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**S.O.S.**



the Newsletter of the  
**Friends of the Newport Ship**

## Our ***BIGGEST*** Grant Yet!

Earlier this year the Friends were asked to help buy a new FaroArm Laser Line Probe for the Ship Team.

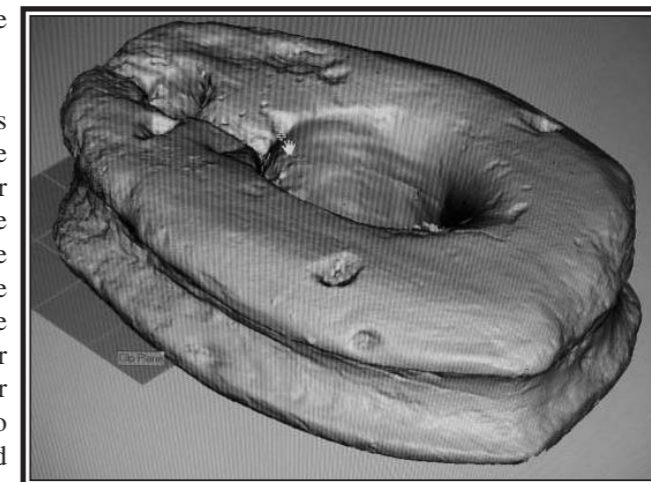
For those of you who have never heard of a FaroArm it is an incredible piece of equipment that allows the Ship team to record the surface of ship timbers in three dimensions - using advanced digital technology.

Now an even more advanced system is available that allows the timbers and artefacts to be recorded in minute detail without even touching the surface of the object. This allows objects, including many of very soft wood such as pieces from the rigging of the ship, to be recorded for the first time.

This equipment is very expensive, over £55,000, and, even by part-exchanging the equipment the project already had, the team were still £10,000 short of the price.

Now thanks to a grant of £10,000 from the Friends the new Laser Probe has been bought. This means the team can now record and safeguard many vulnerable objects recovered from the Ship.

Although the Friends finances were stretched we feel it is the best use of our funds, and we will be actively raising more money to support the project. We would also like to thank the former Newport Maritime Trust for their donation of £2,883 to the Friends, which helped make the grant possible.



**No. 12**

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### *Inside this edition*

- The Friends' Biggest Ever Grant  
*£10,000 given for new Laser Probe*
- Letter from the editors  
*A thank you to the ship team.*
- The Ship Project  
*A review by Mike Lewis*
- The Newport Ship: The Next Steps  
*A letter from Councillor Ron Jones*
- The Bristol Channel in World War I  
*By Alan Smith*
- A Long Tradition  
*An article by Doug Mcleod*

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*Above: The new FaroArm in action!*

*Left: A deadeye from the Ship's rigging, recorded using the new technique.*



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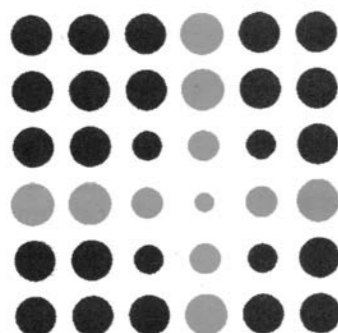
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## FROM THE EDITORS

This is a sad time in many ways since the Heritage Lottery Grant to the Project has now ended and many of the team who have worked on the Ship have left. We will miss them all and would like to express our thanks for their great contribution. Please keep in touch.

We would like to give a special thanks to Kate Hunter, who has now retired as the Project Officer for the Ship because of ill health. We will have more to say about Kate in future newsletters, particularly as she was involved with the ship from the start, and played a key role in the recovery and preservation of the ship. However she will not be allowed to escape as we have now co-opted her onto the Friends' committee.

This newsletter contains a number of interesting articles and we wish to thank all the contributors. However we will still be pleased to receive further contributions - so if it is not in the newsletter you need to tell us.

