Piecing together the history
by Victoria Newton-Davies

One of the most easily recognisable artefacts to be recovered from the excavation of the Newport Medieval Ship is this leather shoe. It was carefully excavated in seven pieces and has now been conserved and reconstructed to show how it would have looked originally. It is a slip-on ankle shoe with a distinctive long pointed toe that was very fashionable in the late 14th and mid 15th Centuries. Like today, footwear in medieval times reflected the latest fashions. This ankle shoe could probably only have been afforded by the more affluent and fashion-conscious people in society.

As a special feature, the shoe has slits cut out in the sides around the ankle so that the wearer could flash a glimpse of his or her coloured stockings.

A Mediaeval Ankle Shoe from the Newport Ship

Poulaine
The long pointed toe of the shoe is called a poulaine. Originally the poulaine would have been stuffed with moss or hair so that it curved up slightly. This would have helped the wearer not to trip over their own feet and also helped keep the elegant shape of the shoe. The Newport shoe was discovered with the poulaine stuffing in place. Points on shoes could vary from just a couple of centimetres up to ten centimetres in length. The poulaine on the Newport ankle shoe measures 7.5 cm making it one of the more pointed shoes of the period.

Shoe Size & Signs of Wear
By measuring the length of the sole of the ankle shoe and comparing this to the modern shoe scale it is possible to get an approximate idea of shoe size. The measurement was taken from the point where the big toe is estimated to have been and the length of the poulaine is discounted. Taking into account possible shrinkage of the shoe, both in the ground and during conservation, it is thought that the shoe is roughly equivalent to a modern day size 4 - 6. It is probably a man’s shoe as Mediaeval people had smaller feet than we do today.

The ankle shoe has obviously been well worn. It has several interesting signs of wear and tear that can tell us a bit more about the person who wore it. The wear pattern on the sole suggests two possibilities. It may have been worn on the right foot and the wearer rolled their foot out to the right when they walked. There is also a hole towards the front of the shoe that could be evidence for a bunion. This happens when the joint at the

continued on back page
The Friends of the Newport Ship have not been afraid of being critical of Newport City Council when they have felt it necessary. The Friends have fought (with partial success) for the recovery of the bow and stern and continue to be severely critical of plans to display the conserved ship in a basement of the new Arts Centre.

At times our relationship has been fraught, and so it is with great pleasure that we welcome the efforts by Mike Lewis, the new Museums and Heritage Officer, to build bridges with us. No better example of this spirit of co-operation can be shown than by the fact that he and two of his staff have contributed articles to this newsletter. We also welcome the news that Kate Hunter, the Keeper of Conservation for Newport Museums and Heritage Service, is to be a leading player in the Council’s post excavation work on the ship and is to liaise with the Friends. She has a wealth of experience with conservation problems associated with waterlogged wood, and was responsible for the work to conserve the Barlunds Farm Romano-Celtic boat. Finally the proposed project review meeting with leading experts (see page 3) is an essential step in the long process of recording, conserving and re-assembling the ship.

In turn the Friends hope to give practical support to the project by acting as volunteers, raising money and giving the ship as high a profile as we can. Details of our events and stand at the Newport based Eisteddfod can be seen elsewhere in the newsletter. A much-needed boost to the ship’s public profile was the well-acclaimed BBC Timewatch programme The Mysteries of the Medieval Ship shown on the 30th January. The possible connections with Warwick the Kingmaker (made public in our last newsletter) is just one of the theories relating to what the ship was doing at Newport, where it came from and where it was built. Please BBC, repeat the programme soon, and let us have a follow up.

It is therefore a great shame that the Council has not yet resolved its legal dispute with the Glamorgan Gwent Archaeological Trust over the payment for the excavation and raising of the ship. Those of us who saw the hard work undertaken by the Trust and heard the accolades for their work from leading ship experts and archaeologists, will wonder why this dispute has not been resolved. The absence of archaeologists from the Glamorgan Gwent Archaeological Trust from the post excavation advisory process will inevitably harm the project. Without involving GGAT the proper publication of the excavation of the ship may not be possible.

