



# Welsh Wreck Web Research Project (North Cardigan Bay) On-line research into the wreck of the: SS Herefordshire



# **Report compiled by:**

**Gareth J.S. Davies** 

Welsh Wreck Web Research Project

Nautical Archaeology Society

Report Title:

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### **1.0 Abstract**

Since 2001 the Malvern Archaeological Diving Unit (MADU) has developed a database of vessels known to have wrecked around the coast of Wales.

This project is to discover information relating to the history and sinking of the SS Herefordshire off Cardigan Island in March 1934, Pembrokeshire in March 1934, (MADU Ref. 431).

The SS Herefordshire was a passenger liner/cargo steamship built in Belfast and commissioned in 1905. The SS Herefordshire sailed largely on the UK to Burma run prior to 1916. In 1916 during WW1 SS Herefordshire was requisitioned as a hospital ship and returned to the UK to Burma run after the end of WW1. In 1929 the SS Herefordshire was rebuilt for cargo services only. In March 1934, SS Herefordshire ran aground on Cardigan Island after breaking free from two tugs which were towing her to the Clyde to be scrapped. The SS Herefordshire broke up on the rocky coastline and now lies in approx 5-11m water depth.

The research has been conducted from information gathered from MADU and on-line sites as I do not reside in the U.K.

### 2.0 Index

2.1	Table	es of Contents	Page No.			
1.0	Abstract					
2.0	Index	- 4				
	2.1	Table of Contents	4			
	2.2	List of Tables	- 4			
	2.3	List of Figures	- 4			
	2.4	Contributors	- 4			
	2.5	Abbreviations	- 5			
	2.6	Appendices	- 5			
3.0	Introd	luction	- 6			
4.0	Backg	round	- 7			
5.0	Resea	rch Methodology	- 8			
6.0	Result	ts	- 9			
7.0	Analy	sis	- 10			
8.0	Concl	usions & Recommendations	- 12			
9.0	Refer	ences	- 13			
	9.1	Online WebPages	- 13			
	9.2	Personal Correspondences	- 13			
	9.3	Publications	- 13			
2.2	List o	of Tables				
Table	1. Ext	ract from MADU Master Wrecksite Database	- 7			
Table	2. SS	Herefordshire Specifications and History	- 9			
2.3	List o	of Figures				
Front	Cover:	SS Herefordshire at dock	1			
Fig. 1	Locati	on of Cardigan Island, Cardiganshire	7			
Fig. 2	Мар а	nd satellite location of SS Herefordshire, Cardigan Island	- 7			
2.4	Cont	ributors				

Ian CundyMADU Archaeological Diving Unit,<br/>Nautical Archaeology Society (Regional co-ordinator for Wales)

### 2.5 Abbreviations

MADU Malvern Archaeological Diving Unit

### 2.6 Appendices

Appendix A – SS Herefordshire at sea (location unknown)	14
Appendix B - Postcard of SS Herefordshire, early 1900s	15
Appendix C - Christmas card from SS Herefordshire (Dec 1913)	16
Appendix D - Front Page Daily Mirror March 16, 1934	17
Appendix E - Western Morning and Daily Gazette, March 16, 1934	18
Appendix F - SS Herefordshire on the rocks, Cardigan Island	19
Appendix G: Crewman from SS Herefordshire being brought ashore	20
Appendix H: SS Herefordshire before breaking up	21
Appendix I: Lloyd's Register Returns of Ship Totally Lost, Condemned, etc (for quarter ended 31 <sup>st</sup> March 1934)	22
Appendix J: Seabed Wreckage Map of SS Herefordshire	23
Appendix K: Appendix K: Diving Video on SS Herefordshire (Oct 2009)	24

## **3.0 Introduction**

I picked the SS Herefordshire for a number of reasons:

- it covered a period of sea history from pre to post WW1
- it was the 2<sup>nd</sup> ship I picked from the MADU Wrecking list having conducted research on the SS Cydonia. As I live overseas online information would be my priority research tool and similar to my previous research a ship from this period should be reasonably well documented online.