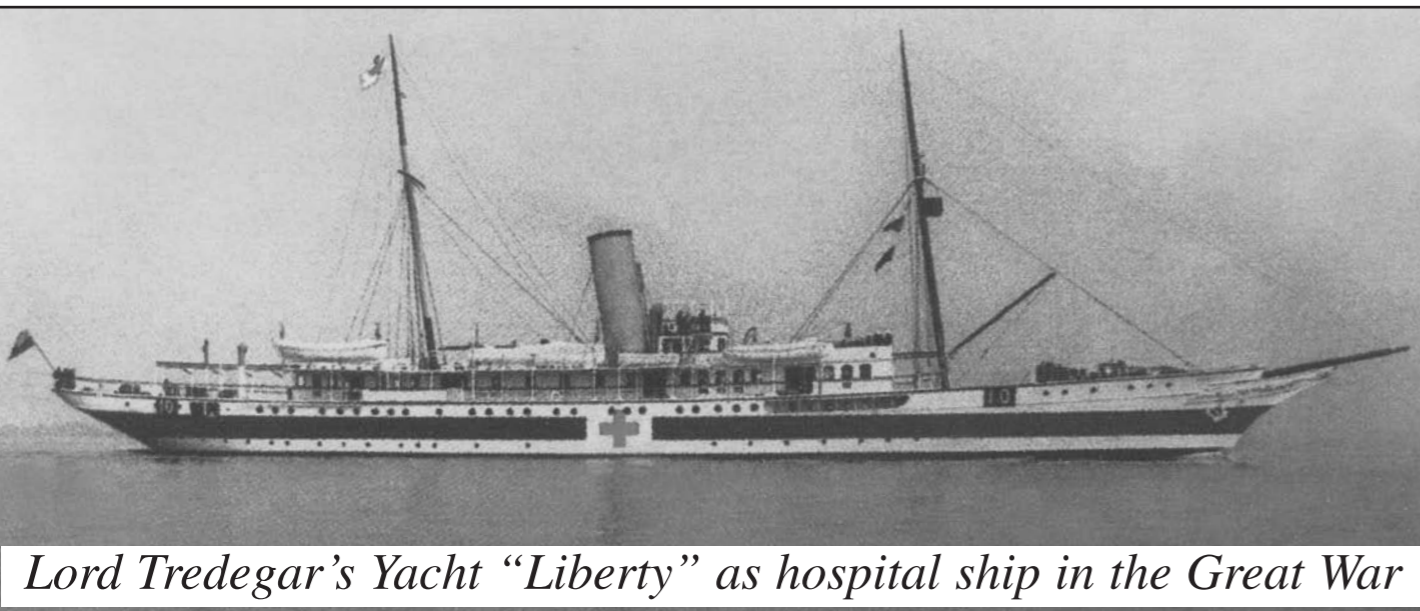
One area of concern to us is what happens when the timbers are conserved, and in particular where will the ship be displayed. Our Chairman Simon Rutherford wrote to Councillor Ron Jones, Newport City Council's Cabinet Member for Culture & Recreation for further clarification. His reply gives a good insight into what the Council hope to do, although clearly no decision has been made on where to display the Ship.

We also have a report from Mike Lewis, who is responsible to the Council for the Project, reviewing the current situation.

During the conservation process many of the Ship's timbers will not be visible, but the Friends will still be active. There are Open Days on 26<sup>th</sup> April and 24<sup>th</sup> May 2008, 11am - 4pm, and more yet to be announced.

We will be selling merchandise and coin replicas at Penhow Village Fete on the 5<sup>th</sup> June, the Chepstow Fair on the 9<sup>th</sup> August, the St Mellons Country Show at Tredegar House on the 13<sup>th</sup> August and the Vintage Rally Show at Tredegar House on the 21<sup>st</sup> September. Please support us.

