

# 36 HOURS

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JUTLAND 1916

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THE BATTLE  
THAT WON THE WAR



**NATIONAL MUSEUM OF THE ROYAL NAVY**

**IN COLLABORATION WITH**

**IMPERIAL WAR MUSEUMS**

**EDITED BY MATTHEW SHELDON**

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*The absence of a material basis for our re-working of the past seems to have a detrimental effect on how we are able to remember. We see and hear so much about Tommy, but so little about Jack.*

## JUTLAND AN ARCHAEOLOGICAL PERSPECTIVE

**BY DR ANTONY FIRTH  
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Most of what we know about the Battle of Jutland is based on paper: books and documents; charts and diagrams; a few photographs. The Battle itself was fought in steel, high explosives and salt water; and in the flesh. A physical battle left physical remains. It is these material consequences with which archaeologists concern themselves.

The paper-based accounts of the Battle of Jutland have occupied people for a century now – starting in the days and weeks immediately after the Battle. Undoubtedly, these paper accounts – and, increasingly, their digital counterparts – will continue to intrigue and fascinate for decades to come. In contrast, the physical remains of the First World War at sea – including its most famous battle – have been ignored to such a degree that they have been regarded simply as scrap metal. A battlefield of such singular importance – and the remains of the thousands who perished there – has counted for little.

Providing an archaeological perspective on the Battle is a welcome opportunity to place physical remains at the centre of how we understand Jutland, including its context and consequences. It is also an opportunity to consider how we might use these physical remains to engage with today's generations about its importance. It is an opportunity too to think about how the physical remains might survive to inform future generations. It is not

long since we commemorated the bicentenary of Trafalgar; what should we be doing now to safeguard the remains of the Battle of Jutland for its bicentenary in 2116?

These three opportunities – understanding the Battle, communicating it to the public, and safeguarding its physical remains for the future – are the foundations of an archaeological perspective. Concern for physical material is at its heart. Much archaeological practice is centred on the material remains of past events as physical evidence; archaeology is a forensic science based on the notion that fragments and traces can provide insights that cannot be obtained from people's own accounts alone. Archaeology and history are complementary, not competing disciplines, so no weakness is implied by the to and fro of interpretation between both paper-based and physical evidence. Even for the 20th century, experience demonstrates that however well-documented something may seem to be, the physical remains can tell us more – or different.

Archaeology is not just about evidence, however. People attribute many qualities to the physical remains of the past. As well as its evidential value, people appreciate the historical value that arises from direct association with events and individuals. The material itself can take a hold of our senses, for its tangible connection to the past, the

**FIG. 34**  
*7.5-inch gun mount  
on the wreck of  
HMS Defence.*

skills and experience it embodies, its design or aesthetics, for example. Physical remains can also have communal value, including in commemorating the family and community connections to those who have died, which is especially important in the case of Jutland.

Part of the excitement of being in the physical presence of historical artefacts is the contact with different scales of time and space. Artefacts often evoke a particular instant in time, when the item was made, broken or lost, for example; but artefacts also evoke long durations, between the particular instant and today, or the duration of the events and processes in which the artefact was entwined. Equally, an artefact can be small in size but also evoke actions that encompassed very large areas or landscapes. These properties of the physical remains of the Battle of Jutland are very important. As well as providing a connection with the immediate circumstances of relatively short engagements – including the loss of entire ships and their crews within a few seconds – the physical remains of the Battle also call to mind the broader prospect of the First World War in the North Sea. The artefacts in this exhibition provide a direct connection to the technological, industrial and economic rivalry between Britain and Germany that brought about the First World War and, specifically, the clash at Jutland.

The collection brought together for this exhibition underlines the fragility of our physical connection to the Battle of Jutland and the First World War at sea. The documents and artworks that predominate are tremendously evocative and are artefacts in themselves, conveying much more than the information expressed upon them. They provide a tangible connection to the people who created them and to the events that they record. However, these paper accounts were created some time after the Battle, in the following days and weeks or with greater distance. Objects that were present at the Battle itself are fewer in number. They

comprise objects that were intended from the start to embody the ships from which they originate – ships' badges and tompions; bells; ensigns – and more functional items that have become instilled with additional meaning through their presence at the Battle. These include items from the ships themselves, ordnance, and a range of objects made from wood reused from the ships.