The following topics form the basis of the research:

- What were the vessel's specifications?
- What historical information is available relating to the vessel?
- What was the story leading up to the sinking?
- What caused the sinking?
- What happened after the sinking? Has anyone previously investigated or researched the vessel back story?
- Has anyone dived, recorded, surveyed or worked on the site?
- Has any salvage, etc. been carried out?
- Have there been any previous reports produced relating to the vessel?

# 4.0 Background

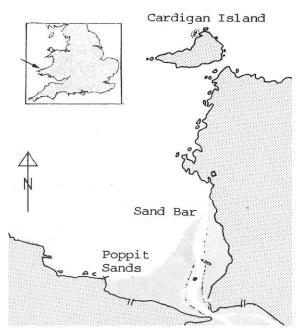
Prior to starting this research the only known data available to me was from the MADU Master Wrecksite Database Listing (Table 1) supplied by Mr Ian Cundy.

#### Table 1: Extract from MADU Master Wrecksite Database

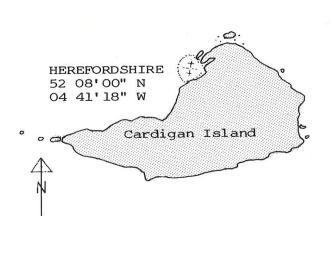
MADU Ref. No.	Date Wrecked	Name	Location 1	Location 2	Details	Vessel Type	Matls
431	15/03/1934	Herefordshire	Cardiganshire	Cardigan Island	stranded onshore	Steamship	steel

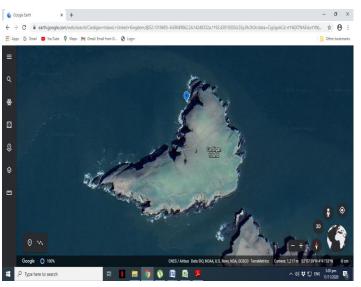
In March 1934, the SS Herefordshire was being towed by 2 tugs from Falmouth to Clyde to be scrapped. During a severe storm the SS Herefordshire broke loose and grounded on Cardigan Island where she broke up. The SS Herefordshire now lies in 5-11m water depth.

#### Fig 1: Location of Cardigan Island, Cardiganshire



#### Fig 2: Detailed map and satellite location of SS Herefordshire, Cardigan Island





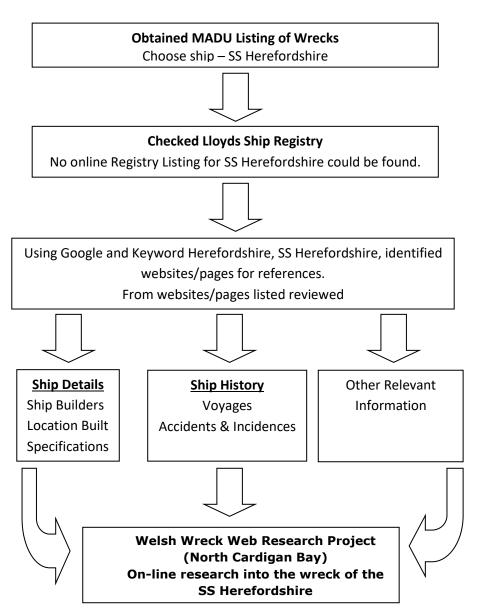
### **Research Methodology**

#### **Computer System**

Acer Desktop 64 bit OS; 8 GB Memory, wireless connection. Windows 10Pro Microsoft Office 2007

