

## ST BRIAC

Built for the Southern Railway in 1924 at William Denny Bros, Dumbarton as a Cross Channel Steamer to operate on the Southampton – St Malo Route.

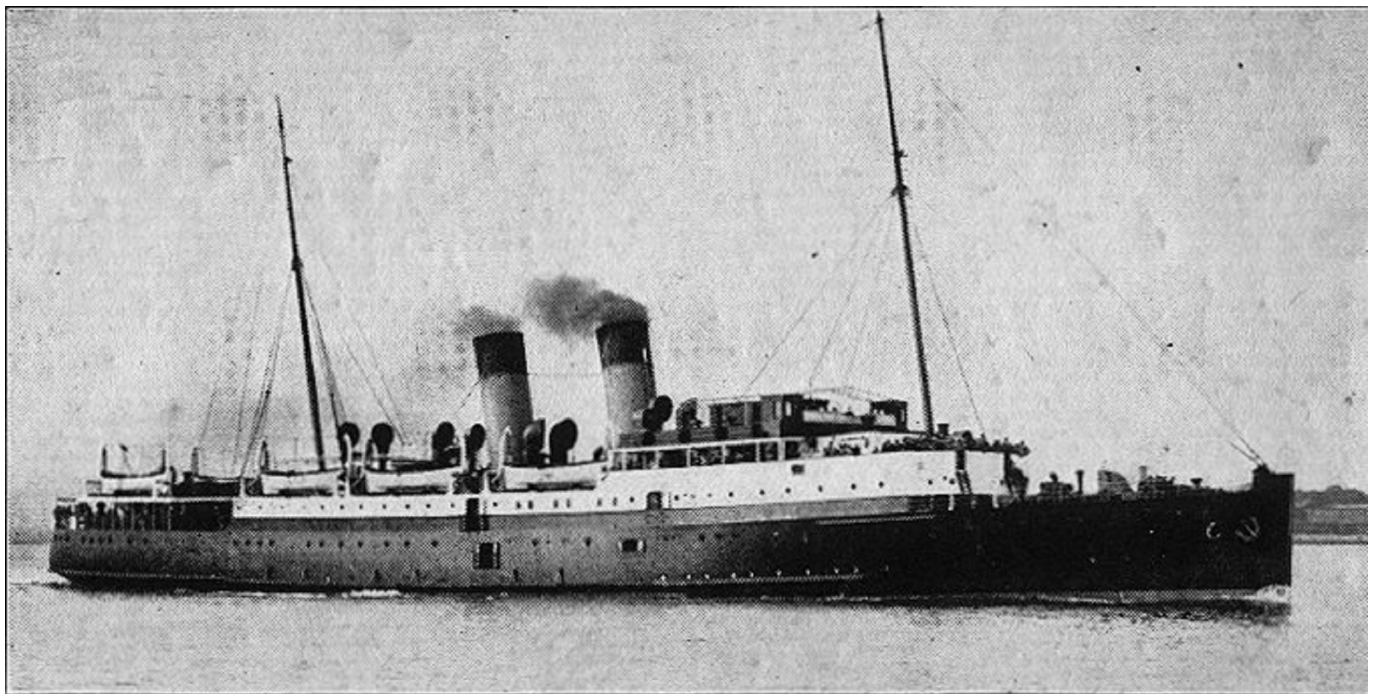
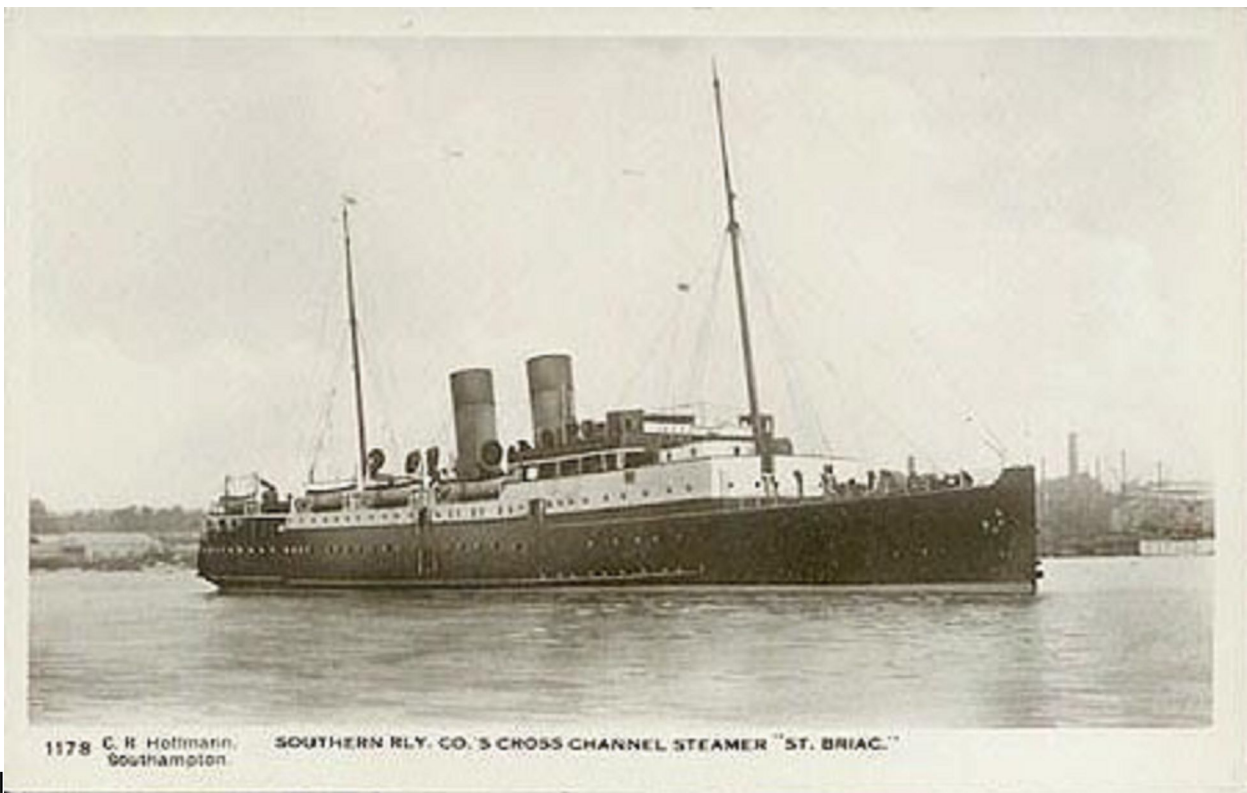
Length 314' Beam 41' Draught 14' and 2,291 Grt .