In all of these cases, the object itself draws us away from the exhibition, back to the events of a century ago in the distant waters of the North Sea. Each is a little time-machine. However tranquil they may seem here, each was integral to a Battle whose ferocity we can barely imagine. These objects also take us back to the people who handled them – running up ensigns, removing tompions, sliding ammunition into breaches. These objects transport us back to just a few of the tens of thousands of individuals who participated in the momentous events of the Battle, including 8,500 who would not survive. These objects also invoke much broader landscapes and timescales, from their manufacture and use over the years before the Battle and, in some cases, for decades after. These few objects propel us out of the gallery back to Jutland, to an explosion of innumerable connections that are ours to make.

One thing all of these objects have in common is that they have been picked out at some time in the past as signifying something out of the ordinary, often because of their association with the Battle itself. For all that these objects are special, otherwise identical items have been discarded and reused and are lost to us. We cannot keep everything. What we see here has been carefully selected by our predecessors, set aside and looked after. As well as telling us about Jutland and its context, these objects also reveal a little of the people who tried to hold on to the Battle over the ensuing century. From its immediate aftermath, people were plainly not content only to record Jutland on paper. They wanted to keep something of the Battle itself and of the ships

that fought there. These objects give a sense of people engaged in the Battle or touched by it who wanted to convey more than could be captured in words alone. It is difficult to even guess at what thoughts and memories have become embedded in these items, either by the people who first picked them out or by those who have subsequently taken care of them over the last hundred years. As we contemplate them in this exhibition, further layers of commemoration are added to items that are now historic but which were once quite mundane.

The sense that these items were selected to capture something quite fleeting is particularly strong from the objects made of wood taken from the ships. The exhibition includes a range of items – letter openers, a napkin ring, a breadboard and so on – made from teak, especially from HMS *Iron Duke*. This might strike us as slightly odd, as the wood itself is essentially anonymous; as archaeological evidence it can tell us virtually nothing about the Battle or the ship. Creating objects from the ship's teak appears to be a way of trapping the whole vessel – its role and participation in the Battle – in small household items, like a genie in a lamp. From an archaeological perspective the physical connection to the vessel is tenuous, perhaps impossible to verify. But for the people for whom they were made, the use of these objects (it is notable that they are all functional, not just decorative) must have prompted visceral recollections of the ship in Battle.

The fragments of shrapnel in the exhibition probably engaged their original collectors in a similar way. What could be more evocative of the Battle – of your good fortune but others' loss – than the instruments of carnage themselves? Perhaps nothing encapsulates the character of the First World War better than these small pieces of metal, epitomising the technological and industrial advances that enabled shells to be hurled across the sea at ranges that that could hardly have been contemplated just over a decade before. The

Battle turned on the capacity of these shells to hit their targets, to tear through armour and explode. From manufacture to museum case, these fragments have undergone extraordinary journeys.

A small number of the items in the exhibition are recognisable for their place aboard ship. In some cases these are quite large items – such as naval guns – but there are a few small items too, such as the stopcock from HMS *Lion* and the tread plate from HMS *Marlborough*. As with the wooden items, these small objects imply an attempt to capture the ships in a more convenient form; like an abbreviation that stands for the ship itself, without any meaning being lost. This is perhaps an understandable response to the impracticality of retaining the ships themselves, or even significant components. How else might you hold on to the memory of the ships through which the Battle took place?

