



The Wreck of HMS Jason (1917)



Approved for release by M. Thomson (Director):

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- Lostinwatersdeep project

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1. INTRODUCTION & AIMS

HMS Jason was an Alarm Class Torpedo Gunboat, built by Naval Construction & Armament, Barrow, and launched in 1892. Prior to WW1, HMS Jason was converted for minesweeping duties and at the outbreak of war she joined the Grand Fleet at Scapa Flow as part of the Second Fleet Sweeping Flotilla.

HMS Jason:

- Displacement: 810 tons.
- Length: 74 m.
- Beam: 8.20 m.
- Draught: 3.80 m.
- Complement: 103
- Armament: 2 x 4.7 inch guns, 4 x 3 pounder guns. Built with 3 x 18-inch torpedo tubes one of which was in the bow.

On the 3rd April 1917 HMS Jason together with HMS Circe were conducting a minesweeping operation in the Minch, to the east side of Tiree and Coll. At 11.10 am HMS Jason struck a mine and sank with the loss of 25 crew (Figure 1). HMS Circe, which was close by, managed to rescue 78 of the crew but 25 died (Appendix 1). Only one body was recovered, that of Stoker James Edward Blackman, who is buried in Oban.

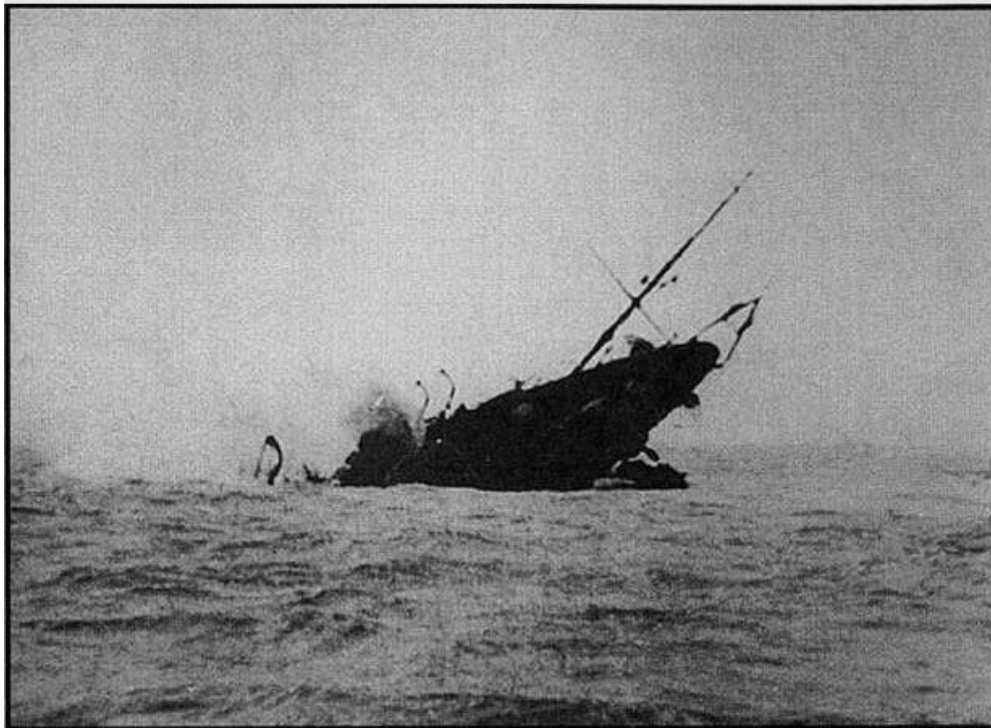


Figure 1: HMS Jason sinking (K. Heath, personal collection).

The aim of this project was to locate and survey the wreck of HMS Jason, re-examine the circumstances surrounding its loss and provide new information to the Ministry of Defence (MOD) to help in the possible scheduling of the site as a War Grave under the Protection of Military Remains Act 1986. By making the report publicly available it is also hoped to increase public awareness of such events and serve as a reminder of those lost.

2. METHODOLOGY

2.1. Archive research

Archive materials were obtained from the National Archive, the United Kingdom's Hydrographic Office, and the National Maritime Museum. U-boat KTB extracts were kindly supplied by Michael Lowrey. Plans for HMS Jason (National Maritime Museum, Greenwich) were used to provide detailed information on the structure and dimensions of the vessel.

2.2. Side scan sonar

The side scan sonar survey was carried using a C-Max CM2 system, comprising a digital towfish with depth sensor. Sonar data were collected using a medium and high frequency settings of 325 kHz and 780kHz, respectively, and recorded using MaxView software. An Evermore SA380 Marine GPS (accuracy $\pm 3\text{m}$) was used to collect spatial data. The towfish was towed behind the survey vessel at an altitude of 5 - 20m off the seabed, depending on range. A counter pulley recorded the layback distance of the towfish, which was used during post processing to determine the location of the towfish (and thus any sonar contacts) relative to the vessel position. Post processing of sonar data was achieved using SonarWiz 7. All locations were given in degrees and deci-minute format (datum WGS84).

2.3. Magnetometer

A magnetometer survey was carried out using a Marine Magnetics SeaSpy magnetometer with data collected on BOB software. Spatial data was collected using an Evermore SA380 Marine GPS, providing accuracy of $\pm 3\text{m}$. All locations were given in degrees and deci-minute format (datum WGS84).

2.4. Remote video

A Spyball remote video system (Submertec, 540TVL, min. illumination 0.02Lux) was used to investigate the site. A secondary video system (GoPro Hero 4/6) was attached to the Spyball to gather still images and/or additional higher quality video.

2.5. Diving

Diving activity was planned using a volunteer dive group called "The Gasperados" and organised by Bob Anderson/Halton Charters. Information collected during the diving survey was provided free of charge to the project.

3. RESULTS

3.1. Archive research

The German U-boat U78 (Capt. Otto Dröscher) was on a mine laying campaign around the Inner Hebrides in January and February 1917. The KTB (KriegsTageBuch, or War Diary, provided by Michael Lowrey) shows that after laying mines in the Firth of Clyde, it travelled northwards and on the 2nd February was off Loch Eatharna, on the east side of Coll. At 03.37 it laid a line of 8 mines on a course of 090° from the light buoy on to 1 ½ sea miles, in a water depth of 80m. This is illustrated and described in the KTB (Figure 2).