Search engines used: Google Chrome

#### Methodology



See Section 9 for list of websites viewed

# 5.0 Results

#### Table 2: SS Herefordshire Specification and History

Vessel	Name/s	Herefordshire							
	Туре	Steamship							
		Passenger/Cargo, rebuilt for cargo services only in 1929							
Built	Date	Laid Down: N/A							
		Launched: 31/08/1905							
		Delivered: 29/11/1905							
		Cost: N/A							
	Builder	Harland & Wolff Ltd							
	24.140	Belfast, Yard# 371, Slip #9							
Construction	Materials	Steel							
	Decks	3 x deck / 4 x masts / p.deck 51ft / b.deck 223ft / f.castle 33							
	Bulkheads	7							
Propulsion	Туре	Engine, Steam							
	.,,,,,,,,,,,,,,,,,,,,,,,,,,,,,,,,,,,,,,	Converted to oil burning in 1920							
	Details	2 x screw							
Engine	Details	Type: 2 x Quad 4 cyl							
		Size: 24, 40, 65 x 42in							
		HP: 833							
		Manufacturer: N/A							
	Boilers	4							
Drive	Туре	Propeller							
	Number	2							
Dimensions	Length	452ft 2 ins 137.76 m							
	Beam	54ft 2 ins 16.53 m							
	Draught	30ft 6 ins 9.29 m							
Tonnage	Gross	7183 (from Harland & Wolff Ships Built Catalogue)							
. e.m.a.ge	Net								
Owner	First	Bibby Steamship Company							
		Liverpool, England							
	Last	Smith Ship breaking Company							
		Bought from Bibby Lines Ltd for GBP 9500 on Feb 19 <sup>th</sup> 1934							
	Others	None							
Registry	Port	Liverpool							
<u> </u>	Flag	GBR							
	Number	120903							
History	Routes	Predominately UK - Burma							
/	Cargo	General							
Final Voyage	From	Dartmouth, England,							
	То	Clyde, Scotland (scheduled port of arrival)							
	Captain	No Captain aboard							
	Crew	4							
	Passengers	None							
	Cargo	Ballast							
Wrecking	Date	15/03/1934							
	Location	52°08'N/4°41'18"W, Cardigan Island, Cardiganshire							
	Cause	Drifted onto rocks after tow ropes to 2 tugs parted							
	Loss of life								
	Outcome	Sunk (The wreck is currently owned by the Llanelli Sub-Aqua							
		Club Register #120903)							

## 6.0 Analysis

- Three other ships have carried the name Herefordshire (1944, 1972, 1984).
- Official #: 120903.
- Sister ship of the SS Worcestershire (1904), SS Herefordshire was launched on Aug  $31^{\rm st}$  1905 and completed on Nov 29th 1905
- A newspaper article from The Belfast News Letter of Nov 30<sup>th</sup> 1905 described the SS Herefordshire as it left on its maiden voyage: "After a satisfactory trial the SS Herefordshire left for Liverpool in charge of Captain Humpreys and Mr Arthur Bibby onboard.

The SS Herefordshire is 452ft long, 54ft broad, 34 ft 6" deep with a gross tonnage between 7000 to 8000 tons. The machinery has also been constructed at Harland & Wolff's works and is on the quadruple expansion system which from experience has been found to give a minimum of vibration. The auxiliary machinery for working the ship's cargo is of the latest design as is the special gear for transporting the ship – windlass and winches. The steering gear is one of the firm's latest designs and embodies ail the newest points in engineering for this particular purpose"

The first class saloon has accommodation for about 160 people and is situated on the upper deck. The accommodation is every way equal to the other vessels of the line, if not superior, and on account of the trade every provision has been made for both mechanical and natural ventilation. In many cases instead of using the old system of punkahs, fans have been erected in different portions of the saloon and elsewhere for changing the air. The vessel is entirely arranged with Mr Arthur Bibby's patent "tandem" state rooms for comfort of the travellers. This does away with the old inner state rooms, every stateroom having a port thus giving natural light and ventilation. The drawing room or library is on the boat deck and is worked out in design; the material used being principally mahogany and satinwood. The first class smoking room is also on the same deck and is panelled and carried out in Austrian wainscot oak with easy sofas, lounges and card tables. All the foregoing principal apartments have been fitted up in the most luxurious style, both as regards design, woodwork, upholstery and the extra introduction of mechanical ventilation for each stateroom must naturally tend very much to the comfort of those onboard. Very extensive refrigeration appliances have been fitted to ensure always having a good supply of ice and for the keeping of fresh provisions, fruits and other things while electrical appliances and lighting have been carried out in a very extensive way".