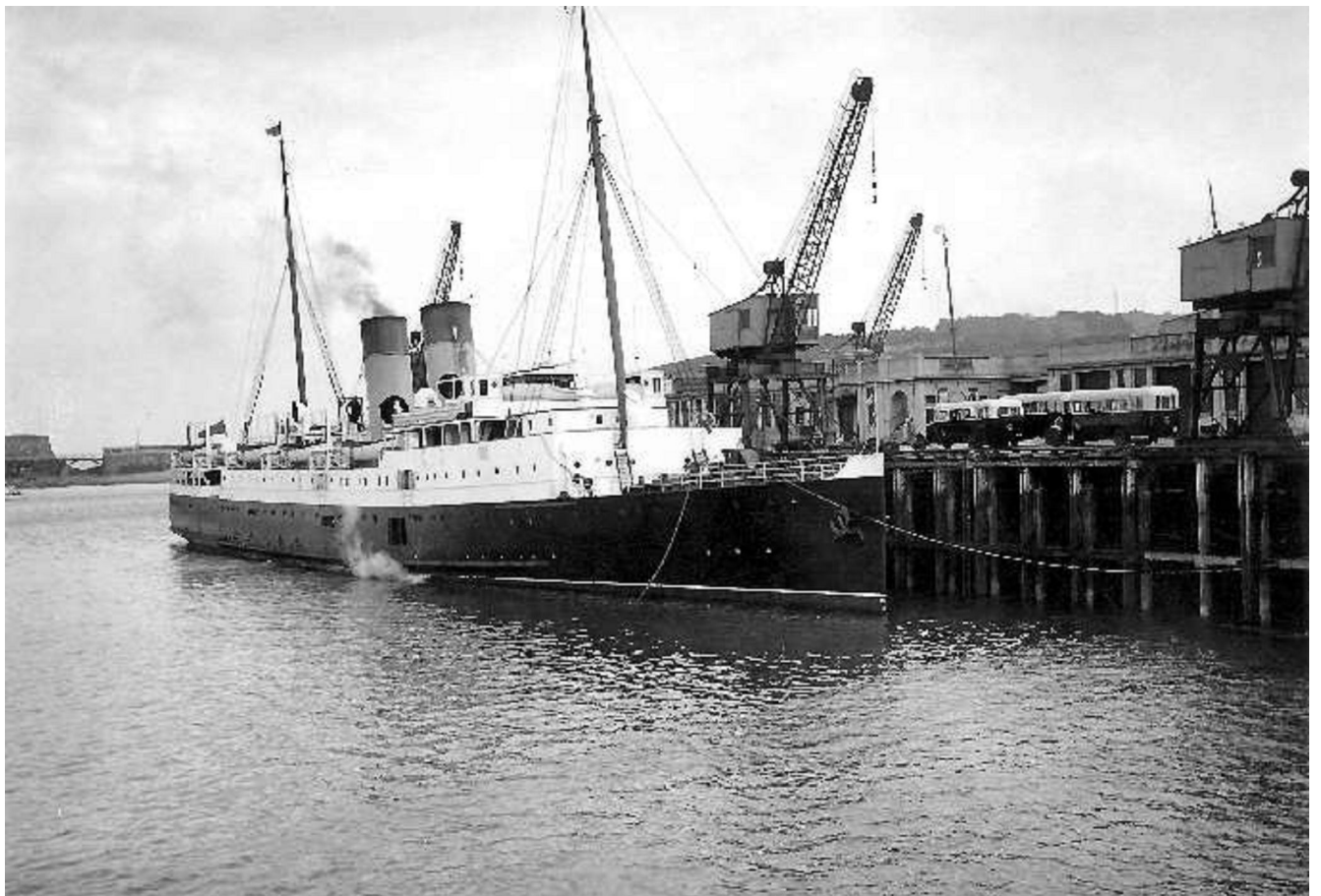
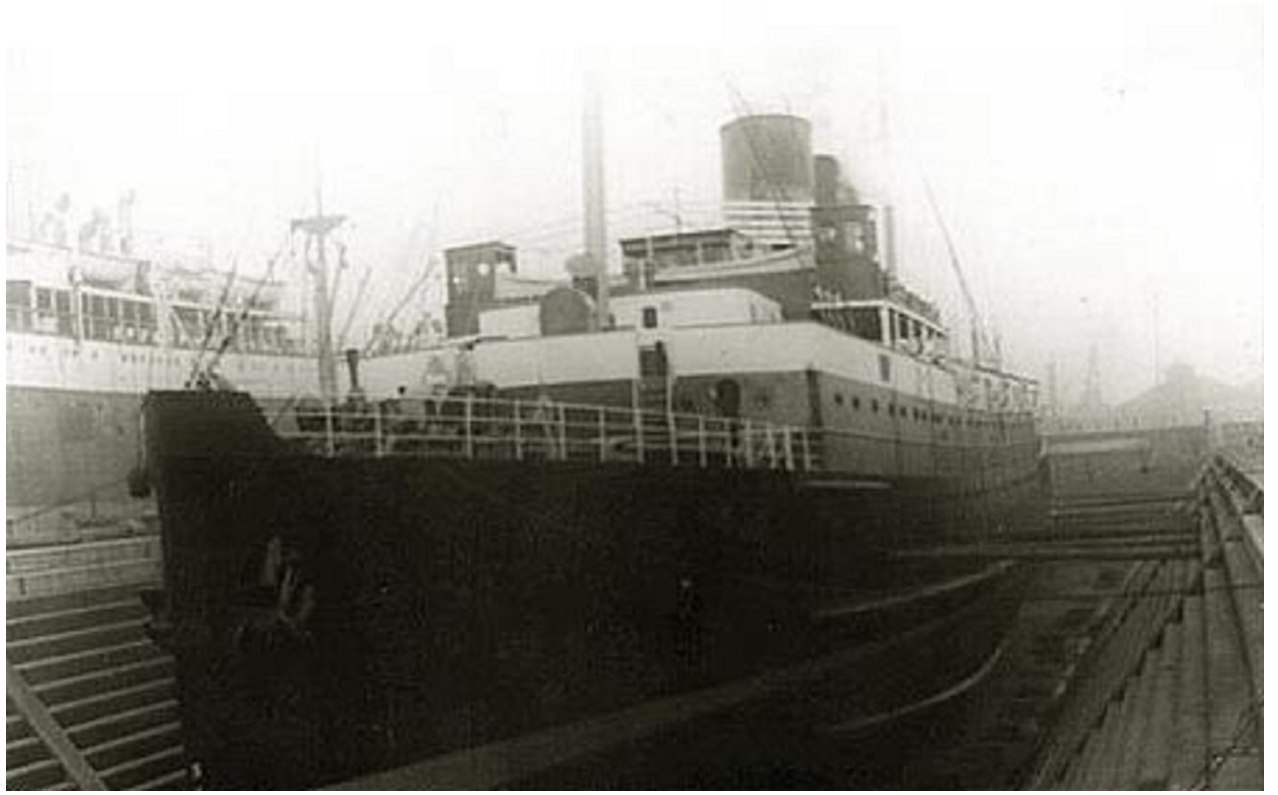
St Briac and her sister Ship, Dinard, were launched within a month of each other in late spring 1924. The steamers were built to use either coal or fuel oil and their turbines allowed them an operational speed of 18 knots. They were built for the Southampton to St Malo service which varied according to tidal conditions, until the St Malo basin was finished in 1931. They had accommodation for 1300 passengers, mainly first class, with around 450 sleeping berths available. In the 1930's St Briac undertook exclusive weekend cruises for around 160 people, out of Southampton, and carried out 56 such cruises in a three year period.

