

Welsh Wreck Web Research Project (North Cardigan Bay)

On-line research into the :

Caernarvon School of Navigation



Ellen Edwards

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Report Title: **Welsh Wreck Web Research Project
(North Cardigan Bay)
On-line research into the of:
*Caernarvon School of Navigation***

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1.0 Abstract

The “www Research Project” is about, discovering by on line research details of ships, on the MADU data base of wrecks of North Wales , the circumstances of their loss ,details of the owners and crew, the cargo carried and their history.

To accompany the work completed above there are a few local people who had key roles in the North Wales sailing industry – Ellen Edwards is one such individual.

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3.0 Abbreviations

A list of any abbreviations used in this report, i.e.

GAT	Gwynedd Archaeology Trust
IJNA	International Journal of Nautical Archaeology
MADU	Malvern Archaeological Diving Unit
NAS	Nautical Archaeology Society
NPRN	National Primary Resource Number
OS	Ordnance Survey
RCAHMW	Royal Commission on the Ancient & Historical Monuments of Wales
URL	Uniform Resource Locator
etc.	

4.0 Summary of Research

Ellen Edwards 1809 - 1889

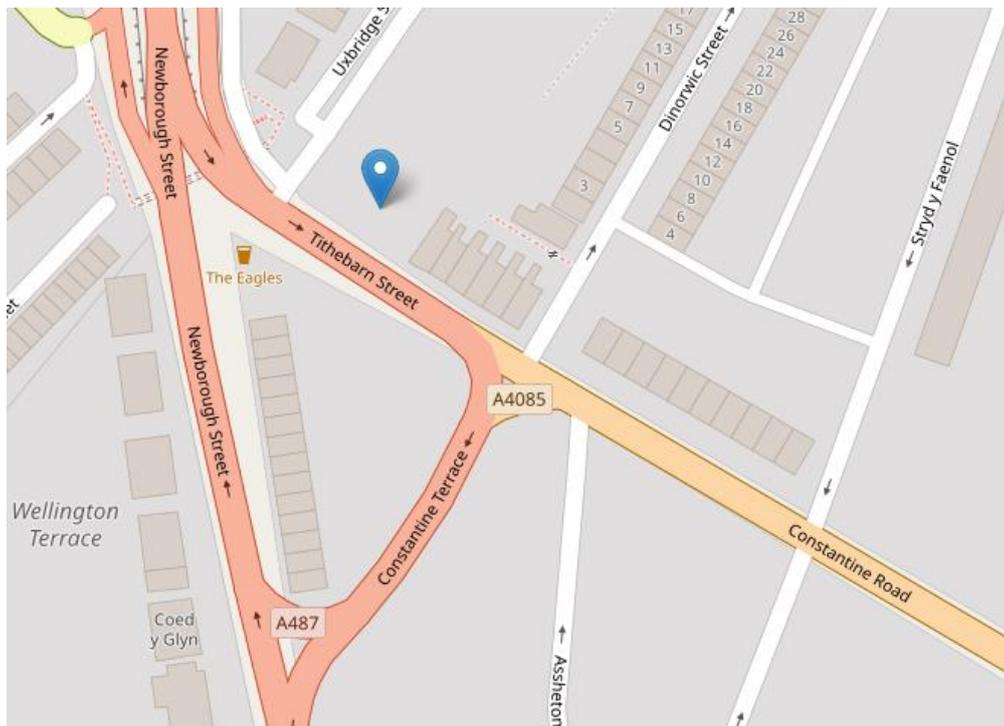
Referenced in The Port of Caernarfon 1793 -1900 Chapter 11 (Page 175

“On November 24, 1889 Mrs Ellen Edwards ‘teach of navigation’, died at 13 Tithebarn Street, Caernarfon, in her eightieth year. An obituary in the ‘Herald’ of November 29 was headed ‘DEATH OF A REMARKABLE OLF LADY AT CAERNARFON’ and Mrs Edwards was there described as ‘the very notable and successful teacher of navigation’ and as the most successful seamen’s teacher of in North Wales for the long period of sixty years

On Thursday, November 27 her remains were interred at Llanbeblig.

Mrs Ellen Edwards was a daughter of Captain William Francis who quit the sea to become a well known and highly respected teacher of mathematics and navigation at Amlwch until his death in 1847.”