- SS Herefordshire was used on the Liverpool to Burma run stopping at the main ports of Marseille, Port Said, Colombo and Rangoon until July 1916.
- On 25<sup>th</sup> July 1916, SS Herefordshire was requisitioned as a hospital ship for 380 patients serving Salonika, Mesopotamia and East Africa. The medical staff consisted of 8 officers, 10 nurses and 43 orderlies. The ship had an accommodation capacity of 50 officers, 230 cots and 100 berths. On Jan 1<sup>st</sup> 1918, SS Herefordshire was decommissioned.
- On 4<sup>th</sup> February 1918, SS Herefordshire was narrowly missed by two torpedoes during her first Mediterranean convoy. When the torpedo tracks were spotted her Master, Capt. E. Millson, ordered the helm hard over and one engine to full astern which slewed the ship around. One torpedo passed under the counter stern missing by a foot or so. The 2<sup>nd</sup> torpedo went on to hit the P&O's Sardinia.
- In 1920, SS Herefordshire was refitted by Harland and Wolff and converted to oil burning.
- In October 1922, George Orwell was appointed as Probationer in the Indian Police and was advanced £30. On Oct 27<sup>th</sup>, he travelled on the one month trip from Birkenhead to Rangoon on the SS Herefordshire via the Suez Canal.

- In 1929, SS Herefordshire was rebuilt for cargo services only and equipped with, in addition to modifications for transiting the Manchester Ship Canal, a heavy lift derrick on the foremast.
- In April 1933, SS Herefordshire was laid up at Dartmouth and on March 9<sup>th</sup> March 1934 left in tow bound for the Clyde to be broken up.
- On March 15<sup>th</sup> March 1934 while on tow, SS Herefordshire broke her tow and finally ran aground on Cardigan Island.
- The SS Herefordshire was being towed by the tugs Chieftain and Wrestler. After leaving Dartmouth the ships sheltered in Falmouth due to bad weather for a few days before carrying. On March 14<sup>th</sup> the tow line from the Wrestler broke at 2:30pm and numerous attempts to reconnect were unsuccessful. About 12 hrs later the 2<sup>nd</sup> towing line from the Chieftain parted leaving the SS Herefordshire adrift. The Fishguard and St Davids lifeboats searched for the ship in vain before it was spotted from the Penrhys Castle Coastguard Station drifting in the bay off Cemaes Head.
- SS Herefordshire first ran aground toward Poppit beach, then broke free, coming to rest on the seaward side of Cardigan Island.
- The SS Herefordshire went aground on the rocks at around 7am and as the waves crashed against the wreck, the four man crew scrambled onto the island. Hundreds of people gathered to watch as rocket-fired lifesaving equipment at Gwbert (mainland) was rushed to the shore where a line was shot across to the stricken men. The men were brought ashore on the mainland by breeches buoy through the waters amid dramatic scenes.
- Later that year two salvage ships recovered everything worth saving, including crockery, furniture, luxury fittings, bedding, linen and timber, much of it teak. They were auctioned in Cardigan and many items were bought by locals happy to secure a memento of the area's biggest shipwreck.
- A devastating legacy of the wrecking was the infestation of rats from the ship which wiped out the puffin and Manx shearwater colonies on the island. It was more than 45 years before the island was once again clear of the pest. Both puffin and Manx shearwater have not returned to the island.

## 7.0 Conclusions & Recommendations

The project took approximately 4 working days with half of that time spent on on-line research.

I set out with the goal of researching the history of the SS Herefordshire with basic information provided. Reading the report here, I believe I have collated sufficient information on the history of the SS Herefordshire from when it was built to her wrecking on Cardigan Island.

Many different WebPages were viewed ranging from large organisations e.g. Lloyd's Registry Listings to smaller WebPages such as local history or people with a given interest in a subject. The quantity and quality of the WebPages appeared depended on the targeted audiences and the amount of work undertaken. Some of the historical and interest in a subject WebPages were extremely useful. Newspaper achieves were also helpful in giving an overall picture of the operation of the ship and filling in information gaps.