It is certainly ironic that a launch of the excavation report for the Barlunds Farm Romano-Celtic boat is to be held on 22nd May. It is a tribute to both the Glamorgan Gwent Archaeological Trust and Newport City Council on the recovery of the most complete boat of the Roman period yet found in Britain. Maybe the launch will be a chance for the parties to talk. We hope so.

The BBC Timewatch programme, broadcast in January, investigated what the ship was doing in Newport, when and where it was built, what it might have looked like, its links to the political changes of the Wars of the Roses and links to Richard Neville, Earl of Warwick the 15th century Chancellor of England.

Despite strong evidence for a Portuguese connection, the programme aired questions about whether the ship was actually built in Portugal as its clinker construction is more common in Northern Europe. Investigations in Portugal, Germany and elsewhere produced a theory that it may have been constructed in France during the 100 Years War, when the English Crown controlled much of the French coast.

While the full size of the vessel is yet to be determined, the keel appears to be over 23 metres long, suggesting that the ship may have weighed 200 tons or more (see our article on its size - page 5). Computer reconstructions of the ship suggested that it might have needed additional smaller masts to help with its steering. (see new drawing - opposite). The Newport ship remains the only example of a large 15th century "clinker built", seagoing ship following in the Viking tradition. The programme presented the most comprehensive presentation to date of current thinking on the origins of the Newport ship. The theories of the small group of people working on the project were examined and opinions sought from experts at the National Museum of Wales, the Warwick Record Office and other specialists from Britain, Germany and Portugal.

All in all it was the most encouraging and positive distillation of everything that we currently know about the Newport Ship and served to underline the historical and international importance of this remarkable find.
Developing the Plan - by Mike Lewis

The Project Plan review meeting is set to take place on 22nd April. It is intended that the panel of invited experts will examine the proposed plan and make recommendations. Contributors will include representatives from leading European ship preservation projects including Roskilde, Bremen Cog and Mary Rose, together with experts from The National Museum of Wales and Cadw. We hope that the meeting will produce a plan for which there is a high degree of consensus with the Ship preservation and Archaeological communities.

Resources have been identified to finance the revenue cost of running the Maesglas facility for the coming year, and subject to Council approval work will commence on the cleaning and recording phase of the project by the early summer. A second outcome of the meeting on the 22nd will hopefully be a set of policies to guide the cleaning process, to ensure we capture the information crucial to the rebuilding phase of the project some years down the line.

The meeting will also evaluate the recording methods proposed for the project. Two new technologies and hand drawing have recently been tested and compared, to find out which method is the most efficient whilst giving the project all the information it needs. The recording phase of the project is an enormous task given that 1700 individual wooden components have to be painstakingly cleaned and recorded in three dimensions with every nail hole, mark or any other surface detail being documented.

Working with the public

I want to submit a heritage lottery fund application for a project planning grant in the next few months. A successful grant will underpin the finances available for the recording work, as this process will give us the information needed to cost-model the main conservation phase of the project.

I want to start planning open days for the coming year, and I would like one to take place in May to coincide with Museums and Galleries Month. Planning permissions restrict us from holding more than three public open days a year, but we are free to host visits “by appointment”, and for the time being that will allow the project to start the audience development work needed over the next couple of years.

Exhibition proposals

The Newport Ship exhibition opening in October in the basement space of the new Riverside Arts centre is currently in production. Central to the exhibition will be an exciting audio-visual interpretative “experience” that will pose the many questions surrounding the origins of the vessel and provide as much information as we currently have. It will also look at the vessel’s discovery, and the campaign to save the ship. The exhibition will feature all the artefacts it is possible to display, although many of the organic objects will still be going through the long conservation process. The exhibition will also seek to interpret the conservation processes which underpin the exhibition and inform visitors of the long and complex procedures necessary before the ship can be displayed. Underlying the whole experience will be the notion of leading visitors to reach their own conclusions about where the ship came from. Interpreting the Medieval port of Newport and examining the importance of medieval maritime trade will also be an important visitor “take out”.

