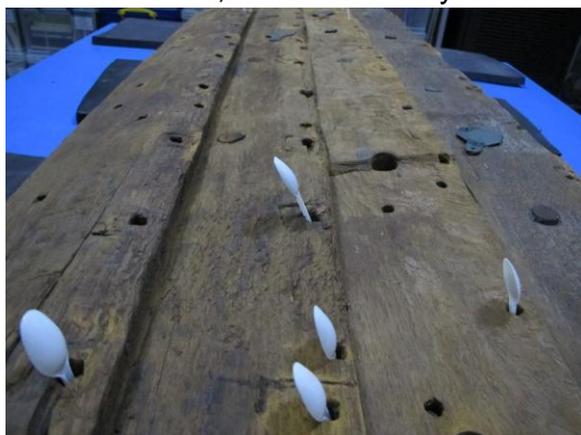




### **Chairman's Introduction**

Phil Cox, Chairman

Welcome to your July edition of the FoNS Newsletter. This year is building to be a huge success! As of mid-June, the anniversary of our first regular opening, we have had over 1,000 visitors to the Medieval Ship Centre during 2016, and the daily figures are increasing. Group visits have contributed greatly to this total and many more are scheduled.



The 'Stop Press' news is that Dr Toby Jones, our curator, has identified and collected together four timbers that were last fixed to each other back in 2002. These have been laid together and will shortly be on display in the conservation store – held in place by plastic teaspoons!

Highlight of the month has been the visit by HMS Severn, Newport's affiliated RN warship. The committee agreed to present the officers and men of

the ship with one of our beautiful Peter Power prints to bring them up to date with the latest image of our Ship. It is shown here along with the fabulous silver model of one of the first depictions of the Newport Ship. The model was made by Langford's Silversmiths of Chancery Lane based on the minimum reconstruction. At that time we still had not defined her sailing rig, hence she is shown with a single mast.



### **Still Desperately Seeking Secretary**

We are continuing to explore possible replacements for the role of Secretary. If you have the time and the inclination to undertake this role, please get in touch with me at [chair@newportship.org](mailto:chair@newportship.org).

### **New Membership Secretary**

It is pleasing to make appointments within the committee when volunteers step forward to take on more responsibilities. Our existing Events Coordinator, Rob Kenny, is taking on the role of Membership Secretary alongside his existing role as from 19 July 2016. The email address [membership@newportship.org](mailto:membership@newportship.org) will henceforth redirect to Rob to address any queries, and he can also be contacted via the Ship Centre.

### **Feature Article: Coins Hidden within Ancient Ships**

There is precedent for placing coins in mast steps and the keelson/stem joint. From a Portuguese colleague I have been told that the keel/stem joint was seen as the most vulnerable part of the ship (often hitting things) and ceremonies led by priests would take place (with many blessings etc) while the ship was built to offer some 'divine' protection for this critical area.

### **The Petit Blanc and Medieval Religion**

Allan Cook

Of the five coins found on the Newport Medieval ship four of them can be disregarded in terms of religious significance. They were probably lost or hidden by the sailors. The one coin of significance in a religious context is the Petit Blanc. This was deliberately placed in the keel of the ship for some reason; someone took the decision to place the reverse – the cross – pointing

upwards. The commonly held belief is that it was placed there for “luck”.

In her article **Mast Steps among the Romans**, Deborah N Carlson questions this conclusion (International Journal of Nautical Archaeology 2007). While I agree with her views, I find it difficult to disentangle superstition and religion in the medieval period.

As Dr Madeleine Gray, Professor of Ecclesiastical History at the University of South Wales, says, “It's virtually impossible to disaggregate faith and superstition; one person's faith is another person's superstition. A coin with a cross on it would be both a good luck charm and a blessing.” Carlson traces the practice of placing coins in the mast step of ships to at least 200 BC, almost to the point at which Romans started to create coinage. Other sources equate the tradition with the placing of coins under Roman pavements and walls and trace the tradition back to Greek temples. However, we are working with a very small data base; Carlson only lists twelve examples of mast step or keel coins in ships of the Roman period.



Perhaps the most interesting of these is the ship excavated at Blackfriars in London in the 1960s. The coin is a low value imperial bronze coin dated to AD88. The reverse, which faces outwards, represents the goddess Fortuna holding a ship's wheel. Was this a prayer to the goddess to protect the ship? Interestingly the Blackfriars' ship is thought to have been Celtic, so that the tradition had obviously spread to all parts of the Roman Empire by the beginning of the 2nd century AD.