Much of the data collated between websites checked out with some discrepancies observed. These are thought to be due to the SS Herefordshire being converted from a passenger/cargo liner to a cargo only ship.

A few WebPages viewed led to pay to view pages. However in most cases the information was obtained from other sources.

From the research conducted, setting a goal and how to reach that goal should be mapped out first. Careful use of specific words in search engines is very important.

The SS Herefordshire appears to have played an important role in the British shipping industry with her links to its colonies and as a hospital ship during WW1. The sinking of the SS Herefordshire has also been an important event in the history of Cardigan Island providing an accessible wreck for diving with abundant wildlife on it but also to ecological projects showing the effect of invasive animal species on local wildlife.

The SS Herefordshire is a well documented wreck dive site. At the website <a href="https://wrecksite.eu/fullReport.aspx?wk=10327">https://wrecksite.eu/fullReport.aspx?wk=10327</a> a full report on the wreck can be purchased. Future research on the SS Herefordshire wreck could be in the sphere of ecology looking at the growth and diversity in marine species on the Wrecksite.

### 8.0 References

#### 9.1 Online WebPages

The following websites and pages have been used in the compilation of this report:

http://archive.divernet.com/uk-dive-sites/p301473-the-wrecks-of-cardigan-b

https://www.britishnewspaperarchive.co.uk/ Keyword: SS Herefordshire; Years 1905-1935

https://coflein.gov.uk/en/site/272548/details/herefordshire

https://www.google.co.uk/

https://hec.lrfoundation.org.uk/archive-library/casualty-returns

http://www.theyard.info/ships/ships.asp?entryid=371

https://www.walesonline.co.uk/news/local-news/storm-1934-changed-cardigan-island-1882

https://wartimememoriesproject.com/greatwar/allied/battalion.php?pid=

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bibby Line

https://wrecksite.eu/wreck.aspx?10327

#### 9.2 Personal Correspondences

I would like to thank Mr Ian Cundy for supplying the initial information and other information with regards to the research project.

#### 9.3 Publications

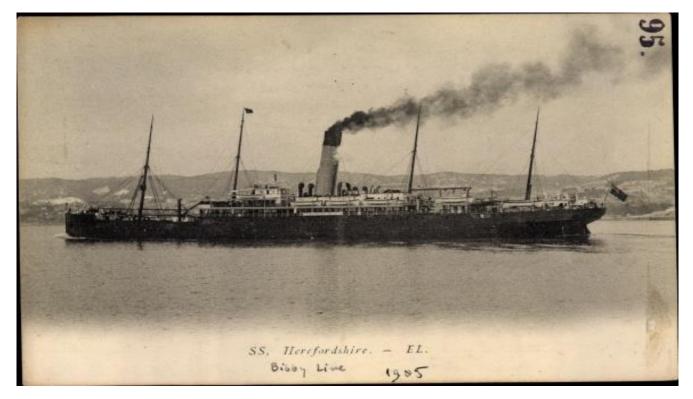
South West Wales through the lens of Harry Squibbs, South Cardiganshire, Vol 1

