



Welsh Wreck Web Research Project (North Cardigan Bay)

On-line research into the wreck of the Brigantine

Haba,

**lost in August, 1885, in the vicinity of Bardsey
Island.**



Bardsey Island, as viewed from the former Coastguard Lookout on the mainland.
Bardsey Sound is the fast-flowing stretch of water in the foreground.

Report Title: *Welsh Wreck Web Research Project (North Cardigan Bay)*

On-line and practical research into the abandonment and supposed foundering of the brigantine 'Haba', lost in the vicinity of Bardsey Island in August, 1885.

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1.0 Abstract

The Malvern Archaeological Diving Unit (MADU) currently has a database of 453 shipwrecks in the north end of Cardigan Bay in north west Wales. These wrecks date from 1590 to 1993 and very few have been investigated in any depth!

The author of this report is an amateur diver who has visited many of the shipwrecks around the Welsh coast between Barmouth and the Dee Estuary. He wrote and published 'The Essential Underwater Guide to North Wales, Volumes One and Two', and co-wrote 'Life and Death on the Royal Charter'.

He is also the licensee of the submarine 'Resurgam', a historic vessel that lies on the seabed off Rhyl after being lost in 1880.

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2.2 Contributors.

Chris Holden.

2.3 Abbreviations used in this report:

MADU Malvern Archaeological Diving Unit

NAS Nautical Archaeology Society

CPH Chris Holden

3.0 Introduction

The author has spent many wonderful days exploring the seabed around Bardsey Island at the north-west extremity of Cardigan Bay, and has visited some of the shipwrecks that have occurred there. He has located several anchors that have been lost in Bardsey Sound, but these are not thought to have belonged to the 'Haba'.

Note that the spelling of the town of Porthmadog varies in the early newspapers, so it may appear as 'Port Madoc' or 'Portmadoc'. 'Tudwal' also appears as 'Tudwall' or 'Tudwel'. Aberystwyth appears as 'Aberystwith'.

Caernarfon appears as 'Carnarvon' or 'Caernarvon'.

Wherever possible, the spellings in the published newspapers have been used.

4.0 Background.

The author has spent many hours scanning the microfilmed copies of the 19th-Century newspapers, and would like to acknowledge the tremendous effort previously done by the late John Stubbs, who kindly allowed the author of this report to access his records.

Research is now much easier, given that we have access to these newspapers from our homes via the internet, thereby allowing quicker and more thorough research to be undertaken from the comfort of our home rather than from a prison cell in the former county jail at Ruthin.

5.0 Research Methodology.

Equipment and sources used:

Richard Larné's Shipwreck Index of the British Isles. West Coast and Wales.

Gwynedd Archives Record Office, Caernarfon.

Denbighshire Records Office, Ruthin.

British Library on-line newspaper records.

National Library of Wales on-line records.

Lloyd's List records.

6.0 Details.

Vessel Name: Haba.

Type: Brigantine. Built in 1848 at Prince Edward Island, Canada.

Owners: Edward McSherry, Belfast.

Construction Materials: Wooden hull. Weight: 93 tons net.

Dimensions: Length: 77 feet; Breadth 20 feet 6 in.; Depth of hold amidships 11ft 6 in.

Location.