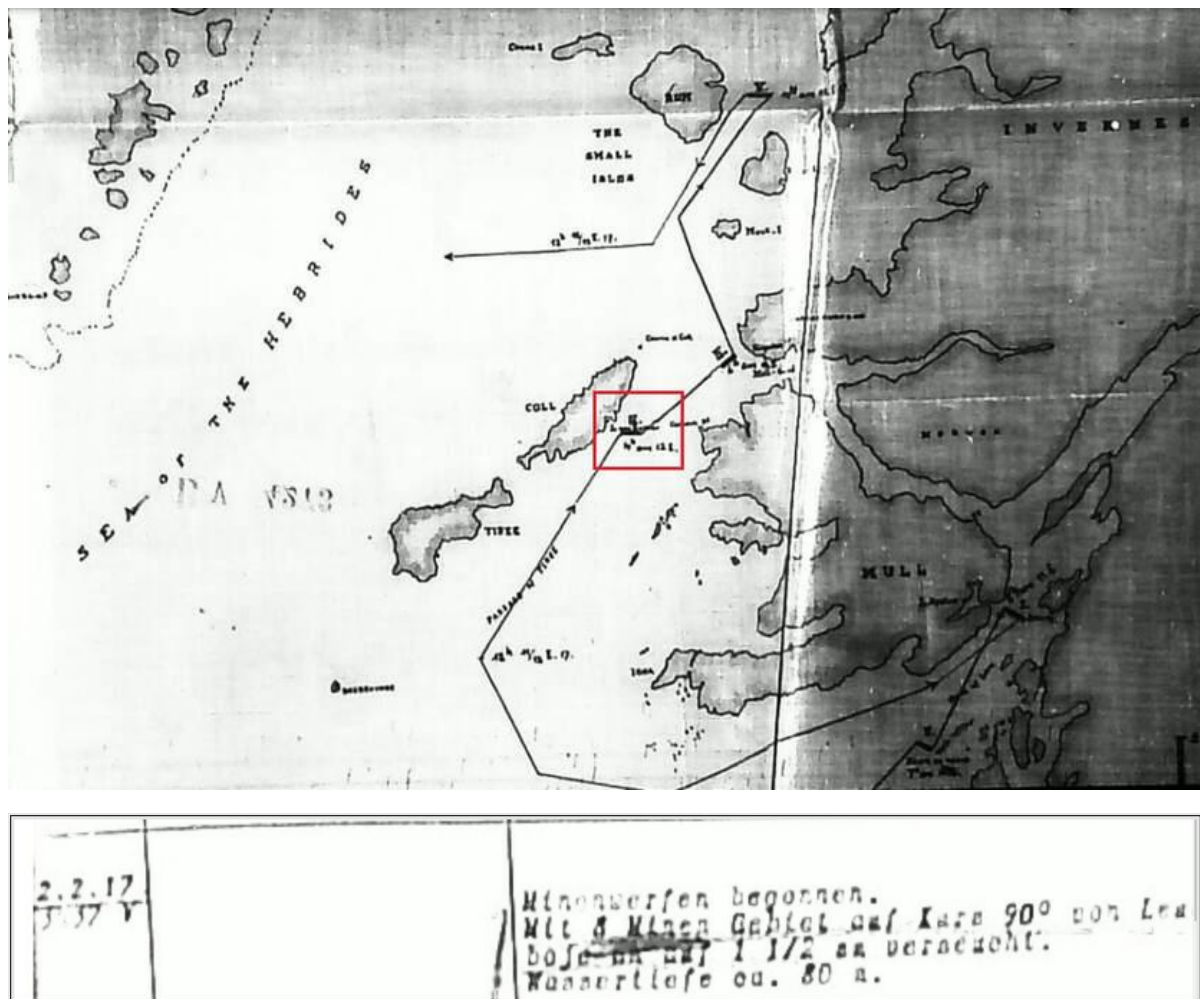


Figure 2: The chart shows the route of U78 and the position of the mine line laid off Coll. The KTB (logbook) from U-78 stated "03.37 am, Begun dropping mines".

On the 3rd of April 1917, two months after U78 had laid the mines, HMS Jason and HMD Circe were conducting mine sweeping operations off the east coast of Coll and Tiree. The orders were to sweep a channel up to one and a half miles off the coast. At 11.10 HMS Jason struck a mine causing severe damage to the bow of the vessel. The forward mast fell and the bow was seen to droop and bridge was observed by HMS Circe to be considerably damaged. At 11.14 HMS Jason heeled over to port then sank almost vertically, stern uppermost (ADM 53/37826, Figure 3). HMS Circe launched lifeboats and picked up all the surviving crew and recovered one body. 24 other crewmen were lost.

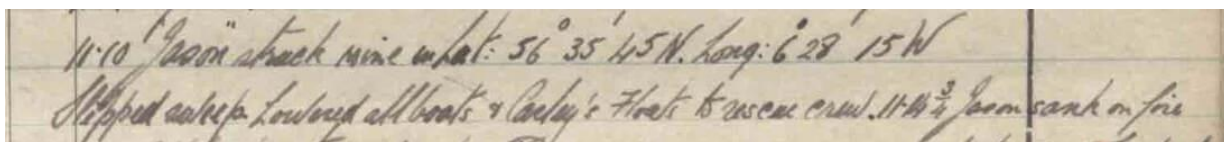


Figure 3: Extract from the Log book HMS Circe, 3rd April 1917 (ADM 53/37826). "11.10 Jason struck mine in Lat: 56 35'45N. Long 6 28'15W. Slipped sweep. Lowered all boats and Carly floats to rescue crew. 11.14 3/4 Jason sank on fire".

3.1.1. Definition of search area

Three criteria were used to define the search area for HMS Jason:

1. The position of the sinking reported in the logbook of HMD Circe;
2. the mine-line taken from bearings and description in U78s KTB; and
3. the swept channel, one and a half miles off Coll.