Fortuna in the Roman Pantheon was equated with good luck and good fortune, so once again we have this amalgam of religion and the superstition. She is often depicted with a ship's wheel in a nautical context or a carriage wheel in a land based context, signifying a safe journey.

From the Blackfriars coin and that found on the Newport Ship, it is clear that the intrinsic value of the coin is of little if any importance. Something else must have been the deciding factor, perhaps the symbol shown on the reverse? Nor can the date of the coin be a deciding factor in ascertaining the age of the ship. Some coins have been found to be antique at the time they were placed in the keel.

Most Roman homes had a *lararium*, a family shrine, with small representations of the household gods, to which they would make offerings of food, wine, etc. Where would Roman sailors have turned to in need? Would it be to the point at which they knew there was a representation of a sympathetic god, in the case of the Blackfriars' ship close to the main mast.

Although the decree by Constantine in 312 AD made Christianity the official religion of the Roman Empire, the transition was probably much slower, and it is likely that during this period Christian symbols were placed in mast steps for the first time. Roman villas would still have had their *lararia*, only now they would have held representations of Christ, the Virgin Mary and the saints.

If Roman sailors had turned to the mast to pray in times of need, it is likely that this tradition would have passed into the post-Roman and medieval periods. Coins were still placed in the mast steps of British ships into the 20<sup>th</sup> century, and the tradition was noted in Bodrum in Turkey as late as the 1980s. There was a Greek and Greek Orthodox population in Bodrum until the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

I have floated this idea among religious historians, with the help of Professor Madeleine Gray. At the moment it is early days. She herself says, “What evidence I have suggests prayer to saints, e.g. young Henry Tudor asking St Armel for help during his earlier failed invasion attempt, but there is also the helmet trim with '*Iesus autem transiens*' on it to suggest looking to Christ for help.” She also espouses that “studies of medieval religious art suggest that the crosses on these coins made them a reminder of the Crucifixion and a focus for thought and prayer about salvation.”

Graham Jones (a researcher at Oxford University and editor of an online atlas of saints cults) says, “Lots of things come to mind of course, the cross-like structure of mast and spars, the word-play on 'navis' and 'nave', Christ's calming of the waves, and so on. I've written here and there about the roots of the St Elmo's Fire superstition (focused on masts and spars), and one could even see this 'internal' protection as an opposite (or complementary?) action to 'external' protection such as the Jonah principle which seems to lie behind the sacrifice of valued metallic

objects to the stormy sea (extending in Gregory the Great's reportage to one of the nails of the Crucifixion)."

St Elmo's Fire is a meteorological phenomenon especially in storms, where pointed objects, like mast, seem to attract the energy and light up. This could have been interpreted by the superstitious or devout sailor as a visitation from a hoped-for saint.

Direction of prayer is very important. Medieval churches are (roughly) aligned to the east and Jerusalem. One way of telling early Christians' burials is their alignment, again east west. But medieval Christians usually prayed to a favoured saint and would pray in the direction of his or her image.

Dr Gray says that, "if I'd been a medieval pilgrim going from Monmouthshire to St David's, when I arrived at the dangerous Loughor river I would have entered the church of Llandeilo Talybont, (the church that has been recreated in the grounds of St Fagans) to pray for a safe crossing. The first saint that I would have seen would have been St Christopher carrying the young Christ across a river. But I might have chosen any of the saints that were appropriate (St Roch is another possibility) and prayed to them".

What I am asking is whether anyone knows the nature of religion on medieval ships. At least some of the time, especially in a storm, the sailors would not have known in which direction the ship was pointing, but they would have always known where the main mast was. Did they know that there was a religious symbol close to its base and did they use it as a direction in which to direct their prayers? More work needs to be done on the exact placing of the coins, their relationship to the main mast and how well known their presence was to the ordinary sailor.

### **Who Discovered the Medieval Newport Ship?**

Babs Same, Volunteer

This is an interesting question, one that matters for the sake of historical accuracy. In 2004 the Newport Outdoor Group commissioned a talk on the Newport Medieval Ship. After a very informative and interesting insight this seemed a very logical question to ask.

The speaker mentioned the archaeologist, Kate Howells, but I pointed out that archaeologists weren't actually working on the site so wouldn't have been the first to find the Ship. I didn't get a definitive reply but determined to try and find out the true circumstances.

Initially, As Newport City Council seemed the best port of call, I wrote to Councillor (Sir) Harry Jones. He helpfully directed my enquiry to Sue Richards, Project Officer, Continuing Learning & Leisure, Newport City Council who was able to clarify exactly what happened on that day in June in 2002 when this wonderful vessel was discovered.

