

The Newport Medieval Ship

What Was She?

In 2002 the remains of a large medieval ship were discovered during the construction of an orchestra pit for the Riverfront Theatre and Arts Centre, on the banks of the River Usk, at Newport in South Wales.

She was at least 26 metres long and was a minimum of 8 metres broad in her mid-section. She could have originally been about 35 metres long.

She had been abandoned in a small inlet or pill, with the bow of the ship facing inland.

The ship is tapered towards both the bow and the stern. She was clinker-built (with the hull planking over-lapping) and she had had a large central mast with a square sail and possibly would have had other smaller masts. The mast was missing when the ship was excavated, although a *mast step* to support a mast still survives. There were at least 65 frames in the ship, about 20 – 30 cms apart from each other.

How Old Was She?

The exact construction date of the ship is not known although *dendrochronology* of the timbers (tree ring dating) is still underway. However a small French coin called a *petit blanc* was found deliberately concealed in the keel of the ship, probably as a good luck charm. This has been dated to the period 1446 – 1451, which means the ship could not have been built earlier than 1446. A wooden timber used as a shore under the ship was felled in the spring or summer of 1468, so the ship could not have been abandoned in Newport before 1468.

Where Was She Built?

It is not thought the ship was built in Britain as otherwise it should have been possible to match the tree rings with known British tree ring sequences. The clinker- hull is typical of many medieval ships in Northern Europe but the close spaced framing is more typical of ships of the southern Atlantic seaboard of Europe.

Who Owned Her and What Was She Called?

We do not know who owned the ship or what she was called. There were Portuguese coins and a German jetton (counting token) from Nuremberg found within the hull and the ship was probably repaired in Britain. The ship may have had different owners and different names at different times. One suggested but unproven name was *The Marie of Bayonne*.

What Was She Used For?

The Newport Ship was a large merchant vessel that would have sailed between different ports and countries, possibly carrying:

wool, cloth, hides and other goods from Britain,
fish, linen and other goods from Ireland,
wine, salt and other goods from France,
dyestuffs, cloth and manufactured goods from north west Europe,
timber, pitch and tar etc. from the Baltic,
iron, wine, oil, fruit, spices and luxury goods from the Mediterranean.

Amongst the finds on the Newport Ship were organic materials, including cereal grains, hazelnut shells, walnut shells, grape pips, and fig seeds, as well as fish and other animal bones.

Many of these remains may have been food for used by the crew - but they are also signs that the ship travelled to southern Europe. Other material included uncut pieces of cork which would have been taken on board as cargo in Portugal. Most of the pottery found inside the ship was also Portuguese.

Was the Ship Involved in Fighting?

There is some evidence of possible involvement in fighting. Two finely engraved copper-alloy strips may have come from a high status helmet. Archaeologists found an archer's leather bracer (used to protect his wrist from a bowstring) as well as a number of stone shot of at least three sizes. These would have been fired from cannons.

The ship was damaged before she came to Newport, and a serious crack in the mast step suggests that the mast had broken. Whether this was the result of fighting or because of a storm is not known. What is known is that the 15th century was a period of political instability and wars. Merchant ships would also have needed to protect themselves from numerous pirate ships that sailed along the Atlantic coast.

What Was She Doing At Newport?

The Ship is unlikely to have had Newport as her home port and she was much bigger than the ships that would have normally come to the town. It appears that she must have been towed to Newport in order to be repaired. One interesting document dated 22 November 1469, from Richard Neville, Earl of Warwick, (known in history as Warwick the Kingmaker) refers to “the making of a ship at Newport”. This was during the Wars of the Roses and could relate to the attempted repair of the Newport Medieval Ship. The repairs were never completed because at some point a decision was made to break up the ship. Many internal timbers were removed and a crude doorway was cut in the side of the ship to allow better access for the ship breakers. For some unknown reason the ship breakers did not finish dismantling the ship and it was left to be covered with tidal mud from the river. There it remained for over 500 years. At some point the upper half of the port side of the ship was hacked off, possibly because they formed an obstruction when new quays were being built in the 18th century.

Why is the Newport Ship Important?

The Newport Ship is important because it is the largest and most complete ship of the 15th century to survive in Western Europe. The finds include artefacts, wooden tools, rope and cloth associated with the ship, and personal items that may have belonged to the crew or merchants and others using the Ship. It was a large ocean going vessel, capable of sailing anywhere in the then known world. The ship itself predates Christopher Columbus’s discovery of America and is probably one of the last big ships to be built with clinker planking.

How Was She Rescued?

With a grant from the National Assembly for Wales and further funding from Newport City Council the ship was fully excavated and removed timber by timber. Each timber was individually numbered and located on a plan of the ship, so that eventually the ship can be reassembled.

There are about 1600 timbers from the ship and many more that were loose inside or beneath the hull. All the timbers were kept in large water tanks to stop them drying out, as otherwise they would have shrunk, cracked or warped, and maybe disintegrated. Now the timbers are being fully cleaned, recorded and conserved. A grant from the Heritage Lottery Fund allowed this work to be undertaken.

What Happens Next?

