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
Report Title:

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Report Ref:

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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.
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2.4 Contributors

Ian Cundy           MADU Archaeological Diving Unit,
                    Nautical Archaeology Society (Regional co-ordinator for Wales)
2.5 Abbreviations

MADU Malvern Archaeological Diving Unit

2.6 Appendices

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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 2nd 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

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>MADU Ref. No.</th>
<th>Date Wrecked</th>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Location 1</th>
<th>Location 2</th>
<th>Details</th>
<th>Vessel Type</th>
<th>Matls</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>431</td>
<td>15/03/1934</td>
<td>Herefordshire</td>
<td>Cardiganshire</td>
<td>Cardigan Island</td>
<td>stranded onshore</td>
<td>Steamship</td>
<td>steel</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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**

- Obtained MADU Listing of Wrecks
  - Choose ship – SS Herefordshire

- Checked Lloyds Ship Registry
  - No online Registry Listing for SS Herefordshire could be found.

- Using Google and Keyword Herefordshire, SS Herefordshire, identified websites/pages for references.
  - From websites/pages listed reviewed

- **Ship Details**
  - Ship Builders
  - Location Built
  - Specifications

- **Ship History**
  - Voyages
  - Accidents & Incidences

- **Other Relevant Information**

**Welsh Wreck Web Research Project**
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See Section 9 for list of websites viewed
### 5.0 Results

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

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Vessel</th>
<th>Name/s</th>
<th>Herefordshire</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Type</td>
<td>Steamship</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Passenger/Cargo</td>
<td></td>
<td>Passenger/Cargo, rebuilt for cargo services only in 1929</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Built Date</td>
<td>Laid Down:</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Launched:</td>
<td>31/08/1905</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Delivered:</td>
<td>29/11/1905</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Cost:</td>
<td>N/A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Builder</td>
<td>Harland &amp; Wolff Ltd</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Construction</td>
<td>Materials:</td>
<td>Steel</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Decks:</td>
<td>3 x deck / 4 x masts / p.deck 51ft / b.deck 223ft / f.castle 33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Bulkheads:</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Propulsion</td>
<td>Type:</td>
<td>Engine, Steam</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Converted:</td>
<td>to oil burning in 1920</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Details:</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2 x screw</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Engine Details</td>
<td>Type:</td>
<td>2 x Quad 4 cyl</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Size:</td>
<td>24, 40, 65 x 42in</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>HP:</td>
<td>833</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Manufacturer:</td>
<td>N/A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Boilers</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Drive Type</td>
<td>Propeller</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number</td>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dimensions</td>
<td>Length:</td>
<td>452 ft 2 ins</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Beam:</td>
<td>54 ft 2 ins</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Draught:</td>
<td>30 ft 6 ins</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tonnage</td>
<td>Gross:</td>
<td>7183 (from Harland &amp; Wolff Ships Built Catalogue)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Net:</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Owner First</td>
<td>Bibby Steamship Company</td>
<td>Liverpool, England</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Last</td>
<td>Smith Ship breaking Company</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Bought from Bibby Lines Ltd for GBP 9500 on Feb 19th 1934</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Others</td>
<td>None</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Registry Port</td>
<td>Liverpool</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Flag</td>
<td>GBR</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number</td>
<td>120903</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>History Routes</td>
<td>Predominately UK - Burma</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cargo</td>
<td>General</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Final Voyage</td>
<td>From</td>
<td>Dartmouth, England,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>To</td>
<td>Clyde, Scotland (scheduled port of arrival)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Captain</td>
<td>No Captain aboard</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Crew</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Passengers</td>
<td>None</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cargo</td>
<td>Ballast</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wrecking Date</td>
<td>15/03/1934</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Location</td>
<td>52°08′N/4°41′18″W, Cardigan Island, Cardiganshire</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cause</td>
<td>Drifted onto rocks after tow ropes to 2 tugs parted</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Loss of life</td>
<td>0</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Outcome</td>
<td>Sunk (The wreck is currently owned by the Llanelli Sub-Aqua Club Register #120903)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
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 31st 1905 and completed on Nov 29th 1905.
- A newspaper article from The Belfast News Letter of Nov 30th 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 Humphreys 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 all 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 25th July 1916, SS Herefordshire was requisitioned as a hospital ship for 380 patients serving Salonica, 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 1st 1918, SS Herefordshire was decommissioned.
- On 4th 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. Milson, 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 2nd 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 27th, 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 9th March 1934 left in tow bound for the Clyde to be broken up.