**Please Note: All views given in the newsletters of the Friends are those of the contributors and do not necessarily represent the views of the Friends as an organisation.**



*Lord Tredegar's Yacht "Liberty" as hospital ship in the Great War*

## The Ship Project - a review

It's hard to believe that it's over two years since we had the happy news that the heritage lottery fund approved our application for funding to complete the recording of the Newport Ship. Now, as that phase of the project is ending it is perhaps time to think about the next step needed to reach our goal of a fully conserved ship on display here in Newport. But let's just remind ourselves of Kate and her team's brilliant achievement over that two year period.

It's no lie to say that the recording of the Newport Ship is the most complete for any large wet wood assemblage ever achieved in Britain. The team have developed and refined the FaroArm recording technique to the point where others from around the world are asking our advice and our assistance with training. We always wanted the project to be regarded as a standard for excellence and in this regard I think the team achieved this goal with room to spare! The Heritage Lottery Fund specialist monitoring officer was equally pleased by the high standards reached by Neil Stevenson and Jane Macleod in terms of the learning & access project and insists that Neil promotes his work as a model of best practice, so hats off to everyone involved. The project will wrap up over the next month with the opening of a new exhibition at the museum together with the production of a leaflet that will explain and interpret what we have been doing and what we have been able to find out about the ship.

Of course it is sad that the end of the project will be marked by a Diaspora of the project team, however I am sure that they will all take forward the skills gained here in Newport and go on to achieve success in their chosen careers.

I had always feared that the ending of the HLF funding would bring the project to a juddering halt, but this is definitely not going to be the case. Newport City Council has agreed to continue funding the project and this means we will be able to go forward with a project team of five. Toby Jones has been made Keeper of the Newport Ship and will lead the archaeological research project.

We will appoint a conservator in the Spring to enable a start to be made on treating the timbers. We called together all the leading experts in wet wood conservation to a meeting here in Newport on a wet January day. This meeting provided us with a blue print for conservation and we now hope to start the work very soon. We know the quantities of chemicals needed - 25 tonnes of Polyethylene Glycol as well as possibly 5 tonnes of a chemical needed to remove iron.

Chemical treatment will compromise public access to the ship and we are now looking at ways to manage this problem. We will try and maintain access to the building as we all feel that the public engagement that the open days provide is very important to the success of the project.

We are also looking at the possibility of reassembling the Barland's Farm boat at the Maesglas centre to give ourselves a clearer idea of the challenges we are likely to face when conservation treatment is completed. We hope that this project will help fill the void left as the timbers are crammed into 8 or 9 tanks and are left to stew in the various chemical solutions.

We have also been searching for alternative streams of funding. Nigel Nayling and Toby have been instrumental in developing two bids now being considered by the Arts and Humanities Research Council, one of these projects is designed to tell us everything about the various tars used on the ship; whilst the other will help with the reconstruction process and allows for the data gathered by the recording arms to be used to manufacture scaled down plastic components - as a sophisticated *Airfix* model kit! Other agencies are also being pursued and I am sure some of this investment will bear fruit.

Mike Lewis



*Kate Hunter during the excavation of the Ship.*

# The Newport Ship: The Next Steps

## *A letter from Councillor Ron Jones*

Dear Mr Rutherford,

### **RE: NEWPORT SHIP: NEXT STEPS**

Thank you for your letter of February 20th. It is heartening to know that the Friends of the Newport Ship are still very engaged with the project. I noted the very kind donation of £10k towards the purchase of the new FaroArm with a laser line scanner, and I would like to thank you for this generous support.

I think the recording project has been a great success, and I agree whole heartedly with your comments regarding the quality of work taking place. The fact that Newport is taking forward an internationally important project and at the same time delivering a quality of work that is seen as a benchmark for excellence is something of which I am very proud.