The conservation process will take a number of years. Because of the size of the ship the timbers will be re-assembled in a cradle, to provide both internal and external support. Hopefully a new Ship Display Centre or Museum will be built to house the ship.

Can I See Her?

Yes - if you come to one of the official Open Days. The ship timbers are being treated in a warehouse by the Newport Medieval Ship Project, administered by Newport City Council.

The address of the Project is: Unit 22, Maesglas Industrial Estate, Newport, South Wales. NP20 2NN. Telephone: 01633 215708.

In addition there is an active educational programme involving both school groups and adult groups. There are also a number of volunteers working with the project and there is a Friends group called

The Friends of the Newport Ship. The Friends raise funds for the project, organise events and publish newsletters.

See the Friends’ website at www.thenewportship.com for details.

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The Friends of the Newport Ship

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Llong Casnewydd o'r Oesoedd Canol

Pwy Oedd Hi?

Yn 2002 darganfuwyd gweddillion llong fawr o'r canol oesoedd tra'n adeiladu rhan o theatre i'r gerddorfa yng Nghanolfan Glan yr Afon ar lannau'r Afon Wysg yng Nghasnewydd, De Cymru.

Roedd hi tua 25 metr o hyd ac o leiaf 8 metr ar draws ei chanol, ond yn wreiddiol credir iddi fod tua 35 metr o hyd.

Credir iddynt roi'r gorau iddi gan ei gadael mewn cilfach neu "pill" gyda blaen y llong yn gwynebu'r lan.

Roedd blaenfain i'r llong ar y blaen a'r tu ol yn null adeiladu llongau'r Llychlynnwyr gynt. Adeiladwyd hi ar steil clincer (sef planciau yn gorgyffwrdd ar hyd corff y llong) gyda hwyllbren fawr a hwyll sgwar iddi. Mae'r hwyllbren wedi mynd ond mae'r adeiladwaith cryf i gynnal yr hwyllbren yn dal yno o hyd.

Pa Mor Hen Yw Hi?

Ni wyddom eto pa bryd yr adeiladwyd hi oherwydd mae dendrochronology (sef coed-ddyddio) i'w chynnal arn. Sut bynnag, darganfuwyd ceiniog a elwir "petit blanc" wedi ei guddio'n bwrpasol yng nghilbren y llong, mwy na thebyg fel swyn rhag anlwc. Rhoddwyd dyddiad arno rhwng 1446 – 1451, sy'n golygu na chafodd y llong ei adeiladu cyn 1446. Roedd darn o bren o dan y llong wedi ei dorri yn y Gwanwyn neu'r Haf o 1468, felly ni chafodd y llong ei gadael yng Nghasnewydd cyn 1468.

Ble Chafodd Ei Adeiladu?

Ni chredir i'r llong gael ei hadeiladu ym Mhrydain oherwydd, fel arall, fyddai'n bosib i'r cylchoedd coed gymharu'n dda gyda patrymau cylchoedd coed Prydeinig a wyddom amdanynt. Mae'r corff llong clincer yn nodweddiadol o lawer o longau'r canol oesoedd yng ngogledd Ewrop ond mae'r ffram o led cul yn mwy nodweddiadol o longau arfordir de Atlantig Ewrop.

Pwy Oedd Yn Ei Pherchen A Beth Oedd Ei Henw?

Ni wyddom pwy oedd perchennog y llong na beth oedd ei henw. Darganfuwyd darnau arian o Portiwgal a jetton Almaeneg, neu darn rhifo o Nuremberg, yng nghorff y llong, a mwy na thebyg cafodd y llong ei atgyweirio ym Mhrydain. Efallai cafodd y llong nifer o wahanol berchnogion ac enwau gwahanol o bryd i'w gilydd. Awgrymwyd yr enw *The Marie of Bayonne* ond nid oes dim sail i hyn.

At Ba Bwrpas Y Defnyddiwyd Hi?

Llong fawr fasnachol oedd llong Casnewydd gallai hwylio i wahanol borthladdoedd a gwledydd – yn cario gwlan brethyn, lledr a nwyddau eraill o Brydain, pysgod, lliain a nwyddau eraill o'r Iwerddon, gwin, halen a nwyddau eraill o Ffrainc, defnydd lliwio gwlan a lliain a nwyddau cynhyrchu o ogledd orllewin Ewrop, coed, pyg a tar, a.y.y.b. o'r Baltig, a haearn, gwin, olew, ffrwythau, sbeis a nwyddau moethus o wledydd de Ewrop a Mor y Canoldir.

Ymhlith y darganfyddiadau a wnaed ar long Casnewydd oedd deunydd organig, gan gynnwys graen grawnol, cnau cyll, cnau ffrengig, hadau gwinwydd, hadau ffigys, yn ogystal a physgod ac esgyrn anifeiliaid eraill. Gallai'r gweddillion hyn fod yn rhan o fwyd criw y llong ond mae arwyddion i'r llong deithio i dde Ewrop. Mae darnau eraill o gorc heb ei dorri a ddaeth ar fwrdd llong fel llwyth o Bortiwgal. Daeth mwyafrif o'r llestri a ddarganfuwyd yn y llong o wlad Portiwgal hefyd.

