

1905

The railway steamer *Hilda*

Despite the filthy winter weather, the *Hilda* left Southampton at 22:00 on the 17th November, 1905, and didn't see the lights of St. Malo until about 18:00 the following day after a rough Channel crossing. Night had fallen and Captain Gregory preferred to wait outside the rock strewn passage until the frequent snow squalls, in which visibility would drop to nil, had passed.

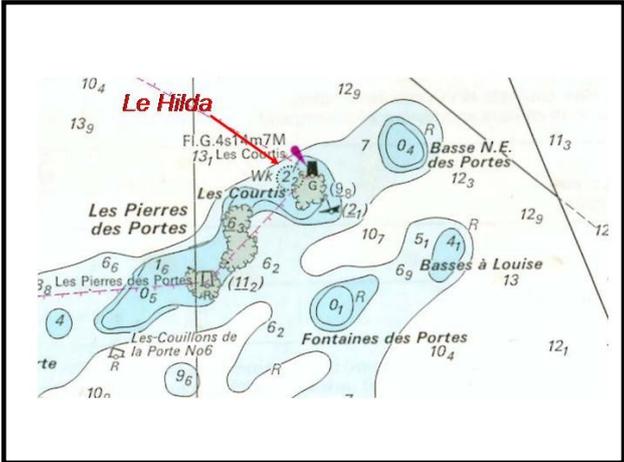
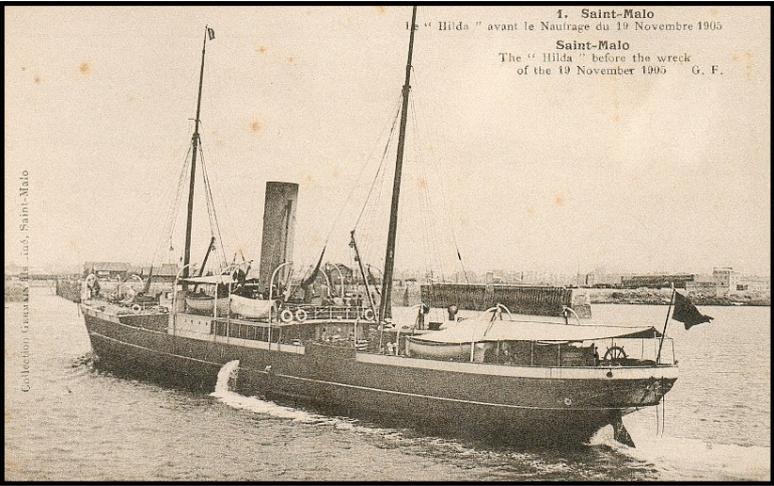
Onboard were numerous English residents of Dinard and the surrounding area, on their way to enjoy the "milder" climates of Brittany. There were also large numbers of "Johnnies", itinerant onion sellers from around Roscoff in Finisterre, who, having sold all their merchandise, were heading home for Christmas. Such was the *Hilda's* human cargo that night, 127 souls including the crew of 26.

As a squall cleared and visibility improved, Captain Gregory gave the order for his vessel to begin her approach to St. Malo - only for another wall of snow to wrap itself around them once again. Suddenly, the passengers and those members of the crew that had gone down to rest in their cabins were woken by a terrible impact!

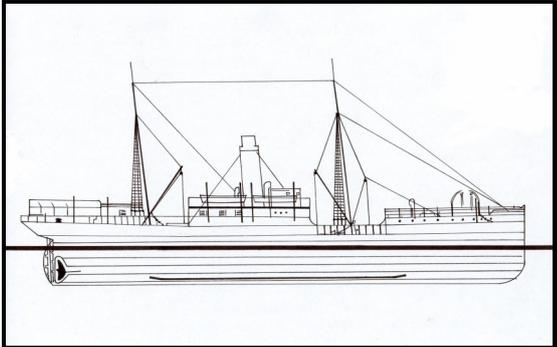
Surrounded by crashing breakers, the *Hilda* was firmly aground and listing to starboard, her stern sinking rapidly into the freezing water. The captain gave the order to abandon ship, but the list and wild seas prevented the boats from being launched. On deck, amid scenes of panic, the crew did their best to distribute life preservers to the passengers, but many were already in the water, crying out for help until they disappeared, enveloped by the dark and icy sea.

A cluster of desperate survivors, mainly Johnnies, climbed the foremast to try to escape the waves breaking over the vessel. Not until shortly after 09:00, when the steamer *Ada*, also of the London & South Western Railway, left St. Malo for Southampton did their plight become known. As the *Hilda* came into sight, lying broken on the rocks of Les Courtils, there were just six men, half dead with cold, clinging to her rigging.

