

S.O.S.

the Newsletter of the

Friends of the Newport Ship



Wales' Mary Rose



Site archaeologist, Kate Howells supervises the recording of the ship's timbers prior to removal and conservation. Photograph © Ron McCormick

In the summer of 2002 the well preserved remains of a mediaeval ship were discovered during excavation works for a new Arts Centre on the banks of the River Usk in central Newport. It is one of the most complete examples of a ship believed to have been built circa 1465. Artefacts and remnants of clothing found by archaeologists show that our ship was trading with Spain and Portugal during the late 1400s. Finds recovered from within the vessel include 15th century coins, Portuguese pottery, large lumps of cork, stone cannon balls and engraved brass straps.

Initially dubbed "the Welsh Mary Rose", the Newport Ship has been described as a cross between a caravel and a Viking longship. It is estimated to have been in the region of 25 metres in length and, unusually, the hull remains largely intact. Tree-ring evidence dates its timbers to the winter of 1465/6.

Unique in northern Europe, the Newport Ship is the only extant example of a merchantman of this period. It is in an excellent state of preservation and historians believe it holds the key to developments in shipbuilding and Wales' international relations 550 years ago when Newport is known to have been a very important mediaeval port.

Newport City Council, in collaboration with Cadw and the National Assembly, have committed £3.5m to preserve the ship's timbers prior to display in a purpose built gallery.

This remarkable find has been internationally acclaimed and Charles Barker, Director of the prestigious Mary Rose Trust has described it as "...probably more important than the Mary Rose...".

No. 1

September 2002

£1.00

Free to Members

Welcome to the inaugural edition of S.O.S. the newsletter of the Friends of the Newport Ship. After an intense campaign by Save Our Ship supporters angered by the suggestion that most of the vessel would be left buried under the new arts centre, the National Assembly and Newport City Council finally agreed a rescue package that will hopefully assure the future of this remarkable discovery.

In response, the Friends of the Newport Ship has been formed and the S.O.S. slogan changed to Support Our Ship. The newsletter will act as a forum for debate and invites articles not only on the Newport mediaeval ship but also related items about Newport's maritime and industrial heritage.

The Editor

Contents

- Wales' Mary Rose
- Council plans for the Ship
- S.O.S. - diary of the campaign
- Why is this ship unique?
- Some interesting facts
- Council plans for display
- Become a Friend of the Ship
- Thanks to our supporters

© Friends of the Newport Ship 2002

Published by
Friends of the Newport Ship S.O.S.
3 - 4 North Street,
Newport,
South Wales,
NP20 1JZ UK.

For further information please see our website at:

www.saveourship.org.uk
www.Britarch.ac.uk/sosnewport

Council Plans for Ship Display

Following detailed negotiations between Sir Harry Jones, Leader of Newport City Council and Edwina Hart, Finance Minister at the National Assembly for Wales, a plan to save and display the Newport mediaeval ship for future posterity was announced on 23 August.

At a current estimated cost of approximately £3.5m the scheme involves the construction of a new 280 metre square basement, four metres deep, beneath the ground floor gallery and main foyer of the theatre and arts centre. The proposal will allow visitors to the theatre and arts centre to access the lower level of the basement via a lift or staircase where they will be able to move around the vessel at various levels. The ship can then be viewed at close proximity from the side.

A purpose-built interpretation gallery will be created alongside the ship and digital technology will allow the recreation of the vessel, as it was in its heyday, and show visitors the lives and times of the people who used it. Items found in the excavation

will also be displayed and visitors will be able to see how the vessel operated, its recovery and subsequent conservation.

Sir Harry Jones, Leader of the City Council said: "The ship is of national importance and we are delighted that the Assembly have provided a national financial solution. I would like to thank Edwina Hart and officials at the National Assembly for making this possible."