Tithebarn Street c1900



“TEACHER OF NAVIGATION

<http://www.carnarvontraders.com/ellen1.shtml>

Ellen Edwards was born Ellen Francis at Amlwch, Anglesey, in the year 1810, the daughter of Captain William Francis. He had sailed the world's oceans for many a year, before deciding to retire in 1814, when Britain's war against the French was at its height. It was a dangerous time for the nation's seafarers, with the French attacking the British merchant ships, plundering the cargo and taking the crews as prisoners of war. With Ellen only a very young girl, her mother persuaded William to look for alternative work ashore, which he duly did, deciding upon a course which drew upon

his considerable maritime experience. He decided to open a school, offering the young men of the locality who had their eyes set upon a career at sea, the chance to be trained in the art of navigation.

The venture proved to be a very successful one, and before long the school was considered to be one of the best in North Wales, with the number of pupils growing year on year. Captain Francis made sure his own children received the same standard of education, and they became proficient in Mathematics and Navigation. As the number of pupils grew, this meant that Captain Francis did not need to look outside his immediate family for assistance in the day to day running of the school. As he had a disabled son, unable to go to sea himself, he gave the job to him. Because of this he did not have room for any more assistants at the school in Amlwch, but he knew there was a big demand for navigation schools in other North Wales ports.

Carnarvon was a port of some importance in the area, and it was decided that the need for a navigation school at the town was great enough for a new school to be viable. It is not certain if it was Captain Francis's idea to send his daughter Ellen to Carnarvon, or if it was Ellen herself who suggested it. In this we can only speculate, but the truth is that Ellen, at only around 20 years of age, came to Carnarvon. She settled in New Street, where her first school was founded. The stage was set for the town's would-be mariners to receive a first-class education in all aspects of seamanship.

From the evidence available, there was no shortage of students and the school soon became hugely popular. This popularity was down to Ellen's ability as a teacher, and her skill at imparting her knowledge. Proof of the success of the school can be seen in the 1841 Census, as her sister, Lydia Francis (aged 25), was residing with her. Both were described as a "Schoolmistress," showing there was need for an extra teacher. By now Ellen was married, with an 8 year old daughter, Ellen Francis Edwards. Her husband, Captain Owen Edwards, though, was away at sea on census night.

Trouble came in 1847, when a report commissioned to look into the state of education in Wales tried hard to blacken her name. It went so far as to suggest that she was unsuitable to run such a school. Two local men were primarily responsible for this sad state of affairs: The Reverend Thomas Thomas, Vicar of Llanbeblig, and James Foster, Headmaster of the National School. Part of their attack on Ellen was "All the navigation that has been learned here as a science has been taught by an old woman of Carnarvon," which was a bit below the belt as Ellen was only 37 years old at the time. Lewis Lloyd, in his excellent study of maritime Carnarvon, (The Port of Caernarfon, 1793-1900) sets forward the argument that this was nothing more than personal antagonism, as James Foster was a strong Churchman, and an out and out Tory, and as such could not stand William Francis's Liberalism and Nonconformity. Perhaps there is some foundation in this as the report refers to Ellen not only as an "old woman," but also as a "Baptist."

The report caused a furore and a great deal of agitation in Wales because of the arrogant remarks of the non-Welsh speaking Anglican commissioners regarding the Welsh language, Nonconformity and the morals of the

Welsh people in general. As a result, the Report came to be known as 'Brad y Llyfrau Gleision,' or 'Treachery of the Blue Books.'

The effects of the report upon the school's work did not last long, as a number of influential men came to Ellen's rescue, some of them ship captains who had been taught by Ellen herself. Another supporter was John Wynne, a local schoolmaster, and later the author of "Sir a Thref Caernarfon." Proof of the success of the school can be seen from the many reports published in the Carnarvon & Denbigh Herald during the 1850's. These reports published annually the names of the successful students, the numbers of which could amount to as many as thirty in one school year.

Ellen's daughter, Ellen Francis, married at Llanbeblig Church in 1853. Her new husband was, unsurprisingly, a mariner, Captain John Evans. Ellen continued to work for her mother as a teaching assistant, although she gradually took over the day to day running of the school. Seven years later tragedy struck the family. On January 22nd. 1860, Captain Owen Edwards's ship, the St. Patrick, was stranded on the sands at Colwyn Bay during a storm. The captain was washed overboard and drowned. He was 47 years old.