These are illustrated in Figure 4. The charted position for the wreck was based on the co-ordinates given by the HMD Circe logbook. Several attempts have been made over the years to locate the wreck itself but have proved unsuccessful. Netsurvey conducted an MBES survey in 2011 and could not find HMS Jason in the charted position and reported "not located 12.2011 using MBES. seabed rocky and uneven." Due to this survey the UKHO record was amended to "DEAD" and the wreck removed from charts (Appendix 2).

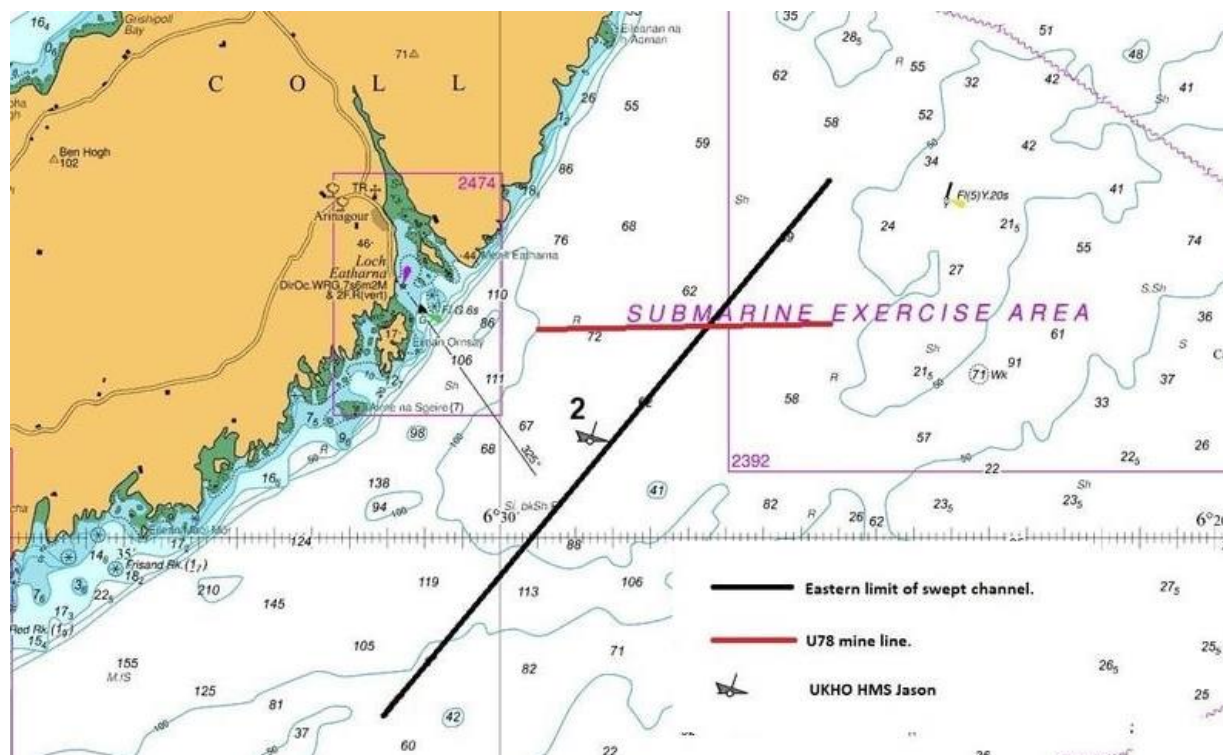


Figure 4: Chart extract of the area, showing the eastern edge of the swept channel (black line), the line along which the U78 laid its mines (red line) and the charted location of the HMS Jason, as reported in the logbook of HMD Circe.

On this basis, the search areas for the side scan survey were defined as follows (in order of priority):

1. the area around the charted location, out to one nautical mile;
2. the mine line laid by U78, approximately 500m either side; and
3. the area immediately outside the swept channel, to 500m.

3.2. Side Scan Sonar

Side scan survey campaigns were carried out 2017, 2018, 2021 and 2022, initially working from MV Halton and latterly from MV Clasina (both of Halton Charters, Stromness). The first two attempts proved very challenging due to weather. All three areas were surveyed but the quality of the sonar data was poor due to the poor sea conditions. While some contacts were observed, none could be obviously linked with a vessel the size of HMS Jason. As a result of this, the 2021 survey returned to the first search area with the intention of conducting a more detailed high frequency survey. Due to unforeseen circumstances, only one hour of sonar data was collected and as a result of this time constraint, the incoming data was not reviewed in real time. It was only during the journey back to Oban that analysis of the data showed that a promising contact had been found during a turn at the end of the usual straight line run (Figure 5). The contact suggested wreckage and was comparable in size of HMS Jason. Its position was 56° 35.001'N, 006° 28.976'W, with a water depth of 90m and approximately 1500m from the charted location for HMS Jason.

The fourth season (March 2022) focussed on the contact recorded the previous year in the hope of providing images that could help with a planned dive of the site later in the year. This survey was again hampered by weather and was carried out at night under worsening sea conditions. Several sonar images of varying quality were obtained, two of which are shown in Figures 6 & 7. Figure 6 shows a wreck shaped contact alongside a large rock or protruding bedrock. The sonar shadow in this image is also very characteristic of a wreck and debris can be seen on the seabed in the near vicinity. Figure 7 was recorded later and suffered from pitch and yaw in the survey vessel due to the worsening conditions. However, as well as the general wreck site they showed what appeared to be a shaft and propeller at one end of the wreckage.

Further analysis of previous surveys showed that the wreck had actually been recorded in 2017 but because of the poor data quality (as a result of the weather) it had not been highlighted as a potential contact (Figure 8).

