

S.O.S.

the Newsletter of the

Friends of the Newport Ship



THE SKELETON

& THE COIN



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Free to Members

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CHAIRMAN'S MESSAGE

The Friends of the Newport Ship now seem well established, stable and accepted - a far cry from August 2002, when a bunch of "layabouts and ne'er-do-wells" had a raggle-taggle gypsy camp by the roadside.

Its all very bucolic and Thomas Hardy - we now seem to operate in an established calendar of regular Committee Meetings, public relations exercises, open day guiding, events, visits and the harvesting of the merchandise. Certainly much of the time I spend on Friends business is very much low profile day-to-day administration and guidance, punctuated with occasional outbreaks of attempts at chairing meetings and damage limitation when Mr Ferris breaks free.

I don't think we at the Friends have become complacent, and recent letters in the press about the future of the Ship are more indicative of the writers' world view (siege mentality?) than life in 21st Century South Wales. If the Ship was to be properly recorded, and then conserved and displayed the Ship always was going to be a "Big Project", both in terms of budget and physical size. Even stopping at the recording stage (and I'm not proposing that) would be costly. Such costly exercises lie outside the finances of Newport City Council, and tend to involve the Welsh Assembly and the Heritage Lottery Fund, bringing with it a particular approach, requiring community involvement, consultancy, PR and a visible wider educational role. This is a good thing, but broadens out the project away from a purely local historic or archaeological restoration project and does involve other stakeholders; it is no longer ratepayers, boffins and the Council.

The Ship is one of Newport's own symbols, but has an international significance, as recent finds underline. We at the FoNS will continue to support the Ship, and maintain our independence. Our membership funds us, and it is to you we are responsible. We can comment (often from an expert point of view) without being politically motivated, and can disseminate information to members and the press cost-effectively. I think we do a good job, and I think we've moved on from the barricade manning days, but I'd also like to think we can still put up a good fight if we needed to. As our members prepare for their Roskilde trip I'd like to think that, in fifteen years time, we'll have a comparable archaeological Ship Museum for the Newport ship and its siblings.

I'd like to congratulate Emma Lewis and her team in putting together a great newsletter. Thanks are due to the Committee for helping organise our many and varied activities.

The Friends have a key role to play in demonstrating community involvement, and the hours we put in do count as a form of "sweat equity" for funding applications. Any members who'd like to help with open days, research, giving talks, administration, merchandising, articles, the newsletter or Charlie Ferris's wardrobe (be afraid, the fancy dress tendencies are spiralling out of control) should contact a committee member. It's our Friends, please get involved.

All the Best for now, Simon Rutherford

The Newport Ship Open Day dates for 2006 are: Sunday June 4th Sunday July 16th Sunday August 13th

These promise to be as busy as last year and in order to make them such a success, we do need your help... If you helped out last year, please do come back and help again - we did so well,



there's no excuse not to do it again! Those of you who can come along and help this time - please do! We provide training for those who would like to do the guided tours (at 7pm on May 13th at the Conservation Centre) and many others are needed to

assist with tea and coffee, the stall, meeting and greeting (Kate would welcome an assistant!) and many other little jobs. Guiding is tiring and you'll be on your feet almost all day, but if you don't fancy this there is a lot else to do - we can even do with volunteers who fancy a busy day sitting down (signing up new members, etc.). Without you it won't work. Taking part is great fun and you'll be working with the Ship Conservation Team, so come along and share the day with the Friends and the public. It's our ship - let's show we're proud of it! Emma Lewis

LETTER FROM THE EDITOR

Hello Friends,

Welcome to the 'BIG NEWSLETTER' for 2006, the committee having decided on three low-key newsletters and one 'heavyweight' each year. This is the full colour newsletter, packed with articles on the ship, the conservation and the medieval period.

I hope you enjoy the articles - from news from the ship team (THAT coin, the skeleton's story) and an article on Medieval Newport's Austin Friars from Historian Bob Trett to a book review from our very own Medieval Archer - who should know a good and authentic medieval story when he reads one!

Charlie has been a great advocate of art inspired by the ship, and has written an article for the newsletter on this very subject, with some of the art discussed to show you.

Jerry has organized a raft of events (see the back page) and also written up a series of pub walks to see wrecks in the South Wales / Severn Estuary area, one or two of which I've done and can heartily recommend. What better excuse to get out for a walk along the foreshore and a pub lunch?

We even have a report of the finding of a Danish Vessel in the Usk from 1878 - a very interesting historical take on wreck archaeology on the Usk.

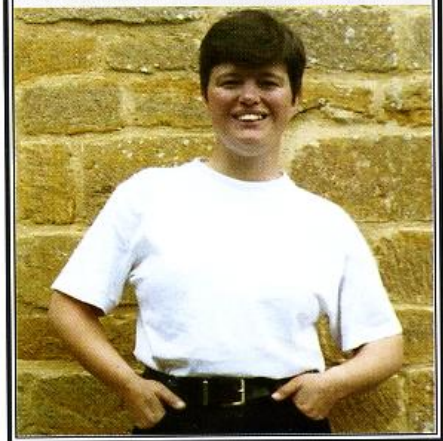
Very many thanks to all the contributors.

Thanks also to the Events Team - Jerry, Charlie and Alan for producing such a great programme of events again this year - without them we'd only meet up for committee meetings which, frankly, aren't as much fun!

We look forward to seeing many of you at the upcoming events and the Open Days - for which we still need volunteers.

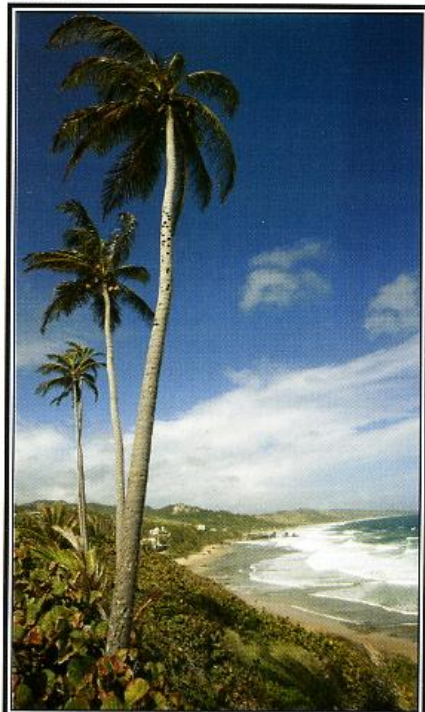
If anyone would like to help with the newsletter or run an event, please do let us know. And do remember to keep an eye out for the Ship Team on Beat the Eggheads...

More next time... Emma Lewis Editor



WITH A SQUARE SAIL...

As an early member of the Friends of the Newport Ship, and having the opportunity for the first time to go tall ship sailing, I was delighted to check out the website for the Prince William and the Stavros S. Nicarchos, vessels of the Tall Ships Youth Trust, who occasionally open trips to the 18-75 year age group, instead of just the 17-25 year olds the vessels are operated for.



Royal Palms, Barbados

The chance to do some real sailing (wind permitting) on a square rigged ship – truly in the spirit of the Newport Ship herself. You can imagine my delight when I discovered the Prince William was sailing across the Bay of Biscay – a route our ship and her crew would have travelled many times – at the beginning of February – coinciding exactly with my leave from work. Hurrah!

Then I came to my senses. The Bay of Biscay. In February. On a type of vessel I've never sailed on. And I have been sea sick in the past. Not often, and not for long, but the Bay of Biscay in February is about the most likely combination to ensure a repeat performance. And I've heard as well as being lumpy, the Bay is COLD in February. Well, it would be, wouldn't it. I wondered for an idle moment where Stavros would be... 10 days in the Caribbean, departing from and returning to

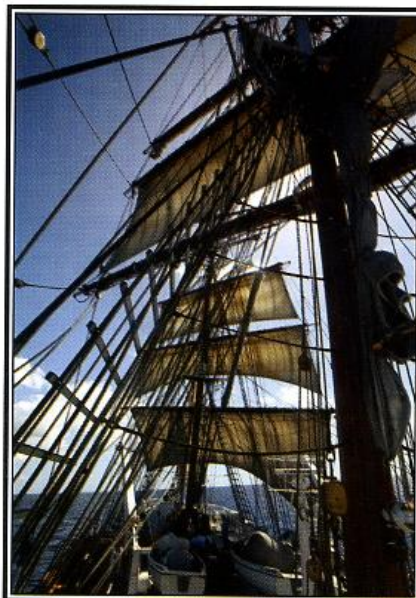
Barbados. Well, what would you have done? Besides, there's always next year for the Biscay trip...