Shipwrecks Around Wales, Vol 1, Tom Bennett

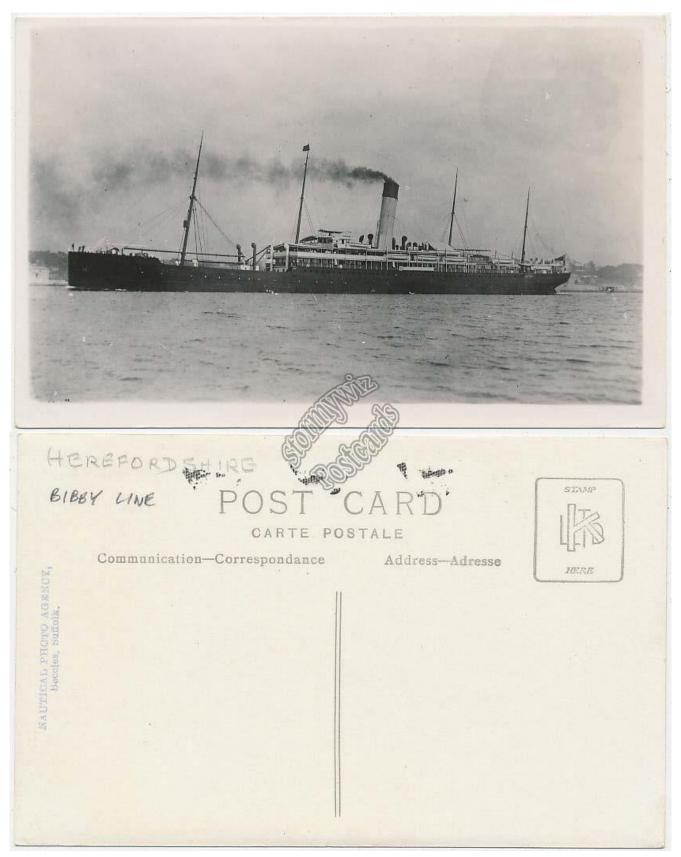
#### Nautical Archaeology Society

# **Appendices:**

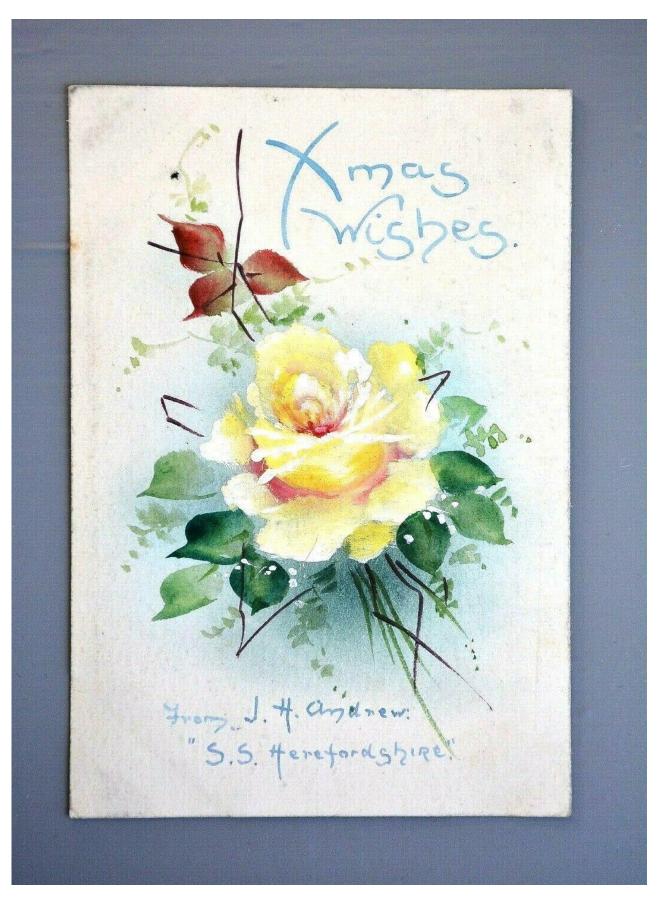
### Appendix A: SS Herefordshire at sea



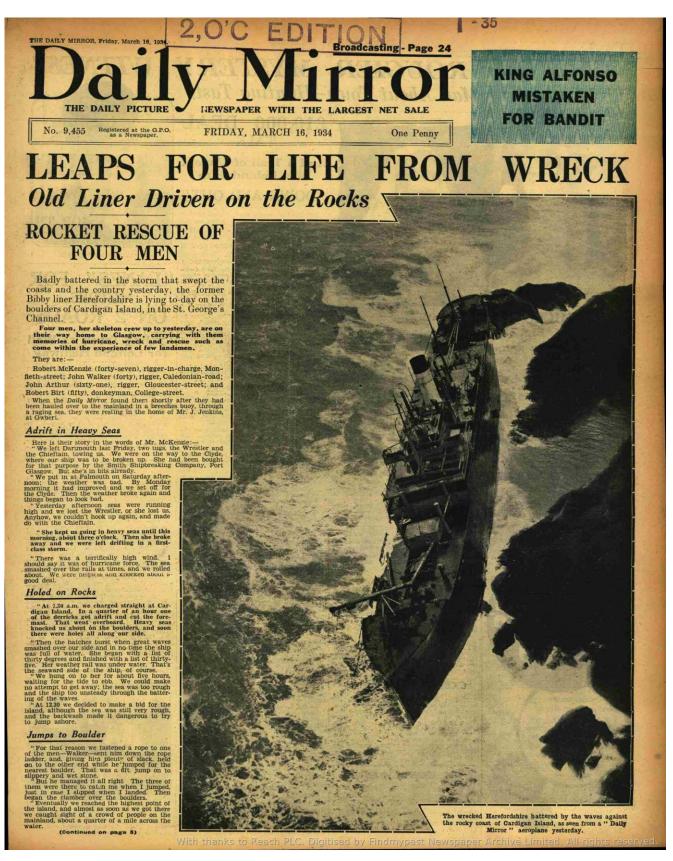
# Appendix B: Postcard of SS Herefordshire, early 1900s