It’s going to be a busy year, and I am anxious not to lose too much momentum with the project. I am hoping that a “permanent” staff establishment will be based at Maesglas before the end of May and once this has been achieved the post-excavation project will become a reality.
Why does it survive?
Under normal circumstances wood and other organic materials, such as leather and textile, undergo rapid decay when abandoned and especially if, for whatever reason, they are subsequently buried. The principal causes of decay are organic and range from animals such as mice and rats, through insects like woodworm or deathwatch beetle, to fungi and microscopic bacteria. Only in especial circumstances do organic materials survive, for instance within the desiccation of an Egyptian tomb or the freezing cold of a Siberian burial.

In Britain organic materials are not normally found on archaeological sites, except those which are waterlogged. A waterlogged soil is one which is permanently saturated with water, in effect excluding oxygen and therefore anaerobic. The most efficient wood decaying organisms are aerobic and cannot exist under true waterlogged conditions, hence the survival of organic objects in anaerobic soils. A soil which goes through cycles of wet and dry is not truly anaerobic and organic materials buried within it are much less likely to survive. In the absence of the usual agents of decay, timbers will still undergo slow physical and chemical deterioration.

The low lying alluvial mud of the Severn Estuary, and its environs, has provided many waterlogged sites, the Newport Ship site being one.

There are some organisms, however, which operate under anaerobic conditions, the most notable for archaeological purposes being sulphate reducing bacteria, commonly found in sewage. These are the organisms responsible for generating sulphur within the wood of the Swedish Warship Vasa, which was recovered from what had been the sewage rich waters of Stockholm Harbour after 350 years of immersion under sediment. In the Vasa the sulphur deposits have been catalysed, eventually forming sulphuric acid. Research is now underway to find ways of neutralising the acid. As the reactions are understood, it is becoming clear that the decay process can be controlled by controlling the humidity of the display environment.

At present I do not believe that the mud in which the Newport Ship was buried had been subject to anything like the same levels of sulphur deposition. However, Dr Mark Jones, of the Mary Rose Trust, has taken samples to establish what levels of sulphur may exist. By the time it comes to putting the Newport Ship on display I anticipate that the research presently being undertaken in Sweden will be able to inform the nature of the display environment.

Another complicating factor is the presence of iron salts, arising from the huge quantity of iron nails used in the ship’s construction. This is a well known problem found in other waterlogged archaeological timbers and treatments exist to remove them if necessary. Fortunately for any later conservation treatment I could detect no chlorides in the alluvial mud in which the Ship was found.

Condition of the Newport Ship
Initial analysis of a few timbers indicates that the oak timbers from the Newport Ship are particularly well preserved. A detailed examination of many more timbers would be a standard part of any conservation condition assessment, carried out before any treatment is chosen. Even so, from the work already done, it is clear that if the timbers are allowed to dry out, they will permanently crack and shrink. At present the ship’s timbers are stored in 16 large tanks of fresh water to prevent this happening.

Conservation
Until the 1960’s, treatments to ensure the longterm survival of even the most well preserved waterlogged wooden objects were not particularly successful. Many important ships, such as the Romano Celtic boat from Blackfriars in London or some of the Bronze Age Ferriby boats could not be saved. In Scandinavia there was a longer tradition of treating waterlogged timbers with success. However in the UK a particular problem is that many of the larger archaeological waterlogged timbers are oak, which presents especial difficulties for conservation.

The introduction of polyethylene glycol (PEG for short) from the 1959 onwards was a sea change. It became possible to undertake, with increasing reliability, the conservation of large waterlogged wooden items. PEG is manufactured in a number of molecular weights, ranging from liquid through to a hard wax. Over the years conservation techniques have become more sophisticated so it is possible to select molecular weights appropriate to the decayed state of individual timbers. It is usual to use two different molecular weights in one treatment – a low molecular weight to replace losses within the wood cell walls and a higher molecular weight, to act as a bulking agent. One of the advantages of
having 16 separate and chemically resistant tanks is that, if necessary, different tanks can be used for different treatment regimes.

