



Welsh Wreck Web Research Project
(North Cardigan Bay)
On-line research into the wreck of the:
SV John G Walter

No verifiable image located

Report compiled by:

Ashton East

Report Title:

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(North Cardigan Bay)
On-line research into the wreck of the:
*SV John G Walter***

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Abstract

The SV John G Walter was a cargo-carrying three-mast schooner launched 1903, and wrecked 1918 off Caernavon Bay. The German submarine U-101 had come up alongside the ship and ordered her crew to the boats before scuttling with explosive charges. This report summarises the ship's particulars and history as identified by a review of primary sources, limited to those available in online format only, conducted in May 2020.

Introduction

The SV John G Walter was launched in 1903 with wood hull and three schooner rigged masts. Trading routes were not identified however evidence did indicate her presence at ports on the eastern coast of the United States and Canada, as well as the final trans-Atlantic journey from Canada to Wales. The wrecking event occurred on 24 March 1918. The ship was wrecked by explosive charges from German submarine U-101 with no loss of life. No record of post-wrecking salvage or verifiable site visit was located.

Research Methodology

The research was conducted in May 2020 during the stay-at-home restrictions, and therefore limited to online resources. The research was conducted on a Microsoft Surface Pro, operating system: Microsoft Windows 10, and internet browser: Google Chrome.

In the first instance the ship's entry was located on wrecksite.eu. This website uses wiki-type crowd sourcing for information and has generally poor referencing. Information sourced from this website must be validated against primary sources.

Lloyd's Registers for the period 1903-1918 were not available online at the time the research was conducted, however the Mercantile Navy List was available via the Crew List Index Project for most years.

The following primary sources were examined:

- 1) Lloyd's List – searched through the British Newspaper Archive advanced search function for “John G Walter”, “Lloyd's List” and date range 1900-1949;
- 2) General search of the British Newspaper Archive for “John G Walter” with results limited to “articles” and date range 1900-1949;
- 3) Mercantile Navy List made available through the Crew List Index Project;
- 4) HSMO's 1919 publication of merchant shipping losses 1914-1918; and
- 5) National Maritime Museum crew records made available through The National Archives.

Finally, general searches were conducted through the Google search engine to identify any further information that might be available. Search terms: “John G Walter” “SV John G Walter” “John G Walter 1918” “John G Walter Caernarvon” “John G Walter ship” “John G Walter 1903” generated only one relevant results.

Results

Vessel	Name/s	SV John G Walter
	Type	Cargo
Built	Launched	1903
		Parrsboro, Nova Scotia
Construction	Materials	Wood
Propulsion	Type	Sail
	Details	Three mast schooner
Tonnage	Gross	258
	Net	209

Owner	Last	The Amherst Navigation Co Limited, Amherst Nova Scotia (1916)
	First	Rhodes Curry & Co Limited, Amherst Nova Scotia (1904)
Registry	Port	Parrsboro, Nova Scotia
	Flag	Nationality
	Number	116325
Final Voyage	From	Le Havre, Canada
	To	Cardiff, Wales
	Captain	D J McDonald
Wrecking	Date	24 March 1918
	Location	20 miles SW of Smalls (no reliable co-ordinates)
	Cause	Captured by German submarine U-101, crew evacuated to boats before scuttling with explosive charges
	Loss of life	None
	Outcome	Loss

The Google search for “schooner John G Walter” turned up a contemporaneous New York Times article describing the Captain’s experience of the wrecking. The Captain alleges that he was ordered to the deck of the German submarine while his crew was ordered to the boats. The Captain further alleges that, left alone on the deck with the submarine’s Captain he punched the later in the jaw before diving overboard and swimming to the boats. Whether the story was true or fanciful could not be established but it is entertaining nevertheless.

Analysis

Searches of the British Newspaper Archive for references to the SV John G Walter produced a small number of results. However, the OCR quality of records in this resource is poor and the search function is quite limited. Given the ship was registered in Canada and appears to have been active off the eastern coast of Canada and the United States it is possible that searches of United States and Canadian newspaper archives would yield more results.

The chain of ownership was established by reference to the Mercantile Navy List. The identity of the German submarine responsible for sinking was established by reference to a secondary source with high confidence (uboaat.net).

No information concerning post-wrecking salvage or inspection could be located, and no reliable co-ordinates for the wreck site were identified. The ship is unlikely to be easily located but the information in this report may assist with identification of unknown wreck sites in the area.

Conclusions and Recommendations

Approximately two hours were spent on this project. The majority of time was spent searching various online resources mentioned above for references to this ship. It is possible that United States and Canadian archives may yield more information on the SV John G Walter.

Only limited particulars of the ship could be established from online resources and it is likely that further details can only be established through inspection of archival material stored in Nova Scotia. Little of the SV John G Walter’s wooden hull is likely to have survived, and given the lack of accurate co-ordinates the wreck site is likely to be difficult to locate.

While records of the SV John G Walter can be improved from the particulars identified in this report as part of the broader investigations into North Cardigan bay, no distinguishing characteristics of vessel, cargo or story were identified that would justify priority attention.

References

- British Newspaper Archive <available 10 May 2020 at <https://www.britishnewspaperarchive.co.uk/>>.
- HSMO, "Navy Losses and Merchant Shipping (Losses)" (1919) <extracted content available 10 May 2020 at <https://www.naval-history.net/WW1LossesBrMS1918.htm>>.
- Registrar General of Shipping and Seamen, "Mercantile Navy List" <available 18 May 2020 at <http://www.crewlist.org.uk/data/viewimages?year=1917>>.
- uboat.net, "John G Walter", <available 18 May 2020 at https://uboat.net/wwi/ships_hit/3175.html>.
- New York Times, "Hit U-boat Captain Who Sank His Ship", 8 May 1918.
- Wiki-type contributions, "John G. Walter SV [+1918]", Wreck Site <available 20 May 2020 at <https://wrecksite.eu/wreck.aspx?58611>>.

Appendix A – The Timeline for the SV John G Walter

1903	Launched Parrsboro, Nova Scotia Owned by Rhodes Curry & Co Limited
1906, 25 October	Arrived in Parrsboro under tow, having been ashore in Cumberland Bay.
1906, 7 December	Arrived in Gloucester, Massachusetts with loss of sails.
1916	Owned by The Amherst Navigation Co Lintied
1918, 24 March	Sunk by explosive charges from German submarine U-101

Appendix B – The Location for the SV John G Walter