Edwina Hart, Minister for Finance said: "The discovery of this rare national treasure on the banks of the River Usk has brought Newport to the forefront of national and international interest. Newport put to the Assembly proposals how best to safeguard this treasure and I am, therefore, absolutely delighted to announce today that the Welsh Assembly Government has agreed to grant substantial funds - over £1m in the current financial year - to enable the ship to be lifted, recorded and conserved, and to undertake the necessary work to display it.

"Much work needs to be done on the detail,

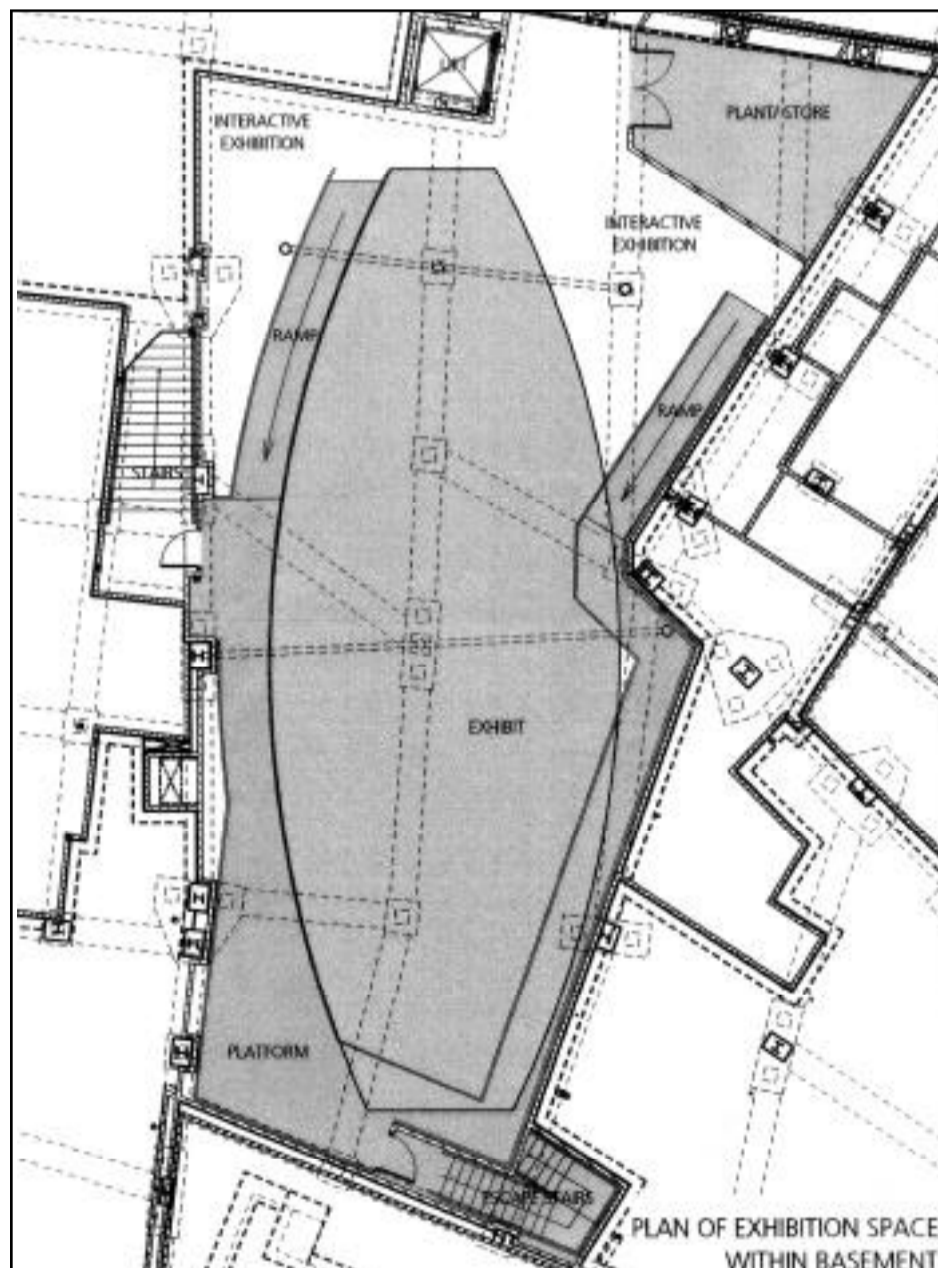
and final decisions on the display of the ship within the theatre will be reached only after an archaeological evaluation has taken place of the proposed display area. But I am confident that this course of action is the right one and that the ship will be a fitting symbol of the vibrant history and the culture of our newest city and Wales as a maritime nation."

