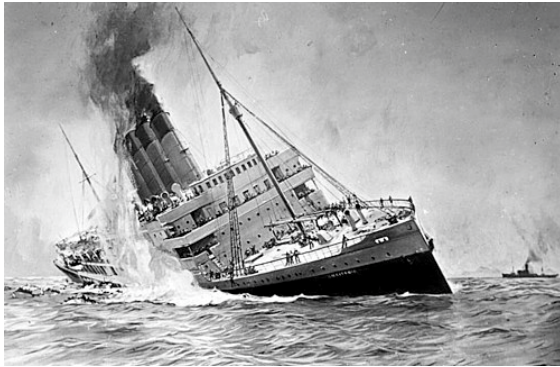



The Lusitania – a Medallion and a Never-Ending Story by Simon Wilson



The *Lusitania* is one of the most famous shipwrecks in maritime history. She lies eleven miles off the coast of Ireland, and is 300 feet down. This is shallow for a wreck and as a result she has suffered a lot of damage over the years – strong currents, looting, fishing nets, attacks by the Royal Navy and the attention of iron-eating bacteria. Some estimates say that by 2050 the wreck will have virtually disappeared.

The Royal Navy attacks were made for several reasons - to reduce the size of the wreck and prevent U-Boats using it for concealment in WW2, to reduce the hazard to fishing nets and as NATO target practice in the late 1940s. However, they have given birth to a conspiracy theory – that the depth charging was done to prevent people discovering a secret about the cargo.

OCEAN STEAMSHIPS.
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EUROPE VIA LIVERPOOL
LUSITANIA

Fastest and Largest Steamer
now in Atlantic Service Sails
SATURDAY, MAY 1, 10 A.M.
Transylvania, Fri., May 7, 5 P.M.
Orduna, - - Tues., May 18, 10 A.M.
Tuscana, - - Fri., May 21, 5 P.M.
LUSITANIA, Sat., May 29, 10 A.M.
Transylvania, Fri., June 4, 5 P.M.

Gibraltar-Genoa-Naples-Piraeus
S.S. Carpathia, Thur., May 13, Noon

NOTICE!

TRAVELLERS intending to embark on the Atlantic voyage are reminded that a state of war exists between Germany and her allies and Great Britain and her allies; that the zone of war includes the waters adjacent to the British Isles; that, in accordance with formal notice given by the Imperial German Government, vessels flying the flag of Great Britain, or of any of her allies, are liable to destruction in those waters and that travellers sailing in the war zone on ships of Great Britain or her allies do so at their own risk.

IMPERIAL GERMAN EMBASSY
WASHINGTON, D. C., APRIL 29, 1915.

There are other theories too, one revolves around the presence of “illegal” munitions and a second explosion as the ship went down. Another, based on the absence of Royal Navy escorts in 1915, was that Churchill deliberately put the ship at risk to bring the USA into the war.

As if that wasn't enough to keep the legend alive, there is also the sunken treasure. Twenty-seven Old Master paintings, including works by Monet, Rembrandt, Rubens and Titian were sealed in lead tubes and insured for £4 million (about £30 million in today's values) The tubes were located by a diver in 1994 though none have been recovered so far.

American millionaire Gregg Bemis bought the wreck in 1982, based on the £12 million of scrap metal it contained. He became fascinated by the idea of exploring the wreck and discovering what had really happened, though he was never to complete his explorations. He bequeathed the wreck to the Old Head of Kinsale Lusitania Museum in 2019, shortly before his death.

In the time he owned it, he had to fight off a legal challenge from the British Government, who tried to stop him bringing up items from the wreck. Then, after territorial waters were extended to 12 miles (they had been 3 miles for many years) he found himself in conflict with the Irish Government, as the Lusitania was now in Irish Waters. He had to go to court several times just to get permission to dive on the wreck he owned.



So, a tragic loss of life, conspiracy theories, legal battles and treasure. That would be enough, but it was the subject of one of the most widespread medallions of the Great War. Even today, it's a common sight at fairs and online. There are currently over 50 on eBay, including a fair number in boxes and with the original leaflet.

There are four varieties of medal – the original medal and two later versions with corrections. They are the first, third and fourth versions and

were all made in Germany. The one in the picture is the second version. It is 55mm in diameter and is cast in iron – hence the rust marks on this example and on the paperwork. It bears the date 5 May rather than 5 Mai, and the packaging is in English. That version was made in England.



The original medal was made by Karl Goetz, a Munich based medallist. He intended to satirise the profit motive which had led people to risk their lives by crossing the Atlantic on the *Lusitania*, and shows them eagerly buying tickets from a skeleton (representing Death) despite the warnings. He also wanted to show people that the Germans had warned people of the dangers (which they had, by running newspaper adverts about the establishment of a war zone in the waters around the UK). And finally, by showing the weapons stacked on the deck, he tried to reinforce the idea that the ship was carrying munitions to help the war effort and was therefore a legitimate target.