• On March 15th 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 14th the tow line from the Wrestler broke at 2:30pm and numerous attempts to reconnect were unsuccessful. About 12 hrs later the 2nd 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 https://wrecksite.eu/fullReport.aspx?wk=10327 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/herfordshire

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

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

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


https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bibby_Line


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
Appendices:

Appendix A: SS Herefordshire at sea
Appendix B: Postcard of SS Herefordshire, early 1900s
Appendix C: Christmas Card from SS Herefordshire (Dec 1913)
LEAPS FOR LIFE FROM WRECK

Old Liner Driven on the Rocks

ROCKET RESCUE OF FOUR MEN

Badly battered in the storm that swept the coast and the country yesterday, the former Bibby liner Herefordshire is lying to-day on the boulders of Cardigan Island, in the St. George’s Channel.

Four men, her skelton crew up to yesterday, are on their way home to Glasgow, carrying with them mementoes of hurricane, wreck, and rescue such as come within the experience of few landmen.

They are:

Robert McKee (forty-seven), rigger-in-charge, Monksthes-street; John Walker (forty-five), rigger, Caledonia-road; John Arthur (sixty-one), rigger, College-street; and Robert Birt (fifty), deckerman, College-street.

The Herefordshire, though driven on the rocks, had not been headed over as the weather in a storm. The ship was lying to-o at Glanau.

Adrift in Heavy Seas

Here is their story in the words of Mr. McKee:

“We left Portsmouth last Friday, two men, the Wrestler and the Chiefman, leaving us. We were on the way to the Clyde, when a gale sprang up. We took the direction of the shipping company, and were on our homeward way. We got in at Cardigan on Tuesday afternoon, at a quarter to four, and found that we were to have a round trip for the Clyde. Then the weather broke again and things began to look bad. We got in to the roadstead, and we were all at sea, and we lost the Wrestler at the last, and we couldn’t go up again, and made do with the Chiefman.

“The seas were going in heavy seas until this morning, about three o’clock, and they were all about a good deal worse.

“There was a terrifically high wind, and we were set adrift in a great

Holed on Rocks

“At 1.30 p.m. yesterday, we were married by Cardigan Island, in a matter of 12 feet, and one of the deckhands got adrift and went down the ship. That went unfortunately, and one of the men was hit by the gale, and it was all over. The sea was running high, and we lost the Wrestler at the last, and we couldn’t go up again, and made do with the Chiefman.

“The seas were going in heavy seas until this morning, about three o’clock, and they were all about a good deal worse.

The wrecked Herefordshire battered by the waves against the rocky coast of Cardigan Island, as seen from a "Daily Mirror" aeroplane yesterday.
Appendix E: Western Morning and Daily Gazette, March 16, 1934

OLD LINER ON THE ROCKS

Rough Journey From Dartmouth

TUGS BREAK ADRIFT

FROM OUR OWN CORRESPONDENT.

CARDIGAN, Thursday.

The former Bibby Line steamer Herefordshire broke adrift early to-day from two tugs that were towing her to the Clyde to be broken up, and drifted ashore on the rocks off Cardigan Island.

The four men on board managed to scramble on to the island, and were afterwards brought to the mainland by the breeches buoy. The Herefordshire was to-night being pounded by heavy seas, and it was feared that she would break up.

The first concern of the four men rescued was that their wives and children should be informed that they were not only safe, but happy.

The ship drifted on to the rocks of Cardigan Island at 7.30 a.m. She could not be seen from Cardigan, but was sighted from Comines Head. The Fishguard life-boat, which went out at 4.20 a.m. to her rescue, got into difficulties and had to return.

