and event tent. They are also being incorporated into the project database that will be publicly accessible via the internet as part of the project legacy.

Diving the wreck of the steam drifter
John Mitchell, mined off Dorset 1917
Collecting information

Online research

Historical researchers are our largest group of forgotten wrecks volunteers. They come from all walks of life and span all ages, sharing one common goal: to uncover the stories behind the forgotten wrecks. Many dedicated volunteers are researching online as it is so flexible, fits well around jobs and school and can take place in homes, libraries and even on trains across the country.

More than 60 volunteers have been undertaking online research and with 1,100 wrecks on our list, the more help we can get, the better!

Internet research into the forgotten wrecks is carried out by visiting six main websites and attempting to complete as many boxes as possible on the standard recording form. A general web search is then performed to find any other relevant information. Often a search will pull up divers’ notes and videos, local history projects, genealogical research, photographs of artefacts and news articles relating to a site. For some sites, very few details can be found, while others open an online research labyrinth. Volunteers tell us that online research for one site typically takes between half an hour and three hours.

A number of volunteers have come to us as part of their school work experience programme. One, who first came in July 2015, has continued to research wrecks during his school holidays. He has now researched in excess of 30 wrecks. Twelve other researchers are also very prolific, researching between 10 and 40 wrecks each, one of them does his research during his train commute to and from work! Other volunteers have been scanning though digitised newspapers of the period, looking for relevant articles and reports using the British Newspapers Online Archive.

Our volunteers have been crucial in enabling us to research so many wrecks and their results, incorporated into the project database, outreach resources and site reports, will constitute the backbone of the project legacy.
Volunteers (top) Richard, Stuart, (middle) Peter, and Jon, researching wrecks online and at The National Archives. Bottom: The wrecking of the Ponus. Painting by Mike Greaves.
Collecting information

Archive research

The next leg of the historical research trail is to consult primary sources held at The National Archives (TNA) and other collections around the country. In many instances, using the primary sources themselves has helped clear up disagreement between online and/or published retellings of ships’ losses.

Similarly, archive research has highlighted losses that, in more modern sources, claim to be ‘unknown’ as in the case of The Queen. Although lost during a major engagement in the Straits of Dover in 1916, the circumstances of the loss of this transport vessel are only briefly alluded to in published sources and the few online records suggest that little is known of how the ship came to be sunk. Even the summaries of British merchant ship losses in an Admiralty bound-volume at TNA were found to be devoid of any details beyond the date, and the fate of the crew was not stated.

Further investigation by a volunteer consulting Ministry of Transport records revealed that, in fact, the entire crew had escaped safely after the ship was boarded by a party from a German destroyer. The master wrote a full account of the events and was widely praised by the Admiralty for his actions in evacuating his crew. Furthermore, it was recorded that, although the ship had been employed transporting troops to the Western Front, it was not considered to have been on service on this empty return voyage, so the government denied any responsibility for the vessel and crew!

In addition to researching as many of the 1,100 forgotten wrecks as possible, we are also exploring important elements of the war in the Channel, which establishes vital background and context for the project. Themes such as the U-boat war, supplying the Western Front, the fate of U-boats after the war, convoys, fishing, minesweeping, the role of ports and harbours and coastal stations are all being covered in more detail and here the original sources are essential.

The information collected by our online and archive research volunteers has been used to create written articles on the forgotten wrecks website, exhibitions that are touring the south coast from Kent
to Cornwall, audio articles that are used by Talking Newspapers for visually impaired people across the country and Southampton Hospital Radio. The information is also used in booklets, posters, videos, talks and on the MAT’s Discovery Bus.

Some volunteers become so absorbed in a topic or site they have been researching that they write an extended article. These articles are the result of many months of hard work. Keep an eye out for these in online and printed format.

Behind the scenes, the information collected by research volunteers is regularly consulted by the project team when planning fieldwork and diving and is increasingly being incorporated into site reports. Perhaps most importantly, it will soon be uploaded into the publically accessible database for all to access online.

A number of individuals and groups have been undertaking research into one or a number of south coast First World War wrecks for many years. They have generously shared their findings and knowledge with us, for which we are very grateful. This information (fully credited) will be included in site reports and in the project database.

Volunteers (left) Charlie, (right) Dani, and Katherine, researching wrecks online and at The National Archives.
The recovery of artefacts from the forgotten wrecks began, in some cases, almost immediately after a sinking and has continued over the last 100 years, especially during the 1970s and 1980s with the rise in popularity of SCUBA equipment and the advent of sport diving. Only a few of the forgotten wrecks have any legal protection preventing access and/or removal of material from a wreck, but the majority of today’s SCUBA divers follow a look-and-don’t-touch approach to wreck diving, recognising the need to leave sites intact for future divers to visit and enjoy.

