

## On The Rocks at Tregardock near Delabole

The SS Woodleigh (Captain R Parsons) on August 26th, 1917 was coming up channel with cargo making for Barry Dock after a voyage to Boulogne, France and off the Cornish coast she encountered a terrific south easterly gale. As a preventative measure against the prevailing storm, the captain kept by the lee shore and was making for Lundy, where it was thought the anchor could be dropped.

A patrol boat warning the captain he was in a dangerous location, German submarines being frequent visitors to this vicinity, the anchor was cast near Lundy with the intention of remaining there until daybreak or the abatement of the storm which was now raging fiercer than ever. At about 1.00 am on the 27th the wind suddenly changed to the north west and the vessel began to drag her anchor. This intensified the danger of being driven to the rockbound coast. The second anchor proved to be unsuccessful and the 'Woodleigh', broke adrift leaving both anchors and 60 fathoms of chain; she was now to the mercy of wind and wave. Being deprived of her powers of navigation by the fact that her rudder was bent and propeller damaged, distress signals were sent up.

### The work of Rescue

Mr James Eley of Treligga was an eye-witness of her grounding, "I heard some firing" he said, "early in the morning, but thought it was nothing unusual. About 7 o'clock I saw a large steamboat, about 500 yards outside Tregunnick Tail. She anchored for a time, and she then began to drag her anchor. They didn't seem to see any prospects of staying there, so the captain seeing Tregardock Beach ran her there, she came in broadside between 9 and 10 o'clock."

In response to the distress signals, Mr Eley said Port Isaac rocket apparatus team came up by road and was soon on the spot. After two or three attempts they succeeded in firing the rope to the ship and it was made fast to the mast. The work of the rescue then began, but owing to the gradual movements of the ship further towards the beach, the main rope became slack, resulting in those coming ashore in the breeches basket frequently being submerged in the water. This process was successfully executed in about three hours, the captain of course being the last to leave; the crew numbered 27. Some of the crew were then brought to Treligga and others to Tregardock Farm where they found Mr and Mrs Strout hospitable and sympathetic hosts. At Treligga, comforts without stint were given to the survivors. The persons who assisted Mr Eley were a Rev. Perry (a visitor to the district); Mr James Rowe; Mr Ernest Eley and Mr E Sandercock, all of Treligga. After the crew had partaken all the good things offered to them, they went down in the evening and the tide being low, went aboard and brought away their belongings. Soon after the captain and crew left the district, probably for further service.



### Hundreds of Sightseers

Hundreds of people from a radius of ten miles visited the scene that day and in the evening the beach became animated. There lay the mammoth victim of wind and wave, deserted by those who previously manned her, the object of a thousand eyes and the subject of a thousand tongues. One found consolation in the fact that she had not altogether fallen victim to the German navy. She was a merchant vessel of 3,500 tons and 300 feet long.

### Salvage Operations

It was first thought that the 'Woodleigh' could be salvaged, and some time and labour were expended in blasting the rocks which formed her bed. This work satisfactorily carried out, preparations were made for tugs to come outside, when it was an extraordinarily high tide to get her off. Unfortunately, the night before this scheme was to be put into practice, a very heavy ground sea sprang up and the ship was heaved 50 yards further on the beach and the plan had to be abandoned.

The only course found to be open to the salvagers was to dismantle her and take the material away from Delabole station, except the gun, which was lowered into a small boat and was rowed to a patrol vessel waiting in the distance. This was not performed without a great deal of danger being involved. But a fine day was chosen for the purpose, which considerably lessened the risk. Next the ship was dismantled of all its valuable material, which left the hulk and machinery to their successors who were employed to do this later. To get the material to the top of the cliff, an aerial railway was constructed over which the material was hauled, thence to the farm on a narrow gauge railway using heavy horses to pull the laden trucks. This provided work for many local men who had been on work of national importance and were exempt from military service.

But lucky as the crew was to be saved, the affair had not been without a fatality, for it was whilst on night duty guarding the material awaiting transportation that a Mr George Masters of Delabole was burnt so badly that he died as a result soon after.

With the recovered ship's cargo was a considerable quantity of timber and rumour was that the local builders and carpenters did not go short of timber for quite a while. This all happened during the Great War 1914 -1918.