I checked out the essentials (visa requirements – none, vaccine requirements – none, is the ship air conditioned? – yes) and booked, taking a couple of days in Barbados, on the totally unspoilt East Coast, before joining the ship. The weather, beaches and wildlife were fantastic, but the sailing would be hard work. I have sailed before – from dinghies to a 72' round-the-world racing yacht, but this was different. The anchor and the mooring lines had winches – everything else was operated by hand. That meant that the sails have to be taken in and out of their bags up in the rigging – feet on a wobbly rope under each yard, leaning over the yard and looking straight down at the deck or sea, depending on how close to the mast you are. At sea, you're moving about quite a lot up there. The sails are then handled from the deck – all by hand, with lots of pulling on ropes, in teams. We only had half the paying crew, so we had lots of space on board, but had to work that much harder to handle the sails. Also, the square rig means that these ships can only sail 80 degrees to the wind. Which is limiting. To get the ship to sail this close to the wind, we had to 'brace' the yards round to one side of the other, so that they are rarely 'square' to the vessel – rather one end of the yards will be pointing forwards, and the other end aft,



T.S. Stavros S. Niarchos

pivoting on the mast. The pivot is very well greased, and I'm still trying to get the grease out of one pair of shorts and one t-shirt! We sailed about 200 nautical miles, and motored for 400. We visited 5 islands, and used 5 currencies. We ate wonderful food aboard and better food ashore. The locals were very friendly, and the dolphins, turtles and flying fish came to look at us – the flying fish even landed on the boat. The ships are small and the captain knows the area, so we visited tiny bays that the cruise ships just couldn't get to and this made the whole



Form Stavros's open bridge

experience great. Ed

We did a few of the local clichés – swimming in the sea off the boat, standing out in the very short, warm showers knowing we'd be dry in minutes in the sun, walking in the rainforest in Dominica, swimming under a waterfall and eating grapefruit straight off the trees. Of course, we had to keep night watches (and day watches when at sea), scrub the ship (including the heads and showers) every day and help with vessel maintenance and in the galley – but that just made us feel we'd really had the full square rigged ship sailing experience – as well as making us all hot and sweaty! It was a great insight into the lives of commercial sailors throughout the ages of sail – and I loved the night watches – finding a star to steer by or watching tropical islands slide by in the sunset. I have been asked back as a volunteer assistant engineer, and who knows – next time I might be reporting on the Bay of Biscay trip. I'll have to find my thermals, though – there is a limit to the level at which I want to experience life as our ship's crew would have experienced it!



Boatyard, Bridgetown, Barbados



SHIPHEADS VS. EGGHEADS

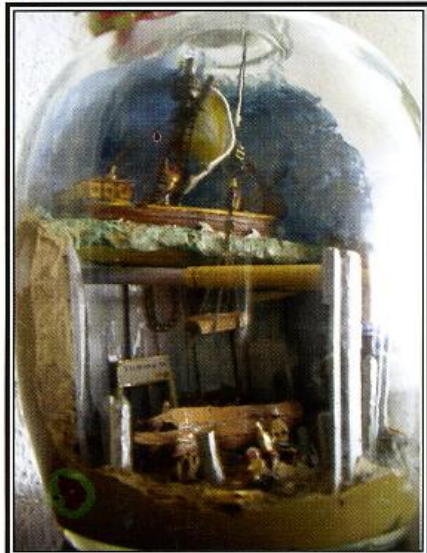
The BBC TV "Beat the Eggheads" quiz series pitted a team of "innocents" (i.e. FoNS) against a team of "Eggheads" (i.e. past TV quiz champions, Mastermind, Brain of Britain, Millionaire winners etc.). Naturally Charles Ferris, FoNS resident force of nature, decided that FoNS should have a go, both for the prize money and publicity. Many sensible people declined his generous offer, but undeterred Charlie instituted a rigorous training and selection procedure, resulting in a crack team attending an audition in Cardiff on 11th February 2006. Thanks are due to Charlie Ferris, Ron Atkins, Rosi Hollister, David Jones, Glyn Morgan and Simon Rutherford. It was very much an audition for TV, rather than a pure quiz test, but the FoNS shone in a close contest against an excellent team from Cardiff Bus. The result was that FoNS were invited to record a show in London. Key learning points included – taking Charlie's Pirate fancy dress away – yes he wore it for the audition – and prohibit our formerly esteemed chairman telling the anecdote about Fanny Craddock's doughnuts. Sadly we didn't win the £19,000 that we intended to donate to research on the ship, but gave the eggheads a run for their money knocking out three of their team, to the loss of only one of ours. For fans of the quiz we can only say that behind Daphne's sweet motherly smile is a mind that would have put Einstein in the shade!

Simon Rutherford

SIMPLY INSPIRING

When the Leader of Newport City Council announced that the Ship would be saved he said "It was a great day for the Ship, a great day for Newport and the people who had campaigned to save her. The ship had captured the imagination of the people of Newport in a way which was unlike anything I've ever seen before."

The Ship certainly has a capacity to enthrall and inspire as is proved by numerous works of art



Len Lloyd put our ship in a bottle!

that depict her. The first artist to capture her in oils was Paul Deacon who shows the ship as single masted and single sailed, making her last landfall at Medieval Newport's waterfront. A beautifully balanced composition including the wooden Town Bridge and castle with blue and green hues of the sky and fields beyond the tiny town contrasting with the ochres and tans of the ship and the Usk.

Paul very generously gave me 70 prints of the picture which I sent on to all the academics and institutions that supported the ship in its literal fight for survival by way of thanks and hope that they would remember and remain friends of our ship.

Unfortunately his kindness left him without a lot of prints to sell – the print run being only 500 in total. The remaining 430 went very quickly and I'm always being asked "Where can you get one of those prints?" We hope to be producing a set of postcards soon and Paul's impression of the ship will be one of them.

On returning from Belarus where I'd been taking aid to an orphanage I made a detour to see the Bremerhaven Cog in Germany. I was able to get copies of their recent sumptuous publication 'Die Kogge' which has photos of the replica Cog under sail. These photographs inspired David Day, the well known Caerleon artist, to venture away from his depictions of the more picturesque places in Newport to a rendition of how the town might have appeared. The ship is shown in full sail bowling downstream past a very accurate rendition of Newport Castle. In the overall composition the

castle has equal prominence, despite being in the background.

Paul and David's versions of the scene complement one another, Paul's being all greens and blues and David's tans and browns. (We should have a small stock of David's prints available at the open days.)

Depicting the ship as she was found, I am the proud possessor of an oil painting by Torfaen artist John Stiles, showing the Chartist Tower in the background and GGAT's archaeologists labouring in the appalling conditions within the coffer dam of the site. John's work is of the impressionist style and although there are no plans at present to reproduce this work as a print, he has very graciously given us his permission to reproduce it as a postcard. We hope this will form part of the second set of postcards as the first run has been arranged. I hope to display this picture at the open days as I did last year, right at the front of the centre so it's the first thing visitors see when they arrive. Now that the timbers have been separated out into 2,300 individual timbers in 16 water tanks, it's easy to forget just how big the ship was when found on site, and just how big she's going to be when reassembled! John's work helps to show the scale of our ship.