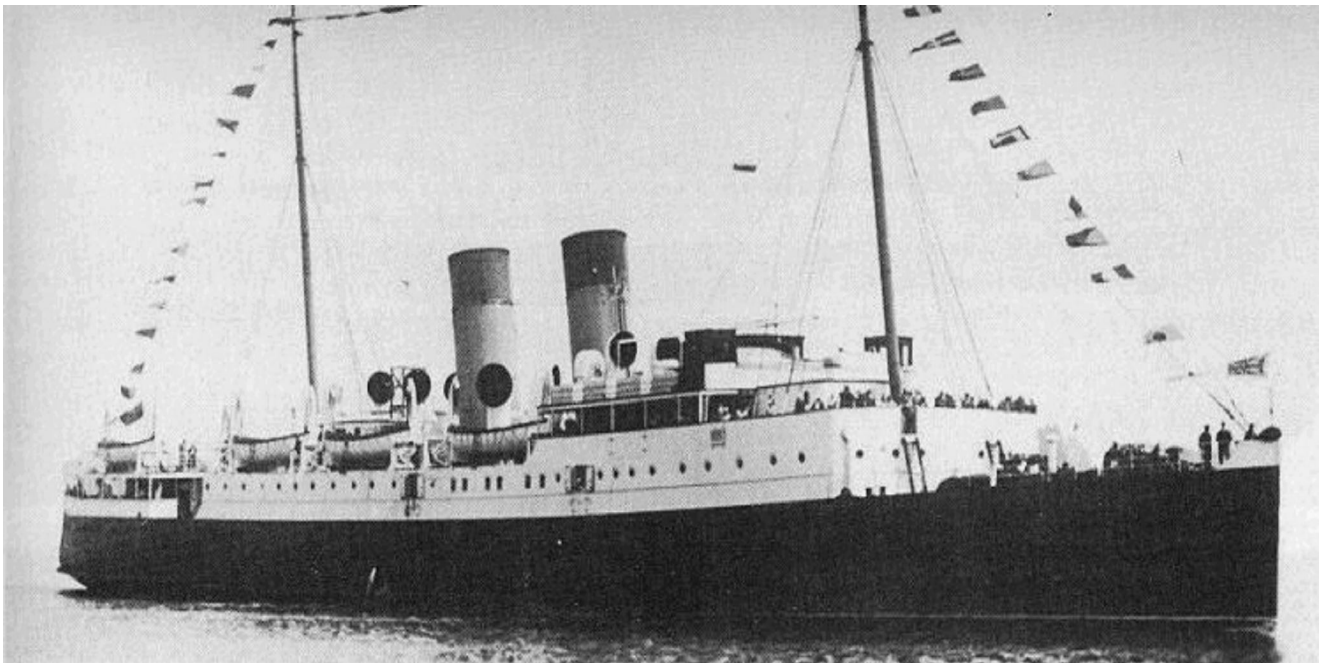
Along with her sister, she assisted in the evacuations from Dunkirk and was requisitioned in June 1941 as a Merchant Auxiliary, then used by the Fleet Air Arm off Arbroath, where she was mined and lost 12 March 1942, while operating as a Fleet Air Arm Target Vessel, both Towing and being a Target, HMS Rockingham was doing this Job in 1945 when she was mined.

