

Welsh Wreck Web Research Project (North Cardigan Bay)

On-line research into the wreck of The St Tudwals ferry 1887



*Unlikely that a photograph or picture ever
existed of the ferry which probably resembled boat pictured above*

Annette Maloney

Report Title:

**Welsh Wreck Web Research Project
(North Cardigan Bay)
On-line research into the wreck of the:
St. Tudwals Ferry**

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Date:

October 2020

Report Ref:

1 Aims and objective

During research by Malvern Archaeological Diving Unit (MADU) 2001 to 2009 a database of 524 ships that had come to harm in the north end of Cardigan Bay (1590 to 1993) was created. With the lockdown caused by the pandemic, Ian Cundy (NAS and MADU) set up the Research Project so members could work from home on the reports into individual wrecks.

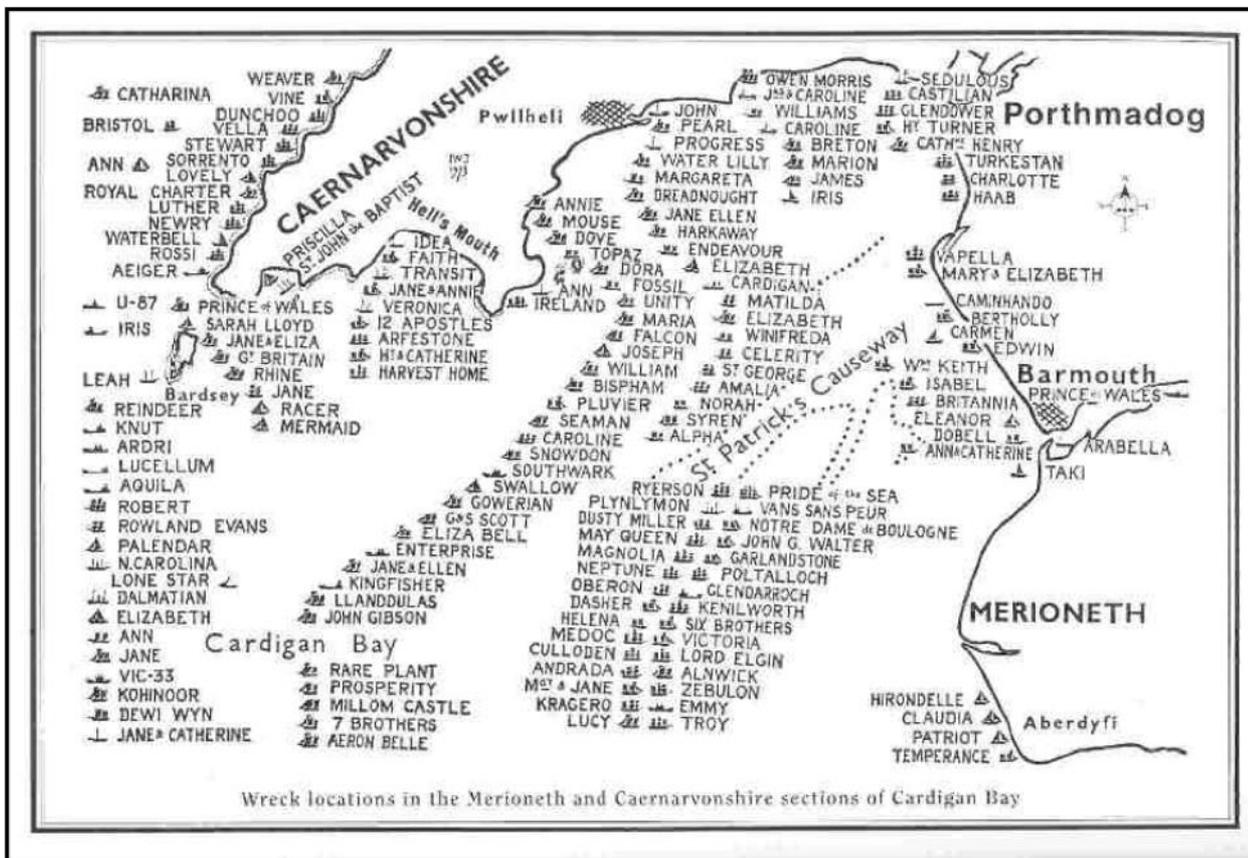
I saw details in Current Archaeology and thought it sounded interesting so applied and chose three wrecks to the first being #270 St Tudwals ferry wrecked St Tudwals Caernarfonshire sometime during 1887
 My other two choices are more conventional but I chose the ferry as I like ferries and was intrigued by the lack of information

There was not a lot to go on but the main aims were to find out

- A. if the ferry existed,
- B. what did it ferry
- C. where/when was it wrecked

I have visited all parts of Wales apart from the Llyn peninsula so the first thing I did was buy an Ordnance Survey map (OS) to understand the area . I was born and brought up in Gloucestershire near many rivers including Severn and Wye as well as the Severn estuary. I moved to the Sussex coast where I have lived for over 50 years.