PEG is soluble in water and can be used in different ways. In the Mary Rose and the Vasa, both of which were lifted as a whole and treated as such, it has been sprayed on, because that was the only feasible option. However, better penetration of waterlogged wood can be achieved via prolonged immersion in PEG. For both spraying and immersion, concentrations are gradually increased over a long period, often years. Because the Newport Ship was taken apart piece by piece, all conservation options are available, including treatment by immersion.

If PEG impregnation via immersion is chosen, two treatment systems are available. The first involves replacing nearly all the water in the wood with PEG, a very time consuming process. The second, freeze drying, requires a lower final concentration of PEG and therefore takes less time. Via a process known as sublimation, water is driven off the timber, avoiding the cellular collapse, warpage and shrinking, which usually accompanies the air drying of waterlogged wood. The finished results for both processes are usually good.

Further more detailed discussions of the pros and cons of each treatment will be in forthcoming Newsletters.

How big was the Newport Ship?

Tonnage-measuring in medieval England seems to have been based on two types of measure:

- Cargo-carrying capacity, called "burden" or "portage", later expressed as "tons burden".
- A measure akin to deadweight tonnage, which took account of the weight of the crew, gear, etc.: this seems to have been less common.

Medieval documents are full of references to ships’ tonnages, although the most accurate figures are probably provided by the customs accounts which show the amounts of goods that ships actually carried. The big merchant ships, vessels in the 300 to 500 ton (or possibly larger) range, seem to have been more common between the 1430s and 1460s. The decline in their numbers in the later decades of the 15th century was remarked on by contemporaries and can be demonstrated from various sources, although clinker-built vessels of this size did exist both before and after this period.

The earliest clear statement on tons burden calculation was given by the English master shipwright Matthew Baker (c 1530-1613) in 1582, and became known as ‘Baker’s Old Rule’, although it may well have predated him by a long way. In its basic form it ran:

Keel length x beam (maximum hull breadth) x depth in hold (depth from the main beam to the keel), divided by 100 (a divisor of 94 was also used in the late 1500s).

Estimating the tons burden tonnage of the Newport Ship from the keel length alone involves a lot of guesswork, but here goes:

Keel: 24 m = 79 ft
Assume that the keel to beam ratio was 1 : 2.5, beam would = 31 ft
From this, assume depth in hold = half of beam = 15.5 ft

\[
\frac{78 \times 31 \times 15.5}{100} = 375 \text{ tons burden}
\]

If the keel to beam ratio was 1 : 2.25 (not at all unlikely in a merchant ship), the tonnage would be about 478 tons burden.

These are just orders of magnitude, and should not be taken as figures with any accuracy. Once the hull has been reconstructed, it should prove possible to make a more accurate Baker’s Old Rule calculation and then to see how this might match (or not) with a computer-modelled version of the ship’s carrying capacity.

Whatever the true figure, I am of the opinion that the Newport Ship belonged to this group of mid-15th century big merchant ships, making its discovery even more interesting. It is also possible - unless the timbers really do prove to have come from Iberia - that it was not a Portuguese-built ship. Ships changed hands readily, by fair means or foul!

Ian Friel MA, PhD, FSA
Principal Curator, Chichester District Museum

Kate Hunter is Keeper of Conservation at the Newport Museum and Art Gallery. She is seen here explaining the timber storage systems employed at the Maesglas Conservation Centre, to Friends of the Newport Ship at the recent ‘Open Day’ for members of FONS
BOOK REVIEWS

Boats of the World
From the Stone Age to Medieval Times
By Seán McGrail, Visiting Professor in the Department of Archaeology, University of Southampton.

This is the first comprehensive study of the archaeology of rafts, boats, and ships from the Stone Age to Medieval times. All the regions of the world are covered, from Atlantic Europe and the Mediterranean to the Indian Ocean, the China Sea, and the Pacific.