I appreciate your group's efforts in supporting the open days; communicating the project to the public is essential if the maximum benefit is to be derived from the investment being made, and I see the open days as a key component in the learning and access delivery. I should also like to comment that the work being carried out by Neil Stevenson is also a very important part of this delivery and again I am thrilled to hear that this work is regarded highly by fellow professionals and can also be considered best practice.

The next step is conservation, and whilst we are hoping that we can start the processes in the near future, we still have to secure funding to purchase chemicals. To this end, we hope that the Heritage Lottery Fund will allow us to use a little of the grant to procure the materials we need. However should this not be the case, then we will have to try and find additional funding from elsewhere. The Council is continuing to support the project, but it is not possible for the Council to bear all the costs associated with the project and we have always stated that delivery of the finished project will require a number of funding partnerships to be forged.

Another important aspect of the project which you have not mentioned is the considerable post excavation assessment work that needs to continue in tandem with the conservation project, particularly if the final display of the ship is to have any academic rigour. It is more complicated than thinking of the project being delivered in three major phases. Experts like Sean McGrail would certainly not be content with little regard being paid to the research aspect of the project and would argue this work is as important as the phases you have mentioned. This area of activity remains a challenge as it will be difficult to find external funding through organisations like the Heritage Lottery Fund. I know that applications are being made to Arts and Humanities Research Councils to help with this work, and Officers are also working with Cadw who might be able to offer additional support.

If adequate funding is in place the conservation work will take approximately 4 years to complete. However, to complete the conservation, the project will require a freeze drier and this will cost in the region of a quarter of a million pounds. Again, this is outside any current budgetary framework. Once the evaluation is completed for the recording project we will then develop a further HLF bid to assist with this aspect of the project, but funding is not guaranteed. The HLF guidelines do not enable us to apply for a further phase until the first phase evaluation has been completed. Whilst we are mindful of final display options, our key focus at present is on the conservation phase. We need to know more about the conservation timetable before we can plan in detail for rebuilding and display.

In conclusion I hope you will agree a lot of good work has been achieved and we have all played our parts in moving the project forward to the current position. In terms of the Ship project including final display we would wish to maximise the benefit the ship can deliver in terms of raising the City's profile, attracting visitors to Newport and at the same time providing the best learning opportunity for the community. Given the international importance of this project, the delivery of this final phase of the project should depend on National resources being made available. Newport City Council has demonstrated considerable commitment to the project and the cabinet has committed to continue supporting it against a challenging economic background. I look forward to continue to work together to ensure others also demonstrate a similar commitment to this wonderful project for Newport, Wales and further afield.

Yours Sincerely

**Councillor Ron Jones**  
Cabinet Member for Culture & Recreation.

# *The Bristol Channel*

## *in World War I*

The Bristol Channel saw its fair share of action in World War I. The Bristol Channel Islands had been heavily fortified to protect the South Wales coast. The Bristol Channel is an arm of the Atlantic extending into the Southwestern part of Great Britain between England and Wales. The paddle steamers has disappeared and were commandeered for war service; it was the River Usk at Newport that saw the first aggressive action against Germany.

With War having been declared a German Steamer with no wireless equipment and quite oblivious to the fact that hostilities had been declared, sailed up the Bristol Channel. The police at Newport commandeered a tug boat and rifles from the Territorial Army and sailed out to arrest the Steamer. The Captain and first mate were invited to board the tug and the Captain having had his position explained to him surrendered his ship and crew. The Steamer was brought up the River Usk and moored at the floating pontoon where the Paddle Steamer's sailed from. The crew were taken as prisoners of war and the Steamer the S.S. BELGIA being a prize of war was taken over by the Merchant Navy. She was eventually sunk by a German U-boat possibly on her first sailing. All this happened within two hours of hostilities being declared. This was possibly the first aggressive action against the enemy. However, the German captain was never told that the rifles borrowed from the Territorial Army had no bullets in them.

