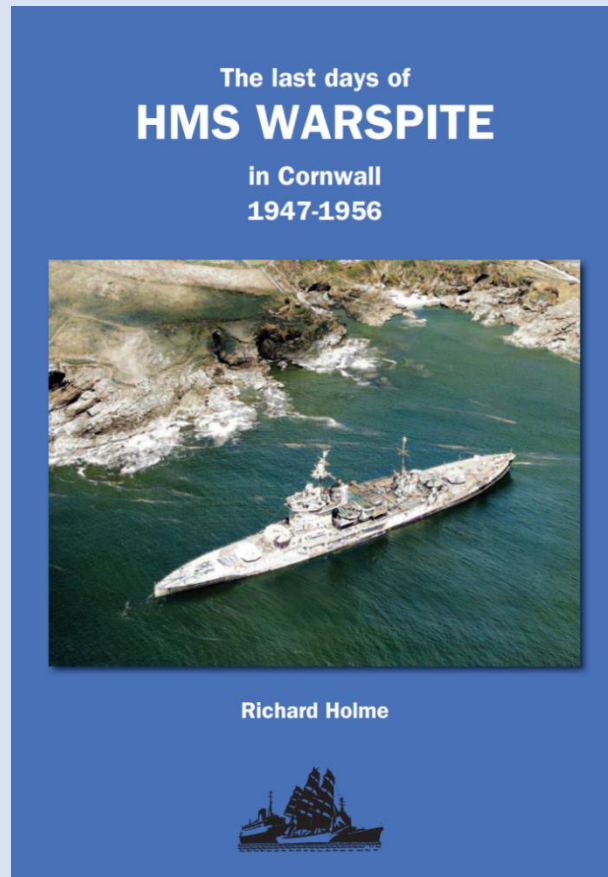


LATEST BOOK FROM WORLD SHIP SOCIETY

THE LAST DAYS OF HMS WARSPITE IN CORNWALL

1947-1956

by Richard Holme



This 128-page hardback book contains 142 photos, featuring several rare and previously unpublished, with a number having been colourised. The book has been compiled from detailed research into the last days of the Royal Navy battleship HMS WARSPITE in Cornwall, using material from various archives and accounts relayed by those who were there. Wrecked at Prussia Cove on her way to the breakers, the ship's crew were heroically saved by the Penlee lifeboat. Acquired by two Bristol scrap merchants, the wreck was refloated, the operation seen by some as the most impressive operation of its time in the UK. Moved to a position near St Michael's Mount, scrapping of vessel would take another seven years, in extremely challenging conditions. The book also touches on other vessels involved, including tugs used in the initial tow and the later salvage operation, as well as other craft which supported the removal of the wreck.

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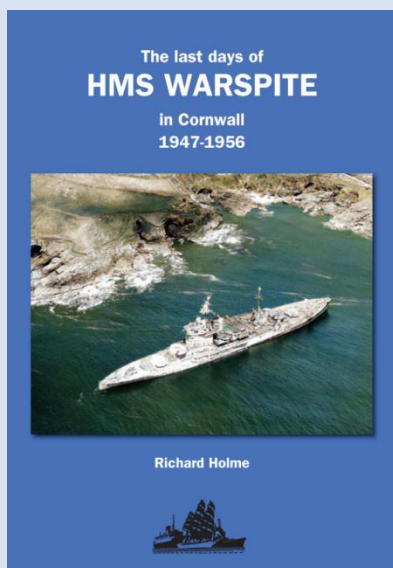
by Richard Holme

About the author

This book is written by World Ship Society member Richard Holme. His research into the Warspite in Cornwall formed part of his studies for a Masters in "UK Shipbreaking 1945-95" at Newcastle University.

Richard's interest in the UK shipbreaking industry saw him publish a history, *Cairnryan Military Port 1940-1996, From U-Boats to the Ark Royal* in 1997. Richard has also been editor of the Naval Dockyard Society for over ten years and writes frequently for several maritime publications.

Richard was awarded the JJ Colledge Naval Essay Prize by the Naval Committee of the World Ship Society for best article published in the Society's Warships Journal during 2022, for the article *Covert mission to view the Graf Spee wreck*, which was published in February 2022.



Ian Watson, the former Managing Director of Shipbreaking (Queenborough), the last major shipbreaker in the United Kingdom made the following comment in the preface to the book;

"A good read" is often said, but often unmerited. Not here: this is an extraordinary tale, told with exemplary skill; a history book that is carefully researched but is also a swashbuckling adventure story....

.... this is a tale of naivety, ingenuity, and courage. A good read indeed

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EXAMPLE PAGE 1



WARSPITE under tow 29 July 1950.

Penlee

The tow to Marazion is recorded in evocative contemporary newsreel films, see appendix 4.7 and 4.8 . Press reports suggested that the tugs had intended to tow WARSPITE to a shipbreaking yard in South Wales. However, there is no available evidence to substantiate that a Welsh yard there had agreed to take her, and, in any case, they would have struggled to accommodate a ship of her size. The only possible yard was Cashmores at Newport, but with its steep riverbank it is thought most unlikely that a warship of WARSPITE's size could be cut up there, even if there was room. Further, just prior to the 1950 refloating, they had received two cruisers HMS AJAX (arrived 13 November 1949) and HMS NORFOLK (19 February 1950) for break up so there would have been little or no room for WARSPITE.

WARSPITE was towed three and a half miles from Prussia Cove (foreground) to St Michael's Mount, in background.

P. Tunstall-Behrens



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EXAMPLE PAGE 2



A good view of the ship from clifftop.

MTSC

Many family holiday snaps were taken on the clifftop with the wreck in the background, see one example above. Indeed, on the author's most recent trip to Prussia Cove in February 2022, he met a lady who had been photographed at this very spot as a nine-year-old, way back in 1947.

The Tunstall-Behrens family (see appendix 6.4) owned the land at Prussia Cove (and indeed still do). It is known as the Porth-en-Alls estate. The Tunstalls were far from happy at the large number of visitors but generously built a public car park for them which survives to this day.

On 19 August 1947, the insurers accepted an offer of £25,000 for the wreck from Bristol scrap merchant R.H. Bennett, acting in conjunction with another Bristol scrap trader A.J. Brewis. Bennett's business was long established, founded in fact in 1868. However, neither had any experience of shipbreaking, so to start on a battleship was somewhat ambitious, to say the least. They did not board WARSPITE prior to making their bid. (MI, having received their insurance monies, had unsuccessfully bid £7500 to the insurers for the wreck and had envisaged using a local contractor to extract non-ferrous and other valuable arisings.)

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EXAMPLE PAGE 3



Two views of the hulk on 9 May 1952. Above: looking forward towards bows. Below seen from the water.

Rolls-Royce