With reference to the map below produced by MADU and taken from Shipwrecks of North Wales (Ivor Wynn Jones) Abersoch and the two St Tudwals Islands are not marked but roughly where the Ann was wrecked between Pwllheli and appropriately named Hells Mouth.



2 General Information

2.1 Pictures and illustrations

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Cover Probable type of boat wreck (from my collection of old postcards etc)

Page 1

Page 2

Page 3. Shipwrecks' of North Wales/MADU

Page 4 None

Page 5 None

Page 6 None

Page 7 None

Appendices

2.2 Contributors

Very shortly after I retired 2017 I had a catastrophic injury which had various consequences including loss of balance, coordination and concentration. The only keyboard I can manage is the iPad (another steep learning curve as I have been used to using Microsoft).

My thanks to Ian Cundy for not only answering my email questions but being patient guiding me through the project

Robert Cadwalader for The Tablet article

Hastings Shipwreck Centre and Dr Peter Marsden for teaching me so much about shipwrecks since I moved to Hastings over 40 years ago

2.3 Abbreviations

NAS. Nautical Archaeology Society

MADU Malvern Archaeological Diving Unit

OS. Ordnance Survey

2.4 Index

1. Aims and objectives
2. General Information
3. Approach and methodology
4. Initial approach and assumptions
5. Initial findings and details re islands
6. Analysis and recommendations
7. Appendices
 1. OS map Abersoch area
 2. Aerial view St Tudwal Island W
 3. Aerial view of both islands
 4. Lighthouse

3 Approach and methodology

1 Had to use an iPad as this had only keyboard I could manage after accident 3 years ago and ensuing treatment (mostly successful but left me struggling with arthritis and coordination problems)

2 Know very little about Llyn peninsula

3 Although I have always taken an interest in archaeology(subscribe to Current Archaeology where I found details of this project, was) I was totally unaware of NAS

My approach initially could only be described as scattergun!

Inevitably I have produced a report which is mainly anecdotal

We do not have a great deal of information about this investigation only from the title and the year 1887

My approach was to consider

1. What is a ferry
2. Where would the ferry be going
3. What sort of vessel is it likely to be
4. Any written matters
5. Why would anyone go to the islands
6. The islands
7. Abersoch
8. The lighthouse

Research what was happening on the Islands around 1887

Look closely at lighthouse and priory

Concentrate on local people and events from any source including stories, 1881 and 1891 census

Inevitably I have produced a report which is mainly anecdotal

Learn more about the area and history to get a better knowledge

Look at reports that have been completed to see if there are any clues for St Tudwals Islands and Abersoch

The big question is why in the late 19th century was there a ferry and why was it on the list and methodology .This puzzled me for some time until I realised that it is not that long ago. My mother in law was born 1907 and died 2013 still very aware of events past and present. We are looking at an event that local people would remember insignificant as it may seem

4. Initial approach and assumptions

As we all know the UK coast is among the most dangerous in the world. Rocks, small islands, craggy cliffs, rift tides, high and low tides, sea eddies, quicksand, cliff falls ; to name just a few of the hazards. It is amazing that anyone goes near but several times every year, where I live people die or have to be rescued by coastguard, lifeboat and others. There ensues much publicity and 'something should be done' but the only answer is education on the dangers of the sea and all other water such as rivers, lakes, gravel pits and even garden ponds.

1.

My definition of a ferry is

"a craft which travels regularly on water taking passengers from A to B and usually back " this would include a wide range from the Dover Calais ferries, King Harry ferry, Burgh Island tractor ferry ,very small ferries over the Wye and Severn rivers (where I was born and lived until I left to go to university);such as the ferry where the pub is in Wales and the car park the other side of the Wye in England, you summon the ferry to take you across and of course'Ferry cross the Mersey.

