

Friends of the Newport Ship

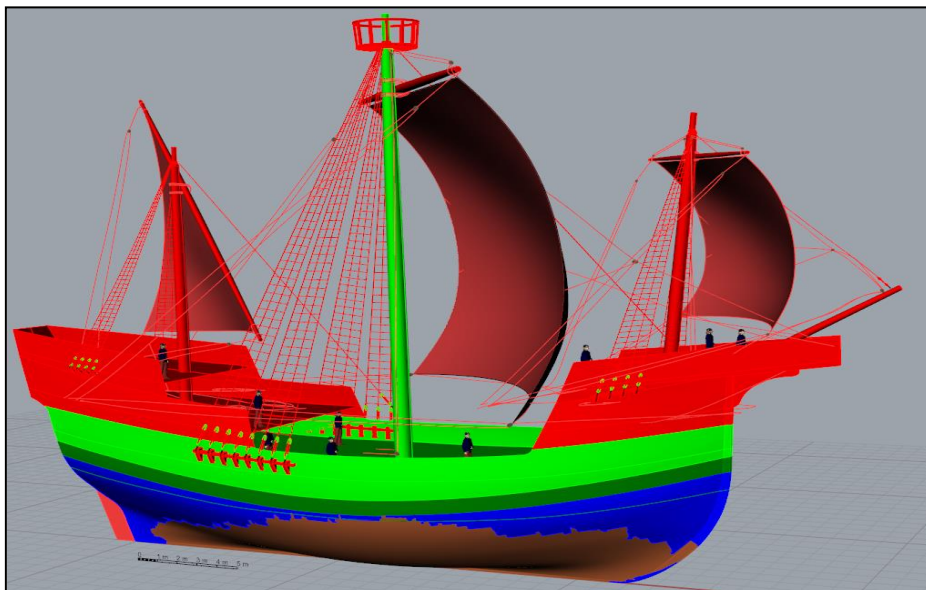
Registered Charity No 1105449

www.newportship.org



News: July 2014

Newport Medieval Ship – The Latest Reconstruction



Working from artefactual evidence and from visual material contained in contemporary books and manuscripts, Pat Tanner has produced a primary reconstruction of our Ship, as it would have appeared during its working life. The most notable change is the addition of another full deck immediately above the cargo hold. This implies a clear enclosed space running the length of the Ship that could shelter the crew and provide living space for them and any passengers the ship carried.

Another noticeable alteration is the raising of the forecastle and the raising and lengthening of the half deck and quarter deck at the stern. The partly open spaces between these stern decks might have provided shelter for animals and for some of the crew. The raised forecastle would have made the ship more seaworthy and better able to cope with weather conditions in the open Atlantic. The colour banding in the drawing is as follows:

- BROWN:** Extant Ship's timbers
- BLUE:** Additional timbers needed for a watertight hull
- DARK GREEN:** Additional deck above cargo spaces
- LIME GREEN:** Hull area for which disarticulated evidence was found.
- RED:** Areas for which no physical evidence has been found, but whose presence can be inferred from the hull shape and contemporary documents and drawings.

The Bristol Conference

The long-awaited two day conference on *The World of the Newport Ship* took place in Bristol on 17th and 18th July and was a great success. Over 100 academics and members of the Friends had booked to attend, and some had to be turned away.

There will be a fuller report in our annual Newsletter, due to be published in September, and the University of Bristol will eventually be publishing the conference papers, so this note just picks out a few snippets as a taster. They are mainly based on the 15th century Bristol port records, a unique resource for information on early shipping.



Was our Ship unusually large for its time? Well, yes and no. The majority of ships trading out of Bristol had a capacity of under 100 tonnes. In the early 15th century and again in the early 16th century there were hardly any large ships or *navis* (>150 tonnes). In the mid 15th century, though, *navis* accounted for 20% of the overseas shipping, so our Ship was not alone. The fluctuations in the use of large ships probably reflected changes in trading as political liaisons ebbed and flowed.

Between the loss of Gascony in 1453 and the Treaty of Castille (opening up the Spanish trade) in 1467, trade with Portugal was dominant and the same ships tended to ply the Bristol-Lisbon route repeatedly. The finds on our Ship reflect this. Large ships took 5-6 months to make the round trip, but as the sailing time was only 3-4 weeks, they must have spent a long time in Lisbon waiting for cargo and loading/unloading. Smaller ships turned round faster, so they weren't necessarily less economic than large ships.