HMS *St. Briac* had sailed from Dundee that morning, but shortly before 1500hrs Captain Lubbock sent distress signals to say that she had broken down in a strong south-easterly gale, and was drifting into the British minefield 20 miles east of Arbroath. She struck a mine, six of her Southern Railways crew were killed. The surviving crew members abandoned ship. Four armed trawlers, Arbroath Lifeboat *John and William Mudie* and Montrose Lifeboat *The Good Hope* were despatched. At 1832hrs the Free French rescue tug *Abielle IV* sailed from Aberdeen to assist. One of *St Briac's* lifeboats was picked up by the tug *Empire Larch*. Another lifeboat drifted north and capsized before being driven ashore at Collieston, north of Aberdeen, at 09.52 hrs the following morning. Thirteen of the 17 occupants were drowned. A total of 47 lives were lost.

Some of the information and pictures were supplied by Author Bob Baird and some pictures were from the Photoship website. Other information was found on various government and internet websites.







### **Diving the *ST Briac* – Divers View**

Having organised a group of 10 Tri-mix divers to dive a potential new wreck 30 miles offshore, we set off on 26<sup>th</sup> Oct from Eyemouth. We were using Marine Quest and there Offshore 110 to take us there. Sailing time was 3 ½ hours to the site. The dive site was actually equally distant from Aberdeen and Eyemouth.

Once at the site the wreck was very quickly found and the wreck shotted at one of the high points. Once the shot was checked for position on the wreck, the Deco Station was then deployed off the shot line.

Diving with Neil we went down the shot, signed into to the Deco Station then carried on down. The wreck could be seen clearly from 40m. Visibility was over 20m – fantastic !!!

At 64m we reached the seabed, shot was just off the stern of the wreck. The stern was sitting upright and intact, rudder in place but we couldn't see the props. We then moved back up towards the stern deck where we started looking around. There was some intact structure with door ways and a very large gun mounting in place, sitting upright, but no gun. The deck area was littered with intact boxes of 4" shells still in place. Looking over the stern looked like the pivot brackets for the gun. (one of the other divers said he saw what looked like the breach of a gun sticking out of the sand.

As we worked our way forward, there were lots of intact port holes about and the odd light. It was possible to do a long swim under stern deck with out any restrictions. It was light due to holes in the deck and intact portholes along the hull sides. Once onto the mid ship section the wreck was collapsed, possibly from the damage of the mine. The engine, main boiler plus two donkey boilers were all exposed, wreck fallen away to the sides. There area was littered with port holes, toilets and sinks everywhere. At this point we knew this was not a cargo ship with the amount of portholes, toilets, sinks and of course no holds. Also scattered around were lots of plates, some still stacked in piles, cups etc. The plates were all plain white, however on the reverse was an anchor symbol

– note made to come back to these later. Parts of the hull were lying bent over with yet more portholes in place.

Working our way forward we then came to a 10m brake in the wreck, then it restarted again. Off to the starboard side was a very large mast lying on the seabed. Moving forward again we came across some large winches followed by the bow. We had a good look around the bow area, you never know you might find the bell. The bow was lying on its port side, large starboard side anchor still in place. We then scooted away from the wreck, turning back to a grand view of the bows. We then returned back to the bow and began to follow the wreck on the port side.

Just past the intact bow section on the seabed amongst some wreckage I noticed the shape of something that could fit the description of a bell partly buried in the sand. On closer inspection there it was the Bell. Neil had no doubt that I had found something by all the noise I was making over and above that of the Zepps.

Out with the mine and Neils lifting bags, bell secured and up it went – hoping that it reaches the surface and that its spotted by the boat.

We then worked our way back to the mid ship section, stopping by a large pile of plates which were then put into the goody bag. (turned out to be stamped with a Royal Daulton mark and an Adrimal anchor on the back of them. We then spent a leasurily time looking around while working our way back to the stern.

115 minutes later we were back on the surface. The 3 ½ hour return journey back didn't seem to bad for some reason.

Max Depth 64m, Dive Time 115 minutes.