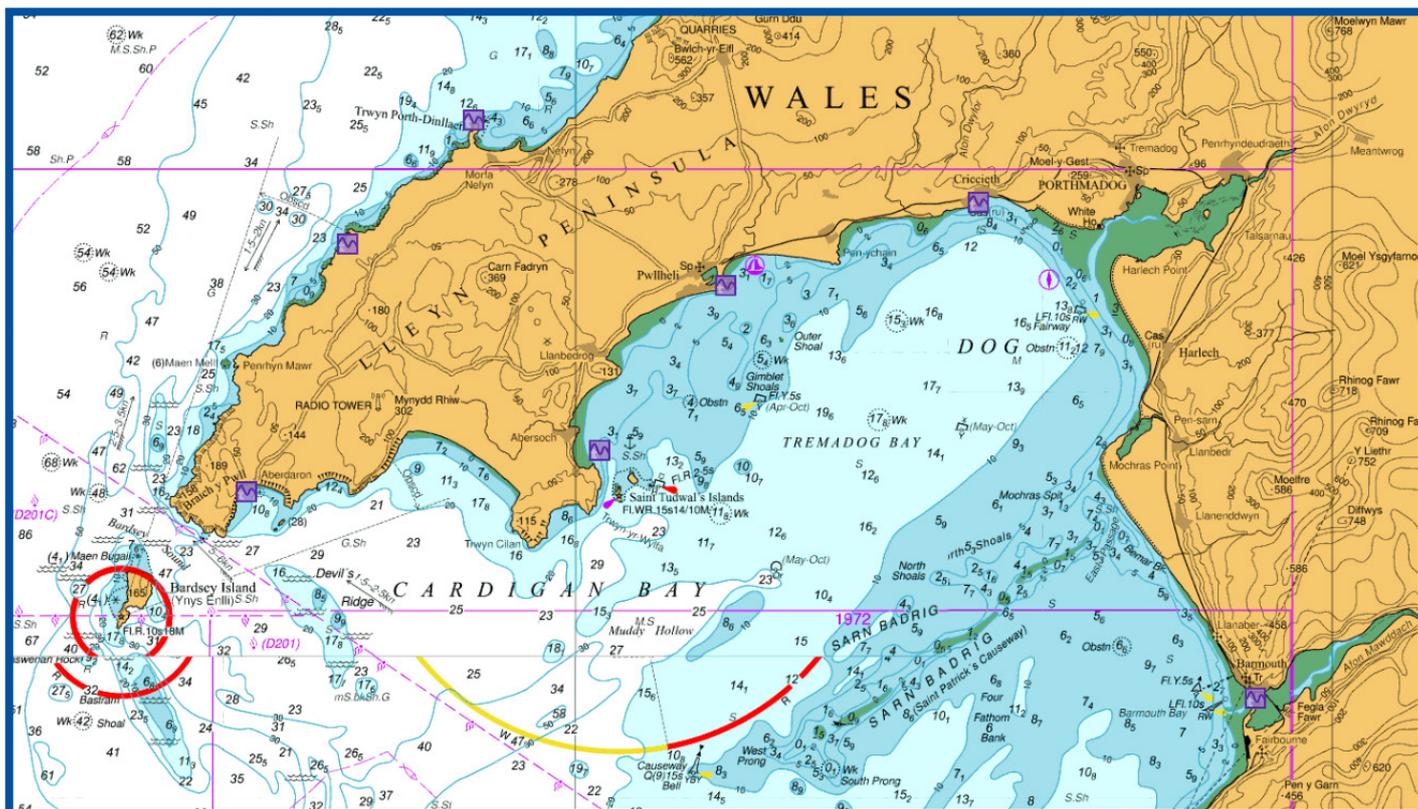
The precise location of this shipwreck is currently unknown, as the newspaper reports of 1885 quote the vessel as 'wrecked on Bardsey Island' or 'a little south of Duddell's Ridge, near Porthcaddell'. Presumably these are the Devil's Ridge and Porth Cadlan, but these are located several miles from Bardsey Island.

The Devil's Ridge lies approximately four miles east of Bardsey Island and three miles south of Porth Cadlan, so this is quite a large area to search, and it suffers strong currents and heavy overfalls. The author has dived in this area, but cannot recommend the experience.