This conundrum warrants further reflection, but it is first worth contrasting the Battle of Jutland and the First World War at sea with the war on land and in the air, at least as far as the retention of physical reminders is concerned. The First World War on land and in the air appear to be better represented by people selecting and safeguarding artefacts during the War itself and subsequently, safeguarding them for the future. The principal weapons – even up to the size of aircraft and

### FIG. 35

*German shell splinter recovered from the British battlecruiser HMS Princess Royal.*

Catalogue No. 44



tanks – are far more portable than even the smallest ship. Uniform and equipment would have been more numerous, especially from the vast armies of the conflict. Moreover, material that was lost is still relatively accessible, under a few metres of soil that is frequently disturbed by agriculture or development. The physical remains of the War on land and in the air are not infrequent in museums and private collections; whilst the remains of the War at sea have sunk without trace.

The relative lack of naval artefacts in museums appears to coincide with a broader invisibility of the First World War at sea in public engagement with the conflict. Re-enactors and replicas provide a powerful medium for education and learning, largely centred on the physical trappings of historic events – uniforms and equipment, tools and personal items. The First World War at sea seemingly lacks these props and prompts. Despite its significance and the many thousands of people whose lives it affected – and in contrast to the plethora of groups representing battles on land – the Battle of Jutland is not ‘living history’. The absence of a material basis for our re-working of the past seems to have a detrimental effect on how we are able to remember. We see and hear so much about Tommy, but so little about Jack.

The items collected together within this exhibition transport us out of the museum and back to Jutland itself. However, the collection’s limitations also prompt us to look further afield, to physical remains of the Battle that have been treated with much greater ambivalence over the last century than the carefully curated artefacts inside. In fact many of the ships that took part in the Battle of Jutland have survived, just not in forms – or in places – that make them easy to engage.

HMS *Caroline* is the sole surviving warship still afloat that fought at the Battle of Jutland. Based in Belfast, she is undergoing significant restoration in time for the centenary. *Caroline* was a light cruiser; almost 450 feet long but still one of the smaller vessels in the

engagement. (The history is given within Andrew Baines’s article, p.73). Several other vessels still afloat are thought to have been present at the Battle of Jutland, but on a smaller scale. The National Historic Register of Vessels includes four vessels with a Jutland connection: Steam Cutter No. 26 was one of the boats aboard HMS *Falmouth*; motor launch MB 436 is thought to have been aboard HMS *Royalist*; Pinnace 199 – part of the NMRN’s collection at Portsmouth – is thought to have been present aboard the battleship HMS *Monarch*; and the admiral’s barge known as *Count Dracula* was used by Hipper to transfer between SMS *Lützow* and SMS *Moeltke* during the Battle itself.

Evocative as these small craft are, the scale of the fleets engaged at Jutland cannot be gauged from any of the participating craft still afloat. USS *Texas* is the only First World War dreadnought that has been preserved, permanently moored near Houston. Although *Texas* served with the Grand Fleet in the North Sea this was in 1918 after the US had entered the war, 18 months after Jutland.

Of course, vessels in preservation present only a tiny fraction of the ships that once sailed. The usual fate of most ships is to be scrapped, and this is indeed the way that most of the ships at Jutland ended their days. Following the War, the Royal Navy was much larger than the UK needed or could afford so many, even relatively modern, vessels were disposed of. Some stayed in use through the inter-war period into the Second World War, again to be scrapped at the end of their careers. Many famous names finished under the shipbreaker’s torch. Indeed none of the vessels that fought at Jutland on either side was intentionally saved to represent the climactic encounter. The motivation that saw the development of a core collection of military vehicles and aircraft at the Imperial War Museum and other institutions simply did not extend to whole ships.

Other than the fortuitous survival of HMS *Caroline* and the few boats mentioned above,



**FIG. 36**  
The light cruiser HMS  
*Falmouth*.

the only other ships from Jutland that escaped breaking were those that had sunk. These are in fact the most significant remains of the Battle, though their importance has yet to be fully recognised. There are two main groups of wrecks – at the site of the Battle itself and at Scapa Flow – plus a series of individual wrecks at various locations.