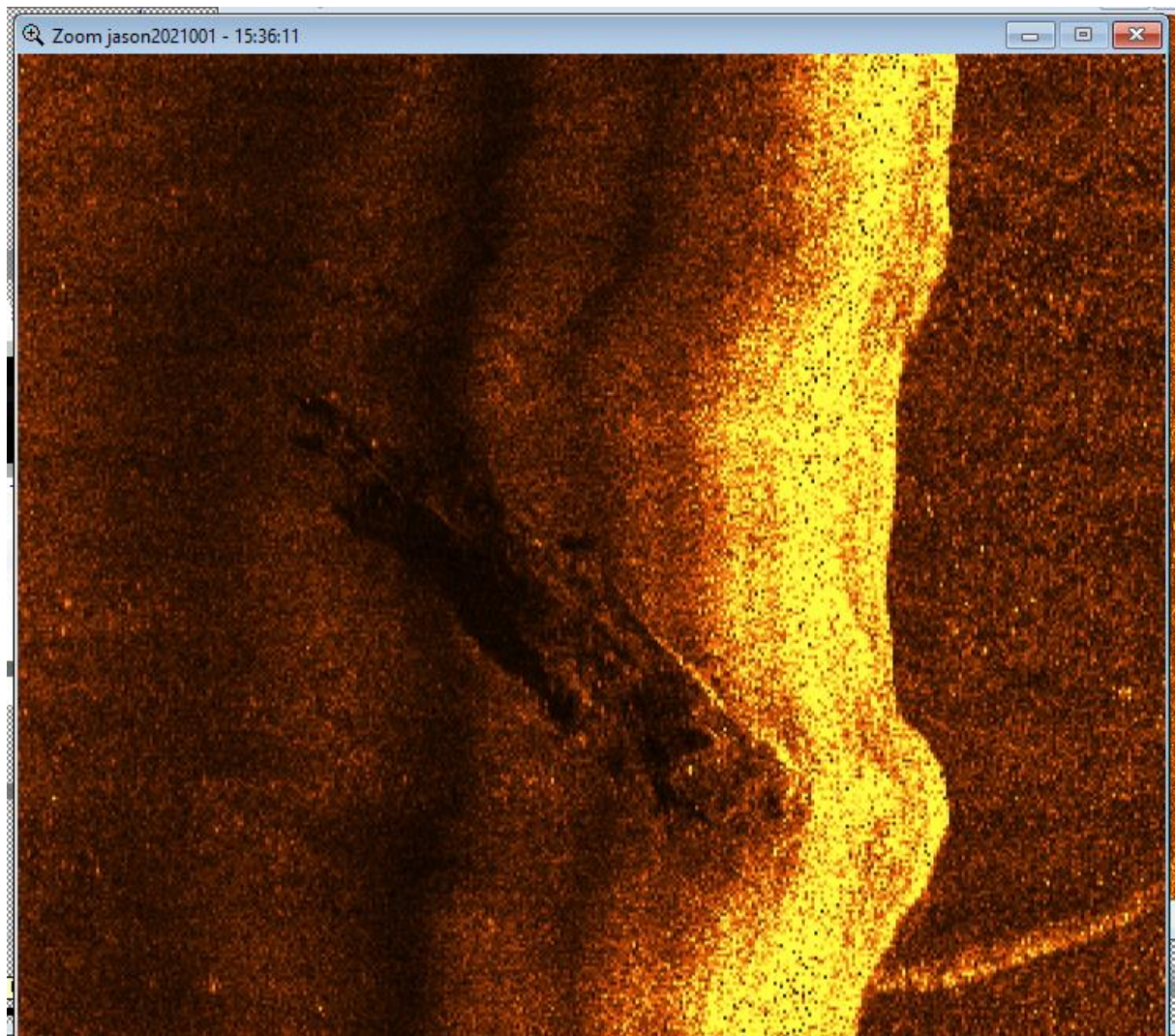


Figure 5: Side Scan image from 2021 survey data, showing possible wreckage.