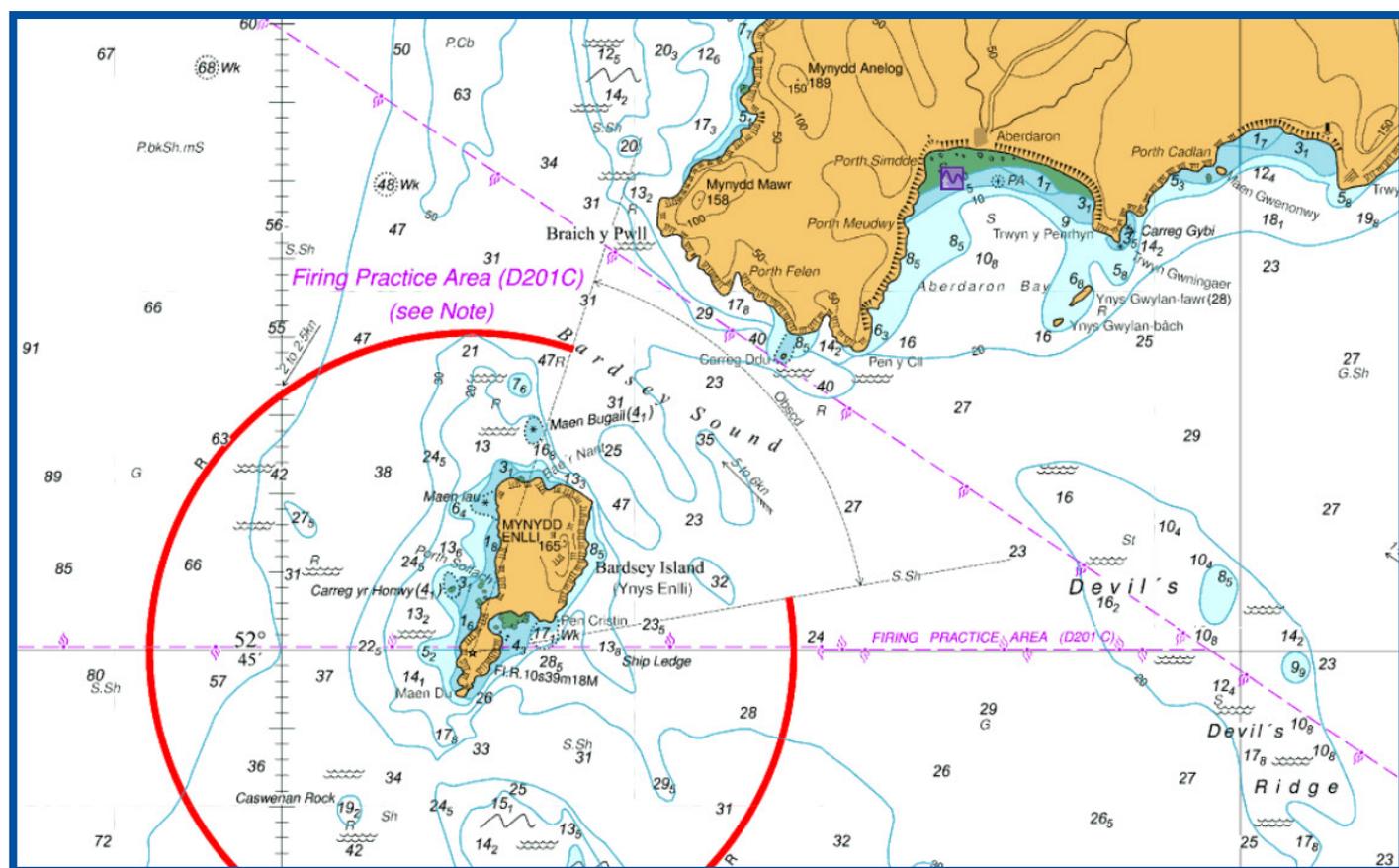
The newspaper reporter also confused Teignmouth with St. Tudwal.

Overview.

Ivor Wynne Jones, in his book 'Shipwrecks of North Wales', mentions a coal-laden vessel that ran ashore about a third of a mile north of the Bardsey Lighthouse, so this could refer to the 'Haba', as she carried a cargo of coal. The late John Farley, one of the author's diving-buddies, has talked about an anchor and wreckage in this area, but the author has been unable to find this debris, mainly due to the thick layer of kelp found in the shallows around the island.



The northern half of Cardigan Bay.



Bardsey Island, Aberdaron and the Devil's Ridge.

The Cambrian News and Merionethshire Standard. 28th August 1885.

PWLLHELI. A report has reached this town that a large vessel belonging to Montevideo has been wrecked off the coast of Aberdaron.

The Cambrian News and Merionethshire Standard. 28th August 1885.

PWLLHELI. WRECK AT ABERDARON. Late on Saturday night the brigantine Haba, Mr Sherry, master, and owned by Messrs Coulson and Co., Belfast, bound from Cardiff to Belfast with a cargo of coal, was wrecked on Bardsey Island, having sprung a leak. The captain and all the crew landed safe in their own boat at Aberdaron early on Sunday morning.

Belfast News-Letter. Thursday, 24 September, 1885.**BOARD OF TRADE INQUIRY.**

The Board of Trade Inquiry into the circumstances attending the abandonment of the brigantine Haba, of Belfast, off Bardsey Island, on the 22nd August last, while on the voyage from Cardiff to Belfast, was resumed yesterday in the Town Hall. Mr, J.F. MacCarthy, R.M., presided, with Captains Hyde and Wilson, Nautical Assessors.