The dictionary I have "to convey passengers etc over a stretch of water from one place to another especially along a regular route "

2

Given that I am investigating the St Tudwals ferry 1887 it is a fair assumption that the two St Tudwal islands are involved and the nearest town/village Abersoch

Both islands are less than two miles from Abersoch

3 The Llyn peninsula is one of the few parts of Wales that I have never visited but I know the coast well. Tourism was non-existent late 19th century so the ferry is likely to be a small rowing boat or possibly a fishing boat operating in the vicinity of the two islands. There appears to be no publicity so unlikely anyone drowned .Given the dangers of this coast,I think we are looking for a small rowing boat

4 The St Tudwals islands are St Tudwals Island East (with remains of priory)and St Tudwals Island West (with lighthouse).

5 Sea conditions in that area are treacherous and around the late 19th century particularly so.

6 There is little information concerning St Tudwals written or otherwise

7 Why would anyone want to go to the Islands, they appear to be inhospitable, very small and not easy to reach

8 The St Tudwals lighthouse was built by Trinity House 1887

Abersoch

The Afon Soch begins its journey in the vicinity of Mynydd Cefnamwlch, snakes its way through Morfa Neigwl and flows into the sea at Pen Cei, Abersoch. The Welsh word 'soch' is said to be the same as the word 'hwch' (sow)

Ysgol Botwnnog (School) was established in the 15th century by Henry Rowland, who later became Bishop of Bangor.

14 small ships were built in the harbour at Abersoch between 1774 and 1854. The beach at nearby Trwyn y Fach, which now belongs to the National Trust, is sheltered and popular. The two St Tudwal Islands where, according to tradition, Saint Tudwal lived in the 6th century, are situated in the bay off Abersoch. It is said that it was once possible to walk from Ynys Fach (the smaller of the two, and the nearest to the shore) to Trwyn yr Wylfa on the mainland at a time of very low tide. A Trinity House lighthouse was erected on this island in 1877. One of the islands is now owned by the TV personality & chief scout, Bear Grylls

The ferry was based somewhere in the near vicinity possibly Abersoch which is only 2 miles from the Islands

5 Initial findings and details of islands

My first big clue was an article from The Tablet sent to me by MADU

2 The Tablet 22 October 1887

THREE HALFPENCE IN THE ISLAND." We have received from correspondents the following extracts from letters written by the Rev. Father Hughes, from Saint Tudwal's Island, North Wales, The first is dated September 2 1887 : Our boat, the Dove, slipped her moorings during the night so far as to get badly stowed against the rocks, and on Sunday, the 10th, we had hard work to get her above water and alongside the wharf for repairs. To-day the tackle by which she was slung gave way, letting her fall bow on to a rock, so that she stove in her whole bow, and is, I fear, a total wreck. So here we are real " Missionary Crusoes "on an island two miles from Abersoch, and dependent on the charity of those on shore for our communications. Fortunately we had just laid in our winter stores of biscuits, pease, rice, coffee, oatmeal, &c., so that we shall not starve. our gardens yield well, but our net cannot be used without the boat. What we are going to do I don't know just yet, but St. Joseph will probably get us another boat before long, and all will be right. Meantime my lads are rigging a derrick and trying to hoist the wrecked boat on to the wharf, to see if it will be possible to repair her. Money is scarce ;we have 1. on the island, hut even that cannot be spent here, as there is no shop next door. We are going on as usual, trying to repair damages, but leaving the rest to providence, who has never failed us yet. The two postulants are fine fellows : one is a decent cook, ant the other a musician who will play our harmonium—when we get one. Unfortunately, neither of them can cook"

The Father and his two postulants with their wrecked boat Dora were marooned but the boat could not be described as a ferry . It is unlikely that Father Hughes decided that a trip to St Tudwal's was a fun day out and the monastery shown on the island was medieval and wrecked at dissolution of monasteries in 16th century There was an archaeological dig 1962 to find out more about the medieval monastery but the archaeologists were annoyed to find 19th century remains of a monastery obscuring their primary objective.

I read the notes on the dig and there was Father Hughes mentioned again (much maligned for ruining the medieval archaeology). He had ambitions to have a monastery on St Tudwal's Island East and gardens which would have not only for the postulants but local labour

Even the redoubtable Father Hughes had to give up defeated by not only the weather but the logistics of building and living on the island . He died later that year not from drowning but heart?problems December 1987

REV. **FATHER HUGHES**, ST. TUDWAL'S MONASTRY. **Rev.** F•thsr Henry Bailey Mar's Haghe.. the Pith inst. at Aherswh, of dilente of the heart end ery.iploas. Ile was son of the **Rev** Howell **Hughes**. first of Trefrior. Llanrwst, efterwant4 ot ...

insert source

Another more recent and highly publicised island dweller and his family is Bear Grylls. He bought the island for £95000, he and his family use it as a holiday home in August. He initially installed a chute which took him and others from the cliff top down into the sea; he is reported as saying that the descent was extremely fast! The local council made him take it down which he has as it was only meant to be temporary