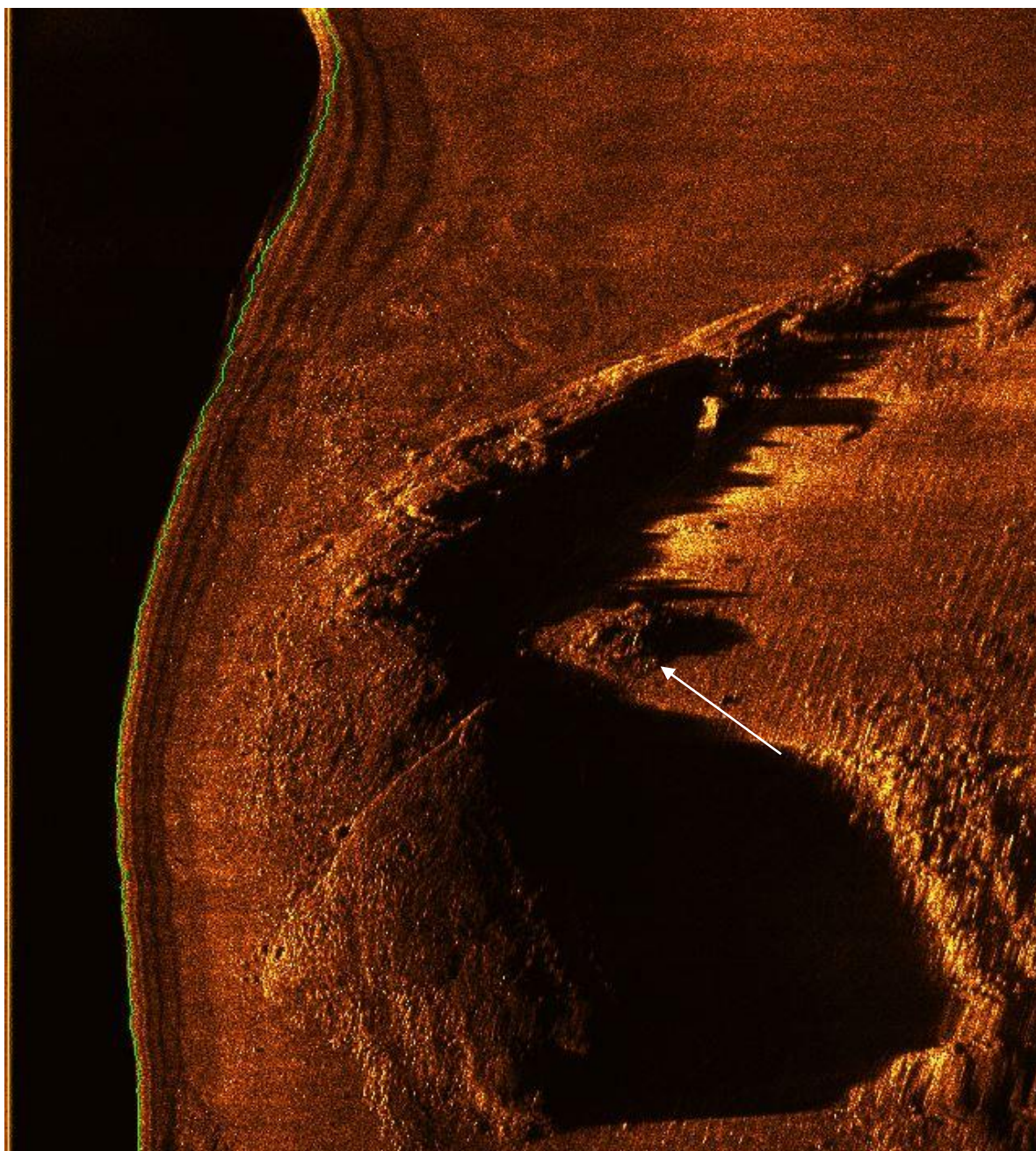


Figure 6: Sonar image recorded in March 2022 showing a wreck like object (top) located beside a large rocky protrusion (bottom).

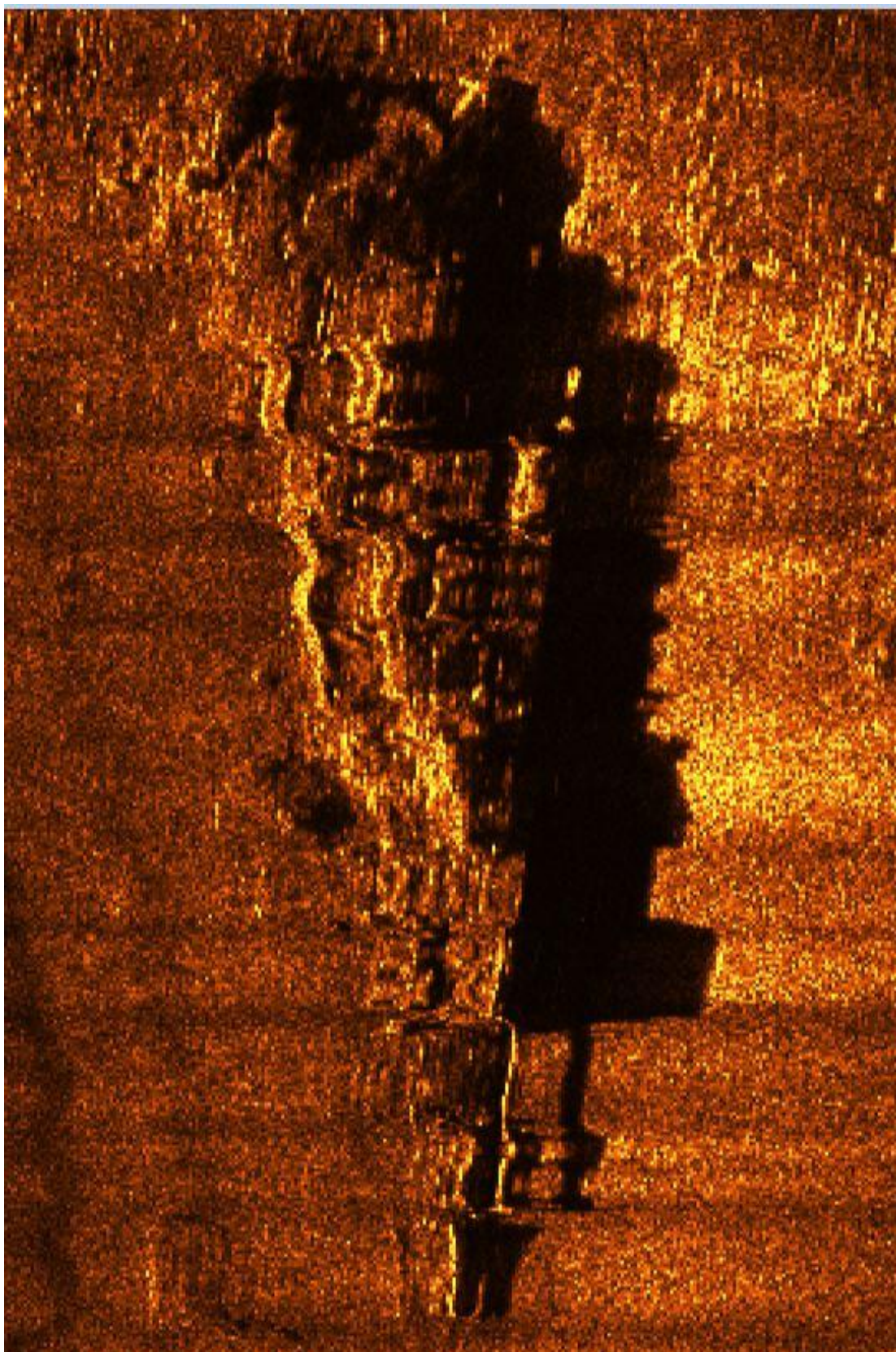


Figure 7: Sonar image recorded in March 2022 showing the wreck site, with propeller and shaft visible at one end. Sea conditions were worsening and the image is affected by pitch and yaw in the survey vessel.