The Forgotten Wrecks project has a non-recovery policy and the MAT will not be bringing up any artefacts from sites. However, the project aims to record and catalogue as many artefacts as possible that have been recovered from forgotten wrecks in the past.

Although some of these artefacts can be found on display in museums, many more reside in storage or in private collections. Through the Forgotten Wrecks project, staff and volunteers have been working with the owners of such artefacts to photograph and catalogue them: recording details such as their size, type of material and condition, in order to create a virtual exhibition of them.
Recording sessions have taken place in museums, at dive shops and in private homes and garages. With a short briefing and introduction by Trust staff, a recording form and some basic equipment, volunteers are soon photographing, measuring, weighing and describing artefacts.

The Trust is very grateful to Dave Wendes of Wight Spirit Diving Charters and Martin Woodward of the Shipwreck Centre, Isle of Wight who, in addition to allowing us to record their First World War artefacts from south coast wrecks, have loaned many of them to us, for use in our exhibitions and outreach work.

The details and images volunteers collect at artefact recording sessions have been used on the project website and in posters and booklets for the Discovery Bus and exhibitions. They are now being incorporated into the online database, helping to ‘virtually reunite’ dispersed artefact collections with the vessels they came from, so researchers and interested individuals can study and explore them. In some cases it is possible to produce 3D models of artefacts, thereby improving ‘virtual access’ from anywhere in the world, to previously little-known objects. This involves particularly patient volunteers taking hundreds of photos of an artefact from every angle and then processing them using open-source software. Spare a thought for our volunteer Katie, who took and processed hundreds of photos to produce this model!

3D model of the toilet from SS Polo, torpedoed off Ventnor, Isle of Wight, 1918
As information about each forgotten wrecks site or topic is gathered, either online, from archives and collections, or from the sites themselves, the next important step is to collate it all. Without this essential stage, all the research and hard work that has gone before would be for nothing because the data must be collated and processed before we can interpret it and disseminate what we have learnt. Here, a small group of diligent volunteers have been regularly coming into the MAT office to prepare research findings for the project database and site reports.

The database will be the basis of the online portal through which all of the information we gather can be accessed by the public. The particulars of ships and the story of their loss, historical images and photographs of a site, the catalogue of artefacts held in museums or private collections, links to 3D models and other sources of information will all be available with a mouse click.

However, it all needs to be prepared for the database first, to make sure that it is compatible with the presentation system we are using. This work takes many forms. Some of our volunteers are helping by digitising the extensive hand-written notes that we gather ‘in the field’. Object recording forms are collated into digital spreadsheets and the plethora of photographs taken of each artefact are sorted to identify the best for different uses.

Each visit to The National Archives creates many days’ work in the form of sorting, renaming, saving images and digitising hand-written notes relating to each site. Information is then prepared for bulk-uploading to the database.

Our outreach work creates even more paperwork in the form of feedback forms, and volunteers have been helping by digitising responses so they can be used in evaluation and reports for our project funder: the Heritage Lottery Fund.
Maintenance and support

One of the activities that frequently makes an appearance at school and public events is our mini-ROVs. These small, remote-controlled, underwater robots are a huge attraction to young and old alike.

Real ROVs (Remotely Operated Vehicles) are used to explore the sea floor, especially in places where it is too deep or dangerous for humans to dive. Our miniature versions enable visitors to get a taste of controlling ROVs without all the extensive training needed for a real one!

The ROVs need regular care and repair, and volunteer Stuart is their long-serving maintenance engineer. Stuart has volunteered with the MAT for a number of years and puts his extensive electronics skills to use in maintaining and refining the mini-ROVs for use by the public.

You can have a go with one of Stuart’s ROVs at our outreach events, a calendar of which can be found here:

www.forgottenwrecks.maritimearchaeologytrust.org/events

These behind-the-scenes project support roles are absolutely vital to the project and Trust’s success, so an extra special thank you!
Sharing what we have learnt

Letting people know what we have learnt is the final stage in the archaeological process and perhaps the most important.

Telling people about the forgotten wrecks and sharing the information that volunteers have found in archives, collections, at sites and online, involves meeting people face-to-face at events, schools and talks.

An enthusiastic band of volunteers help with this front-line and rewarding work. Venues, all along the south coast, range from community centres, country parks, sailing clubs and grand estates, to schools, universities, scout huts, museums and exhibition centres. These make use of our HLF funded Discovery Bus or event tent.

People are always fascinated to hear about the forgotten wrecks and the work of the Trust and we simply could not reach as many people as we do, without the hard work of our outreach volunteers.