Sue Essex, who is Minister with responsibility for Cadw added: "Rarely has such an archaeological find captured the public imagination. The ship has generated an enormous interest - not only from the people of Newport, who attended the open days in record numbers, and the media, but also from archaeologists and maritime historians from all over the world. Clearly, we must look after this precious find for the future. This is an historic treasure not only for the City of Newport, but for Wales as a nation."

The council estimate of costs for the scheme to house the ship are as follows:-

Construction and Interpretation -	£1,364,000
Lifting -	£131,000
Post Excavation/Analysis -	£470,000
Treatment of Timbers (estimate) -	£1,500,000
Total -	£3,465,000

(Source - Newport Borough Council Press Release 23 August 2002)



S.O.S. Comment

While **Friends of the Newport Ship** welcomes the initiative taken by Newport City Council there remains a number of issues of concern.

- The Council says that it has no plans to excavate the bow and the stern which have been sliced off by the construction company's coffer dam and will remain buried under the building. This is a wasted opportunity as we believe these important sections will reveal invaluable knowledge about the construction and steering mechanism.
- Doubts remain that a 4 metre viewing gallery will be high enough to accommodate the ship. Equally the space to be given overall does not appear to leave adequate room for the associated artefacts that should be shown alongside the ship.
- We anticipate that cramped viewing areas will result in restrictions on visitor numbers.
- The decision to display the ship in the basement of the Art Centre represents a lost opportunity to present this ship alongside the other boats recently excavated in the area and the numerous maritime artefacts currently in storage. Only a dedicated Maritime and Industrial Archaeological Museum will be capable of providing an adequate response to the significance of this find and Wales' rich heritage.

S.O.S. The diary of the campaign to Save Our Ship

May 2002

Work begins on the new theatre and arts centre.

July 11

South Wales Argus reveals a medieval ship was discovered on the building site of the new theatre and arts centre and that Glamorgan-Gwent Archaeological Trust are carrying out an archaeological dig for Newport council.

August 1

Newport council announces two open evenings for those interested in viewing the ship.

August 7

Newport council says between 10 and 15 per cent of the ship will be removed for scientific analysis, but the rest would be buried in the Usk mud that has kept it preserved. Charles Baker, managing director of Mary Rose Archaeological Services, says it would be a 'national scandal' if the ship is not put on display. Hundreds of people flock to the first public viewing of the ship.

Newport businessman Charles Ferris launches his Save Our Ship campaign at the site.

August 12

Leading historian Professor Eric Gray, of Hull University, and world-class yachtsman Sir Robin Knox-Johnson, call for the ship's preservation.

August 14

An estimated 6,000 people turn out to get a glimpse of the ship at the second of two open evenings. Viewing times were extended until darkness fell, due to extraordinary public demand. Around 200 people attend a public meeting to discuss the ship and the Council for British Archaeology backs the campaign.

August 16

Campaigners begin a round-the-clock vigil to protect the ship.

August 17

Welsh Assembly Minister of Culture, Jenny Randerson promises to save the ship - but says it could cost £20 million.

August 19

Newport's merchant sailors back calls for the ship to be kept at the centre of a maritime museum.