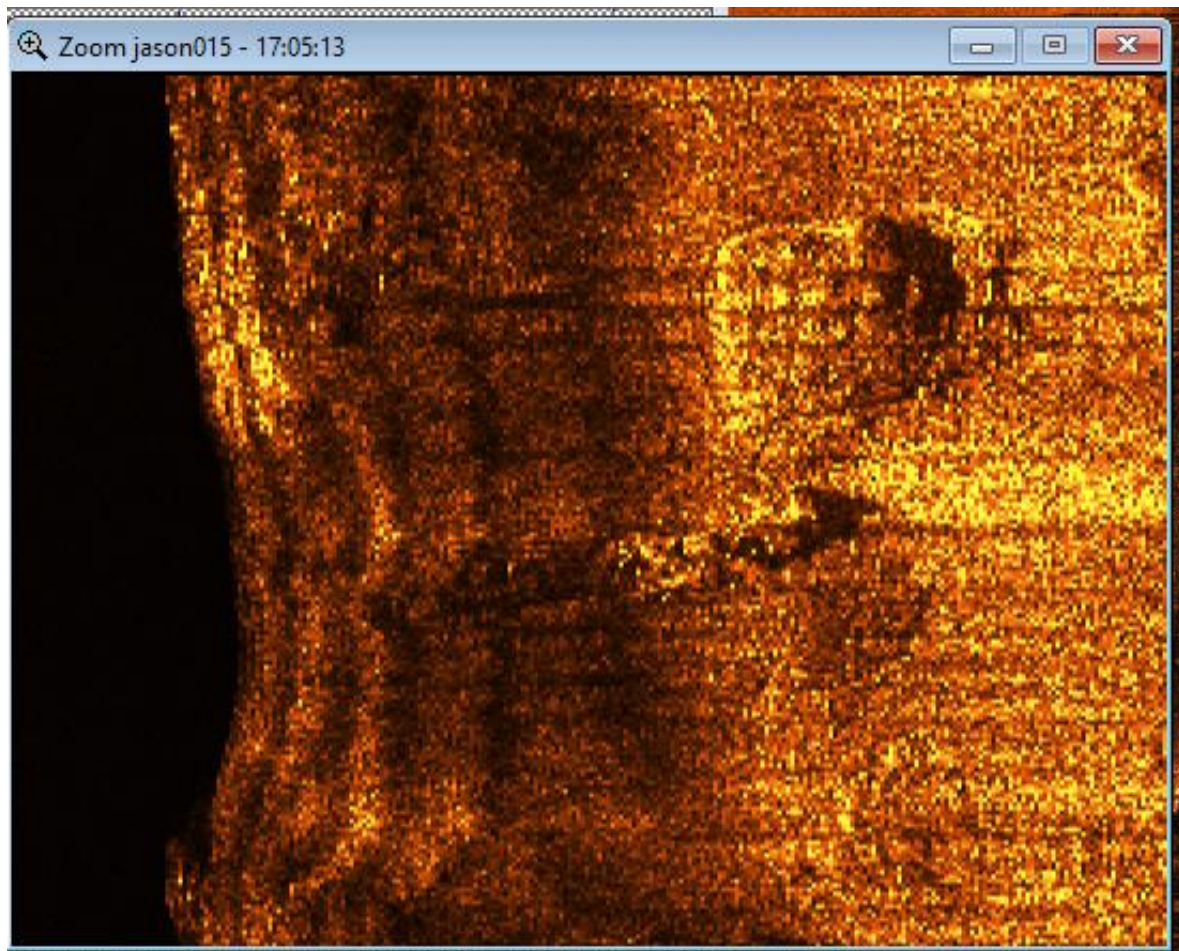


Figure 8: Data from the 2017 survey showing the wreck and adjacent bedrock protrusion.

3.2 Magnetometer

The magnetometer was used in 2021, but due to time constraints, it was not possible to carry out a full survey of the area. Three magnetic anomalies were detected but it was not possible to confirm if those corresponded to the site where wreckage was subsequently found.

3.3 Remote video

An attempt was made to survey several contacts located during the 2017 side scan survey. However, due to the water depth, strong tides and poor visibility this was unsuccessful and no useful video footage was obtained.

3.4 Diving Survey

A diving survey of the wreckage was carried out on the 12 & 13th April 2022 by the technical diving group “The Gasperados”. Two dives were carried out over the two-day period. Water depth (93m) limited bottom time to 24 minutes on each occasion, but the divers succeeded in locating the site and confirmed the presence of vessel wreckage, missing its bow section. Despite the short bottom time the divers were able to inspect the full length of the main wreck site over the two dives and recorded photographs and video whilst doing so. Items seen by the divers included the following:

- two 4.7-inch guns, one forward and one aft;
- two engines and Yarrow style boilers;
- starboard propellor, shaft and A bracket;
- the port side propeller and shaft were not seen, although the A bracket support for the missing shaft was present;
- crockery showing the Admiralty anchor;
- ammunition boxes containing brass casings;
- admiralty pattern anchor;
- compass binnacle; and
- bridge items, including telegraph and helm.

Photographs are shown in Figures 9 – 16. As noted above, the bow of the wreck was missing and not seen during the dives. The sonar image (Figure 6) shows another smaller object lying to the north of the main wreck (indicated by the white arrow), which may be the bow section.



Figure 9: Forward 4.7-inch gun (Photo: Dominic Robinson).



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Figure 10: Forward 4.7-inch gun (Photo: Rick Ayrton)



Figure 11: Aft 4.7-inch gun (Photo: Dominic Robinson).



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Figure 12: Aft 4.7-inch gun (Photo: Rick Ayrton).



Figure 13: Still image from video of 4.7-inch ammunition box, showing brass casings (photo: Fran Hockley).