The very first person to see the Ship, after 533 years lying hidden in the mud, was a workman called Lee Davies; he saw the first visible timbers. He called over his foreman, Don Bowles, and they both realised this was something special. The foreman stopped work on the site and rang the Newport Museum and spoke to Peter Brown.

The archaeologists were informed and attended the following day. Archaeologist Adam Yates was the first onsite, then Kate Howells arrived and the extraordinary adventure began.

So, an ordinary man carrying out his usual working task was suddenly drawn in to an amazing historical drama that is still unfolding and revealing secrets about the world's maritime past, five and a half centuries later.

These workmen share a part in history with the world's most famous explorers, linked across time by a vessel that was sailing the same seas that Columbus would sail as he was growing up.

*If these people are still around, then it would be great to have them get in touch with the project and stake their claim on their bit of history! If you are one of them, or you know them, then let them know about this article. Thanks. Ed.*

### **Collaboration Success**

Angela Platt

In the age of austerity we're living through, it's good to know that some positives have arisen as a result of cuts to services.

Back in 2013 when the small Handpost Library on Stow Hill, Newport closed (as did many others across the land), a gathering of local people led by Alan Roderick held a meeting. The idea emerged of appealing to the council not to sell the premises to yet another take-away chain, leasing them instead to a group of volunteers who would run the old library to promote the arts, library and community events.

The slow wheels of council administration eventually turned and granted the group permission to go ahead with this exciting, not-for-profit long-term project. A new charity group, The **Handpost Community Library Association** was formed and a nucleus of hard-working, willing volunteers moved heaven and earth to decorate the premises, to make them fit for purpose, and to raise funds to cover costs and council rent. The latter is an ongoing process, and monthly poetry readings at the Murrenger and some musical events held at St John's Church all help towards keeping the project solvent.

Since 2015 and its phoenix resurrection, the **Cwtsh** as it's now called, has been used for a number of eye-catching exhibitions expertly launched by John Briggs and a range of artists and photographers. A children's library has been set up and is used by children regularly, as are several courses for adults. Spanish, Welsh, ukulele and creative writing courses, art, yoga, mindfulness classes are flourishing and keeping the organisation afloat. When Friars Walk opened in Newport, a **Cwtsh** exhibition of artistic, photographic and poetic responses of local people made a stunningly colourful and professional display. The Hera art group is currently holding an exhibition of their work, so why not pop in and pay them a visit?

What, you may ask, has all this to do with The Newport Ship? First and foremost, it is a twin enterprise; two wonderful groups of volunteers doing their utmost to engage the public in what we consider worthwhile projects. Yours is to preserve and promote, to discover and engage the public in learning about The Newport Ship, the biggest of its time in maritime history that has ever been found. Ours is to engender community spirit and promote the arts and education.

A serendipitous merging of our two organisations occurred during May, when you and we elected to make our contribution to the Coleridge in Wales Festival on Newport's behalf. Friday, 20<sup>th</sup> May proved to be an entertaining evening at **Cwtsh**, of poems, music, prose and pints. Guests from the touring festival joined and contributed, and my **Cwtsh** creative writing group and I read some of our poems reflecting Coleridge's values that we still share, about community spirit and cherishing landscape. FoNS followed this by holding a jolly event at The Newport Ship centre where we joined to read Coleridge's **Rime of the Ancient Mariner**, interspersed with musical entertainment for the audience, followed by a musical jam session. The organiser of the Coleridge in Wales Festival, Richard Parry arrived on his bicycle to the authentic acoustic sound of a torrential storm, complete with a wet albatross (an artist's version of one). No birds were harmed in the killing of

this creature, unlike the ancient mariner's!

The outcome of this happy merging of events is that Phil Cox asked me to set my talented creative writing group the task of putting their imaginative minds to work on a nautical project. Creating stories that link discoveries about The Newport Ship is precisely what they are now working on as a result. Some of the writers have made an exciting and promising beginning, and their enthusiasm is palpable.

During the summer, each of the writers will be

developing their individual stories or poems, and when these are completed and polished we hope to be able to share with you what could be an interesting and inspiring collection of creative writing to complement your new Newport Ship updated Guide. So watch this space!

## **Review: FoNS Pembroke Visit – 16<sup>th</sup> June 2016**

Graham and Julie Jarvis

On a bright, sunny morning we assembled at the Medieval Ship Centre. Our limited numbers

meant that we were able to use a minibus driven by our own Rob Kenny. We reached our first stop at about 11am. This was at the Milford Haven Maritime Heritage Centre. Our guide was very informative and explained how Milford Haven came about.