Mr. Robert M'Henry, chief clerk of the Police Courts, was in attendance.

Mr. J.S. M'Tier, solicitor, appeared on behalf of the Board of Trade; Mr. James M'Lean, jun., attended on behalf of the captain of the lost vessel, Edward M'Sherry and Mr. M. Galvin for the mate, Mr. Daniel M'Callum.

Daniel M'Callum, the mate, was re-called, and further examined as to the events previous to the abandonment of the vessel.

Walter Jubb, Board of Trade Surveyor for the port of Belfast, was examined, and stated that he made a survey of the vessel in January, '81, and found her then in a seaworthy condition. She was then lying at Queen's Quay,

In reply to Mr. M'Lean, witness said Captain M'Sherry always kept his equipment in proper order.

George Collins, able-bodied seaman, stated that he had been on board the Haba for the last four years. The witness corroborated the evidence given by the master and mate as to the circumstances under which the vessel was abandoned.

John Robinson, a partner in the firm of Messrs. J. Cochrane & Co., shipbuilders, Belfast, gave evidence as to repairs to the Haba executed by his firm in 1879.

This concluded the evidence.

The following list of questions was submitted by the Board of Trade for the opinion of the Court- :—

1. Whether, when the vessel left Cardiff, she was in a good and seaworthy condition ?
2. Whether her pumps were sufficient and in good order?
3. Whether the vessel was sufficiently manned?
4. What was the weight of the cargo, and whether, having regard to the age of the vessel, she was of sufficient strength to carry a cargo of that dead weight ?
5. Whether the master, after leaving Cardiff, was justified in putting his vessel upon the mud banks, and whether in so doing, had any effect upon the leakage of the vessel?
6. What was the cause of the vessel making so much water at or before four o'clock p.m. on the 15th August?
7. Was every possible effort made to ascertain the whereabouts of, and to stop the leak?



Bardsey Island as viewed from Bardsey Sound.

8. Was the master then justified in proceeding on his voyage?
 9. Whether when coming to anchor off Tenby, and the leak was partially stopped, the master was justified in continuing his voyage?
 10. Whether the master, in the state of the vessel, was justified in quitting the Bristol Channel and proceeding to sea?
 11. Whether, after leaving Tenby, up to the time of the abandonment of the vessel, were there any available and sufficient attempts made to reach the beach?
 12. Whether the pumps were used with sufficient frequency, and whether every possible effort was made to save the vessel?
 13. Whether she was prematurely abandoned?
 14. Whether the master and mate are, or either of them, in default?
 15. What was the cost of the vessel to her owner?
 16. What was her value at the time she left Cardiff?
 17. What were the insurances, and how were they effected ?
- The above list having been handed in, the Court adjourned until this morning.



The lighthouse on Bardsey Island.

Belfast News-Letter - Wednesday 23 September 1885

Yesterday, at twelve o'clock, an official inquiry, held pursuant to an order of the Board of Trade was opened in the Town Hall, before F.J. MacCarthy Esq. R.M., and Captains Hyde and Wilson, Nautical Assessors, to investigate the circumstances attending the abandonment at sea by her captain and crew of the barquentine Haba, belonging to Belfast. The parties summoned by the Board of Trade to appear at the inquiry are Edward M'Sherry, master and part owner of the brigantine, and Daniel M'Callum, the mate.

Mr. J.S. M'Tier, solicitor, appeared on behalf of the Board of Trade,; Mr. James M'Lean represented the master, M'Sherry; and Mr. Michael Galvin was present on behalf of the mate, M'Callum.

Mr. Robert M'Henry, chief clerk of the Police Courts, was in attendance.

Mr. M'Tier, having announced that he appeared on behalf of the Board of Trade, said the present was a formal investigation under the Merchant Shipping Acts of 1854-1876, directed by the Board of Trade, into the circumstances attending the abandonment of the British sailing ship Haba, of Belfast, near Bardsey Island, Irish Sea, on or about the 22nd August last. Mr. M'Tier then stated the facts of the case as follows:

The Haba was a sailing ship registered in the port of Belfast, her official number being 834256. She was an old wooden vessel, having been built in 1848 at Prince Edward's Island. It appeared from the transcript of registry that the vessel had one deck, was rigged as a barquentine, and was carvel built.