Another work showing the archaeology in progress at the riverside site is Kevin Sinnott's depiction of one of the open days. The crowd are shown looking over the coffer dam while busy figures in yellow t-shirts are rushing around a white canvas gazebo. One of these yellow clad figures is carrying a tea tray, and I wondered if that was a reference to my family business – a café... yet pride cometh before a fall, and I learned that the figure is Ian Varrah who commissioned the work on behalf of the City Council. It's a pity this spectacular work is not on show in a more prominent position at the new arts centre. It is currently in a conference room next to the bar on the first floor. I have been told that due to the high cost of insuring the work, it is kept in a lockable room. It is a shame that we have an arts centre that cannot properly display the art it holds, but that said, the staff are very helpful and enthusiastic about the ship. They will often show the film about the ship in the basement to visitors even when it's not due to be shown and I'm sure will let visitors see the Kevin Sinnott painting.

The other representation of our ship was to be a mural in the foyer of the Civic Centre. This



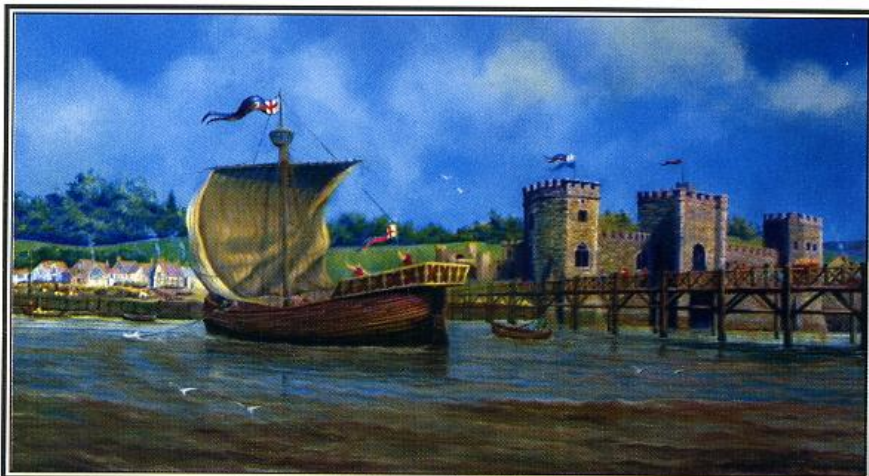
The Matchstick Ship

work was a continuation of the Hans Feibusch murals on the first floor of the Civic Centre outside the Council Chamber. The new work was to show the castle, the timbers of our ship as they were uncovered and a large crane grab from the docks, showing Newport's maritime trade past and present. This work came to an end with the untimely death of the artist Roger Smith. I believe his wife planned to take over the commission as a tribute and memorial to her husband but I'm not sure how far the work has progressed to date.

It is not just paintings the ship has inspired. We had a stall at Newport Market when the campaign to save the bow and stern was on (2003) and we were visited by an old Royal Navy sailor – Len Lloyd. Len was aboard the Lady Constance which accompanied the Amethyst on her epic 2,000 mile run down the Yangtse to open sea under hostile fire. Len indulges in that most maritime of arts; putting ships in bottles! He asked us for details of what she would have looked like – at that time we thought a single masted, single sailed vessel and he came back with a model inside a demijohn. At the base of the bottle is the coffer dam with the keel being winched out. Figures in yellow jackets supervise the operation – one with black beard, moustache and site hard-hat – obviously Nigel Nayling! Then up in the clouds at the top of the bottle is the ship as she was under full sail – a surreal vision of her glorious past. This wonderful interpretation of the ship is at the Conservation Centre and is on display at



Kevin Sinnott's excavation

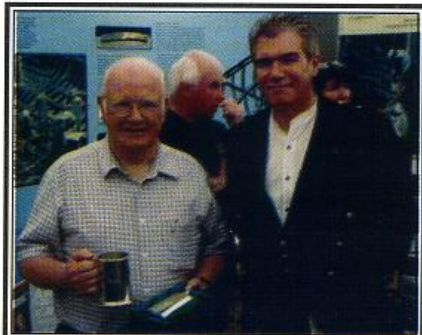


Paul Deacon's Painting

our open days.

At one of the open days we were asked for a picture of what she looked like and then had Owain Roberts, the renowned ship expert's latest impression of her as a three masted vessel. We gave a copy of this to a visitor who returned to the centre a few weeks later with a model of the ship made out of matchsticks! Even the sails were reproduced using matchsticks! It is a very accurate model and is also on show on our open days.

Another artist who has been inspired by our ship is Kelvin Reddicliffe who manages the Newport branch of Timpsons. Kelvin has been with the company for 35 years and produces tankards with the Newport Ship engraved on them. He has engraved both versions – single and triple masted and they've proved very



Owain Roberts and Kelvin Reddicliffe

popular as you might expect as the craftsmanship is excellent. It comes as no surprise to learn that Kelvin was given the title of Timpsons Millennium engraver.

One work of art I am looking forward to seeing completed and on show is Jan Preece's 1/72 scale diorama of Medieval Newport that will have pride of place at the Pill Heritage Centre in Alexandria Road, Pill, Newport. It will show Newport Castle, merchants' ships on the river and of course our ship on the bustling Medieval waterfront complete with wagons, horses, merchants and townsfolk. I'm sure it will fire the imagination of all that see it and like all Jan's models will be full of life, interest and humour.

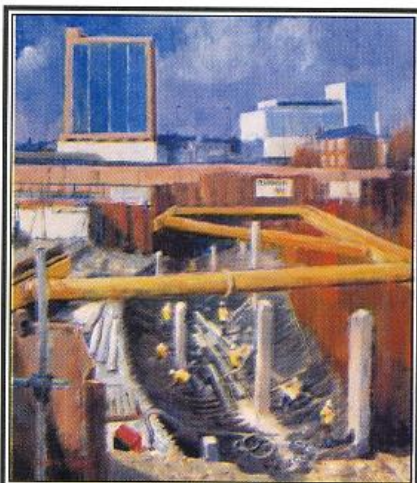
I've just touched on the topic of how the ship has inspired our artists. I shouldn't forget the performing arts and how the ship was the central theme to the Maindee Carnival in Newport in 2004 when a huge bicycle powered float of the ship was pedalled through the

streets of Maindee accompanied by children waving dolphins that ducked and dived through cloths representing waves. As an imaginative and visually spectacular display it would have done justice to the Rio Carnival.

This year we've seen a performance of 'All in the same boat' – a song and dance and one scene drama show staged by young people of varying abilities and special needs at the arts centre. It's storyline is of a young tearaway running off to sea to become a pirate and having a change of heart. The choreographer of the show was a young lady from Brasil.

Yet out of them all my favourite is one I saw while rolling home the worse for wear one night in Bancswell. I must state I'm not in the habit of, and do not condone looking in people's windows late at night but in this case the curtains were parted and I couldn't help noticing the Newport Ship in oils hanging over the mantelpiece. Given the late hour and my sorry state it wasn't the time to make a new acquaintance so I pushed a note through the letterbox asking if anyone would like to phone me and have a chat about the picture. The gentleman who lived there said he'd seen so many pictures of the ship he felt it was time to pick up his paint brushes and have a bash at it himself – and a very creditable rendition it was too.

So there she is – our Newport Ship. She belongs to all of us and she inspires us too! Charles Ferris



John Stiles' Newport Ship

TERRY UNDERWOOD'S TIMELINE

May 8th 2002

Work began on the laying of foundations for the new Riverfront theatre and arts centre on the banks of the river Usk.

June 22nd 2002

The Medieval trading vessel was discovered on the muddy banks of the river Usk by contractors sinking foundation piles, work was halted while a team from the Glamorgan and Gwent Archaeological Trust investigate the find.

June 24th 2002

A small group of Newport people form a committee under the leadership of Charles Ferris. Flag waving and horn blowing was started on the road near the theatre.

July 11th 2002

A campaign group under the leadership of Newport businessman Charles Ferris to save the ship said "The people of Newport feel quite adamant that the ship should be preserved, at the very least more time should be given to see what options are available."

August 1st 2002

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

August 7th and 14th 2002

Public interest increases as an estimated 10,000 people queued to view the ship. A public meeting was held at the Dolman Theatre by the Save Our Ship campaigners where about 300 people attended. The meeting was chaired by Newport author Terry Underwood and in attendance were Charles Ferris, Simon Rutherford and Jan Preece.

