

WEDDING RING FROM HMS OPAL

The Opal and Narborough disaster, 1918

On Saturday 18 January 1918 two M class destroyers, *HMS Opal* and *HMS Narborough*, left Scapa Flow to rendezvous with the light cruiser *HMS Boadicea*. They were then to carry out a Dark Night Patrol designed to prevent enemy minelayers operating in the area around Scapa Flow on moonless winter nights.

At first everything went according to plan, but when a severe blizzard blew up the ships were unable to battle against the dreadful seas. Whilst trying to return to the relative safety of Scapa Flow, *HMS Opal* sailed at 13 knots straight into the cliffs of Hesta Head, on the north side of Windwick Bay, South Ronaldsay. *HMS Narborough*, which had been following *Opal*'s stern lights, struck rocks to starboard.

The only man to survive the tragedy, Able Seaman William Sissons, clung to a sheltered rocky ledge on the cliffs for 36 hours before being found by rescuers.

After the war the Admiralty sold the wrecks as scrap and they were largely broken up and removed. The wrecks were never designated as war graves and remain in private ownership although very little wreckage remains today.

Finding the ring

On 12 September 2007 a group of amateur divers were diving on the wreck sites in Windwick Bay. One of these divers, Peter Brady, saw something shining amongst the rocks, which turned out to be a gold ring.

When they examined the ring on the surface, it was possible to read an inscription inside the ring – "To Stanley from Flo – 6 March 1916". Research by fellow divers Bob and Sue Hamilton traced the ring to Ernest Stanley Cubiss, who had married Florence Foster on 28 June 1917 - the ring must have marked their engagement.



Bob Hamilton then managed to trace Stanley's nephew, retired Brigadier Malcolm Cubiss, who decided to donate the ring to Orkney Arts, Museums and Heritage, along with three medals, a bronze 'death penny' plaque given to the families of those who died in WW1 and various other artefacts.

National publicity about the finding of the ring led Florence's son by her second marriage, Lawrence Duttson, to contact the Orkney Museum. He kindly donated the map that his mother used when she visited Orkney to see the site of Stanley's death and, with other family members, contributed to the cost of a display case to house the collection of exhibits.





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