The presence of individual wrecks in various locations reflects the fact that most ships survived the Battle of Jutland itself. They continued in service until decommissioned and scrapped, except for those that sank in the course of their post-Jutland service. Some of these post-Jutland losses occurred in the First World War, but others occurred as a result of action in the Second World War. The wrecks of these Second World War losses might not be recognised as being associated with Jutland, but this is indeed the case. This aspect of these ships' biographies ought to be brought to the fore. HMS *Barham*, for example, was one of the four battleships of the 5th Battle Squadron attached to Beatty's Battle Cruiser Fleet at Jutland. The wreck of *Barham* still lies undiscovered off the coast of Egypt, having exploded as a result of a torpedo attack by *U-331* in November 1941 with the loss of over 800 crew. Closer to home, HMS *Royal Oak* was also sunk by a torpedo fired by a U-boat,

killing over 800 in October 1939. *Royal Oak* had fought in the 4th Battle Squadron of the Grand Fleet at Jutland, next in line to the flagship *Iron Duke*. *Royal Oak* was torpedoed whilst at anchor in Scapa Flow; she lies in relatively accessible waters just 1km from the coast, but on account of the loss of life it is protected from unauthorised diving under the Protection of Military Remains Act 1986.

Amongst the Jutland veterans that sank in the First World War, the wreck of the light cruiser HMS *Falmouth* is perhaps the most accessible. *Falmouth* sank as a result of repeated U-boat attacks in the course of a pivotal action between the British and German fleets in August 1916, less than two months after Jutland. Although the two fleets did not come into proper contact with each other, the action of 19 August 1916 was a turning point because each side concluded that the risks associated with major sorties into the southern North Sea by capital vessels were too great; it was to be the last chance of a major engagement between the fleets. *Falmouth* encountered a screen of U-boats lying in wait off Flamborough Head, eventually sinking just off the coast in Bridlington Bay. Salvaged at the time and subsequently, the wreck is far from pristine. It is, however, the only known surviving example of a Town Class light cruiser, which played such an active role in the First World War. At Jutland, *Falmouth* was Napier's flagship of the Third Light Cruiser Squadron, attached to the Battle Cruiser Fleet, engaging with German units on several occasions during the Battle.

Across Scapa Flow from the wreck of the *Royal Oak* lies a key group of Jutland veterans, namely three of the four König-class battleships: SMS *König* itself, SMS *Kronprinz* and SMS *Markgraf*. The bell of the fourth König – SMS *Grosser Kurfürst* – can be seen in this exhibition. Together, these four battleships formed the V Division of the Third Battle Squadron of the High Seas Fleet. They were in the van of the German units steaming north as Beatty's battlecruisers chased those of



**FIG. 37**

*Bell from the German dreadnought SMS Grosser Kurfürst, which was heavily engaged and repeatedly hit during the fleet action.*

Catalogue No. 63



Hipper during 'The Run to the South'. The three German battleships in Scapa Flow once formed part of a much bigger assemblage, namely the High Seas Fleet that was interned and then scuttled at the end of the First World War. Most of the vessels were subsequently salvaged, including the *Grosser Kurfürst*. The four other remaining German wrecks in Scapa Flow are cruisers that did not participate in Jutland.

The most important group of Jutland wrecks is, of course, the wrecks that occurred in connection with the Battle itself. Twenty five ships sank in the course of the Battle, the majority in a band 100km offshore roughly parallel with the coast of Denmark. Some Jutland wrecks are further afield, notably the wreck of HMS *Warrior* which sank approximately 180km to the north west of where it was hit, whilst being towed back towards the UK. A detailed account of the archaeology of the battlefield by Dr Innes McCartney is being published to coincide with the centenary. A recent survey by the Royal Navy on behalf of the NMRN certainly confirms the presence of the Jutland wrecks as major features on the seabed. The wrecks of the

armoured cruisers HMS *Defence* and HMS *Black Prince* are broken-backed, as is the wreck of the battlecruiser HMS *Invincible*; the wreck of battlecruiser HMS *Queen Mary* lies in two distinct pieces some distance apart; and the wreck of the battlecruiser HMS *Indefatigable* is heavily dispersed. The broken forms of these large ships is testament to the force of the explosions that ripped each of them apart, but the surveys also demonstrate a fair amount of coherence. Although badly damaged on sinking, major sections of most of the wrecks retain their original form. In the case of HMS *Defence*, for example, the 9.2-inch gun turrets at bow and stern can be discerned, as can most of the 7.5-inch turrets in a row along each side.