August 16th 2002

Campaigners launch a round the clock vigil to protect the ship. Mr. Jan Preece of Pill Heritage Centre had collected well over 2,000 signatures to save the ship.

August 17th 2002

Welsh Culture Minister Jenny Randerson promises that the ship will be saved.

August 19th 2002

Campaigners deliver a 6,000 name petition to Newport Borough Council and finally to the Welsh Assembly at Cardiff Bay, in support of the ship.

August 23rd 2002

The Welsh Assembly announces that it will save the ship with a £3.5 million preservation package to put the ship on display in the basement of the new arts centre.

September 2002

A committee was formed to maintain interest and liaison with relevant bodies as to the final resting place and display centre for the vessel. Estimated viewers over a two month period to the ship is said to be in the region of 16,000.

In 2003 an announcement made by Newport Borough Council that the keel and bow of the ship was saved but they were unable to save the stern, as further excavations would have caused subsidence in the embankment, all timbers recovered now being stored in water tanks in Maesglas.

WAS THE NEWPORT SHIP FRENCH?



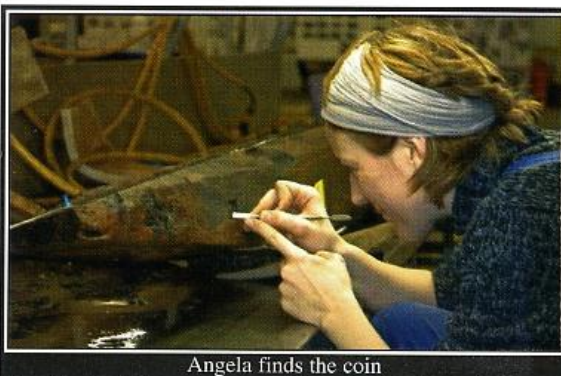
The discovery of a silver coin, deliberately embedded in the keel of the Newport Ship, has excited archaeologists working on the ship. It points to a French origin. The coin had been wrapped in what appears to be tarred caulking and carefully nested in a

hole cut into the keel, at the point where it connects to the stempost (the timber forming the bow). The find position is highly significant because the keel and the stempost would have been the first timbers put in position by the ship builders. Probably inserted as a good luck charm, it gives the date after which the ship must have been constructed. One face of the coin depicts a cross, and the inscription in Latin 'SIT NOME (D)NI BENEDITU.' which can be translated as 'Blessed be the name of the Lord'. This was the face left facing uppermost, almost certainly deliberately. The coin is not worn, suggesting that it was quite new when placed in the keel.

There is a centuries-old tradition of placing coins under the mast during ship construction, and a few parallels for coins between keel and stempost.

The coin has been identified by Edward Besly of Amgueddfa Cymru – National Museum Wales as a petit blanc of the Dauphin, Louis de France. Minted in the town of Crémieu between 1440 - 1456, it comes from Dauphiné, an area of south eastern France, traditionally held by the Dauphin, the eldest son of the king of France. Louis of France succeeded to the Throne of France in 1461, as Louis XI, and reigned until 1483. This type of coin was in general circulation throughout fifteenth century France. The dolphin, the symbol of the Dauphin, is found on both sides.

Discovery of a French coin, placed between two of the most important constructional timbers of the Newport Ship and obviously right at beginning of construction, strongly suggests a French origin for the Ship. The fact that many of the artefacts discovered in the ship are not British, but European, again points to a continental origin, and certainly a working life which involved voyages to the Iberian peninsula. Repaired with timbers felled in southwest Britain in 1465-6, and left abandoned on supporting struts dating from c1468, the team working



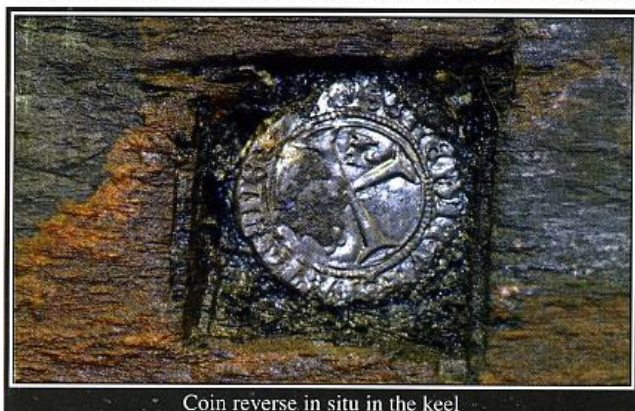
Angela finds the coin

on the ship have known for some time that she was older than 1465, due to the large number of repairs she had undergone. The coin gives a much closer idea of the date at which she was constructed, and therefore the length of her working life.

Dating from the early years of the Age of Discovery, but before the discovery of America, the Newport Ship is the most complete surviving fifteenth century ship discovered in recent years and has already given experts a window into ship building techniques of this period.

The Newport Ship project has recently been awarded a grant from the Heritage Lottery Fund. Over the next two years there will be detailed recording of each of the 1,700 timbers which make up this unique and fascinating discovery. As found in the ground, the ship had undergone serious distortion so that her original shape is as yet unknown. Following the completion of the next stage of work we will have a much better idea of her original shape, tonnage and usage. More discoveries are expected.

Bob Trett



Coin reverse in situ in the keel

THE USK

For countless centuries the river Usk has flowed in and out and yet we all take her for granted, after all we have a bridge to cross whether the tide is in or out and it does not really affect us as we don't have a toll to pay. But, that has not always been so, the river has played a vital part in supporting this part of Monmouthshire.

It was the Romans who saw the full potential of the tidal river that would take them into the open sea to Rome and the world. Caerleon was chosen to build their fortress, and the river had a major role to play in this decision. The river on the approach to Caerleon would have been an ideal look-out point to spot any unwelcome visitors. During the Roman occupation of Caerleon it must have been a familiar sight to have seen ships sailing up the Usk. In the Middle Ages Caerleon was a port, and although by 1184 a bridge had been built at Newport, navigation was still possible. As late as 1538 Caerleon provided a ship for Henry VIII's navy. However Caerleon gradually declined as a port as Newport's pre-eminence grew.

It is not known when the first Newport Castle was built to protect the wooden bridge and the town, but the present castle is mainly 15th century. Long before the present castle was constructed, this point in the river was a lookout point for approaching enemies. This bridge was burnt down by Simon de Montfort, Earl of Leicester in 1265.

The next stage in the history of the bridge was on 4th March 1324 when Hugh de Despenser the Younger received a charter from King Edward II wherein the inhabitants of Newport and other towns were relieved of



paying bridge tolls.

In 1402, another timber bridge was burnt down, this time by Owen Glyndwr. On February 23 1533 a dispute between two leading families in the district resulted in the bridge being broken down by the Morgan family to prevent the Herbert family from crossing. In 1800 a new stone bridge was built that lasted for 125 years. Our present bridge was opened in 1923.

In 1801 the population of Newport was 1,087 and at this time Newport really took off with the building of the town dock in 1842 and the coming of the railway in 1845. By 1935 the population of Newport had risen to almost 100,000.

Newport Medieval ship would have been and gone, protected by the river that she had served until the year 2002, when the jewel in our crown, the river Usk gave up a fantastic secret. As friends of the Newport ship sip ale at the St Julians Pub on the banks of the river we can only stop and ponder at what secrets our river will give up next.

You are all welcome to come at our winter pub talks – details on the website and in the autumn newsletter. Alan Smith

NEWPORT SHIP WINS SUPPORT FROM HERITAGE LOTTERY FUND

Press Release

Issued: 13 December 2005

The timbers of the Newport Ship, one of the most important archaeological discoveries ever made in Wales, will be studied by a team of experts to uncover its origins and history thanks to a £799,500 grant from the Heritage Lottery Fund (HLF).

The grant will also fund activities for schoolchildren, as well as talks, workshops and exhibitions for the public. The HLF is also funding a Community Memories project, as part of this initiative, to record the experiences of modern seafarers to help illuminate the lives of the ship's seafarers in the Middle Ages.