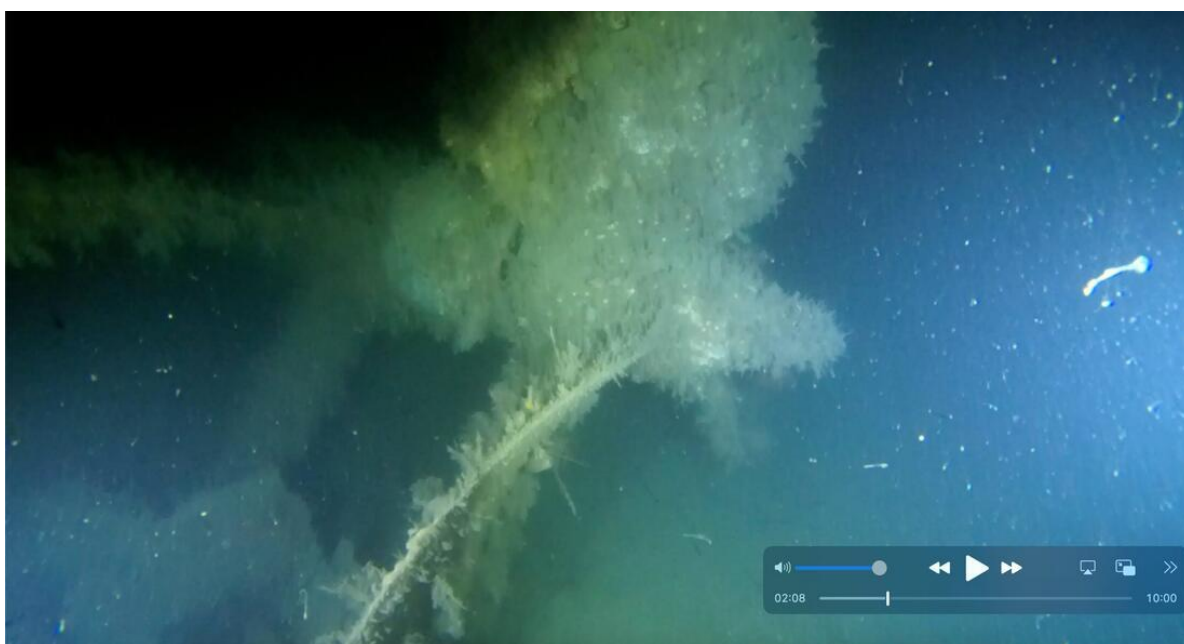


Figure 14: Still image from video of port side propeller, shaft and 'A' bracket (photo: Fran Hockley).



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Figure 15: Yarrow style boiler (photo: Rick Ayrton).



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Figure 16: Royal Navy plate (photo: Rick Ayrton)

4. DISCUSSION

This project succeeded in locating a significant wrecksite, approximately 2 nautical miles south east of Loch Eatharna, on the east side of Coll. There is little doubt that the remains at the site are those of HMS Jason. This conclusion is supported by evidence gathered during the course of survey work, which includes the following:

- The location of the wreck site (56° 35.001'N, 006° 28.976'W) is approximately 1500m away from the position where HMS Jason sank, as detailed in the logbook of HMS Circe and used on the Admiralty chart for the area (No. 2171);
- There are no other recorded Royal Navy losses in the area;
- The wreckage is approximately 60m in length and missing its bow. The length of HMS Jason was 74m; and
- Articles on the wreck site observed by divers include crockery with Royal Navy stamps, 2 guns (one fore and one aft) of similar calibre with matching munitions and twin engines with Yarrow boilers.

Other general features of the sites match closely with the layout of HMS Jason. The missing bow section is consistent with other incidents of this type (e.g. HMS Albacore, HMS Carnation). While the bow section was not seen during the dive, side scan images show a separate item of debris lying a short distance to the north of the main wreck site and any future dives on the site may wish to investigate this.

The position of the wreck has been reported to the UK Hydrographic Office. The discovery was also reported to the Royal Navy by Lt Cdr Jen Smith, who was part of the Gasperados dive team that surveyed the wreck. This will trigger a process that may see the wreck designated under the Military Remains Act 1986. If designated, this would confer some legal protection of the site, although its location and depth already provide this to some degree as it can only be visited by experienced technical divers. Irrespective of its legal status this discovery serves as a poignant reminder of the loss of HMS Jason and 25 of its crew.

The investigative process used in this project again shows the importance of combining good fieldwork with detailed archive research. On this occasion, many hours of fieldwork were required to locate the wreck, which lay approximately 1500m away from the nearest recorded location (co-ordinates provided in the logbook from HMS Circe). Moreover, the use of side scan sonar was crucial to the discovery as a previous multibeam survey of the area had not succeeded in finding the wreck.

5. REFERENCES & BIBLIOGRAPHY

ADM 53/37826 Logbook HMS Circe April 1917.

KTB U-78, kindly provided by Michael Lowry.

Bob Baird (1995). Shipwrecks of the west of Scotland. Glasgow: Nekton Books.

Larn and Larn, R and B. (1998) Shipwreck index of the British Isles: volume 4, Scotland. London: Lloyds Register.

ADM 137/1920. Secret packs of the Commander in Chief Grand Fleet, Volume XL, pack 0021.

Appendix 1: Sailors lost on HMS Jason, 3rd April 1917.