Activity in the Bristol Channel during the First World War was not without its casualties. One such casualty was the hospital ship Glenart Castle, on the afternoon of the 25<sup>th</sup> February 1918 she slipped out of Cardiff at about 4.30 in the afternoon bound for Brest to take on patients. She was sailing with a crew of about 130 and about 70 medical staff. The Channel on that afternoon was particularly rough and she sailed high in the water with all navigation lights on and a large red cross flag clearly visible. Though the Channel was rough, visibility was good, she was painted white and had a broad green band around her with red crosses on so there could not have been any mistake that she was a hospital ship. However, she had not left the Channel before she was torpedoed and sunk by U55; she went down in about seven minutes and only 38 survived. The torpedo hit in number three hold and she immediately started to list preventing all the lifeboats from being lowered. The sinking was a complete violation of an agreement between Germany and Britain that hospital ships would be immune from attack. A memorial to those who lost their lives in the sinking of this ship was dedicated in February 2002 at Hartland point North Devon.

A fortnight later on the 10<sup>th</sup> March at approximately 5.30pm the British hospital ship Gilford Castle with Captain Thomas M. Lang R.N.R. flying the red cross flag and with all the hospital lights on had a remarkable escape. On a Sunday afternoon an attack was made in full daylight. The fourth officer observed the wake of a torpedo that just missed the stern of the ship from a distance of 600 yards. A minute afterwards a second torpedo was fired and hit the ship a heavy blow on the port side abreast of the mainmast causing her to vibrate considerably. However the torpedo failed to explode but holed the ship below the water line. Discipline on board was excellent, there was no panic and the patients were placed in the lifeboat's very quickly and were half lowered when it was discovered that the ship's pumps could keep the water down. A wireless call for help was sent out. A destroyer appeared and full steam ahead was ordered. The Steamer made her way to Avonmouth where the wounded and hospital staff disembarked. Again, the ship could not have been mistaken for anything other than a hospital ship as it had recently been repainted.

On the 27<sup>th</sup> June 1918 the hospital ship Llandovery Castle was torpedoed by U86 just off Newquay Cornwall. After Llandovery Castle went down U86 returned and started to ram the lifeboats. After the war the captain and first officer were put on trial for war atrocities and both spent lengthy periods in prison. This was a particularly savage attack.

Another hospital ship Rewa was sunk just off Newquay. On 4<sup>th</sup> January 1918 with the loss of four crew, she was built in 1908 and was used in the Spithead review; she was torpedoed 33 miles off Newquay in 60m of water by U20. Hospital Ship Drina built by Harland and Wolff in 1912 was torpedoed on St. David's day 1917 by U65 off Stockholm Island Pembroke and lies 60m down. Fifteen crew members were lost.

A hospital ship with a difference was the Hamadryad She served from 1860 until 1905. This vessel, a Man of War with 46 guns had been built at Pembroke Dock in 1823. She was taken to Devonport to be fitted out but never completed and was towed to Cardiff in 1866 to be converted as a floating Seaman's hospital ship with room for 50 patients. She was moored at a site donated by the Marquis of Bute to the west of the entrance to the Glamorgan Canal. In 1904 a new Seamen's hospital was built to replace the ship and also as a memorial to Queen Victoria's Diamond Jubilee. The redundant ship was towed to Devon to be broken up. The ship's bell and figurehead are preserved.

A Newport hospital ship that survived the war was the yacht Liberty owned by Lord Tredegar (Sir Charles Morgan). Hospital ships were usually passenger liners completely unarmed and unable to protect themselves and despite an agreement between Germany and Great Britain that hospital ships would be immune to attack, U-boat commanders deliberately targeted these ships.

**Alan Smith - Feb 2008**

# Newport Ship

*and the long tradition...*

Seeing the Newport Ship released from the silt of ages was like renewing an old acquaintance.