Even in their damaged state these wrecks are hugely important monuments to the Battle. If they were fortifications on land they would undoubtedly be visited by the public as much as any spectacular castle. Lost in the heat of battle, they also comprise the full complement of artefacts of warships in action, for which there are few parallels on land. It must be recalled, however, that very large numbers of men were killed when these ships were lost and human remains are reported to be present. The wrecks of Jutland are a focus for commemoration, but they also provide tremendous scope for research, education and public engagement. The capacity of the material remains of the Battle to challenge documentary accounts, upon which we often rely, will be an increasingly important avenue for Jutland scholarship to pursue.

The wrecks that form the archaeological remains of the Battle of Jutland present a series of instances of time and place where a vessel came to the seabed. They reflect not only their individual battle histories but also the stories of the many other ships that survived those 36 hours, but not the ship-breaker. The wrecks' broad distribution gives a flavour of the extent of the Battle and its dynamics, fought at full speed across many miles of sea. We are used to seeing this

represented as neat lines on a chart; the wrecks on the seabed hint at the human scale of this cataclysmic encounter. It is only in contemplating not drawings or photographs but the material remains of the wrecks themselves – whether in the North Sea, at Scapa Flow or at the other locations where those veterans lie – that we get a sense of what the Battle of Jutland entailed. If we think about these wrecks for a moment we might catch a glimpse of what it was like to experience 250 warships manoeuvring against each other. The North Sea had not witnessed anything like the clashes between the First World War fleets of Britain and Germany either before or since.

The intent was absolute destruction, itself a departure from the naval warfare of previous centuries when the objective was to capture, not sink, the enemy's ships. It is difficult to overstate just how radical had been the changes in shipping in general – and warships in particular – over the few decades leading up to the First World War. Having kept to the same broad form – the three-masted wooden sailing ship – for over 300 years, materials, propulsion, speed, protection, armament and many other facets of ship design and use saw repeated quantum changes in the late 19th century. Nor was the further revolution represented by HMS *Dreadnought*, launched just 10 years before Jutland, restricted only to the largest ships; new light cruisers and

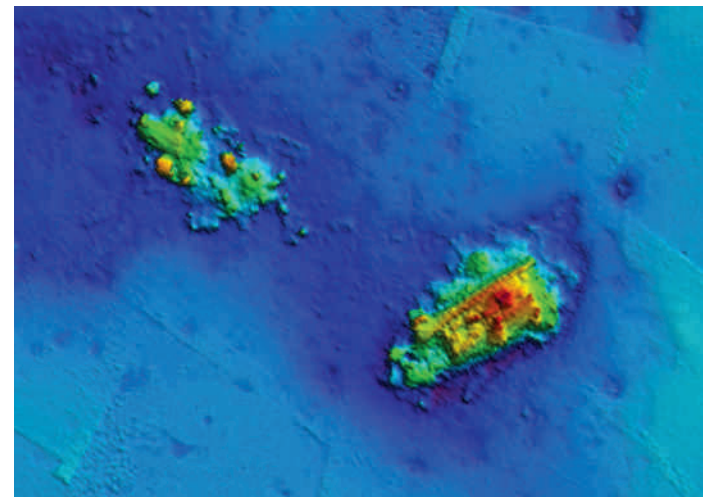
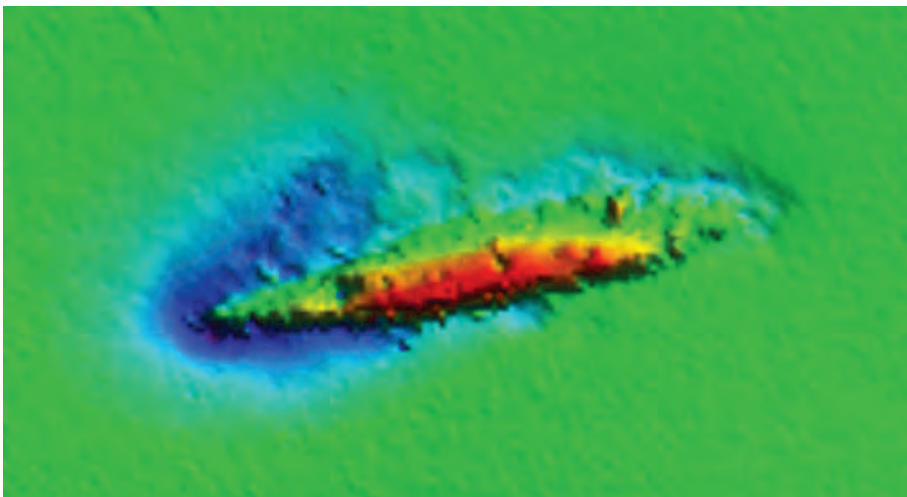
destroyers were also built around steam turbines and a uniform main armament. Also present at Jutland were the craft that heralded the next revolutions in warfare: submarines and aeroplanes.