Most of the large ships trading to/from Bristol were Bristol-owned. In 1465/6, for example, 7 of the 8 named *navis* were 'of Bristol' and just 1 'of Lisbon'. Thus although our Ship was Basque-built, it could well have been Bristol-owned for at least part of its life.

We'll finish with a teaser for you. Imagine you're the captain of the Newport Ship, coming back from Lisbon. You've made it up the Iberian coast and across the Bay of Biscay, and now you have to cross to Bristol. You have a compass, but no charts and no satellite navigation. All you have are the following sailing instructions:

From Finisterre, go your course NNE. When you guess you are 2 parts over the sea, if bound for the Severn, you must go N by E till you come into soundings. If you have 90-100 fathoms turn N until you come into 72 fathoms with fair grey sand; that is the ridge between Cape Clare and Scilly. Continue N until your soundings are of ooze; the go ENE or else E by N and you will not be far short of Steep Holm.

Do you think you can do it? In the spirit of experimental history, perhaps we should seek a volunteer to give the instructions a try and see if they work!

On the Move – cautiously.

With the deadline for the expiry of the lease on the Maesglas warehouse fast approaching, and with Newport Council apparently no nearer a decision that when they started looking at this 9 months ago, an initiative by your Committee successfully got the Welsh Government involved. On 19 June a tripartite working group with representatives from FONS, CyMAL (the Welsh Museums, Archives and Libraries Service), CADW and Newport Council looked at alternative properties and came up with a recommendation. Subsequently, the Welsh Government offered some financial support for the next few years, conditional on Newport Council allowing continued public access and maintaining the Curator post.

We are still waiting to hear what Newport Council propose to do, but if they go ahead, it will provide welcome relief from the current uncertainty and ensure a home for the next few years. It doesn't secure the long-term future of the Ship, but your Committee is working on a business plan for a Trust that would re-assemble the Ship and put it on permanent public display.

Goodbye to Marie



Marie Jordan with Ian Panter (York Archaeological Trust) at the commissioning of our freeze dryer in 2012,

As Project Conservator, Marie has been responsible for caring for the entire fabric of the Ship, but she will be leaving in mid-August; a cause of considerable regret to us. Her quick wits, quickfire humour, knowledge and professionalism will be much missed by all of us.

We wish Marie well as she moves on to new challenges.

The National Eisteddfod

As usual, when the National Eisteddfod is held in southern Wales, the FONS will have a presence on the *maes* in the tent of the Wales History Forum.

Our bi-lingual pop-ups will be in use and there will be a new A5 four page flyer for visitors. They will also have the chance to buy our guide book and a copy of our latest “up-dating” news letter.

We share our space with MOROL, but there will be several other historical societies too; each adding their own perspective on Wales’ past.

The Eisteddfod is being held the Millennium Coastal Park, Llanelli from August 1st - 9th. And it’s a myth that you have to be able to speak Welsh on the *maes*. Everyone is welcome!

Councillor Whitcutt

Councillor Mark Whitcutt has taken over the Leisure and Culture brief, and on 12th June representatives of your Committee had a meeting with him. We are pleased to report that he showed considerable interest in and support for the Ship. We also met the official who has taken over responsibility for leisure and culture, Steve Ward.

Flying the flag

The Friends will be promoting the Ship to the public at the following events. Come along and support us – and enjoy the events as well.

Wed 13th August: We'll be advertising the Open Day (see below) and rattling a bucket at Sainsbury's Newport, from 9.30 am to 5.00 pm.

Sat/Sun 23rd, 24th August: We'll have a stand at 'Empire – a Roman Spectacular' in the amphitheatre at Caeleon from 11.00 am to 5.00 pm. This promises to be a pretty exciting event.

Mon 25th August: For the first time ever, we'll have a FONS float in the well-established Pill Carnival, starting at noon. Join the crowds cheering us on.

.....and lastly for this issue,

Saturday 16th August Open Day, 11.00 am to 4.00 pm

Come and join us for our swansong Open Day at Unit 22.

Wednesday 1st October St Julian Inn at 7.30 pm

The first of our winter talks. Toby Jones, the Curator, will tell us about the latest findings regarding the Ship.

Thursday 9th October Newport Civic Centre at 7.00 pm

A talk by Dr A J Parker of Bristol University on trade between the West Country and Spain in the 15th Century. This is a Newport Civic Society event.

Saturday 1st November Malpas Court at 2.00 pm

Our AGM. Put the date in your diary now!