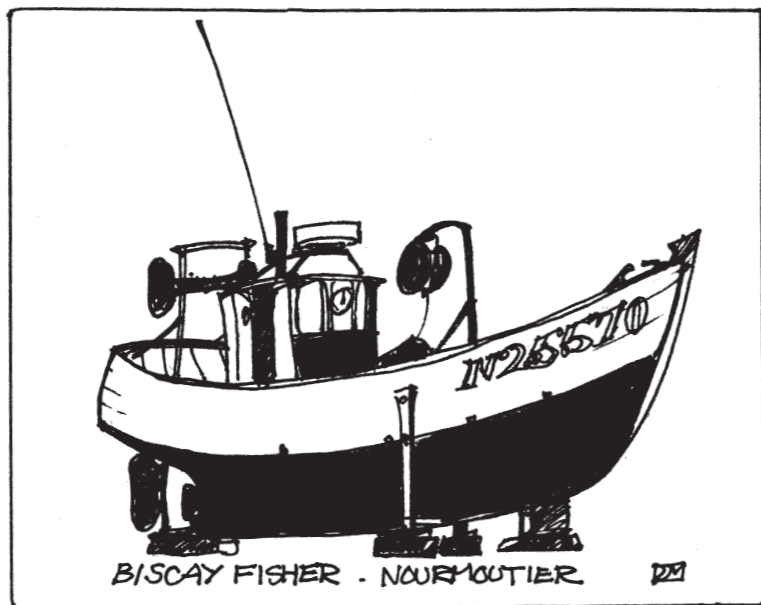
Together with my young brother I spent my wartime boyhood in a Yorkshire town close to a busy fishing harbour. In the way of small boys the harbour was our favoured haunt, the boats and bustling activity the focus of our long leisured hours. There we developed what was to be a lifelong fascination with boats, their sailing, handling and construction.

The local inshore fishing craft was the sturdy Yorkshire coble used for longline cod fishing, crab potting, summer angling and tripping. The Newport Ship however, recalled the larger M.F.V.'s motor fishing vessels, 60 - 70' long, being built by local shipwrights on the hard at the head of the harbour. These vessels were destined, not for fishing, but for a variety of utilitarian roles and as tenders for the admiralty. We watched absorbed, as over weeks, the structure of these craft took shape, from the laying of the keel, the erection of the stem and sternposts and timbers, the skeletal structure that determined the final form. Then came the planking, laying of decks, building the simple superstructure, fitting out and the final finishing with coats of admiralty grey paint before the completed craft were eased down the slip into their element.

The shipwrights I watched more than sixty years ago still used hand tools: augers, adzes, caulking mallets and irons. Fastenings were copper rivets and roves, galvanised dump nails and even treenails. The inner face of the planking was shaped and left with a scallop pattern by the adze. There was about the site a constant rhythmic ringing of hammers and the rasping of saws. Caulking the carve hulls with oakum and cotton, called for considerable toil with mallet and irons. While the largest timbers were power sawn or shaped on a band saw, there was little else in the work of the boatyard that would have been unfamiliar to a medieval shipwright - who could have found useful employment in this workplace.

On expeditions on bikes into the hinterland of rolling Yorkshire Wolds, we sometimes encountered a team of young women of the Land Army, foraging in the countryside in an ancient truck. They were felling and trimming woodland and hedgerow trees with hand axes and saws to provide suitably shaped timbers, knees and crucks for the boatbuilders. Medieval shipbuilders were dependent upon just such a supply.

These versatile M.F.V.'s - there are many still around - though some are reduced to houseboats and motor yachts, were generously proportioned, beamy, with a full rounded bow and stern, round bilged. The hull form not unlike conventional representations of medieval craft. They were diesel engined, relatively slow but fine seaboats.



