

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

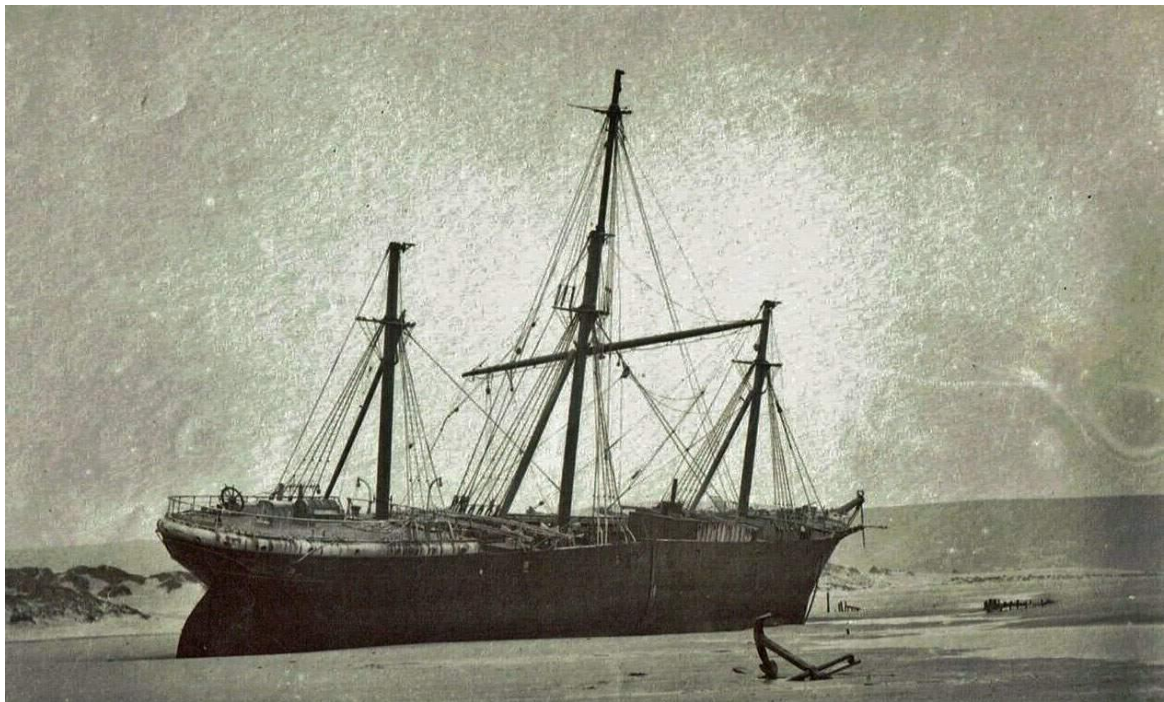


Image Nick Chipchase on Wrecksite.eu

Stranding of the TURKESTAN at Morfa Harlech Feb 17/18<sup>th</sup> 1876

Report compiled by:

**Robert Dafydd Cadwalader**

Report Title:

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**MADU No. 212**

## 1.0 Abstract

The Malvern Archaeological Diving Unit (MADU) currently have 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! With corona virus currently requiring us all to rethink the way we live, on-line research would appear to be something we could all safely consider taking on.

The author of this report is from a seafaring /fishing/ lifeboat family from Criccieth at the northern end of the Bay and the sea has been in his blood all his life, serving on ships of all types, including, as master, on research vessels, for over 40 years. His particular interest is in Tremadog Bay as the whole expanse of the bay is visible from Criccieth and as Trustee/Secretary of the Porthmadog Maritime Museum has gathered material on local shipwrecks and maritime incidents for many years and aims to correlate this and expand the information from written and the many on-line resources available. Anecdotes are included, but as always, though often useful, this type of information should be treated with caution so will be clearly indicated. The author is a Welsh speaker so possibly has wider access to newspapers in that language.

No diving experience or training in archaeology. This report describes the historical aspect of the incident.