Volunteers have also been helping out with school and youth group sessions. These sessions see students from preschool to university, learning about maritime archaeology and exploring the forgotten wrecks. During the sessions, students have the chance to get hands-on with heritage by trying on dive kit, handling real archaeological artefacts from First World War vessels and uncovering secrets on the sea bed with our mini-airlifts.

Sessions like these are incredibly important, helping to educate the next generation on an aspect of the First World War that is infrequently mentioned - let alone taught - in schools. They also offer a unique and hands-on way to engage with heritage which emphasises accessibility, a cross-curricula approach and soft-skills development.

Volunteers at these sessions, with their enthusiasm and hard work, help us to deliver activities and ensure each student has an experience to remember.
Volunteers Dawn (top left), Kathryn (top right), Mateusz, Ben, Morgan, Lee, Alyssa and Emma (bottom) helping with outreach.
Digital 3D modelling

A number of volunteers have been involved with creating digital 3D models of sites and artefacts from the First World War. The 3D models are created through a process called photogrammetry: taking a huge number of photographs from which common points are extracted and triangulated to build up a copy of the subject in digital 3D space. By visiting sites, collections and the MAT office, Volunteers have taken photographs and constructed the digital 3D models themselves.

3D models are a great tool in archaeology, allowing us to present and explore sites and objects in new and exciting ways. They can be used for research, education and outreach. Where an object is too delicate to be handled or needs to be kept in special conditions, a digital 3D model can be virtually-handled as much as we like! Similarly, such models allow virtual access to artefacts that would otherwise be inaccessible due to conservation, logistics or geography.

The level of detail that can be achieved with these models means we can capture information on-site to undertake research back at the office. This is particularly important in maritime archaeology where environment, time and tide can significantly restrict access by researchers and the public.

You can see the results of our volunteers’ hard work, along with dozens of other models and information about their subjects online at:

www.forgottenwrecks.maritimearchaeologytrust.org/artefacts-from-wrecks

Figurine of a woman, recovered from the wreck of SS Shirala, torpedoed of Sussex, 1918. Recorded at Littlehampton Museum.
Model volunteer!

One of our more unusual volunteer-roles cropped up when we found a model of a steam pinnace, similar to the one we have been recording at Forton Lake, near Gosport, Hampshire. Unfortunately, the model was in kit form, so we needed the help of someone with considerable modelling expertise. Thankfully, a member of the Fareham and District Model Engineers Society came to our aid and, in a remarkably short space of time, built the lovely 1:35 scale model which can be seen at our outreach events. The model helps show how the vessel remains at Forton Lake would have looked when the steam pinnace was in use during the First World War and provides another medium with which we can interpret and promote maritime sites.

Photos and model courtesy of Ken Manchip.
MAT artist in residence

For many of the wrecks from the First World War, we have no photographic record and artistic impressions are enormously powerful in helping to tell their story.

Towards the beginning of the project, one of our new volunteers mentioned that he would be happy to do some paintings for us and we were delighted to take him up on his offer. On his first visit to the office he mentioned that he “didn’t do ships”. Happily, this proved not to be the case and Mike has since produced more than 30 stunning ink and watercolour paintings depicting the vessels and people of the First World War. The subject of each painting has been thoroughly researched; Mike uses the information he and other volunteers uncover to create detailed and historically accurate representations.

Artwork like Mike’s can be very useful in presenting these vessels as they once were and help capture moments from their stories in visually compelling ways. They have already been incorporated into a range of project resources, from the website to printed media. Copies of his paintings are also hanging on the SS Shieldhall, and will be exhibited at various locations during the course of the project.

Fishing trawlers in Brixham. Artwork by Mike Greaves.
Treasure hunt

Geocaching, a form of modern outdoor treasure hunting, is proving to be a great way to reach new audiences at locations relevant to the Forgotten Wrecks project. People who want to play (“cachers”) log onto the Geocaching.com website to find the coordinates of nearby caches. Here they can read about the cache and its significance before following the coordinates to search for it (a container which holds a log book and usually some ‘treasure’).

Our first Geocache, “Old Contemptibles”, has been found by more than 300 people since it was placed in its historic location within Southampton in November 2014. Many of the cachers are visitors to the city, often on a short stopover from cruise ships. The log comments have been very complimentary and show that people are thankful for the opportunity to learn a little of the city’s history.

The “Lost at Sea” geocache was created in November 2015 in partnership with the 6th New Forest North Scout group. The Scouts discovered the fate of the 7 men named on the Netley Marsh village memorial, next to their meeting hall, who lost their lives at sea during the First World War.

Our latest geocache, in Cornwall, informs people about the fate of the SS *Ponus*, the wreck of which can be seen from Gyllyngvase Beach (the cache location) at low tide. We are grateful to local expert geocachers Cornish Maid and Rudger for creating this cache on our behalf.