# Appendix C: Christmas Card from SS Herefordshire (Dec 1913)

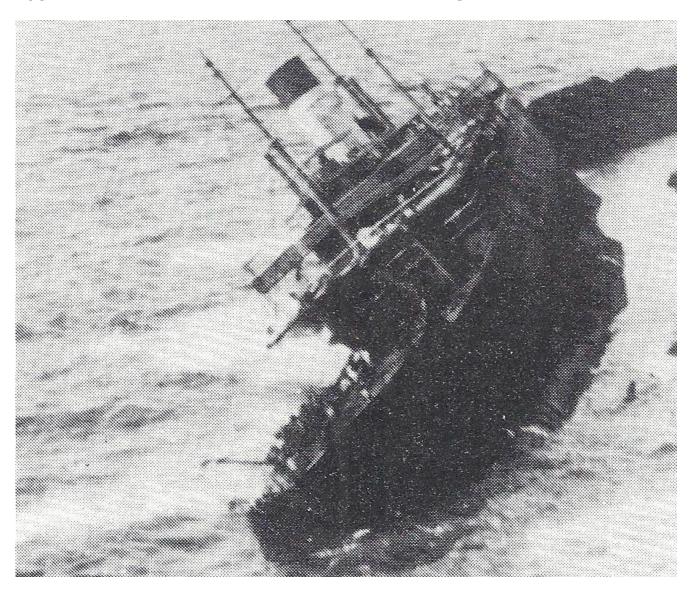


#### Appendix D: Front Page Daily Mirror March 16, 1934



#### Appendix E: Western Morning and Daily Gazette, March 16, 1934



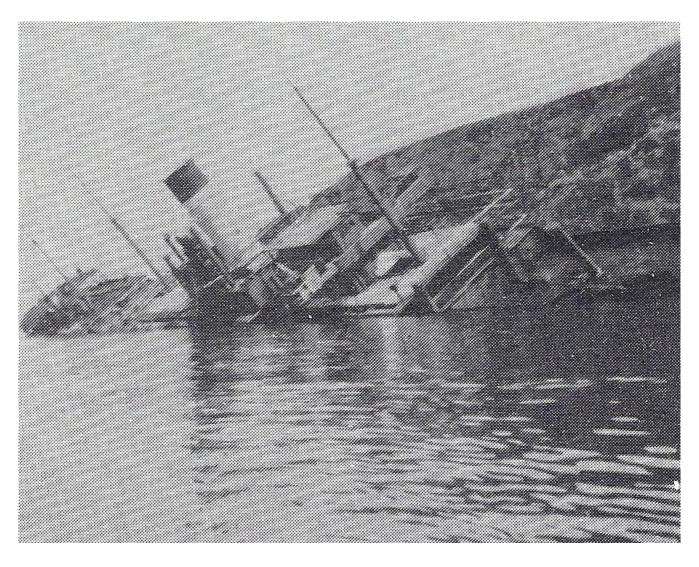


# Appendix F: SS Herefordshire on the rocks, Cardigan Island

# Appendix G: Crewman from SS Herefordshire being brought ashore



# Appendix H: SS Herefordshire before breaking up

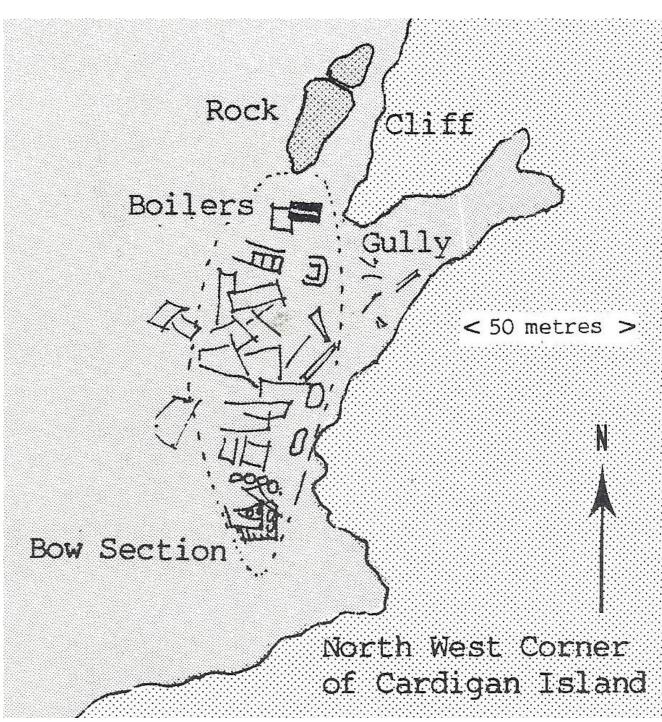


#### Appendix I: Lloyd's Register Returns of Ship Totally Lost, Condemned, etc (for quarter ended 31<sup>st</sup> March 1934)

$(\mathbf{o}, \mathbf{v})$	Wrecked.
(g.)	wrecked.

(Under this heading are included ships lost through stranding, or striking rocks, sunken wrecks, &c.)

No. in Reg. Book. 1933-34.		Name, and of Build.	Tons (Gross)	Country	Descrip- tion.	Voyage.	Cargo.	Circumstances and place.	Date.
21689	Bangor		340	U.K.	Stl.Sc	Portland-Belfast	Stone	Stranded atiBaliyquinton Point	26th Feb.