Boat building in the developed world underwent a major change in the 1960's with the introduction of G.R.P. - glass reinforced plastic - a material, that was to determine the way small craft, yachts and working boats were produced. Though the material is more expensive than timber, boats can be produced quickly, "laid up" over moulds by unskilled or semiskilled labour, enabling quantity production to meet the demand fuelled by increasing prosperity. Working boats, sailing and motor yachts could be manufactured on industrial estates miles from the sea. Sailing / boat owning became popular and affordable recreations. There was little benefit however, for the woodworking shipwright who was fortunate if he could find employment maintaining and repairing the declining stock of wooden boats.

And yet wooden boatbuilding of the type that produced our Newport Ship survives. In the materially poorer less developed world where maritime, river or lakeside communities are dependent on boats for essential fishing and transport, vernacular boats are being constructed in an entirely traditional way. In much of the world modern materials are prohibitively expensive and the means to work them non-existent. Somewhere beyond the reach of western technology and capital craft much like the Newport Ship are still being built.

On the Basque, North and Atlantic coasts of Spain and Portugal, close to the Gascon coast of France, suggested as the Newport Ship's birthplace, scores of small shipyards have wooden fishing boats on their stocks. These handsome beautifully maintained Atlantic and Biscay boats with high raised bows and deep curved sheer, perfectly adapted for their waters, are the remarkable productions of a long tradition of boatbuilding and design. Modern technology does not have anything better to offer.

Nearer home, fine wooden boats are still being built and many old craft restored. There is a revival of interest in building, owning, crewing and sailing craft built in a traditional way. Bristol Channel Pilot Cutters - some fine examples were built in Newport - Morecambe Bay Prawners, Mersey Nobby's, Looe Luggers, Thames spritsail barges and scores of other traditional types are being sailed, many jointly owned by clubs or groups of enthusiasts. Festivals, regattas, rallies where these craft can be viewed in harbour or under way, have a huge following. A consequence of this revival, a rising generation of young people are showing the commitment necessary to acquire the skills of the boatbuilder, some serving apprenticeships, others at colleges that offer courses. Some fine small craft are being built by skillful amateurs.

The steeply rising cost of petrochemicals means that G.R.P. is fast becoming uneconomical, manufacturers are now concentrating on producing the more profitable large luxury yachts and motor cruisers for the very rich. The annual boatshow, the industries showcase, now has little on offer for buyers of modest means. However, small independent boatbuilders can produce a clinker sailing boat, built of good timber to a high specification for half the cost of a G.R.P. production boat of a similar type. Most discriminating observers would agree that wooden boats possess charm and individuality and are aesthetically more pleasing than their plastic successors. Though requiring maintenance, paint and varnish, wood is robust, flexible and resistant to abrasion - important for a working boat that may be operated from a shingle beach or fishing harbour - and more readily repairable than glassfibre. Many fishermen having experimented with G.R.P. have found it unsatisfactory for the knockabout life of a working boat and have returned to timber construction. Well built wooden boats can have great longevity. An Irish fisherman from the west coast village of Ardmore explained the advantages to me - if a wooden boat is damaged "you can just nail a bit of tin over the hole and carry on until you have time to repair it, you can't do that with plastic!" In conversation I remarked that the boat in which I was cruising was 50 years old. He replied "round here 50 is very young for a boat."



Flamborough Coble

I learned that the graceful planked currachs drawn up on the beach, were all 70 or 80 years old. A hooker berthed at the quay was more than a century old and still in use, though now engined. In Ireland a strong vernacular tradition of boat building has survived, simple clinker "punts" are constructed over the winter by amateurs and handymen, in summer they are fished and raced under a variety of rigs.

The archaeologist and dendrologist and the skilled technicians all have a vital role in interpreting and enlarging our understanding of the Newport Ship and other ancient craft as they are discovered. We can also gain much from considering the ship not simply as a relic from a remote past but with its near contemporaries - cogs and caravels - as a stage in the evolution of ship design and building. The seaman and the ship and boat builder can contribute to an appreciation of the ships' design, pilotage and handling characteristics.

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**Doug Mcleod.**