He has made an application for a small harbour ,the application makes fascinating reading and includes various reports from ecological experts.The Council have not yet made a decision ,they are probably awaiting more reports on the effects of the proposal on wildlife,infrastructure,the tides etc. The planning application and associated effects by various experts also make interesting reading and give a good insight into the Islands

6 Analysis and recommendations

The rowing boat was probably built locally as Trinity House for the St Tudwals lighthouse would have had their own system and Father Hughes boat Dora probably is not the ferry. As a boat builders the boat could have been built in Abersoch in the late 19th century

The ferry would have transported materials and workers which would have included local people and postulants

There are a number of things which I would pursue but they do not pertain to the brief (Father Hughes early life, census for 19th century for details of local people etc)

Difficult to ascertain how long as I had to learn using an iPad and was getting over an injury

The wreck site was probably where the boat was moored, it is very unlikely that any remains of the ferry exists

I would not recommend further research by NAS or MADU

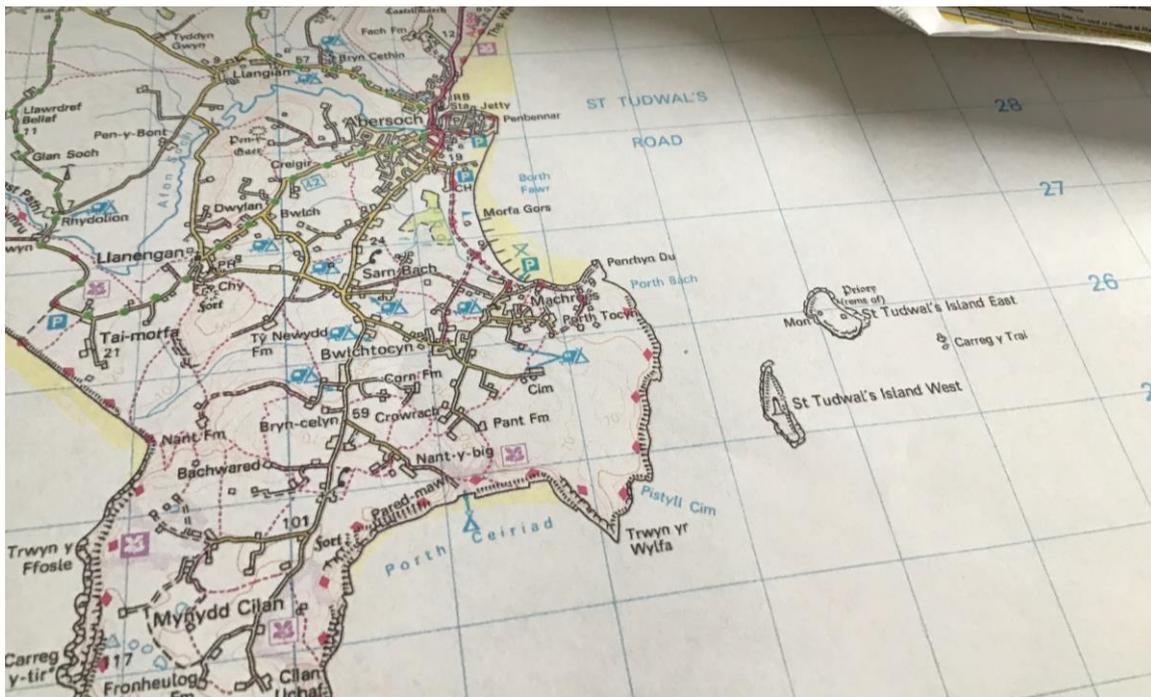
With hindsight much of the information contained in this report was readily available if I had known where to look .However my starting point will always be a map and tourist information which is a surprising précis of information both present and past

I have learned a great deal during my research which has restored much of my confidence and look forward to researching the two more modern wrecks