22120	Bilbeis		2737	U.K.	Stl.Sc.	Alexandria—Mersin.	General	and subsequently sank. At Kuza Khana, near Jaffa	5th Mar.
07151	Black H	awk'87	101	U.K.	I.Tw. Sc.			Stranded at Portishead and subsequently broken up.	3rd Jan.
22448	Brereto	n'21	461	<b>U.</b> К.		Lossiemouth-Barry.	Oats	On Carrick Rocks, near Rosslare. 1	18th Jan.
07379	Bullger	'83	404	<u></u> .к.	I.Tw. Sc.			At Anstruther 2	20th Jan.
22958	Canby	'11	4804	U.K.	Stl.Sc.	St. John, N.B.— Louisberg.		At Guion Island, Cape Breton 1	19th Feb.
07540	Cape Sa	ble'17	324	U.K.	Stl.Sc			At Skaga, Iceland	23rd Jan.
07718	Chancel	lor'01	168	U.K.	Stl.Sc.	Trawler		At Withnoe Point, Whitsand I Bay.	17th Jan.
27397	Herefor	dshire'05	6459	U.K.	Stl.Tw. Sc.			Broke adrift while in tow from Dartmouth to the Clyde to be broken up and stranded on Cardigan Island; reported total loss.	9th Mar.



#### Appendix J: Seabed Wreckage Map of SS Herefordshire

### Appendix K: Diving Video on SS Herefordshire (Oct 2009)

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=\_vpcMpIGknA