We have plenty more ideas for locations and themes, but we are seeking volunteers who can create and maintain the caches. If you could help, please get in touch.
Listen to forgotten wrecks stories

To make the stories of the forgotten wrecks as accessible as possible, volunteers have been recording audio articles. This work was pioneered by a volunteer based in the north of England, using a mobile phone to record the article from her home. After hearing these articles, the Southampton Area Talking Echo invited the Trust to use their studios, where Sound Engineer Chris Litton guided volunteers though the recording process and edited the recordings. Via the Talking News Federation, these articles are now being distributed to people with visual impairments and those unable to read text.

The recordings are available as MP3 files from the forgotten wrecks website, where they can be listened to online or downloaded to a mobile device:

www.forgottenwrecks.maritimearchaeologytrust.org/audio-articles

Between them, volunteers have recorded 20 articles, clocking up nearly 3 hours of listening time. The First World War Centenary Battlefield Tours Programme and Southampton Hospital Radio have both adopted the articles for their use.

Volunteer Valerie recording audio articles.
Commemorating the people of the forgotten wrecks

Through focusing on the maritime heritage of the First World War, the Forgotten Wrecks project aims to counterbalance the common Western Front Great War focus by commemorating the myriad of ordinary people linked to the ships lost off the south coast during the war. This included people of all nationalities, merchant seamen, fishermen, service personnel, civilian passengers, stewardesses, children, patients and nurses. Each day of the conflict, people like all of us worked, travelled, served and sometimes died along the south coast. This project is helping us recognise and appreciate how their ordinary lives were impacted by the extraordinary circumstances of the First World War.

The Imperial War Museum’s Lives of the First World War (LoFWW) is an ambitious centenary project creating a digital memorial to remember each of the 8 million people who served during the First World War. The website consists of a Life Story page for each individual, to which registered users can add details and photographs. We have been working with Lives of the First World War so that individuals associated with the Forgotten Wrecks will be part of this international digital memorial.

We have established ‘communities’ on the LoFWW website for a number of the forgotten wrecks. In some cases it has been possible to populate the communities with all who were on the ship when it was lost, in other cases, only some of the crew have been added to date.
A number of volunteers have been working on this aspect of the project from the comfort of their own homes: finding individuals and adding them to the relevant community. The amazing thing about this digital memorial is that, through the combined effort of volunteers all over the world, it takes on a life of its own. Relatives of crew members have added photographs and documents from their personal collections to the Life Story pages of their deceased relatives. At the same time, they are finding out about their relatives and the role they played in the First World War. The largest forgotten wrecks community is HMS *Formidable* with 546 linked life stories. *Formidable* was torpedoed off Dorset by U-24 on New Year’s Day 1915. Through a chance meeting, we were put in contact with the family of Ordinary Signalman Walter Melluish who lost his life aboard *Formidable*. His family were fascinated to hear of our research and kindly shared a photograph of him, which we have added to his LoFWW page. They were also amazed to hear about Walter’s HMS *Formidable* life belt that was washed up on the Dutch coast during the First World War and is now in the Imperial War Museum.

Having read an article about the project in the Bournemouth Echo, a relative of Willie Alfred Troke contacted us. Stoker Troke was killed when his drifter, the *New Dawn* hit a mine off The Needles, Isle of Wight in March 1918. His relatives had photographs and a commemorative embroidery which we were happy to add to his LoFWW Life page on their behalf.

A Lives of the First World War volunteer from Fife in Scotland, and volunteers closer to home have been essential to the development of this commemorative aspect of the project. As can be imagined, this is a mammoth task and we would be delighted to hear from anybody who would like to help.

*Unknown Heroes.*

*Artwork by Mike Greaves.*
Enhancing heritage records

As the project progresses, more volunteers will be involved with bringing all the archaeological and historical information together into the site reports that will be lodged with Heritage Environment Records and the Archaeological Data Service. If this is something you would like to be involved with, please do contact us.

Thank you!

This booklet aims to celebrate the tremendous work that has been undertaken by our dedicated volunteers and show how their combined efforts contribute to the project as a whole.

We would like to take this opportunity to thank all our amazing volunteers!
The Maritime Archaeology Trust’s HLF Forgotten Wrecks of the First World War project has many elements, from data collection to dissemination, and volunteers are integral at each stage.

This booklet aims to demonstrate how the work of volunteers has made a huge contribution to the project so far. It provides some context to explain how the many and varied tasks fit into the bigger picture of investigating the War at Sea.

With 1,100 First World War wrecks off the south coast, there is much more work to be done.

We hope you will be inspired to get involved and join us on our fascinating voyage of discovery and commemoration.

Please see the project website for further information:

www.forgottenwrecks.maritimearchaeologytrust.org

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