All these efforts to portray the sinking in a pro-German light were undone by one small slip. He used the date May 5 instead of the correct date of May 7.



The British, after obtaining an example from a Dutch coin dealer, sensed a propaganda opportunity and swung into action. Goetz's first production run of 500 medallions was dwarfed by the British production of 300,000 medallions.

The first casualty of war, according to the quote, is truth, and the British, who had started propaganda operations in the first month of the war, lost no time in claiming that the medallion was a celebration of the sinking, which killed nearly 1,200 people, including 123 Americans and 94 children. They also claimed that the medallions were presented to the crew of the U-20 as a reward for their service and that the sinking had been planned in advance (and had been meant to happen on May 5, being part of a murderous plot by the Germans).

Production of the medallion was financed by Gordon Selfridge at the request of the Government, and manufacture was supervised by the Lusitania Souvenir Medal Committee. They were sold through Selfridge's Department Store at a shilling each, and were also sold extensively in North and South America, Profits were donated to the British Red Cross and St Dunstan's Institute for the Blind.



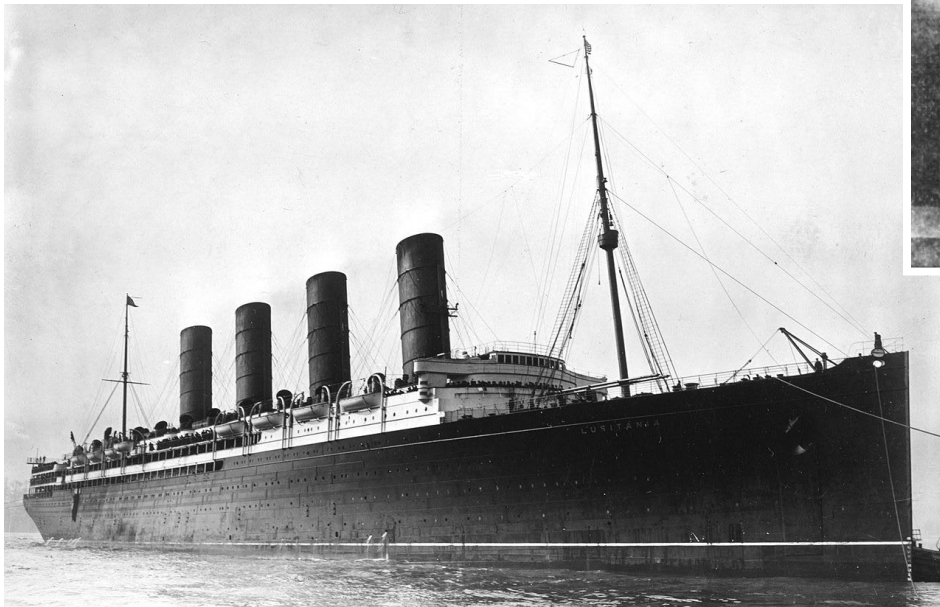
The sinking of the Lusitania, coming on top of several other incidents, brought the USA a little closer towards a declaration of war. These medallions helped to keep it in the minds of Americans, and images of the sinking were used in recruiting posters in the UK and the USA.

Thanks to Mark Ray, Collectors World, Nottingham, for providing this specimen for me to photograph.

The Peterborough Connection by David Gray

Interestingly, there is a Peterborough connection with the story of the Lusitania. On Sunday 9th May, Mrs. Emma Hill, only daughter of Mr. and Mrs. Haynes, 89, Eastgate, Peterborough, arrived safely at their home after being a passenger on the Lusitania when it was sunk on the previous Friday. Mrs. Hill, who was still suffering from the shock of the sinking, gave the *Peterborough Advertiser* an interview. In it she said:

“I got into the last boat which was launched, in company with a minister and his wife and the purser. As we got down, we felt the vessel coming over us. We saw her funnels and the masts gradually overwhelming us, but as the wireless cables came near us the purser grasped hold of the wire, and we just missed being crushed by a hair’s breadth, the wire just touching the end of our boat. As the vessel disappeared it smothered us with water, and it is a mercy I am here today, but I shall carry the memory of those funnels and masts coming over to crush us to my dying day...I might mention that when the minister’s wife saw the ship coming down over us, she leapt down the funnel and disappeared. The minister was praying for her the whole of the time, and you can imagine his joy on landing at Queenstown, Ireland, to find his wife already there and alive.”



Mrs. Emma Hill