Maritime archaeology, the study of man's early encounter with the rivers and seas of the world, only came to the fore in the last decades of the twentieth century, long after its parent discipline, terrestrial archaeology, had been established. Yet there were seamen long before there were farmers, navigators before there were potters, and boatbuilders before there were wainwrights. In this book Professor McGrail attempts to correct some of the imbalance in our knowledge of the past by presenting the evidence for the building and use of early water transport: rafts, boats, and ships.

Professor McGrail presents a history of water transport as it has developed over the millennia, from before 40,000 BC to the mid-second millennium AD. The coverage is world-wide: from the Baltic and North Seas to the Bay of Bengal and the Tasman Sea; and from the Gulf of Mexico to the China Seas and the Baring Strait.

Will be of interest to scholars and students interested in archaeology, especially maritime archaeology; maritime historians; and readers with a general interest in boats.

510 pages, numerous maps, halftones & line drawings, 276mm x 219mm
Published January 2003  Price: £40.00 (Paperback)

The Barland’s Farm Romano-Celtic Boat
by Nigel Nayling & Seán McGrail

It is not generally known that Newport City Council has not just one, but two unique boats of major archaeological importance. Newport Museum and Art Gallery has in store a boat known as The Barland’s Farm Romano-Celtic Boat. This was found in 1993 near the small town of Magor, during the construction work for a storage depot for Tesco Stores.

The substantial remains of this well-preserved Romano-Celtic boat were discovered during survey work in advance of construction at this former agricultural site in the Gwent Levels in south-east Wales. The boat was recorded in situ, and then dismantled and recovered for detailed recording prior to conservation. This research report covers the detailed excavation evidence, an examination of the environmental context, theoretical reconstructions, methods of dating and conservation, and general conclusions about the contribution made by this crucial find to understanding of Romano-British technology and shipbuilding, as well as networks of transport; commerce and communication.

The boat, constructed of oak, was found in the bed of a silted-up river channel. Much of it survives, including the bow, the lower hull and most of one side. Overall the remains measured 9.5 metres long (much smaller than the Newport Medieval Ship). Tree-ring dating of the boat timbers help show it was abandoned in the early 4th Century AD and was probably reused as a landing stage! Study of plant remains show evidence of chaff from cereal grains and the boat would have no doubt been used to transport grain and other goods up the small tidal rivers along the Severn.

A detailed account of the boat-find, and the environment in which it was used, is being published by the Council for British Archaeology. The major authors of the report are Nigel Nayling (who also excavated the Newport Mediaeval Ship) and Professor Sean McGrail (a leading expert in early ships and boats).

The Barland's Farm Romano-Celtic Boat
Council for British Archaeology - Research Report No. 138
ISBN 1 902771 40 0  publication April 2004.  Price £30

Eisteddfod lecture
Early Ships of the Severn Estuary
by Owain Roberts

The Cambrian Archaeological Association lecture at the 2004 National Eisteddfod will be on Early ships of the Severn Estuary with special reference to the Newport Ship and will be given by Owain Roberts. Owain Roberts is a world renowned expert on early ship construction and has been advising on the construction of the Newport Mediaeval Ship.

This talk will be held in the lecture room of the Science Pavilion at 12 noon on Wednesday 4th August

FONS - Friends organise launch of new book

Sean McGrail and Nigel Nayling are longstanding active supporters of FONS in its efforts to preserve the mediaeval ship and we are honoured to be able to sponsor the launch. Newport Museum and Art Gallery has kindly agreed to host the public launch of the Barlands Farm book on Saturday 22nd May 2004. It is hoped that copies of the book, signed by the authors, will be on sale after 12 noon. Visitors to the Museum will also be able to see an excellent model of the boat, although the actual ship timbers remain in store until a suitable display area can be found.
Committee Matters

OFFICERS
Chairman: Simon Rutherford
Vice Chairman: Ron McCormick
Treasurer: Terry Underwood
Membership Secretary: Emma Lewis

Secretary: Adrianne Jones
remain and she will send one on request to
any member who really wants one.

