

Orkney's historic houseboat

KAREN JOHNSON, Benvie Road, Dundee has just come back from her first trip to the scenic Orkney Isles.

During her stay, she visited the island of Stronsay, north of the Orkney mainland.

Karen went for a stroll along the shore in Whitehall and noticed an old upturned boat.

At first glance it looked like any other boat, but when she drew closer she noticed it had been built on foundations.

Relic

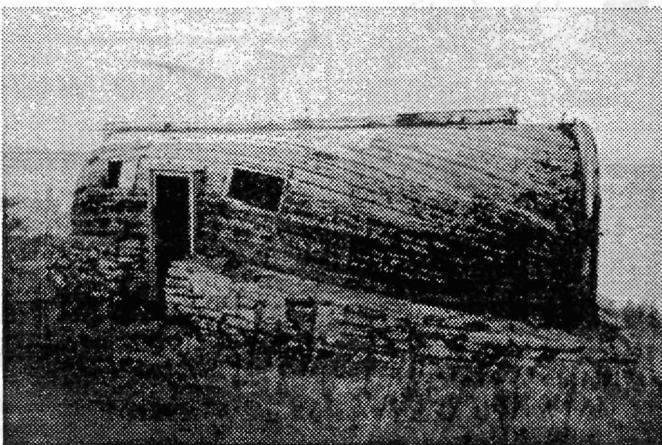
INTRIGUED BY this unusual sight, Karen took a photograph and then asked us if we could help satisfy her curiosity about its history.

Bill Vevers from Kirkwall knows all about the boat and the fascinating tale behind the now decaying relic.

Today, it's used as an ordinary shed, but Bill tells us that it's no ordinary boat—and the story behind it is a sad one.

At the start of the second world war, one of the 30 German U-boats already lurking around the coast of Britain, lay on the surface 250 miles off the Hebrides.

Commander Lemp, the 26-year-old German in charge, decided he would be the first



U-boat commander to sink one of the enemy ships.

At the same time a 14,000 ton passenger liner, the SS Athenia, was on course for Canada, having left Liverpool and passed the tip of Ireland.

In a tragedy that was to horrify the world, early that evening he torpedoed the helpless Athenia, without checking to see if she was armed.

With help from a US steamer and a motor yacht, 1300 survivors were landed at Galway in Ireland.

But, later that morning the

SS Athenia went down, with the loss of 118 lives.

Bill doesn't know what happened to all the other lifeboats that saved the passengers from certain death, but he knows the final resting place of one.

Caught in strong westerly winds and tides, it eventually ended up in Stronsay, turned upside down on the seafront in Whitehall.

So if you're ever visiting Stronsay and see an old upturned boat with a chimney, pause a while to remember the sad story behind the lone relic.

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