

SHIPWRECK STORY

THE SINKING OF THE S.S. KYARRA

The 6,953 tons steel cargo and passenger luxury liner Kyarra was a beautiful Steam Ship built on the River Clyde by Denny Bros in Dumbarton and launched on 2 February, 1903 for the Australian Steam Navigation Co. Ltd. After ten years carrying cargo and passengers to and from Australia, she was requisitioned by the British government in October 1914, painted white and fitted out as a hospital/troop ship.



The Kyarra under construction at Denny Bros. Shipyard

The Kyarra had an eventful 1st World War career during which she saw service at Gallipoli, landed Anzac Expeditionary troops in the Dardanelles and brought many injured soldiers back from Europe. Three months before the end of the war she was decommissioned and sent to London, where she was refitted and loaded with a general cargo to be shipped back to Australia, along with a large number of war-wounded. On the 24th May 1918, she sailed from Tilbury for Devonport, Plymouth, where she was to embark 1000 war-wounded Aussie soldiers. On 26th May however, passing the Dorset coast at a good speed and in quiet waters she was torpedoed in her port side amidships, instantly killing six crew members. At first it had been thought she had struck a mine and the Skipper turned for Swanage in an attempt to beach her, but it was soon realised that she had been

torpedoed. The German U-boat UB-57, skippered by the German submarine ace Oberleutnant Johann Lohs, had hit and sank the P&O liner Moldavia off the Sussex coast just two days earlier. The skipper Captain William Smith immediately ordered the crew to abandon ship and the Kyarra nose dived into the dark waters off Anvil Point in less than ten minutes.

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Artist's Impression of the German Submarine

The wreck of the Kyarra now lies in approximately 30 metres of water about 3/4 mile SE of Anvil Point Lighthouse. She is one of the most dived shipwrecks in Britain and with good reason. Her cargo consisted of, among other things, Marmite, perfume, champagne, Russian stout, wine, Worcester sauce, bottled vinegar, bales of black silk and fabric, sealing wax sticks, photographic processing trays, ladies silver purses and gold watches, ceramic tiles, medical supplies, ointment in china pots and gold pocket watches.

She lay undiscovered and marked on the Admiralty Charts as a shoal sounding until 1966 when she was found by a lady member of the Kingston Sub Aqua Club while investigating the shoal. Thinking they were going to dive an obstruction thought to be a reef, you can imagine their shock and surprise to find a 500 ft liner in near perfect, untouched condition (every diver's dream). This now famous wreck is well plotted at location: 50°34.90N; 01°56.59W but in 1966 the wreck was considered to be nearer to St. Aldhelms Point. The dive club soon set about trying to discover the name of the ship they had stumbled across and found her to be the Kyarra, after checking the manifests of all the ships known to have sunk on the Dorset Coast. They eventually found a serial number of a stick of sealing wax that matched one they had found in one of the holds.

The Kingston Sub Aqua Club decided to see if they could buy the wreck from the Government's receiver of wrecks and in 1967 they bought the ship for £120. All ships lost in wartime that had been requisitioned by the Government of the time were paid for if lost in action. The Kyarra was salvaged in earnest for three or more years and became known as the Ship made of Brass as so much brass was used in her construction.

I was lucky enough to dive this wreck on many occasions, before it became too well known, with one of the owners. I have some wonderful souvenirs to adorn various shelves the - best of which was a most beautiful hand made perfume bottle, complete with perfume (a very rare find at the time) the smell of which I have yet to find better.



Artist's Impression of the S.S.Kyarra

One of my dive buddies found the most coveted of prizes...the KYARRA name from the bow in very large brass letters; it took weeks to retrieve them and made the news. Another friend retrieved a three and a half foot, ten and a half pound lobster from the same hole as we had seen a seven foot conger the week before. There are many stories of the Kyarra, some good some not so good, if you see me around the marina or moored up you might get me to part with the odd one..... Happy Days.

The next time you head west to Weymouth or beyond and are passing close in by Durlston Head and Anvil Point lighthouse, at slack water, look out to sea and you'll probably see a group of ribs and inflatables strung out over 500 ft or so with their dive flags aloft. These guys and gals will be diligently hunting for a souvenir to remember this famous but now well broken up wreck by and won't appreciate any motorboats going too close to take a peek. We all know what a divers 'A' flag looks like and if seen we should always give them a wide berth. Divers don't always surface near their safety boats and none of us would like a mangled diver on our conscience.

Have fun with your boating in 2007 and always have a smile on your face.....Work of Art might just be close by with their camera!!

Story and Paintings by Peter Hayton, Work of Art, C24

"The Kyarra became known as the Ship made of Brass as so much brass was used in her construction"