Co-opted Committee Members
Jerry Cross
Sherry Parker
Chris Plaister
Jan Preece
Glenys Silverson
Bob Trett

Committee
(elected at the A.G.M. on 25th. October 2003)
Jeff Brooks
Sheila Dyke
Charles Ferris
Jean Gray
Alan Smith

Hang on to your Membership cards
New membership cards will not be issued
each year except to new members. The
Friends of the Newport Ship keeps track of
its members by database, and we take this
around with us on lap top computers when
needed. Reissuing new Membership Cards
each year would be an unnecessary expense
and add to administration for the Secretary
(Emma Lewis). A limited number of cards
remain and she will send one on request to
any member who really wants one.

If you received a mailing of the Friends’
Events 2004 – Part 1, or this newsletter by
post then you are a current member, on our
database and will receive all the benefits of
membership, including a lovely warm
feeling that you are continuing to ensure a
safe and public future for our wonderful ship
and all she can teach us.

From a younger member
Dear Friends of the Newport ship,
I am very happy to be ten as I can go on all
the events and see these things as a child. I
would just like to say a big thank you to
everyone who has arranged all the outings
and trips I have been on over the past year
or so. I had a fabulous time when I went to
Bristol and went in the transport museum
and saw all of the transport that was from
the nineteenth century to the twentieth
century. I went on the S.S.Great Britain and
had a guided tour of the ship and got to go
inside and see what all the rooms would
look like. Then it was the moment I had
been waiting for, it was time for everyone to
go on the boat and sailed up the river and
back again. I had a great time and lots of
fun. I’m glad to be a member of friends of
the Newport ship Because there are lots of
events and trips to go on .

Joe Sullivan, Caerleon

Dear Newsletter
I was reading your website and half
remembered a story which my Dad once
told me about medieval Newport that I
thought might be of some interest. It went a
bit like this - Once in Newport there used to
be Oak trees growing along the length of
Stow Hill from the West Gate all the way up
to St Woolos. Somehow the inhabitants
managed to upset either the lord of the
castle or the king, and as punishment for
their misdemeanours he ordered that the
oaks be chopped down and used for
shipbuilding.

It may be only a story, and I know that these
things often get changed in the telling, but I
was wondering whether anyone else has
heard it before and whether it can be
verified? I’ve not managed to find any more
information about it anywhere, but it gives a
tantalising glimpse into the availability of
raw materials and possible shipbuilding
activity in Medieval Newport. I know it’s
unlikely, but wouldn’t it be great if it
somehow linked in with the story of “the
Isca”!

Best wishes,
Brian Wilkinson, Newport

Mathew Trip
Dear Newsletter
I am glad I am 10 because I have already
learnt loads of information from the
newsletter about the Newport- ship. I have also
had a brilliant time on ‘the Matthew’
with the vice chairman (Ron McCormick).
We saw a lot of Bristol on the Matthew and
even brought back a few souvenirs of
remembrance. I reckon more children
should join the Newport Ship and find out
more of its history.

Yours sincerely
Joshua Sullivan, Caerleon

Letters @

National Eisteddfod
Volunteers Wanted

JULY 31st. – 7th. August 2004

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We urgently require volunteers to man the exhibition and we would like to hear from any Welsh speakers who would be prepared to give us a hand.

If you can help please contact us via letter to our new address (front cover).

Alternatively use the contacts on our website www.thenewportship.com

Members Events

Those of you living within a ship’s cannon shot distance of South Wales should have received a flier listing forthcoming events. On 8th March we had an update on the Ship by Kate Hunter and Bob Trett; on 21st March a group took a walk on the Severn foreshore with Nigel Nayling; and on 31st March Nigel Nayling did a talk at the Cardiff Bay Norwegian Church.

Forthcoming Events include:

Saturday April 24th. - A visit to the Mary Rose
A day trip to Portsmouth and guided tour of this ancient wreck arranged courtesy of the Mary Rose Archaeological Trust. At the time of printing this is almost fully booked, but contact Alan Smith tel. 01633 761397 for details.

Saturday 8th. May - Cardiff Bay Day
Meet at the Norwegian Church 10am for coffee and a fast boat trip into the Bristol Channel and around Flatholm (£12). Followed by Lunch on the Lightship, then sailing on Classic Swedish Yachts in Cardiff Bay. If you can’t sail, we’ll provide a skipper! (£10). Join all or part of the day.