August 21

A flotilla of small craft sails up the River Usk to back the campaign and is applauded by an audience of several hundred people lining the riverside.

August 22

SOS campaigners meet to prepare a legal injunction to prevent the City Council burying the remains of the Ship. Meanwhile the 24 hour vigil continues with the incessant support of tooting vehicle horns. Newport taxi drivers declare their support of the campaign and reveal plans to bring Newport roads to a standstill with a convoy of slow moving taxis.

August 23

In a visit to the site, Welsh Assembly Finance Minister Edwina Hart, accompanied by the Leader of Newport Council, Sir Harry Jones, announces a plan to save the Newport Ship with an injection of £3.5m.

Why is this ship unique?

The Newport Ship answers a number of questions on the evolutionary step between a long ship and a later trading cog/caravel, and would have been typical of North European vessels upon which commerce relied, and which explored the Americas. Many of our great trading ports feature this type of vessel on their seals, and the ship is of international interest.

In the Council Chair's own words "the ship is magnificent", and is the only extant example of an armed merchantman of this period. It has been dated to the winter of 1465 and apparently had recently returned from Portugal, filled with pottery and large lumps of cork bark in the bilges. It has decking and superstructure still visible and was probably laid up for a refit and then abandoned. At c.25m with a beam of c.8m. it is not much smaller than the Mary Rose (built in 1509); and a similar size to the Bremer Cog (built c. 1380, on display in the Ship Museum in Bremerhaven, Germany).

The Newport Ship is of immense value - as its secrets are uncovered we will gain a window on to the world of local seamen during the 'Age of Discovery'. The crew have been compared to astronauts, as they sailed across the Atlantic to fish on the Grand Banks, protected by their faith and lucky charms. The Luke 4:30 strap end found in the ship is just such a charm, to protect an item, possibly a piece of armour, from theft. The sailors would have been armed, to protect against piracy, and in war would have provided the second rate ships

of the embryo Royal Navy. Such vessels would have carried salt fish, necessary for strict religious observance of the 15th century around Europe. Fortunes were founded on this trade. The ship would have carried British wool and cloth out of the Severn ports, and returned laden with spice and wine. The West coast of Africa and the Americas would have been within range - this vessel is larger than Cabot's *Matthew*, and probably of the same size as Columbus' ships. Its wide flat shape means it needs no complex harbour, and can settle on mudflats at the quayside. It can carry considerable cargo but can also be rowed out of port. The ability of the shipwrights and sailors of the time should not be underestimated - we are over a hundred years before Drake, fifty years before the Mary Rose. Could this vessel have carried Henry Tudor back from France? Could this type of ship have served as transport for Welsh archers during the Hundred Years War?



Some interesting facts and quotations

- Over 1000 timbers have already been recorded by archaeologists surveying the Newport ship - it is thought that there may be in excess of 2000 used in her construction.
- A 1522 Crown survey of the possessions of the late Lord Buckingham recorded the following:
"Newport ...haith a goodly haven commyng unto hit, well occupied with small Crayes whereunto a veray great shippe may resoorte and have good harbour."
- In a return of shipping compiled during the reign of Elizabeth I, Newport reported two ships of 100 tons - the Green Dragon mastered by one Richard Baker and the White Eagle mastered by William Peche. Records show that these were the only known ships of this size in the whole of the Severn area.
- To avoid customs duties Newport was often used as a staging post by ships bound for Bristol during the 16th Century.
- In 1492 Christopher Columbus set sail in the Santa Maria on his voyage to the New World hoping to discover a passage to the Far East. Instead he found what we now know as America - the rest is history. The Newport Ship is thought to be a similar size to the Santa Maria.
- In 1497 John Cabot set sail in The Mathew from Bristol on a voyage of discovery to Newfoundland.

Taken from a list compiled by Bob Trett

Why not become a Friend?

“...an international treasure”

“Mediaeval ships still in one piece are extremely rare and there is absolutely nothing from this period.”