The 15th Century Ship was discovered on the banks of the River Usk in Newport in 2002 during excavation work for the City's £16 million Riverfront and Arts Centre. It is the only intact medieval ship to be found in Britain, and is widely considered to be one of the most important archaeological finds of recent times. Made up of 1,700 timbers, the ship's remains can now be traced and studied to bring its past to life and enlighten archaeologists on the travel, trade and maritime innovation of nations across Europe and even further afield at the end of the Middle Ages.

The HLF grant will enable a team to record and analyse the timber remains using state of the art technology over a two year period. They will look in detail at the different ship building technologies which led to European trade expansion in the late 15th century, and make informed decisions about the ship's original shape and function; what cargoes it carried, how many crew sailed it and why it was abandoned. The team will also decide on its future conservation and reconstruction.

Jennifer Stewart, HLF Manager for Wales says: "This is one of the most important archaeological finds in Wales, and it is essential that we help record and conserve the ship for future generations so they can enjoy and learn about this remarkable find. Unveiling its past will provide us with a real insight into our maritime heritage, and it is extremely encouraging to see such passion and enthusiasm from local people in Newport to save and conserve this wonderful discovery."

The discovery of the ship on the banks of the River Usk in Newport in 2002 evoked huge public interest and the HLF grant will enable the employment of an Access and Learning Officer to further involve and engage the local community. A programme of presentations, open days

and 3D displays will ensure that as many people as possible get the chance to learn about and enjoy the Newport ship project.

Councillor Bob Bright, leader of Newport city council, comments: "We are delighted that the Heritage Lottery Fund has agreed with the council's view that Newport is the home of a national and international treasure which warrants funding on a national level.

"This decision will enable the restoration and conservation project to continue its excellent progress and we look forward to identifying a continuing string of funding so people from across the country can enjoy the project's eventual completion.

"The ship's potential as a major tourism asset for Newport was demonstrated by the thousands of people from across the UK who visited the city during the open days earlier this year.

"With the support of the HLF, the council looks forward to driving forward the conservation project and the unique opportunities that it presents for the people of Newport and Wales."

Alun Pugh, Minister for Culture, Welsh Language and Sport, said: "This important find has captured the imagination of the people of Newport and further afield so I'm pleased that the Heritage Lottery Fund has been able to support further research to ensure we are able to learn more about the history of the ship and to conserve it in the correct way for the education and enjoyment of future generations."

WARWICK APOLOGY



My sincere apologies to Tony Hopkins of the Gwent Record Office who produced the original transcription of the Warwick

letter published on page 5 of Newsletter No.7. I mistakenly accredited the transcription of the letter to Bob Trett.

THE BODY BENEATH THE BOAT

The skeleton found beneath the Newport Medieval Ship has been radiocarbon dated to the Iron Age, c 170 BC. The Newport Ship is one of the most significant maritime archaeological discoveries of recent times. It dates to the fifteenth century. The skeleton, which is about 1,500 years older, was found beneath wooden struts supporting the ship. The skeleton is incomplete; the leg bones were missing from the knee downwards because the workmen who positioned the struts had dislodged these bones, not knowing the skeleton was there. The head was also missing. It is the remains of a tall male, something over 5'9". The individual was very muscular, especially in the upper arms and he was probably right-handed. He was possibly aged in his late twenties or early thirties.

Dr Ros Coard of the Department of Archaeology and Anthropology at the University of Wales, Lampeter, together with a research student, Alison Bennett, carried out work on the body.

The fact that the body is so much older than the Newport Ship means that this individual had nothing to do with the ship. However, the body was lying in the same channel in which the ship was found. Therefore the channel itself was at least 1,500 years old, and could easily have been used by other vessels long before the Newport Ship. The body may have been deliberately placed there or, equally likely, be the unfortunate victim of drowning, whose body was washed into the channel and buried under sediment.



The Skeleton in the mud

Kate Hunter

ANOTHER SHIP FIND (1878 STYLE)

The following accounts by Octavius Morgan, as published in *The Archaeological Journal*, Volume XXXV, 1878, Royal Archaeological Institute of Great Britain and Ireland and a pamphlet published by the Monmouthshire Antiquarian Association in 1882 on "Goldcliff and the Ancient Roman Inscribed Stone found there 1878, together with other Papers". With thanks and acknowledgement to Monmouthshire Antiquarian Association and Castle Books.

ANCIENT DANISH VESSEL DISCOVERED AT THE MOUTH OF THE USK.

Extract from the *Proceedings at a Meeting of the Royal Archaeological Institute*,
June 7, 1878.

MR. OCTAVIUS MORGAN gave the following account of the discovery of an ancient Danish vessel in the alluvial deposit near the mouth of the river Usk:-

"In April last, in the course of the excavation of the new timber pond of the Newport Alexandra Dock, in the extensive tract of flat alluvial land which there forms the shore of the Bristol Channel between the mouths of the rivers Usk and Ebbw, the workmen came upon the remains of an ancient vessel about twelve feet below the surface of the green sward. The tide rises high here, and would still overflow the land at very high spring tides with a south-west gale unless it were protected by a low sea bank. The workmen in this excavation discovered a portion of the side of an ancient ship which was retained in an upright position by sharpened rough oak stakes driven into the soil beneath as if to form a dam or embankment. In the excavation of the Alexandra Dock itself, about forty-five feet below the surface, a number of oak trees, with abundance of hazel nuts, were found, apparently portions of an oak forest growing amid a thicket of hazel bushes. At Goldcliff, on the shore of the channel a few miles on the east side of the river Usk, are still to be seen at low water the roots and remains of a similar oak forest with abundance of hazel nuts, which may be gathered up by handfuls in the mud.

The Vessel found was built with oak planks, of no great thickness, fastened together with broad-headed iron nails, which had all perished, the metal having been converted into oxide. There were occasional large holes to receive trenails, a portion of one of which found *in situ* is exhibited with the nails, but it has much shrunk in drying. It was what is termed clinker-built, the planks overlapping each other, and sloped off so as to make a smooth joint. Between the planks some of the caulking was found, which was of a dark coloured wool, and it is not improbable that strips of sheep's hides with the wool on were used for this purpose. Nothing like pitch appears to have been found. These remains of the vessel were carefully examined by a ship-builder, and the master of the dock, who made the following report: - "In compliance with your letter I have to-day examined, in company with a ship-builder, the remains of the vessel found in excavating the timber ponds at this dock, and it is our opinion that the vessel is of foreign build, as she appears to be constructed of Dantzic oak. We found traces of timber or ribs on the inner side of the planking, which were evidently about two and a half inches in width, and it is our opinion that the vessel was constructed more for speed than strength as she must have been only slightly put together. From the general appearance and position of the different parts, we are led to think that she was placed where she is for the

purpose of forming a dam, and the stakes which you have observed outside were merely driven in to secure her in position. The vessel was very likely captured from foreigners, and cut into pieces for the purpose indicated as above, but we found nothing whatever to enable us to fix the date of her being placed there, but she has been there some centuries, as eight feet of mud has been gradually deposited above her and the metal fastenings are completely rusted through."

The dockmaster, from having been in the Baltic and well acquainted with ship-building there, is of opinion that, from its clinker-build, as well as from the quality of the timber, it is most likely from that part of the world, as that mode of construction is still carried on there. He considers it may have been about seventy feet long, and from seventeen to twenty feet broad, and that it most probably had some sort of deck. From the examination of the timber and the piece of plank exhibited, judging from the loose open grain and the broad silver grain or laminae or flowers, as they are sometimes called, there can be no doubt of its being of Dantzic timber, for the grain of English oak is closer, harder and more compact, and silver grain laminae not so apparent. From all these circumstances it appears to me that it was most probably a vessel which formed part of one of the Danish fleets which invaded that part of the country at several early periods. A ship built for speed and not for strength, is I think, just the sort of vessel that these northern adventurers would build and use to ensure a quick transport, and having but few stores and little baggage no great strength would be required, and a fleet of such vessels would convey and land on any coast a large body of adventuring invaders.

That part of the country along the northern shore of the Bristol Channel was subjected to frequent invasion by the Danes and they have left their names and marks in various places, and especially in the two islands in the Bristol Channel over against the coast of Glamorgan, viz., the Steep and Flat Holms.