So much change is embedded in the material remains of Jutland – technological, industrial and strategic but also social and cultural too. Often portrayed only in terms of admirals and captains, the NMRN's Jutland Mapping project is bringing to the fore the thousands of people that manned the vessels and linking them to their families and communities. It is important that these people are no longer regarded only in terms of unimaginable statistics accompanying each ship that exploded. Archaeology seeks to achieve insight into past individuals and societies through their material culture, not just to understand the material culture itself. Jutland wrecks provide an opportunity to explore what it must have been like to experience such a battle, but also what a First World War warship was like as a place to live and to work on every deck – including those for which documentary records are silent.

It is important also to develop an archaeological perspective on Jutland set within the broader context of the First World War in the North Sea. Jutland was not an isolated encounter. The War at sea was central to the origins of the War and to how its outcome would be determined. The clash of fleets was central to

### FIG. 38

**Multibeam sonar images** showing the wrecks of (left) the German light cruiser SMS *Frauenlob* and (right) the British battlecruiser HMS *Queen Mary*.



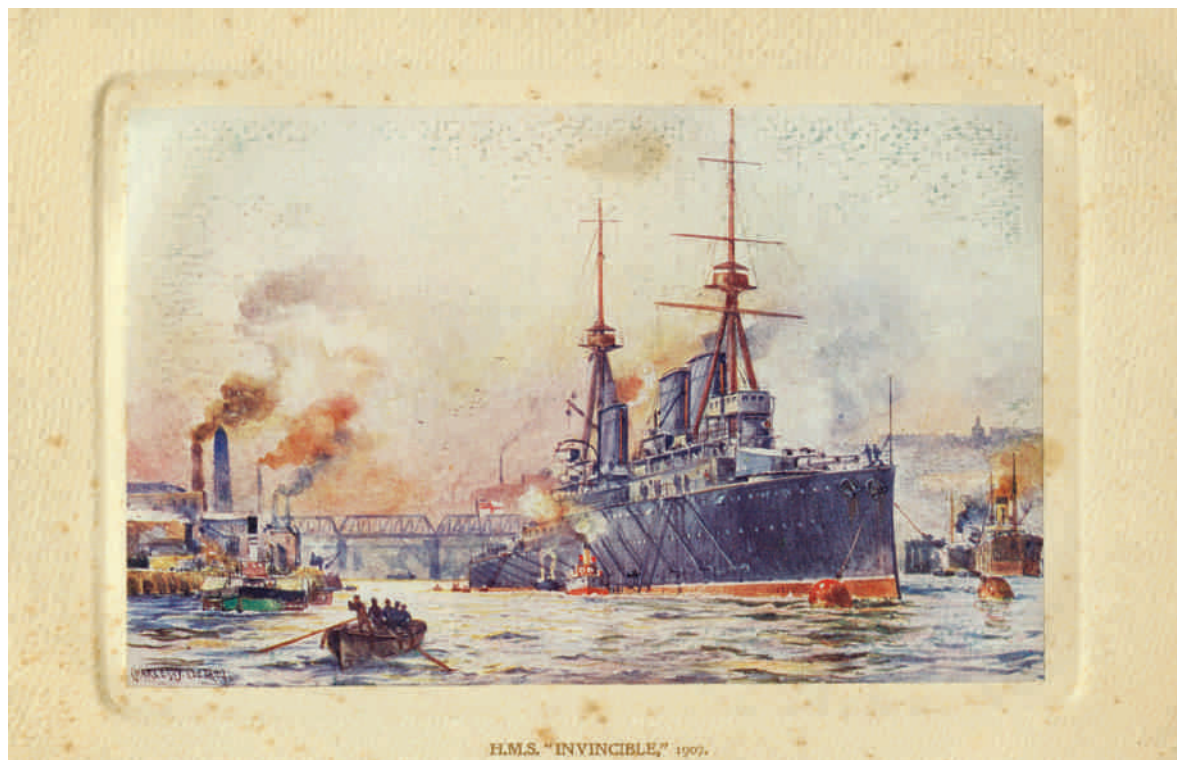
the military doctrine of both sides; the North Sea was their principal arena. The fleets of Britain and Germany both sought to bring about the necessary battle on a series of occasions through to August 1916, each in terms advantageous to itself. In between these fleet actions and subsequently there were constant sorties, sweeps and operations by smaller units. Additionally, a huge volume of merchant shipping continued to use the North Sea, as did fishing vessels. These were in turn subject to interventions by both sides: stopping and searching; arrest and sometimes destruction – especially by mines and the effects of unrestricted submarine warfare. In effect, the whole of the North Sea was a militarised zone, structured by minefields, patrols and war channels together with an infrastructure of defences and ports along its coasts. Jutland has a central place in this war-long landscape, but this battlefield is by no means its only feature.

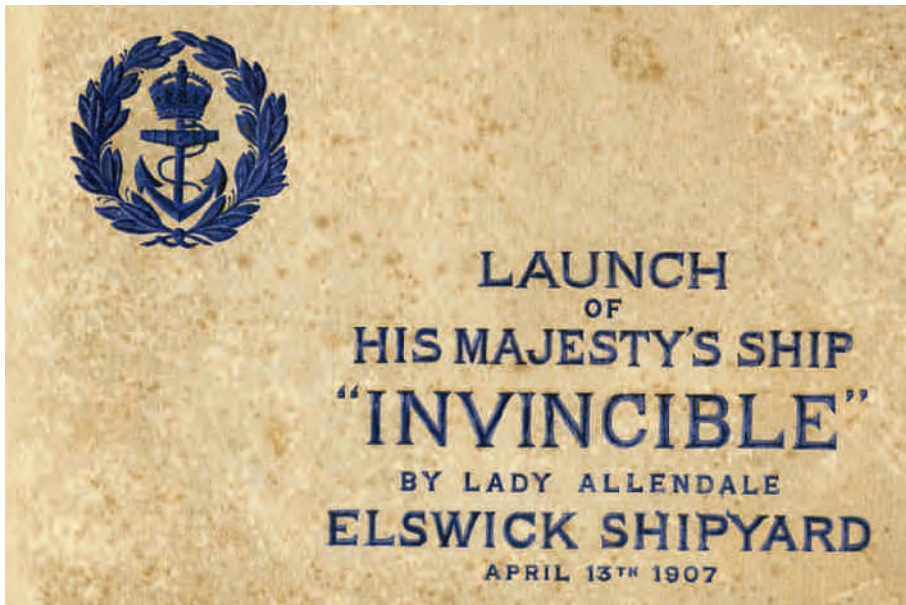
The need to think of Jutland beyond the battlefield itself is especially true when considering the bases where the fleets were