Her length was 77 feet, her breadth 20 and a half feet, and her depth of hold amidships 11ft 6 in. Her net tonnage after deducting crew space was 93.19.

She was owned by Edward M'Sherry, of 7, Welch Street, Belfast, who was also her manager and master at the time of the casualty. The value of the insurance upon the casualty would be given in evidence. She was stated to be well found for the voyage.

She had two double-gearred hand-pumps, stated to be in very good order, and 14 feet long. The vessel left Cardiff, in the Bristol Channel for Belfast on the evening of Friday, the 14th August last, having on board a cargo of coal from 165 to 175 tons weight, which was stated to have been well stowed.

She was drawing 11 and a half feet forward and 12 and a half feet aft. Her crew consisted of four hands, all told, namely the master, the mate, an A.B. and a boy. She had no passengers on board. The Haba came to anchor for the night in Penarth Road, outside Cardiff, and in the morning proceeded on her voyage.

At this time, the weather had been fine and the sea smooth, and the vessel had been only making her usual quantity of water, namely, what would have been cleared by five minutes spells, twice a day, at the pumps. She was pumped dry in the usual way before leaving Penarth Roads. All appeared to be well until about four o'clock the same day, when the vessel was five or six miles to the west of Nash, in the Bristol Channel, when she commenced to make a considerable quantity of water through labouring in a heavy swell from the west. The second pump was set going, and it was now necessary to keep both working continually day and night, except for one short interval from that time until about midnight on the 22nd of August, when the vessel was abandoned, it being a period of upwards of a week.

In an hour or two after discovering the leaky state of the vessel on the 15th., she came to anchor in the Teignmouth Roads [SIC], and an attempt was made to stop the leak with oakum, which partially succeeded for a time. This stuffing fell out several times, and was replaced up to Wednesday the 19th inst., at which time the vessel was off The Bishops, Pembrokeshire, and it seems the master came to the determination of making for some port. As Milford Haven was stated to be unavailable, they proceeded towards Bardsey Island, and tried to make St. Tudwell Roads, which it appeared they were unable to enter, and also unable to beach the vessel when they tried Aberdaron, Carnarvon. On Saturday, the 22nd August, when the brigantine was in Bardsey Sound, the crew took to the boat, remaining alongside, as the vessel had become unmanageable, and they were afraid she would strike, but she, having cleared the rocks, they returned to her. She had some six or seven feet of water in her. The pumps were again manned, but finding the water was gaining, and the vessel unmanageable, she was finally abandoned about midnight, and the crew, by means of their punt, landed at Pwllheli, Carnarvon, about two o'clock on Sunday, the 23rd. The master states that after leaving the vessel, he saw nothing of her except a few floating articles of her, and now believes she lies in sixteen to eighteen fathoms water a little south of Duddell's Ridge, near Porthcaddell [SIC]. The ship's papers were saved, and no lives were lost.

Evidence was then given by the master and mate of the vessel.

Mr. Calderwood, one of the managers of the Troon Shipbuilding Company, also gave evidence as to certain repairs executed by the company upon the vessel in the years '81, '82, '84 and '85. During the last four years, she had been overhauled and caulked.

After the examination of the above witness, the Court adjourned until half-past eleven o'clock this morning.

Northern Whig. Friday, 25 September 1885.**BOARD OF TRADE INQUIRY IN BELFAST.**

Yesterday, the Board of Trade Inquiry was resumed in one of the Committee rooms of the Municipal Buildings into the facts connected with the abandonment of the brigantine Haba, of Belfast, near Bardsey Island, on the Welch coast on the 22nd inst. The inquiry was held by Mr. MacCarthy, R.M., assisted by Captains Hyde and Williams, nautical assessors.

Mr. M'Tear (Messrs G.K. Smith & M'Tear) appeared for the Board of Trade. Mr. M'Lean represented the master and owner (Mr. Edward M'Sherry, of Belfast), and Daniel M'Callum, the mate, was represented by Mr. Galvin. Mr. Robert M'Henry, Chief Clerk of Petty Sessions, was present.

James Starkey was sworn, and stated he held a certificate as master. He knew Penarth Roads, and Penarth mud. The latter was a usual place for ships to lie on going into and coming out of Cardiff. He had been in ships himself lying on the mud when they were laden. He had seen dozens of vessels on it. He knew the Haba. She was a nice little vessel and was kept in good order. He had known her master (Edward M'Sherry) for a long time, and knew him to be a very careful man in the navigation of his vessel.