The St. David's life-boat, which was also summoned, had not arrived when the last member of the crew was rescued by the Aberystwyth-on-the-Sea voluntary rocket service. It was at first thought that the Fishguard life-boat had reached the steamer and was experiencing difficulty in getting off the crew.

SPECTATORS SURPRISED.

Several spectators on the mainland were surprised to see the four men appear on top of the island. They were staggering and in an exhausted condition. They were afterwards got to the mainland by means of the breeches buoy.

The first man to be brought ashore was Robert Mackenzie, 47. He told a reporter that they were taking the boat from Dartmouth to Port Glasgow to be broken up. They left Dartmouth last Friday, towed by two tugs, and had to put into Falmouth owing to the heavy sea.

They left Falmouth on Saturday afternoon, and the weather continued to be rough. One tug broke adrift at 3 a.m. to-day and the other an hour later.

The steamer then drifted and narrowly missed Strumble Head. When she struck the island they waited for the tide to ebb. The ship was listing obliged to escape. They had no wireless communication.

John Walker, 37, jumped ashore, and Mackenzie tied a rope round his waist and lowered the two older men, whom he and Walker had to assist up the rocks. The other men were John Arthur, 50, and Robert Bird, 30, all belonging to Glasgow.

The tugs Chieftain and Wrestler, which were towing the Herefordshire, are now in Fishguard Harbour.

When the Fishguard life-boat returned it was revealed that five miles north-west of Strumble Head Robert Russan, 50, was swept off the life-boat. He was rescued after much difficulty and was unconscious.
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 31st March 1934)

(g.) Wrecked.

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

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>No. in Reg. Bk. 1933-34.</th>
<th>Ship’s Name, and Year of Build.</th>
<th>Tonn (Gross)</th>
<th>Country</th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Voyage</th>
<th>Cargo</th>
<th>Circumstances and place</th>
<th>Date</th>
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<td>21640</td>
<td>Bangor</td>
<td>340</td>
<td>U.K.</td>
<td>St.LtSc</td>
<td>Portland—Belfast... Stone ...</td>
<td>At Ballyquintain Point; 30th Feb. and subsequently sank.</td>
<td>30th Mar.</td>
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<td>22120</td>
<td>Bilheis</td>
<td>2737</td>
<td>U.K.</td>
<td>St.LtSc</td>
<td>Alexandria—Mersin. General...</td>
<td>At Riza Kham as near Jaffa ...</td>
<td>5th Mar.</td>
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<tr>
<td>22448</td>
<td>Breton</td>
<td>161</td>
<td>U.K.</td>
<td>St.LtSc</td>
<td>Losiemouth—Harry. Oats ...</td>
<td>20th Jan.</td>
<td></td>
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<td>67379</td>
<td>Bulger</td>
<td>101</td>
<td>U.K.</td>
<td>I.Tw. Sc.</td>
<td>At Anstruther ...</td>
<td>20th Jan.</td>
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<td>22918</td>
<td>Canby</td>
<td>1894</td>
<td>U.K.</td>
<td>St.LtSc</td>
<td>Ballast ...</td>
<td>At Guion Island, Cape Breton</td>
<td>19th Feb.</td>
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<td>67516</td>
<td>Cape Sable</td>
<td>324</td>
<td>U.K.</td>
<td>St.LtSc</td>
<td>Trawler ...</td>
<td>At Skaga, Iceland</td>
<td>23rd Jan.</td>
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<td>57718</td>
<td>Chancellor</td>
<td>168</td>
<td>U.K.</td>
<td>St.LtSc</td>
<td>Trawler ...</td>
<td>At Withmore Point, Waitsand</td>
<td>17th Jan.</td>
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<td>27397</td>
<td>Herefordshire</td>
<td>6439</td>
<td>U.K.</td>
<td>St.LTw Sc.</td>
<td>Broke adrift while in tow from Dartmouth to the Clyde to be broken up and stranded on Cardigan Island; reported total loss.</td>
<td>3rd Mar.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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</table>
Appendix J: Seabed Wreckage Map of SS Herefordshire

Bow Section
North West Corner of Cardigan Island

< 50 metres >
Appendix K: Diving Video on SS Herefordshire (Oct 2009)

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_vpcMplGknA