



The Mystery Of The Campania

The Campania now
lies in the Firth of
Forth however the
story of this ship is
a remarkable one as
Philip Robertson
recounts ...

THE MYSTERIES of the Firth of Forth came under the spotlight earlier in 2008 as one of Scotland's most important historic wrecks was surveyed, producing the most detailed images of this important shipwreck ever recorded.

Originally built in 1892 as a passenger liner for Cunard's Liverpool-New York service, *Campania* held the Blue Riband award for the fastest transatlantic crossing by ship from 1893 to 1894, losing it to her sister ship *Lucania*. She remained on the transatlantic routes for two decades but in 1914, the Royal Navy purchased *Campania* from the ship breakers and converted her into an aircraft carrier.

HMS Campania's passenger accommodation became a hold for up folded-wing

FACTFILE

The wreck of *Campania* is designated under the Protection of Wrecks Act 1973 and a licence from Historic Scotland is required to dive on her. One option is to participate in the visitor scheme operated by the Divebunker, Burntisland (www.divebunker.co.uk).

seaplanes. The planes were hoisted out of the hold using cranes, their wings unfolded and they were then placed in the sea. Shortcomings were noted after manoeuvres in Scapa Flow, and *Campania* returned to Liverpool where it had a forward flight deck fitted. This allowed the *Campania* to launch an aircraft directly from the ship into a headwind.

In May 1915, back in Scapa Flow, the *Campania* successfully launched a Sopwith Schneider seaplane from its deck, heralding the advent of the modern aircraft carrier. After further trials the ship underwent a third refit to lengthen the flight deck. The forward funnel was replaced with two smaller funnels and its after-deck was cleared to carry an observation balloon for spotting U-boats in the waters around Orkney.

It was intended that *Campania* should sail with the Grand Fleet for Jutland but she fell behind the rest of the fleet and was ordered back to Scapa Flow, so avoiding possible destruction at the Battle of Jutland. At the end of World War I, *Campania* returned to the Firth of Forth but, on the morning of November 5, 1918, she dragged her anchor off Burntisland, before sinking after collision with the battleship *HMS Royal Oak* and battlecruiser *HMS Glorious*.

The story of the wreck after 1918, like the remains of the German High Seas Fleet in Scapa Flow, encapsulates the way in which our attitudes to historic wrecks have changed within a relatively short space of time, from weapon of mass destruction, to navigational hazard and salvage resource, and then finally to historic asset worthy of survey and statutory protection.

In 1923 the wreck of *Campania* was cleared by explosives because she represented a

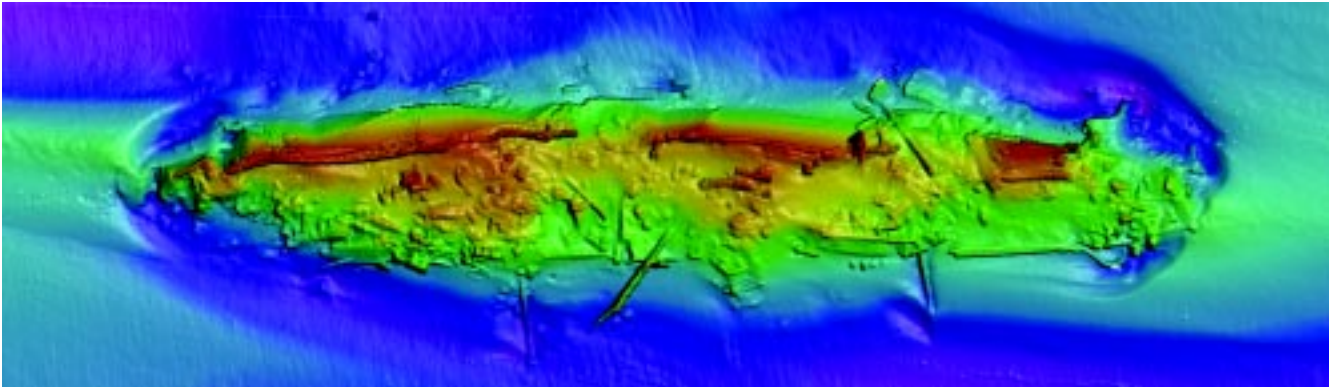
navigation hazard. Nevertheless, today *Campania* remains a substantial seabed feature 200m long, 20m wide and standing 12m above the seabed and in 2001, the wreck of *Campania* was designated under the Protection of Wrecks Act 1973 because Historic Scotland recognised the historical and archaeological importance of the site.

In such instances, statutory protection should not be viewed as an end in itself rather a means to an end and part of a heritage management tool-box best complemented by education as well as by ongoing monitoring, management and analysis. Several geophysical surveys have followed, culminating in February 2008 when a team from ADUS Ltd., a joint initiative of the Universities of St Andrews and Dundee, in partnership with the Ministry of Defence Salvage and Marine Operations, carried out a highly detailed survey of the wreck with grant support from Historic Scotland and trialled a multibeam sonar system mounted on a remote operated vehicle (ROV). The work of ADUS will be well known to readers of **SCOTTISH DIVER** from their exploits on the wrecks of the German High Seas Fleet and *HMS Royal Oak* in Scapa Flow.

The ADUS surveys contradict some earlier reports that the ship was broken into two pieces. She remains in one piece



Testing an ROV-mounted geophysical survey on the *Campania* (Historic Scotland)



Multibeam sonar plans of Campania (ADUS)

although the deck superstructure has been flattened almost flush with the deck. One side of the vessel appears mostly intact and visible above the seabed; on the other, the bow and stern are mostly embedded in sediment. It is almost possible to make out the remains of masts and other features, possibly too the remains of a part of the flight deck.

The ADUS survey is only the start. Although the sonar surveys are highly detailed and accurate to the nearest centimetre, even when the diving conditions are as challenging as can be found

on the *Campania* there is no substitute for divers when it comes to detailed observations and interpretation of seabed remains.

So, over the next few years, it is hoped that there will be opportunities for divers to build on the work by ADUS by helping us understand better what some of the seabed features are, and by helping to monitor the wreck into the future. And beyond that, the visual products that ADUS has provided will hopefully enable non-divers to appreciate this impressive and important wreck in the Firth of Forth.



Philip Robertson watching the survey as it happens (Historic Scotland)

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