Sir William Hamilton married Catherine Barlow in 1758 and so acquired part of the largest estate in



1 Richard Clayton, Angela Platt, Phil Cox, Sarah Radford, Pam Cocchiara, Sharif Gemie & Barbara Hawkins



Pembrokeshire. In January 1764 he was appointed British envoy to Naples. In 1790 Hamilton was credited with building the new town of Pembroke.

In 1791 he married his second wife, the young Emma Hart. He was over 70 by then and Emma 34. It was in Naples that Emma met first Nelson (then a vibrant 45 year old). The rest as they say is history!

One of the pictures in the centre was of the fishing vessel, 'Welsh Prince'. She was built in 1983 at the Atlantic Shipbuilding yard in Newport. The sister ships at Newport were the *Welsh Princess*, *Welsh Monarch* and *Welsh Consort*, all built for the Welsh Fisheries. They were 100ft long, 27ft beam with gross tonnage of 338 tons.

We left the Maritime Museum and made our way to the Sunderland Flying Boat Museum in Pembroke. During WW2 there were over 30 Sunderland and Catalina flying boats stationed in the Haven. They would patrol the Atlantic waters, watching for and attacking German submarines for over 14 hours without refuelling.

The volunteers there were enthusiastic and informative. There are no flying boats there, but they are bringing up parts of one that sunk at her moorings in Milford Sound and restoring them. They then sell the parts to collectors to raise funds for the Centre. After a chat with our hosts over cup of tea, we left and made our way to Pembroke Castle.



The castle was first built in 1093 by Roger of Montgomery and was of the 'wooden motte and bailey' type. In 1189 it was given to William Marshall (Chepstow Castle was built by Marshall). It was he who built the stone castle, and it was carried on by his son, Gilbert Marshall.

It is a very large castle, similar in size to Caerphilly Castle. The huge round keep which dominates the inner ward is 75ft high and has a domed roof. It is built on a rock promontory surrounded by water. This meant attacking forces could only approach on a narrow front. The towers and wall on the landward side are thicker than on the sea side.

At the end of the Civil War, Oliver Cromwell laid siege to the castle for seven weeks, finally capturing it, and the three leaders were found guilty of treason. Cromwell ordered that the castle should be destroyed. Townspeople were encouraged to disassemble the fortress and use the stone for their own purposes. The castle was abandoned and allowed to decay. It remained in ruins until 1880 when a three year restoration took place. Nothing further was done until after WW1 when Major General Sir Ivor Phillips acquired the castle and started extensive restoration. On his death a trust was set up and the Phillips' family and Pembroke Town Council jointly run it. It has been Grade I listed since 1951.

On the return journey those on board agreed to stop and we enjoyed a meal together.

Thanks to Rob for a wonderful day.

### **Spotlight on Volunteers – Phil Cox**



It's not my fault! It was my late wife who was 'out there' with Charles Ferris and the rest of the Save Our Ship campaigners back in 2002. When I took voluntary redundancy in April 2011 to spend time looking after my wife, she kicked me out of the house saying that I wasn't to be under her feet all day! So I was encouraged to visit the Ship Centre and volunteer as a guide on the open days. It all grew from there – co-opted onto the committee to help with PR, and then elected and cajoled into being the chairman. For me it was something to bury myself in after the loss of my wife – but I hope that I am championing the cause, keeping the project firmly in

the public view and broadening the audience and expanding the support for our project.

*If you can tell others what inspires you to support the Newport Ship through the Friends, please send your story and a photo of yourself to me at [chair@newportship.org](mailto:chair@newportship.org) and you can be in the next issue!*

## FoNS Blog

Why not keep up to date with all our news as it is pushed out to other media sites? Go to our website ([www.newportship.org](http://www.newportship.org)) and click on 'Blog' (on the brown banner top right of the screen) and you can subscribe – that way you get all articles emailed to you as soon as they are published.