Built in steel by Aitken & Mansel of Glasgow, the *Hilda* had a Gross Tonnage of 820 and dimensions 70.9 x 8.6 x 4.3 metres. Her single propeller was driven by a 1300 h.p. two cylinder compound engine fed from a pair of boilers.



Wreck of the *Hilda* on Les Courtils at the entrance to the channel.



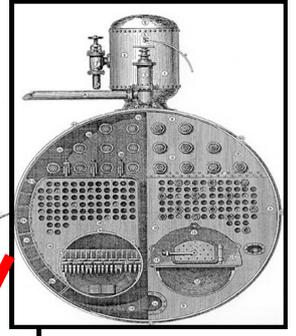
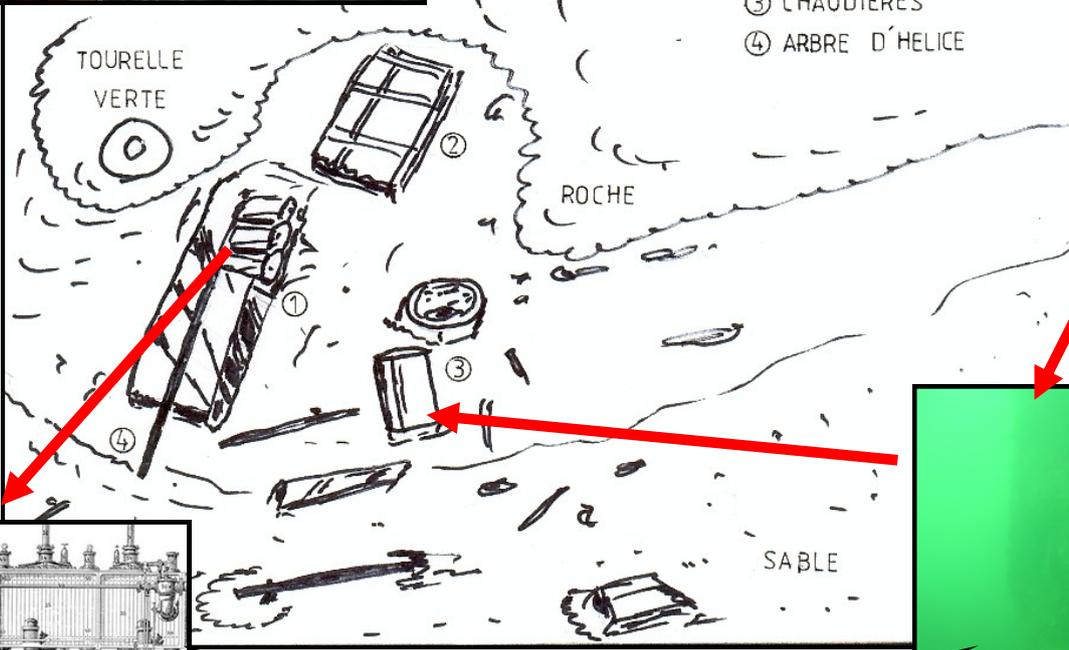
SAINT MALO PLONGÉE EMERAUDE



The site today and in 1905

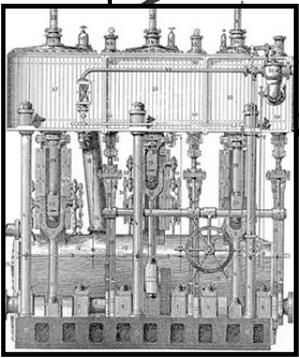


- ① MACHINES
- ② TOLE
- ③ CHAUDIERES
- ④ ARBRE D'HELICE

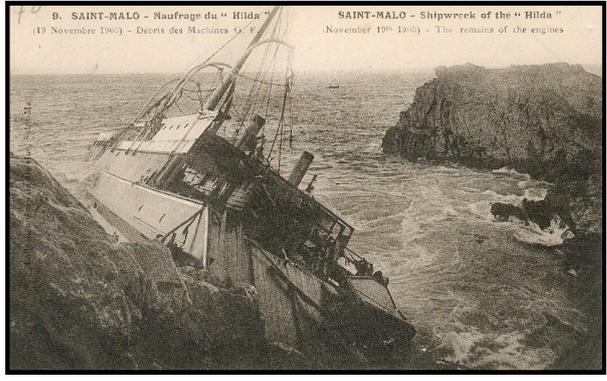


Triple expansion engine

Boiler



The wreck is very broken, lying from the rocks down to sand at 25m at high water; the two boilers stand out on a rocky bottom. The bronze propeller was in the sand at the end of its shaft, leading down from the triple expansion engine, but was removed in 1997 to be displayed ashore. At the same time, a commemorative plaque was placed on top of one of the boilers. Shell-plating litters the sand and the bilges are clearly visible.



The wreck the day after the tragedy

Helmet diver looking for victims' bodies



**SAINT MALO
PLONGÉE EMERAUDE**