.Appendices

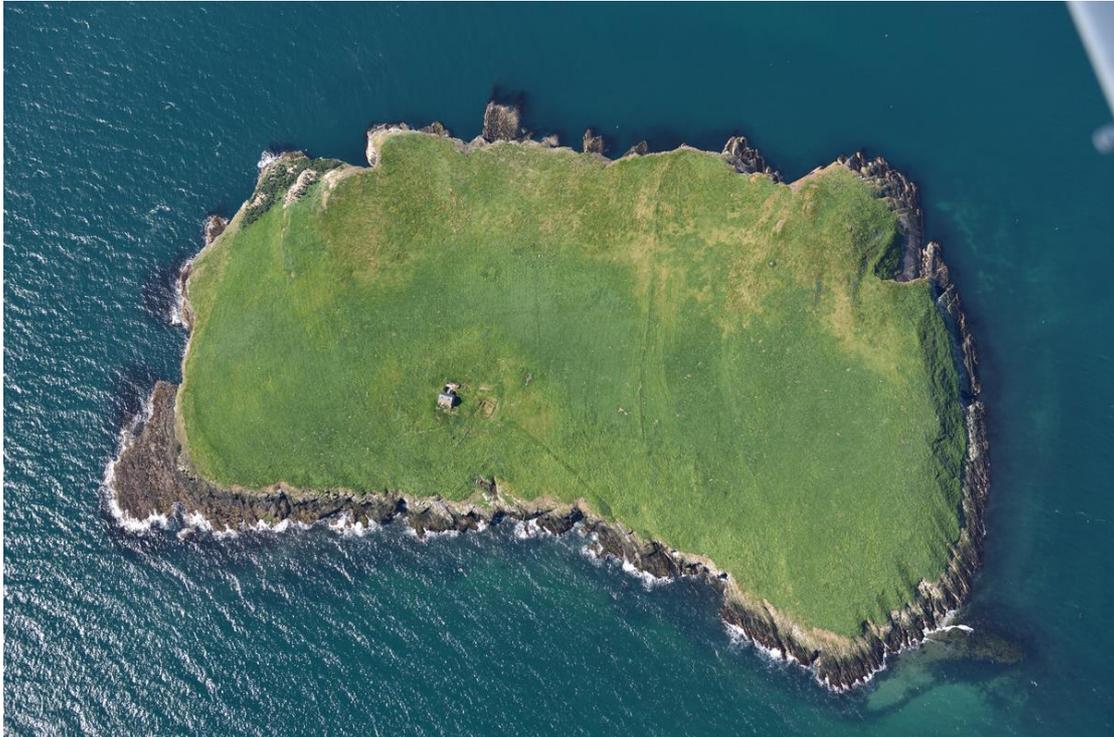
Appendix 1

OS map showing Abersoch and the two St Tudwal's Islands



os landranger 123 (Lleyen Peninsula)

Appendix 2



NPRN 96665

Map Reference SH32NW

Grid Reference SH3346025232

Unitary (Local) Authority Gwynedd

Old County Caernarfonshire

Community Llanengan

Type of Site LIGHTHOUSE

Broad Class MARITIME

Period Post Medieval

Site Description A small, now unmanned, light marking the north end of Cardigan Bay. The stone tower, 10.7m (35 ft) high, was built in 1877. The keepers' cottages are now privately owned and used as a holiday home. The Chance Bros optic of 1876 was the first occulting apparatus made by the firm.

Event and Historical Information:

Appendix 3

Aerial view of the St Tudwals Islands



File Reference AP_2006_0558

Catalogue Number C858407

Appendix 4



File Reference AP_2006_0559

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Catalogue Number C858406

Accession Number NA/GEN/2011/007

Originator Driver, Toby G.

Scope and Content RCAHMW colour oblique aerial photograph of St Tudwal's Lighthouse from the south-east. Taken on 09 February 2006 by Toby Driver.

Collection RCAHMW Colour Oblique Digital Aerial Photographs

Medium photo

Date 9 February Historic Admiralty Chart 1505_A8 RCAHMW digital collections sourced from the UK Hydrographic Office and first published in 1843

Reference AP_2006_0559

In 1845, William Harries, clerk to the Justice of Peace for Pembrokeshire had responded to an enquiry from the clerk of the Parliamentary Lighthouse Committee stating 'I have had communications with the most influential master mariners and other persons connected with shipping in this vicinity, and their unanimous opinion is that a great loss of life and property annual takes place for want of some harbour of refuge, and of course, a lighthouse connected with it, on the whole of the Welsh coast from St David's Head to Bardsey Island'. St Tudwal's lighthouse was built as a response to the continuing petitions by Welsh mariners using the smaller mid-Wales ports of Cardigan Bay, such as Porthmadog. St Tudwal's is one of the 'inner' lights along the Welsh coast - the Skerries and Smalls forming the 'outer' lights for the vast flow of 18th and 19th century empire trade heading for Liverpool. Its mode of operation is noted on an historic chart 'Light occulting every 10 second, 151 ft, visible 18miles. Lower light flashing red, 135ft, visible 17 miles.'

Sources include:Hague, D, 1994, Lighthouses of Wales: Their Architecture and Archaeology, pg64-5