Gillian Hutchinson
National Maritime Museum

“...the most significant recent archaeological find north of the Alps”

William Graham
South Wales East Assembly Member

“...probably more important than the Mary Rose...”

Charles Barker
Director of the Mary Rose Trust

What is the Friends of the Newport Ship?

The Friends of the Newport Ship (S.O.S.) was formed to promote knowledge and information about the Newport Mediaeval Ship and to foster an appreciation of the maritime and industrial heritage of South Wales. The Association aims to provide a forum for debate, monitor progress on conservation of the vessel and contribute to the promotion of Newport's rich heritage.

Friends of the Newport Ship is supported by:

- o The Council for British Archaeology
- o Chepstow Archaeological Society
- o Pill Heritage Centre
- o Risca Industrial History & Archaeological Society

Membership benefits include:

- o S.O.S. Newsletter
- o Regular progress updates on the the ship
- o Special events including 'meet the experts'
- o A chance to have your say on local heritage matters
- o Discounts for members

How do I join the Friends?

Membership is open to all who support the aims of the Association and is renewable annually on 23rd August. Individual subscription is only **£5**. Please complete the proforma below and send with your cheque to:

Membership Secretary, Friends of the Newport Ship, 3 - 4 North Street, Newport, South Wales NP20 1JZ

Confirmation of membership will be forwarded to you shortly after receipt of your application. The newsletter and information about other events will be mailed to you on a periodic basis.

Thanks to all our sponsors and supporters

Without the tireless efforts of the many supporters who campaigned day and night manning the round-the-clock vigil, making sandwiches, posters and banners, the campaign to Save Our Ship would not have been the success it is. Thank you to all the people who fed, watered and supported us - you know who you are! To those who showed their support by “tooting” their car horns and to all those across the world who wrote the thousands of letters that helped convince the sceptics and sway the minds of the City Council and the National Assembly.

We are particularly indebted to the many individuals and small businesses who generously helped to save the Newport Ship by giving advice, help in kind and materials and donations. Especially:

A Print
FSSS -Fire & Safety
Newport Signs
Susan Smith Designs
The Edwards Partnership
O'Neills Bar
Ferris's Cafe
Dollweaver Project
T.Js
OTTs
Pill Heritage Centre
The Council for British Archaeology
Chepstow Archaeological Society
Risca Industrial & Archaeological Society
 ~ and others who have expressed a wish to remain anonymous.

If you wish to retain your newsletter intact please feel free to photocopy this form

Title	First Name	Last Name
<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>
Address		
<input type="text"/>		
<input type="text"/>		
<input type="text"/>		Postcode <input type="text"/>
Telephone	<input type="text"/>	Email <input type="text"/>
Would you like to help? Please indicate what you can offer (e.g. secretarial, design, professional services, catering, anything at all?)		
<input type="text"/>		
I wish to become a Friend of the Newport Ship and enclose my subscription of £ 5 (please tick one box)		
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Cash	Cheque	Corporate Membership £10
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I wish to make a further donation of £ <input type="text"/> (Make cheques payable to Friends of the Newport Ship)		
Signature		Date
<input type="text"/>		<input type="text"/>
Please send this form with your subscription/donation to:		
The Membership Secretary, Friends of the Newport Ship (S.O.S.), 3 - 4 North Street, Newport, South Wales, NP20 1JZ, UK.		
Office use only:	Fee	Dat
SOS-NL1	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>
	Mbship	Comment
	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>
	Don	<input type="text"/>

Seen the Ship, Done the Vigil,



Now get the T-Shirt!

XXL/ XL / M / S / Child - Yellow
 all **£10** (child £8) plus £2 post & packing.
 Orders with cheques to the address opposite.
 We reserves the right to supply a different colour

S.O.S. Newsletter
 Designed by **Newport.MaryRose**
 Photography © **Ron McCormick**
 Printed by **A Print Newport**