From the *Gwentian Chronicle* or "*Brut y Tywysogion*" of Caradoc of Llancarvan, who died in 1157, we learn that A.D. 797 the Black Pagans first came to Britain from Denmark and made great ravages in England; afterward they entered Glamorgan, and killed and burnt much, but at last the Cymry conquered them, driving them into the sea and killing many of them, and thence they went to Ireland.

In A.D. 893 the Black Pagans came to Wales over the Severn sea, burnt Llanelltyd the great, and Cynfig, and Llangarvan and Gwent, and Brecknock, and Buallt, and during their return through Gwentllwg (the locality where this vessel was found) whilst ravaging Caerleon upon Usk, Morgan Prince of Glamorgan fought a battle with them and drove them over the Severn Sea into the Summer country (Somersetshire?), where many of them were killed by the Saxons and Britons of that country. Here we have in the record of an old chronicler of that locality a direct mention of an invasion and warfare with the Danes on that very spot,

and as they were driven over the Severn Sea, or Bristol Channel, they must have had ships, and I think it by no means, therefore, improbable that this Danish ship may be of that period. If that be so we get a date of about 900 when that fragment of a ship was placed where it was found at the mouth of the Usk, or on the shore of the Severn Sea. The spot where it was found is now more than half a mile distant from the river Ebbw, and considerably more than a mile from the Usk, and from the time it was placed there eight feet of solid mud or silt must have been deposited above the top of it, and the beds and channels of the two rivers and the shores of the Severn Sea or Bristol Channel have varied accordingly, and we can now form some idea of what changes have taken place in that alluvial district in 1000 years."

In the *Monmouthshire Antiquarian pamphlet*, Morgan adds that "the paper was prepared and read in 1878, and there appeared in the *Illustrated London News* of June 24th, 1880, an article accompanied by a wood engraving, which gives a description of an ancient ship, recently discovered near the coast of Norway which exactly illustrates this paper, and confirms me in attributing the ship discovered at the mouth of the Usk, to the Danish or Northern invaders from the Baltic.

On the farm of Gokstad, not far from Sandifjord, is a large mound 150 feet in diameter, and there was an ancient tradition that a mighty Chief was buried there. Last winter the people of the farm began to excavate the hill, and came upon some timber and wooden materials. On prosecuting the work, the hill was found to contain the entire hull of an old ship, of the Pagan Vikings, in a remarkably good state of preservation.

In the estimation of the Norwegian Antiquarians it was considered to be more than 1000 years old. The vessel was built entirely of oak, and is 75 English feet between the stem and stern, it is about 16 feet broad amidships, and it appears to have been of a low build, drawing only five feet, of water. The planks were united together with iron nails, and the ribs of which there are twenty, were connected with them, at the top by rivets, but at the bottom by ties. It is clinker built. Amidships in the bottom of the ship is a heavy beam; this beam served as the support of the mast, of which there is still a piece standing in its place, whilst the upper part which had been cut off was found in the vessel. The mast appears to have been about 22 feet long. In the vessel were also found bits of sail and ropes, and a number of oars, some 20 feet long and also a rudder. From this description there appears to be a considerable similarity between this vessel and that which was discovered here near the mouth of the Usk, which I think we may fairly presume from the similarity of construction, and the other particulars which have been given respecting it, to have been a vessel from the North Sea, brought by some of the invaders of this coast."

THE AUSTIN FRIARS, NEWPORT

There is much of the early history of Newport that is either unknown or unverified and dubious in its accuracy. For example the original date of the present Newport Castle is unknown, although much of the surviving castle is a 15th century rebuild. In Newport Museum there are only two shoe-boxes with pottery recovered from the castle and most of this is on display. This is because no archaeological investigations were carried out during alterations to the castle site even in the 20th century, for example when the new road and Castle Green area were put in to the rear of the castle, or when the remains of a brewery in the castle were cleared away.

The Newport Ship was found in an inlet or pill that once marked the boundary of an area known as Friars Field. The inlet was filled in, probably in the 18th century when a slipway to the river, which ran over the ship timbers, was built. This can be deduced because the port side of the ship was hacked away as it would have protruded above the line of the cobbled slipway. Although the friary associated with Friars Field has now gone there are a few references to its existence.

A house of the Friars Eremites of St Augustine was founded in Newport by Hugh, Second Earl of Stafford, in 1377. Stafford owned the lordship of Newport. He died in 1386 at Rhodes, on a pilgrimage to Jerusalem. The Austin Friars claimed to have been originally founded by St Augustine of Hippo in the fourth century and were organised as an order in 1245. The friary at Newport appears to have been the only Augustinian friary in Wales. The first prior was Thomas Leche, who probably came from a house of friars in Staffordshire. When appointed he promised "to promote the welfare of the Stafford souls, and to pay a pension of one mark yearly to the vicar of the parish church (St Woolos) as compensation for revenue lost through the establishment of a friary". It was endowed

with 31 burgages (land holdings) and one "free place" (probably a chapel) in Newport. It later received more burgages, bringing the total to sixty, but the friary was always a small establishment and was destroyed by



by Bob Trett

Ruins of the AUSTIN FRIARS Newport.

Owain Glyndwr in 1402/3 but re-established by the Duke of Buckingham in the middle of the 15th century.

Very few records of the friary exist. The last prior, Richard Batte, surrendered the friary to the agent of Henry VIII on 8 September 1538 during the dissolution of the monasteries in England and Wales. The friary, which stood in Friars Field, is clearly marked on 18th century and early 19th century maps of Newport. It stood in the area that

is now part of Newport Bus Station, by John Frost Square. Friars Field stretched down to the river and the northern boundary was where the Riverfront Theatre now is and where our medieval ship was found. However such a small establishment as the Austin Friars could hardly have owned such a large vessel.

The friary building survived into the 19th century and there is a fine engraving of it published by Henry Mullock in 1859. Around 1860 the Newport Corporation purchased the site and raised the building to the ground. The Monmouthshire Building Society (established 1869) had their original offices on the site, and during the redevelopment of John Frost Square in the 1960's removed a stone plaque depicting the friary from their old offices to their new premises. Two unimpressive original stone fragments of the friary building are still in Newport Museum. One former employee on the John Frost Square development claimed that a number of vaults were destroyed unrecorded during the development of John Frost Square. It would be nice to think that the proposed redevelopment project for the city centre might bring to light more information on Medieval Newport.



Medieval Archer Mike

THE BOOK REVIEW - Mike Jones

Bowmen of the Rose

Welcome everyone to what might be the first literary fiction review article that has appeared in the Friends of the Newport Ship newsletter. To call it a book review might be a little misleading as the books mentioned are not recent releases. We all know what it is like to try and find something to read that hits all of our interests and these of course might only cover mine. By the fact you are members of the Friends of the Newport Ship you have demonstrated an interest in history and at least some form of interest in the medieval period. This I noted by the numbers of

him on an adventure across the water to France where his skill with the bow start to play it's part in his life of warfare. The book ends with the words 'I am an English archer'.

The second in the series is called 'Vagabond' and sees our archer's fortunes ebb and flow as he moves ever nearer to finding the answers he seeks. The series culminates with 'Heretic' where the scene is set for the well earned revenge, the truth about his family and the finding of the Grail cup itself. It finally sees our hero finding his love and eventually returning to his home village with his love. It ends with the line 'He was an archer, and the madness was over. He was free.'

A really great trilogy to read and once started will leave you feeling you are living this medieval adventure for yourself.

The last of my book reviews, if you have an interest in Welsh bowmen is 'A Dragon to Agincourt'; set a little later than the Grail Quest series it follows the fortunes of a Welsh Bowman during the times of Owain Glyndwr. It tracks our archer's life on his family's farm, to his finding of love and his role in the forces of Owain Glyndwr. It ends at the battle of Agincourt with the archer having been pardoned for his part in the revolt and entering the army of Henry V to do service with his bow.