Captain M'Sherry, of the Haba, was re-examined on some points, after which Mr. M'Lean addressed the court on behalf of the captain, and Mr. M'Tear replied on the part of the Board of Trade.

The Court adjourned to four o'clock, announcing that at that hour they would deliver judgement.

On the re-assembling of the Court at the hour mentioned, Mr. Galvin, who represented the mate, applied for costs for attendance. The mate had been made a party to the cause, and had been put to the expense of being represented there, and he thought he should be allowed for those costs.

Mr. MacCarthy – There was not a tittle of evidence against the mate.

Mr. M'Tear said the Board of Trade made all the officers parties to the cause, and if they were not in default, they were paid for their attendance.

Mr. Galvin said he was applying for costs for his own attendance.

Mr. M'Lean thought Mr. Galvin's application was very reasonable. Of course, the Court would measure the amount of fees for his attendance there on behalf of the mate.

After a consultation with the nautical assessors, Mr. MacCarthy delivered judgement, and read out the replies to the questions submitted by Mr. M'Tear on behalf of the Board of Trade. These were to the effect that when the vessel left Cardiff, she appeared to be in a good and seaworthy condition, and that the pumps were sufficient and in good order. She was manned in the way that vessels of her class usually are in such voyages, but the Court thought it would have been desirable to have had another seaman on board. The bill of lading, according to the evidence, was 165 tons, and the Court considered that that was a large cargo for a vessel of her age and build, although the master stated he had on previous occasions carried from 150 to 180 tons. It is the custom to let small vessels take the mud at low water at Cardiff, and it did not appear from the evidence that the doing so in this case had any effect on the leakage of the vessel. The cause of the leakage at 1 p.m. on the 15th August was unaccountable, but the reason given by the master was a heavy swell and the ship labouring. Efforts appeared to have been made to ascertain the whereabouts, and to stop the leak, and the master was justified in proceeding on his voyage, having partially succeeded in stopping the leak. The



Another view of Bardsey Island and Bardsey Sound.

wind being easterly, the Court thought he was also justified in quitting the Bristol Channel and proceeding on his voyage. After leaving Tenby, several attempts were made to gain a port where the vessel could be beached in safety, but, owing to the prevailing north-easterly winds, the master could not succeed in doing so. The pumps were attended to at every opportunity when the crew were not employed in trimming sail, and every possible effort was made to save the vessel, which was not prematurely abandoned. Neither the master nor mate was in default. The cost of the vessel in 1879, when Edward M'Sherry became sole owner, was £385, which included rather expensive repairs while in dock. The master, who was also owner, stated in his evidence that when the vessel left Cardiff, she was value to him for £400. She was insured for £200 in the Belfast Mutual Ship-owner's Company. The Court made no order as to costs, but, having regard to the fact that the mate, Daniel M'Callum, was made a party to the cause, and that there was no evidence offered against him, it recommended that he should be paid three guineas to cover the expense that he had been put to in obtaining professional assistance.

The Inquiry then concluded.

7.0 Analysis.

A severe leak caused the loss of the brigantine 'Haba' while transporting a cargo of coal from Cardiff to Belfast. Initially, the newspaper reports indicated that she ran ashore on Bardsey Island, but from the master's evidence given at the Board of Trade inquiry, it may be that she foundered further east, possibly in the vicinity of the Devil's Ridge.

8.0 Conclusions & Recommendations.

The 'Haba' was one of many small trading-vessels that were lost around the coast of Wales, thankfully without loss of life. An inquiry by the Board of Trade raised a number of questions as to the conduct of the master and crew, the sea-worthy state of the vessel, her value, and the quantity of cargo carried.

After a thorough investigation, no failings were noted.

9.0. References.

Sources include:

Lloyd's Register.

Shipwreck Index of the British Isles. Vol 5 (Richard Larne, Lloyd's Register).

The Essential Underwater Guide to North Wales. Vol. One, Part One. (Chris Holden)

RCAHMW COFLEIN <https://coflein.gov.uk/>

Wrecksite website <https://www.wrecksite.eu/Wrecksite.aspx>

National Library of Wales Welsh newspapers on line <https://newspapers.library.wales/>

The British Newspaper Archive www.britishnewspaperarchive.co.uk/