stationed. Scapa Flow has already been mentioned in the context of the Jutland veterans that are coincidentally wrecked there, and indeed Scapa Flow is to be a focus of commemorations of the centenary itself. It is worth recalling that major units of the Grand Fleet were also stationed in Cromarty Firth at Invergordon, and the Battle Cruiser Fleet in the Forth at Rosyth. As at Scapa Flow, the ships would have dominated the landscape and had a significant impact on local life. Infrastructure and defences were constructed to protect and support the fleets; their remains – as much a part of Jutland and the First World War in the North Sea as the wrecks themselves – merit broader appreciation. It is worth thinking about the archaeological legacy that arises from the places where the ships were built, equipped, victualled and administered. When contemplating the size and strength of the Royal Navy in the First World War, it is tempting to think just of the vessels and their crews. But embedded in the physical remains of those ships is a much greater mass of human effort and ingenuity.

### FIG. 39

*Right and opposite: The launch programme for the first battlecruiser, HMS Invincible, at Elswick on the River Tyne.*





The heritage of the naval dockyards at places such as Plymouth, Chatham and here in Portsmouth is widely recognised and has been carefully conserved. We can still visit and enjoy this heritage today, gaining insight into how the Royal Navy supported its fleets. However, many of the Navy warships at Jutland were built in civilian yards, predominantly on the Clyde and the Tyne. They returned to these yards for repairs after the Battle. In contrast to the naval dockyards, there are few visible reminders of role of civil shipyards in constructing the British fleet, or indeed of the massive importance of shipbuilding not only to their local communities but to the UK as a whole in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. The wreck of a ship is as much a monument to those who built and equipped it as it is to those who sailed it.

From a teak napkin ring to 20,000 tons of steel on the seabed, an archaeological perspective on the Battle of Jutland ranges in scale across time and many places. Whereas the smaller items displayed in this exhibition have been carefully curated since the Battle itself, we have hardly started to consider properly the heritage of the battle itself, of Jutland veterans sunk elsewhere, or the infrastructure of bases and yards that enabled

it to take place. Our history is largely paper-based and silent on so many issues – especially with regard to the mass of people who built, sailed or fought in the ships themselves.

Outside the museum, the material remains of Jutland and the First World War at sea have largely been regarded as debris – even where ruined ships mark the last resting places of thousands. Twentieth century military heritage has started to receive greater attention in recent years but narratives relating to the sea are still further down the list than those of land-based defence and aviation. For most of the last hundred years, wrecks associated with Jutland have been disregarded or simply mined for their metal. Latterly a degree of protection has been afforded to the *Royal Oak* in Scapa Flow and to the British wrecks at Jutland through the Protection of Military remains Act 1986. However, even this protection is partial and largely passive. Better provision has been made for the three König-class battleships of the High Seas Fleet at Scapa Flow, which are subject to heritage designations and have benefitted from a series of investigations. As noted above, the results of McCartney's new investigations of the battlefield itself are eagerly awaited.<sup>1</sup>

Advances in position-fixing at sea, geophysical survey and underwater photography – together with digital access to a broadening range of paper sources – present a fresh opportunity to address the archaeology of the Battle of Jutland. These technologies have the great benefit that safeguarding this heritage, investigating it and sharing findings with the public can all be advanced simultaneously; indeed the integration of these strands becomes not only possible but necessary. It is time to take stock and ask questions, to think not only about what we already know of the Battle of Jutland and the First World War in the North Sea, but to decide what we still want to find out. This first centenary of the Battle of Jutland is not an end point, a culmination. Rather, it is a first step in calling to mind the naval heritage of the North Sea and deciding how we should regard it in future.

<sup>1</sup> McCartney, I., 2016, *Jutland 1916: The Archaeology of a Naval Battlefield*. Conway.