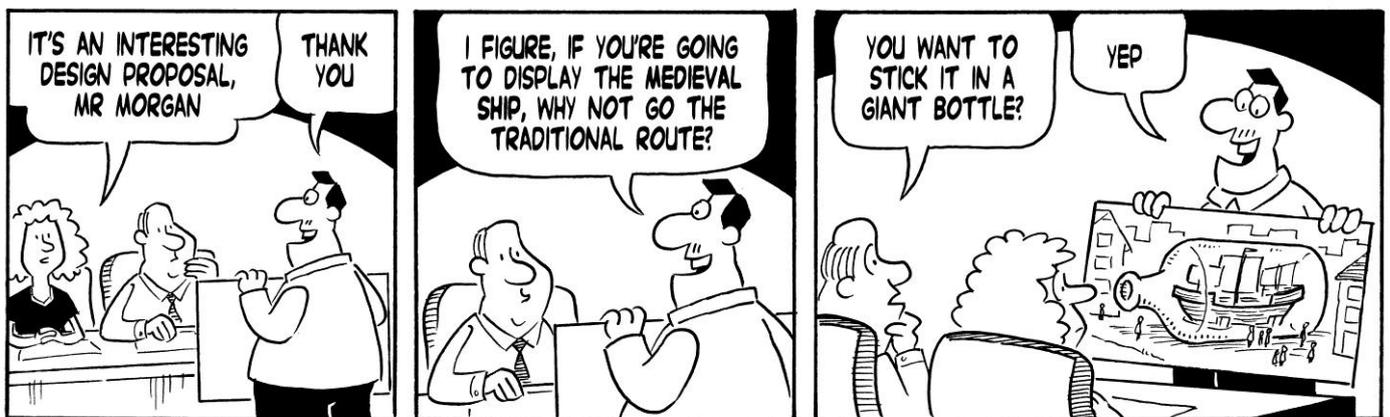
The regular postings will be supplemented by a couple of our student volunteers, Katie & Chloe over the summer months as they come and help out around the Ship Centre.

## Review: Coleridge in Wales – *The Rime of the Ancient Mariner*

Very many thanks to all those who came along to this event – we had a great time. The Rime was read by a series of volunteers, Francis Maxey, Ann Jackson-Bass, Angela and Greg Platt and Bob Evans. Between each section, we had music from Phil Millichip, Bryn Millichip, Frank Summers, and many more. A special mention must be made for our sound engineer and resident pirate, Lewis Griffiths, who led the singing of a couple of sea shanties; we stopped him before they became too bawdy!

## 'Never Say Dai'

Here's another of Tim Harries' cartoons that was originally published in the South Wales Argus. Our project curator, Dr Toby Jones is currently considering options for the display of our reconstructed ship. Here's more inspiration should he need it!



## NAS Dendrochronology Course 15th - 16th October 2016

### From the tree to the microscope with Dendrochronology...

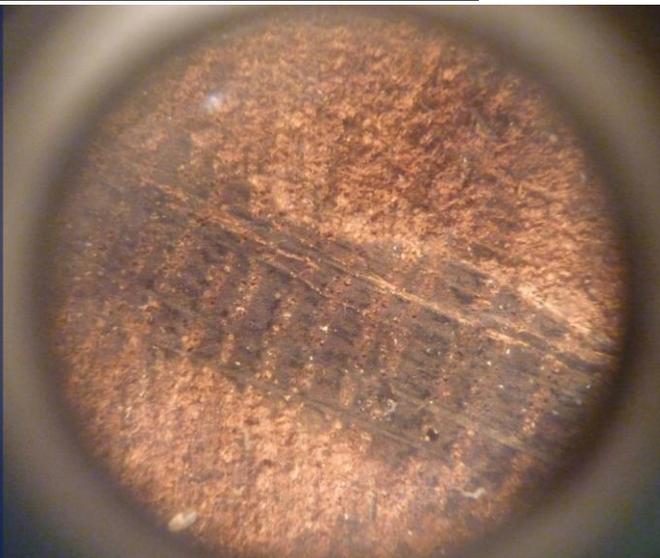
This weekend course is a mix of theory and practical, including the opportunity to go into the woods, take a core sample and learn from the world's leading expert.

**Date:** 15<sup>th</sup>-16<sup>th</sup> October 2016  
**Where:** Lampeter, Wales, UK  
**Cost:** £150 to NAS members/  
£158 to non members

**Email us for details:**  
[nas@nauticalarchaeologysociety.org](mailto:nas@nauticalarchaeologysociety.org)



Nautical  
Archaeology  
Society  
Education Programme



Here's an opportunity to learn more about the technology behind the dating of our timbers. The course is being led by Professor Nigel Nayling, who was very much involved with our own project. FoNS recently linked with the Nautical Archaeology Society through reciprocal membership arrangements, and we can offer NAS members' benefits to all our own members.

Timber is able to provide a large amount of information which can be used to help interpret a site, which is fortunate for maritime archaeologists as we can often find surviving timbers in excellent condition. Join the NAS for this weekend course, and learn more than you thought was possible about timber samples, dendrochronology and dendroprovenancing!

**What's involved** The course will involve theory and practical sessions, including a field visit to study woodland management and looking at a case study of a medieval wreck (*I wonder which one? Ed*)

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