All four titles gave me a great read, if you do decide to read any of them perhaps you can let me know what you thought of them at this years open days. If you think you would like this article to be a permanent feature in your newsletter why not let the editor know, there are many other titles that we might be able to tempt you with.

The titles, author and ISBN numbers are listed below

Harlequin	Bernard Cornwell	ISBN 0-00-651384-0
Vagabond	Bernard Cornwell	ISBN 0-00-651385-9
Heretic	Bernard Cornwell	ISBN 0-00-714989-1
A Dragon to Agincourt	Malcolm Pryee	ISBN 0-86243-684-2

Bowmen of the Rose will be at at least two of the Open Days this summer - do say 'hello' and tell Mike what you thought of these reads, or any others you could recommend. Ed

my colleagues at the open days last year. Perhaps this will be a regular feature where others can inform us all of the books they have read and liked.

My love is that of the longbow and I was therefore amazed to find a number of books that combined history, passion, tension, drama, and most of all seen through the eyes of an archer, living through their trials, tribulations, adventures and desires.

The first three books form part of a trilogy and for all you Bernard Cornwell readers and Sharpe fans my comments may come as no surprise. The first in the Grail Quest series is Harlequin set in what is referred to as the Hundred Years war. It sees our archer hero seeking revenge for his father's murder and to retrieve family treasure. It takes

SOME STICKS IN THE MUD (AND SAND)



Unidentified wreck at Sker point

If you need an excuse to get some fresh air and exercise and you have an interest in maritime history, then a pilgrimage to some of the final resting places of vessels that plied their trade on the Bristol Channel and Severn Estuary may be for you. Most of the wrecks I have chosen are less than 150 years old, but the techniques used in the building of these wooden ships are similar to those used hundreds of years earlier. As these wrecks disintegrate then it is possible to examine details that would otherwise be hidden in a preserved ship in a museum. The details of how the frames were joined together are better understood when the inner and outer planking is absent. The fact that many of these ships have ended their days in remote and beautiful places make a pilgrimage to view them a joy as well as an opportunity to enjoy a pint or two at a local hostelry! Most of the sites described below are those of wooden sailing ships and it is important to say here that a visit to any of these sites is best timed to be about two hours before low water so that the tide is always ebbing during your visit.

A Ship's Graveyard

Probably a good place to start for anybody with an interest in ship archaeology is a visit to the hulks at Purton on the East side of the river Severn some two miles North of Sharpness. Since the 1930's some 35 vessels that have ended their working lives here; their final task before they rotted was to prevent erosion of the river bank and so safeguard the bank of the nearby ship canal.

Access to this site is very easy even for people with walking difficulties. Park your car in the car park in the middle of Purton and cross over the ship canal on either of the two bridges. Turn left along the towpath towards Sharpness and after you have passed a row of cottages you will be diverted around a small wharf. Immediately after passing under a pipe turn right through a gap in the hedge heading towards the river. You will very soon become aware that you have entered a ship's graveyard as you begin to notice all manner of vessels emerging from the river bank. There have been a few surveys of the area, by David MacGregor in 1952 and more recently by Bristol University in 1997. Research has also been carried out in order to establish the identities of these vessels, notably by Colin Green and it is information contained in his article 'On Severn's Shore' that I have used in this section on the Purton hulks.

The first vessels you will probably notice are not wooden but barges made of concrete to store and carry grain during the Second World War. Moving swiftly on and having passed the remains of several wooden craft and another concrete barge you come across the remains of the Severn Collier, its name carved into the transom. Built in Stourport in 1937, she

carried coal around from Lydney to Frampton.

Moving downstream, one cannot fail to notice the skeletal remains of the Sally, latterly re-named River King. The time and place of her construction remain a mystery but she was rigged as a 3 masted barque or possibly a barquentine. Virtually all her wooden structure has been removed leaving only the iron knees protruding from the ground and supporting deck beams to define her shape. The wreck, like many other vessels at Purton, denotes a transitional period for wooden shipbuilding and you can see how iron has been used extensively in the fabrication of knees, which at one time would have been made out of wood.

Further downstream, you come to the remains of the topsail schooner Dispatch. Built in 1888 in Garmouth on the river Spey, she was used in the Newfoundland fish trade. Dispatch became a dumb barge on the Severn and Sharpness Canal until being hulked at Purton in the late 1950's. The structure of this vessel again has been laid bare because, for some unknown reason, people like to set fire to it. I can remember coming here in the late 1980's and seeing the hull well alight without a soul around, quite bizarre! As a result of the arsonists' work it is possible to examine the framing of Dispatch in minute detail. Immediately apparent are the frames, particularly on the Starboard side, with plenty of treenail holes you can see how the component parts of the ships frame were scarphed together. As a result of the outer planking having been removed,



The Skeletal remains of the River King ex Sally



The author and Kate discuss the Severn Collier

you can see the diagonal iron plates inserted on the outside of the ship's frames to strengthen the hull and prevent the hull sagging at the bow and stern; a process otherwise known as "hogging".

Further downstream and almost looking as though she could be put back into service is the Harriet, her name still discernable on her stern. Built at Honey Street on the Kennet and Avon canal in 1894 Harriett spent her working life in Bristol docks and the river Avon.

Two unidentified wrecks

Moving over to the Welsh coast there are two wrecks worthy of further investigation, the first at Peterstone the other at Tremorfa. Although quite close to one another it is necessary to visit them individually due to the Rhymney river flowing between them.

The first site wreck is that of a small wooden ship and the site itself lies about a mile to the West of Peterstone. If you park in the vicinity of the church, which is now privately owned, and head towards the sea and then turn right along the sea wall and head towards Cardiff, (whilst at the same time admiring the views across the channel), you will pass an outfall pipe crossing the foreshore after about a mile. Just to the West of this outfall are the remains of a wreck of a wooden sailing ship. If you have timed your visit after a gale (preferably from the South East) then the chances are that there will be little mud remaining over the firm clay base of the foreshore.

Nothing is known about this site, the name of the vessel, its date of construction and how it came to be here remain a mystery and may prompt someone to do a little research on the subject. The stern of the ship is missing, and what remains are the floor timbers and first futtocks forward of the main mast step. The ship lies at an angle of about 15 degrees; this means that there is a lot of the bow buried in the mud and, given the nature of the clay, should be in excellent condition. The most striking characteristic of the wreck are the flat floor timbers which makes it appear to be some kind of barge though the presence of a mast step indicates that it is some sort of sailing ship, contradicting this theory. Returning to your car and resisting the temptation to visit the "Six Bells" you may have enough time to visit the remains of the wooden sailing ship at Tremorfa.

Unless you have a liking for grim parts of the South Wales coast then



Stern of the Severn Collier

there is no other reason to visit this site other than for the wreck itself. Although the opening of the new water treatment works here means that you now no longer have to walk alongside the Cardiff East sewer, however, should the wind happen to blow from the wrong direction then there is an unpleasant odour coming from the treatment works. The foreshore here consists of slag deposited over the years from the nearby steel works which is of interest only to students of industrial archaeology. Finally there is the mud. The wreck itself lies some hundred yards off the new treatment works and depending on the recent weather conditions there can be some very thick mud here. If on your first step in the mud you sink up to the top of your wellies then turn back as the wreck will also be covered in thick mud. However if you happen to time your visit after a storm, (again from the South East), then the chances are that most of the mud will have disappeared revealing many interesting features.