Name - William George Bick

DOB - 26th April 1899 although Naval records state 1897

Place of Birth - Sandgate, Kent

Rank - Stoker 1st Class, (Ch) SS 117500

Name - James Edward Blackman

DOB - 12th May 1891

Place of Birth - Southsea, Hampshire

Rank - Stoker 1st Class (Ch) K 2972

Name - James Boots

DOB - 25th December 1896, although a birth register entry has not been found

Place of Birth - Newcastle, Northumberland

Rank - Stoker 1st Class, (Ch) K 24909

Name - Clarence Percy Braund

DOB - 19th April 1894

Place of Birth - Paignton, Devon

Rank - Leading Stoker (Ch) K 9965

Name - Harry Edward Brooks

DOB - 28th July 1890

Place of Birth - Battersea, London

Parents - Henry and Sarah

Rank - Stoker Petty Officer (Ch) K 9993

Name - Henry John Carroll

DOB - 2nd July 1888

Place of Birth - Sheerness, Kent

Rank - Shipwright 1st Class (Ch) 345393

Name - Frederick George Castleman

DOB - 5th July 1890

Place of Birth - Milton Ernest, Bedford

Rank - Leading Stoker (Ch) K 3303

Name - Stephen John Cottle

DOB - 24th January 1888

Place of Birth - Mile End, London

Rank - Able Seaman (Ch) 224146

Name - Frederick John Cox

DOB - 22nd September 1891

Place of Birth - Bampton, Oxfordshire

Rank - Stoker 1st Class (Ch) SS 115225

Name - William Daniels

DOB - 8th January 1890

Place of Birth - Rochford, Essex

Rank - Leading Stoker (Dev) K 3512

Name - William Fox

DOB - 7th Feb 1892 given on documents, but probably born in 1891

Place of Birth - Nottingham

Rank - Stoker 1st Class (Dev) K 23171

Name - Sydney Herbert Gidley

DOB - 1st October 1881

Place of Birth - Plumstead, Kent

Rank - Petty Officer (Ch) 191549

Name - Arthur Francis Godwin

DOB - 3rd January 1897

Place of Birth - Clapham, London

Rank - Signalmans (Ch) J 31060

Name - Daniel Edward Green

DOB - 15th March 1892

Place of Birth - Bedford, Bedfordshire

Rank - Stoker 1st Class (Po) K 6859

Name - Charles Edward Harris

DOB - 5th Jan 1892

Place of Birth - Whitechapel, London

Rank - Able Seaman (Ch) J 4281

Name - Michael Hogan

DOB - 24th January 1885

Place of Birth - Tipperary

Rank - Stoker 1st Class ((Ch) K26064

Name - Donald James Hope

DOB - 12th March 1894

Place of Birth - Bromley by Bow, London

Parents - Thomas and Emma

Name - George Archibald Sinclair Kennedy

DOB - 3rd January 1882

Place of Birth - Dipton, Durham

Rank - Armourer (Ch) 343620

Name - John Henry Little

DOB - 1st November 1875

Place of Birth - Bolton, Lancashire

Rank - Stoker 1st Class - (Ch) 280164

Name - George McLeod

DOB - 21st November 1896

Place of Birth - Latheron, Caithness

Rank - Able Seaman (Ch) J 18146

Name - Donald Morrison

DOB - 1st November 1875

Place of Birth - Bernish, Uig, Scotland

Rank - Seaman (Ch) C 1448

Name - John Oliver Moss

DOB - 23rd August 1889

Place of Birth - Plaistow

Rank - Stoker Petty Officer (Ch) K 1258

Name - George Pierson

DOB - 3rd April 1894

Place of Birth - Brenchley, Kent

Rank - Able Seaman (Ch) J 7047

Name - James Thomas Wilkes

DOB - 9th April 1883

Place of Birth - Kidderminster, Worcester

Rank - Leading Telegraphist (Ch) J 3134, formerly RMLI 12988

Name - Phillip Charles Worth

DOB - 25th November 1881

Place of Birth - Mousehole, Cornwall

Parents - John and Olivia

Rank - RNR, Seaman C 2246 (Dev)

Appendix 2. Wreck Card for HMS Jason

Wreck Number 2645 **State** = DEAD **Classification** Unclassified

Chart Symbol WK USC PA 60.0

Status --

Existence Doubtful --

Reported Year --

Date Last Amended 11/03/2013

Charting Comments

--

Wreck Category Non-dangerous wreck

WGS84 Position

Latitude = 56°35,738'N **Longitude** = 06°28,309'W

WGS84 Origin 3-D Cartesian Shift (BW)

WGS84 limits

--

Position

Latitude = 56°35,75'N **Longitude** = 06°28,25'W

Previous Position

Latitude = --

Longitude = --

Position Accuracy --

Horizontal Datum OGB

Position Last Amended --

Position Method

Position Quality Approximate

Limits

--

Depth 60 m

Water Depth 73 m

Depth Method --

Depth Quality Least depth unknown, safe clearance at value shown

Height --

Drying Height --

Vertical Datum Approximate lowest astronomical tide

Water Level Effect Always under water/submerged

Bottom Texture Rock

Sonar Signal Strength --

Original Sensor Reported Sinking

Last Sensor None Reported

Conspic Visual NO

Conspic Radar NO

Non-Sub Contact --

Contact Description Entire wreck

Name HMS JASON

Type TORPEDO BOAT

Flag

Dimensions (m)

LxBxD = 70,1x8,2x4

Tonnage

810 Displacement

Cargo

Date Sunk 03/04/1917

Original Detection Year ??/??/1919

Last Detection Year ??/??/1981

Original Source --

Last Source National HO/authority charts

Sonar Dimensions

LxWxH = --x--x--

Orientation --

Magnetic Anomaly --

Debris Field

--

Scour Depth --**Scour Length --****Scour Orientation --
Markers**

--

General Comments

--

Circumstances of Loss

BUILT IN 1892 BY VICKERS, BARROW IN FURNESS. AN 'ALARM' CLASS VESSEL. FOUR BOILERS, TWIN TRIPLE EXPANSION ENGINES FOR 3500 NHP, TWIN SHAFT. MAX SPEED 18 KNOTS. 2 X 4.7 INCH GUNS & 3 TORPEDO TUBES. DESIGNED TO INTERCEPT NEW CLASSES OF DESTROYER BUT HAD INSUFFICIENT SPEED TO ACHIEVE THIS, THUS WERE GENERALLY EMPLOYED AS MINESWEEPERS. THE GUNS WERE NORMALLY LANDED WHEN SO EMPLOYED. WAS SUNK BY MINE WHIST INVOLVED IN SWEEPING OPERATIONS NEAR COLL ISLAND. CREW OF 85 ALL LOST. REPORTED IN LOG OF ACCOMPANYING VESSEL 'HMS CIRCE' THAT JASON WAS MINED & SANK IN LESS THAN 5 MINUTES. (SIBI & NHB).

Surveying Details

** H2480/19 22.3.19 WK IN 563300N, 062800W APPROX. (VA STORNOWAY). INS AS WK [OLD SYMBOL]. - NM 919/19.

** H6997/29 1.11.29 NOW CHARTED AS NDW PA.

** 19.10.72 NOW CHARTED AS WK USC PA 10FMS.

** 1.8.75 AMEND TO WK USC PA 18MTRS. NC 1778.

** H1270/81 24.2.81 REPORTED IN LOG OF ACCOMPANYING VESSEL 'HMS CIRCE' TO HAVE SUNK RAPIDLY IN 563545N, 062815W. (J BROWN, HEAD OF NHB, MEMO DTD 4.2.81). AMEND TO WK USC PA 60MTRS. BR STD.

** 11.3.13 NOT LOCATED 12.2011 USING M/B. SEABED ROCKY AND UNEVEN. (NETSURVEY, HI 1298). AMEND DEAD.