A Fu'r Llong Yn Ymladd Ar Y Mor?

Mae ychydig o dystiolaeth iddi fod yn brwydro ar y mor. Mae dau sribedyn o aloi copr a ddaeth efallai o helm gapan milwr o safon uchel. Darganfuodd yr archeolegwyr gwisg arddwrn lledr a ddefnyddiwyd i ddiogelu'r arddwrn rhag llinyn y bwa, yn ogystal a nifer o fwledi cerrig o dri gwahanol maint i'w tanio o ganon. Cafodd y llong ei ddifrodi cyn iddi gyrraedd Casnewydd ac mae toriad difrifol yn stepen yr hwyll yn awgrymu fod yr hwyllbren wedi torri. Ni wyddom os oedd hyn o ganlyniad i ymladd ar y mor neu tystyl. Beth a wyddom yn sicr yw fod y 15fed. ganrif yn gyfnod o ansicrwydd politicaidd a rhyfeloedd. Roedd angen i longau masnachol amddiffyn eu hyn rhag for-ladron ar hyd arfordir yr Atlantic – gan gynnwys llongau forladron yn perthyn i'r boneddigion cyfoethog.

Beth Oedd Hi'n Gwneud Yng Nghasnewydd?

Mae'n anhebygol mai Casnewydd oedd ei chartref porthladdol, a roedd hi'n llawer mwy o faint na'r llongau arferai ddod i'r dref. Mae'n debyg iddi gael ei thynnu i Gasnewydd i'w atgyweirio. Ni gwblhawyd yr atgyweiriadau ond yn y cyfamser mae'n debyg, penderfynnodd rhywun i dorri'r llong. Torrwyd i ffwrdd nifer o brennau canolog y llong a thorwyd agoriad newydd i ochr y llong er mwyn i'r gweithwyr gario'r prennau allan. Am ryw reswm ni orffenwyd torri'r llong a gadawyd hi i'w chuddio gan fwd o'r llanw a'r trai ar yr afon. Gorweddodd yno am dros 500 mlynedd.

Mae un taflen diddorol gyda'r dyddiad 22 Tachwedd 1469 oddi wrth Richard Neville, Iarll Warwig, yn son am adeiladu llong yng Nghasnewydd. Roedd hyn yng nghyfnod Rhyfel y Rhosod ac efallai'n cyfeirio at yr atgyweiriadau i long canol-oesol Casnewydd.

Pam Mae Llong Casnewydd Yn Bwysig?

Mae llong Casnewydd yn bwysig oherwydd hi yw'r mwyaf o'i math a'r mwyaf cyflawn o'r 15fed. ganrif i oroesi yng ngorllewin Ewrop. Mae'r darganfyddiadau yn cynnwys artiffactau, offer pren, rhaffau a defnydd o'r llong ac itemau personol yn perthyn i'r criw neu'r marchnatwyr ac eraill ar fwrdd y llong. Llong fawr i deithio'r cefnfor oedd hi a gallai hwylio i unrhyw fan adnabyddis yn ei hamser. Mae'r llong ei hun yn cyn-oesi darganfyddiad Christopher Columbus o'r America ac yn bosibl dyma'r olaf o'i math o'r llongau mawr gyda adeiladwaith clincer.

Sut Chafodd Ei Hachub?

Gyda rhodd o'r Cynulliad Cenedlaethol i Gymru, rhoddion o Gyngor Dinas Casnewydd, cloddiwyd cyfan o'r llong fesul pren ar bren. Rhoddwyd rhif ar bob darn o bren a'u nodi ar gynllyn o'r llong fel y gellir yn y pendraw ail adeiladu'r llong. Mae tua 1600 darnau o bren o'r llong a llawer mwy o ddarnau bychain yn gorwedd ar waelod corff y llong. Cedwir pob darn o bren mewn tanciau mawr o ddwr rhag iddynt sychu, neu o ganlyniad fyddant yn culhau, yn cracio, neu'n camdroi ac yn fwy na thebyg yn chwalu'n deilchion. Nawr mae'r prennau yn cael eu glanhau, eu recordio a'u cadw. Cafwyd rhodd o Gronfa Cynnal y Loteri i wneud y gwaith hyn.

Bet Sy'n Digwydd Nesaf?

Bydd y broses o gadwraeth yn cymryd nifer o flynyddoedd. O ganlyniad i faint y llong fydd y prennau yn cael eu ail-adeiladu mewn crud, er mwyn eu cynnal o'r tu fewn a'r tu allan, mewn Canolfan Arddangos y Llong neu Amgueddfa.

A Gallaf Ei Gweld?

Cewch – os dewch i un o'r dyddiau agored swyddogol. Yn ogystal mae na raglen bywiog addysgol ar gyfer ysgolion ac oedolion. Mae nifer o wirfoddolwyr yn gweithio gyda'r prosiect a grwp cynorthwyol **Cyfeillion Llong Casnewydd**. Gweler wefan y Cyfeillion ar www.thenewportship.com am fanylion.

Robert Trett

Cyfieithu Alun Griffiths

Cyhoeddwyd Mai 2008 gan:

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