Structurally all that is left of the ship are the floor timbers, keelson and stern post, with the remains of the rudder still attached. The wreck is possibly that of a Trow (the Transit van of the Bristol Channel) although the distinguishing D-shaped transom is missing- its dimensions of approximately 65 feet by 16 feet would have enabled it to pass through the locks of the Stroudwater canal. What makes this wreck interesting is the number of artefacts still contained within it. Starting from the bow there is a quantity of stone stacked in neat rows across the vessel and on the port side amidships there is a mill stone. The starboard side of the ship is strewn with pieces of willow pattern plates and on close inspection you can discern the tops of plates stacked vertically sticking out of the mud indicating that this was probably part of a cargo. Unfortunately there are no complete plates, although I have been able to glue enough pieces together to make a complete plate with the idea of trying to date the wreck. Moving towards the stern is the ship's pump and laid horizontally



The wreck at Peterstone looking east towards Newport

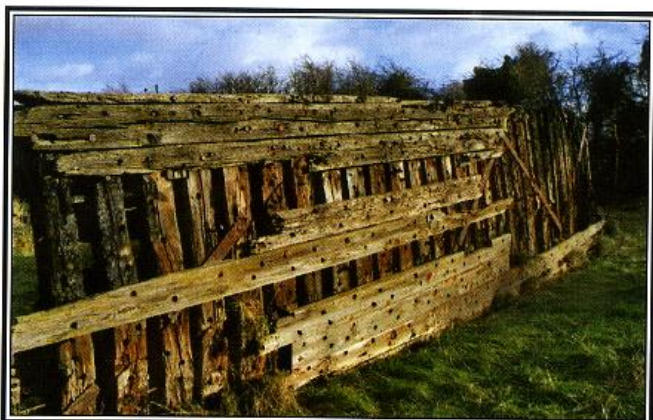
across the stern are the remains of three barrels. The fact that there are remains of a cargo would indicate that this is in fact a shipwreck and not a ship that has been deliberately beached here and then abandoned. To be able to date the cargo of willow pattern plates would then give some indication of when the wreck occurred. This would make it possible to search the records to find out more details of the vessel.

The Louisa of Cardiff

At this point the temptation to include the wreck of the Louisa is overwhelming not only to somehow justify the years a small group of us spent shovelling away tons of mud intermingled with discarded television sets, stolen handbags and of course the ubiquitous supermarket trolley in order to record her structure but also serves to illustrate the problems of trying to give a name to a wreck.

The remains of a ship known locally as the Louisa lie embedded in the West bank of the river Taff downstream from the Channel View Leisure centre. Before the barrage was built she was used as a playground for the local children as well as a source of firewood for their parents. Why Louisa came to end her days here is something of a mystery. Anecdotal evidence suggests that she was placed here to act as a boundary mark between the Bute and Windsor estates, other sources suggest that she was put here as a ploy to stop a barrage scheme across the Taff and Ely rivers in 1905.

The problem with the Louisa is that although everyone in the area has called the wreck "Louisa" we cannot be sure that this is her name. I have yet to find a record that a ship of that name was laid up in this position



Starboard side of the Dispatch showing exposed frames & diagonal strapping and if such a record came to light there is the added problem of which one of the many ships that bore that very popular name she is.

Working from a different direction, we do know that a ship called Louisa was registered in Cardiff from 1872 until 1905. In 1905 Louisa was reported to be under the supervision of the Glamorgan canal, the entrance of which was on the opposite bank of the river Taff where the remains now lie. This Cardiff registered ship was built in 1851 on Prince Edward Island by James Yeo. Louisa was built mainly of Larch, the indigenous wood on that island. Timber samples taken from the wreck along with the beam measurement confirm that this could be James Yeo's Louisa, the only problem is that literally thousands of ships of this size were built on Prince Edward Island out of Larch.

The remains of the Louisa, or what we assume to be Louisa, lie permanently underwater and are only accessible to divers that can comply with the very stringent regulations imposed by Cardiff Harbour Authority. Thus further investigations as to her identity can only proceed within the confines of record offices.

A Frolic at Nash Point

Further West our next stop is Nash Point. The two lighthouses that stand here were built following the public outcry over the wreck of the wooden steam packet Frolic on Nash sands in 1831. The Frolic had picked up passengers in Tenby and was en-route for Bristol when either mechanical failure, bad weather or a combination of both caused her to go ashore on Nash sands. No-one survived and as there was no passenger list, we do not know for sure just how many people perished in the tragedy. Estimates at the time put the death toll at more than fifty. The two lights were subsequently built some distance apart so that by keeping the lights perfectly aligned ships could navigate safely between the sand banks.

Today it is possible to park on the cliff top by the lighthouses and walk down to a rocky and stony foreshore that, despite the establishment of a light here, has been the scene for many shipwrecks over the years, the most recent being that of the BP Driver in 1962. The cliffs here are truly magnificent and I have visited this area many times over the years and each time I seem to find something new along the shore. To the West of Nash Point at a place where the sandy beach meets the stones are the remains of a steel ship, probably the Severn estuary tanker Widdale H which went ashore in dense fog in 1959. The presence nearby of a very crude rudder would seem to confirm that this is the case.

The main point of interest though is the presence of a steam engine crankshaft and a metal rudder slightly to the West of the point and down towards the low water mark. Could these be parts of the Frolic? They



The Harriet built on the Kennet and Avon canal

certainly seem to be of the right dimensions for a vessel of that size though the actual wreck happened on the sands offshore from where the remains are now. The chances of this being the case are fairly small though I have yet to find any record of a small steamship being wrecked here.

Before returning home turn left at the Lighthouse pub, continue along the road for about a mile until you come to the "Plough and Harrow." A visit to this pub is obligatory; real ale, real food, wood fires and a great atmosphere await you!

Tragedy at Sker Point

Our final port of call is Kenfig sands. The best way to access this wreck is to park the car in the visitor centre at Kenfig Burrows which is quite near the "Prince of Wales" pub (back onto pubs again sorry!). This is a huge area of sand dunes and it is necessary to trudge a mile and a half through them in order to reach the beach. To the East is the newly restored Sker house with Sker point stretching out in front.

There have been numerous reports of wrecks occurring on Sker point over the years. The worst however was in comparatively recent times when in April 1947 the Liberty ship Samtampa, bound for Newport from Middlesbrough developed problems with her engines off Swansea. Being in ballast the vessel was very high out of the water and her anchors were unable to prevent her being blown onto Sker Point in a ferocious storm. Not only did all 39 crew members of the Samtampa lose their lives as the ship was pounded to pieces on the rocks, but the incident also claimed all 8 crew members of the Mumbles lifeboat, Edward Prince of Wales, which had gone to its aid. Parts of the engine and anchor chain are still visible at low water and as you look at what is left of this ship you may contemplate the thought that if the ship had been blown ashore a few hundred yards to the West onto a nice soft sandy beach then the outcome may not have been so tragic.

The main reason though of highlighting this area is that a few hundred yards to the West of Sker Point are the remains of a small sailing vessel of just over twenty metres. This wreck lay undiscovered up until fifteen years ago when it was exposed by shifting sands. Most wooden shipwrecks comprise of the lower part of the hull that is the keel, keelson and floor timbers up until the turn of the bilge and the sides and decks of the vessel have usually been destroyed by the action of the elements making it difficult if not impossible to know what the ship looked like originally. In the case of the Kenfig ship it has either fallen over or blown ashore so that it has come to rest on its Port side, which is now mostly intact and lying in the sand, the Starboard side however has completely gone. The size of this ship (about 20 metres) suggests that it probably spent its working life in British coastal waters and could be an indigenous ship to the Bristol Channel. With the whole of one side still in existence then even a simple survey could easily recreate the shape of the ship before it disappears once more back into the sands.

I have only touched on a handful of the many remains of ships around the Bristol Channel. If there is sufficient interest in this subject then it might be possible to highlight other examples in further issues of this publication. Should anyone be interested in visiting any of these sites, particularly the ones at Peterstone and Tremorfa, then I would be happy to lead the way. As I said at the beginning of this article try and co-incide your visit to be at about two hours before low water.

Bibliography

On Severn Shore article by Colin Green in Traditional Boats and Tall Ships Feb/March 2003

Early Bristol Paddle Steamer Shipwrecks by George Harries

Jerry Cross

AN INTERNATIONAL SHIP TEAM

As a result of our successful bid for Heritage Lottery funding a whole team of new people, an addition to the existing team, will be in place from April 3rd. As before there was international interest from archaeologists and conservators keen to work on a large maritime project. The Newport Ship is one of the largest archaeological ship projects in the world, and offers interested specialists a rare chance to gain practical experience working on this unique ship. The new and expanded team builds on the accumulated expertise of the existing members the Newport Ship team and will comprise people from 8 different nationalities. Introductions will be in the next newsletter.