Booking essential – Ring Jerry Cross on 02920 418 858.

Wednesday June 16th. - Boat trip up the River Usk - SOLD OUT
As this was quickly booked up we have now arranged a second trip for Thursday 1st July at 6 pm for those who failed to get tickets for the 16th.

Anyone interested telephone Jerry on 02920 418 858.

Other events are being planned – including a display by Bowmen of the Rose, a long bow group who undertake re-enactments of 15th. century archery. Details of this and other events in the next newsletter.

Newport Oaks

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remembered a story which my Dad once
told me about medieval Newport that I
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editor@thenewportship.com

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Piecing together the History

base of the big toe swells, bulges outwards and rubs uncomfortably on the inside of the shoe. This condition probably would have been made worse by wearing narrow pointed shoes like this one. Or it was worn on the left foot and the holes on the side are where the smaller toes have rubbed through the leather.

The Heel

Some Mediaeval shoes were made up of just one piece of leather which had been cut in such a way that it could be stitched up simply and formed into a shoe shape. The Newport ankle shoe has a more complicated pattern. This can be seen especially in the construction of the heel of the shoe. Two pieces of leather (the quarters) have been stitched together neatly down the back. Shoes are often constructed like this today. Also it is just possible to see the top of the heel stiffener which was an extra piece of leather stitched in place inside the shoe to provide more substantial support.

Cut Outs

Some Mediaeval shoes were decorated with embroidery or even dyed. The Newport shoe has an interesting form of decoration. On either side of the shoe around the ankle area are two elliptical cutouts. These “peep holes” would have allowed the wearer to flash a glimpse of their coloured hose through the shoe.

GGAT, the organisation that excavated the medieval ship has served a writ on Newport City Council to recover £118,000 still owed for the recovery work. Newport City Council retaliated with a counterclaim for £500K for delays to the Arts Centre construction schedule that resulted in heavy compensation payments to the building contractors.

Andrew Marvell, acting-director of GGAT, insisted it had given the council every opportunity to resolve the row over Newport's ship before issuing the writ. Mr Marvell said: "Prior to issue of the writ GGAT took counsel's advice and received confirmation that the sum in question was rightfully due and owing from Newport City Council".

GGAT claims to have made every attempt to seek a resolution of this issue with Newport City Council including requests for meetings, a letter of claim under the construction and engineering industry protocol and an offer of mediation through the mercantile division of Cardiff Crown Court.

A Newport City spokeswoman said "The lifting of the ship took over 40 weeks. The costs that GGAT is claiming are for an over-run to its three-week fixed contract, the additional costs of which was never agreed, and which were incurred solely as a result of GGAT's own failure to complete the work on time."

These conflicting claims beg the following questions which are not difficult to answer.

• Was the Council unaware that GGAT remained working on site after the initial three week period?

• Was there not a council officer appointed at the time to manage the Ship project, albeit a middle manager answerable to the Head of Service?

• Was neither of those officers present at the scheduled weekly site meetings attended by the interested parties, i.e. the archaeologists, the Council and the building contractors?

Perhaps it was expected that GGAT employees would work what sometimes amounted to a 24 hour shift for nothing, or Council somehow imagined that it was feasible to raise the largest and most significant medieval wreck ever to be found in a mere three weeks!

Could it be that the citizens of Newport once more (as has been the case since the Ship’s initial discovery) find themselves in a position where their paid employees are resorting to denials and blatant untruths to mask their own incompetence?

It is surely worth noting that, had the Council acted upon the specialist advice they received at the onset of this riverside development project and insured against construction delays for finds of archaeological significance, the issues relating to this court action would never have arisen.

In conclusion, rather than waste yet more public funds on a fruitless legal challenge the Council should be conducting an enquiry into its own management of the project. Two years on, all the publicity about the ship should be positive and helping to promote Newport, rather than it being embarrassing headline news because of yet more controversy.

City Council claims £500k from ship archaeologists!