In 1880, with Ellen now of retirement age, Sir Llywelyn Turner, a former Mayor of the town, suggested in a meeting of the Harbour Trust that a letter should be sent to the Government in London recommending that she receive a pension in respect of her commendable service for fifty years. Sadly Turner's attempt failed, but Ellen did receive a one-off payment of £75 from the "Royal Bounty" fund.

Ellen Edward died at her home in Tithebarn Street, Carnarvon, on the 24th. November, 1889, at the age of 79 years, and she was buried at Llanbeblig Churchyard on the 27th. An obituary appeared in the Carnarvon & Denbigh Herald on the 29th. November. As expected, a large contingent of Ship Captains and mariners of all grades attended her funeral, and the following verse, which appears on her gravestone, speaks volumes for her prowess.

Distaw weryd Mrs. Edwards dirion

A gywir gerir, gwraig o ragorion.

Athrawes oedd i luoedd o lewion,

Y rhai uwch heli wnânt eu gorchwylion.

Urddas gaed trwy addysg hon. - Ni phaid llu

Môr ei mawrygu tra murmur eigion.

MADOG.

The silent earth of gentle Mrs. Edwards

is truly loved, a woman of excellence.

She was a teacher to a multitude of brave souls

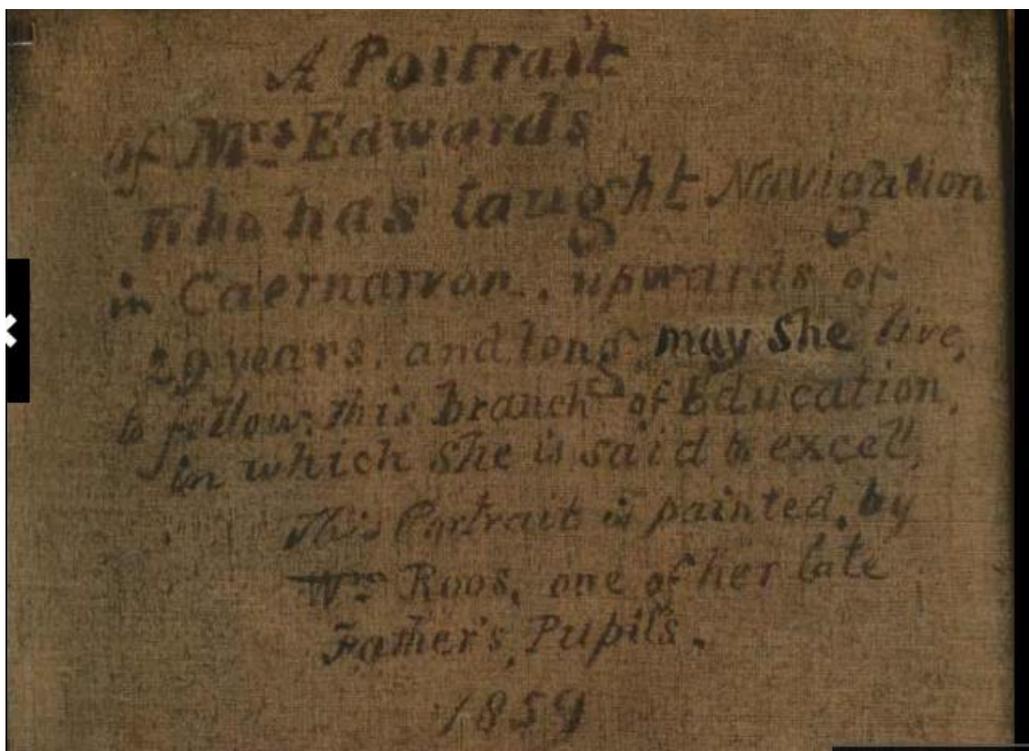
who attended to their duties above the brine.

Their dignity gained through her teaching - Seafarers will not

cease to praise her whilst ocean murmurs can be heard.



A portrait of Ellen Edwards by William Roos, 1859. © Gwynedd Archives Service”



<https://www.peoplescollection.wales/items/8085>