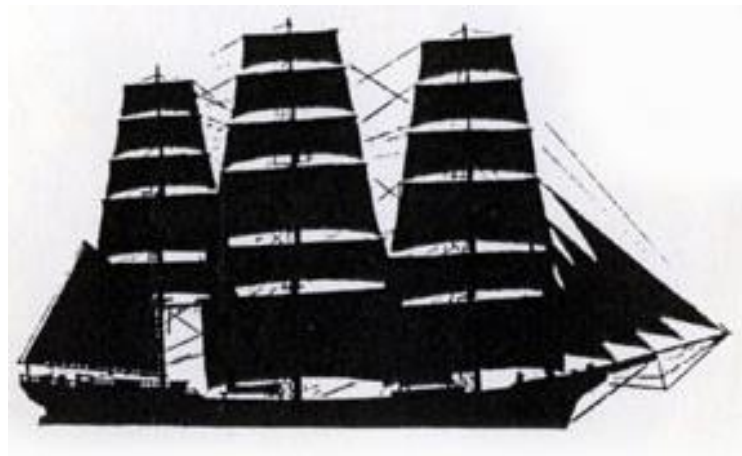


Fig 1. Full Rigged Ship

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## 2.4 Contributors

Porthmadog Maritime Museum  
MADU  
Chris Holden  
Nick Williams

## 2.5 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

### **3.0 Introduction**

The author became aware of this wreck at a young age as it is recorded on the services boards at Criccieth Lifeboat Station. His father and elder brother were members of the lifeboat crew and he spent a lot of time there. It has always been remembered as the service which resulted in the largest number of persons rescued (22).

This shipwreck is very typical of other incidents whereby ships bound for Liverpool have blundered in to Cardigan Bay and been wrecked on St Patrick's Causeway, the shores of Tremadog Bay, and Morfa Harlech.

## 4.0 Background

This wreck is recorded on the Services Boards at Criccieth Lifeboat station and the author heard about it anecdotally as a boy in the 1950s/60s. There is an account of the incident in "Wreck and Rescue on the Coast of Wales by Henry Parry 1969". This appears to be based on newspaper articles of the period. (A selection of these articles can be found in Section 6).

Three communities are named in connection with the shipwreck viz.

Harlech                      The ship stranded on the foreshore by the castle

Porthmadog (then Portmadoc)    The main, and only, port in the vicinity. Where the tugs were based.

Criccieth                      The lifeboat which rescued 22 of the crew was stationed here (despite it being officially named the Portmadoc Station).



Fig 2.



Fig 3. Morfa Harlech (Harlech Beach) Photo © [Colin Smith](#) ([cc-by-sa/2.0](#))



Fig 4.  
8



## 5.0 Research Methodology

### Equipment used

LENOVA C40-3D Desktop PC with Windows 10  
High speed broadband  
Microsoft Office  
Google search engine  
Ancestry.co.uk  
Adobe Photoshop Elements

1. I have a good library of reference books on maritime history including the classic books on shipwrecks and rescue on the North Wales coast. As an amateur local historian I have a collection of autobiographies and biographies by local people plus typewritten and hand written notes by residents of Criccieth going back to the 1830s. I start my research from here.
2. I check the Lloyds Register database to see if there is an entry for the vessel to obtain building date and dimensions.
3. Online – If no entry in Lloyds and if the ship is British I check with the CLIP Crewlist website <https://www.crewlist.org.uk/> to obtain the official number and vessel details from the Mercantile Navy List.
4. The COFLEIN website has information on some wrecks so this is checked. NPRN 271706 <https://coflein.gov.uk/en/site/271706/details/turkestan>
5. A general search with GOOGLE always remembering to precede the vessel's name with.... barque, brig, schooner, sailing ship, SS , MV etc. And the date of the incident. Other search words used are... stranded, foundered, wrecked etc.
6. The national Library of Wales newspaper collection of Welsh newspapers 1800-1919 (English and Welsh) is invaluable <https://newspapers.library.wales/> Try using the name of a nearby community combined with the name of the ship or date of the incident using modern Welsh name or, more likely, the old English version or spelling e.g. Portmadoc/Port-madoc. Criccieth was spelt in several different ways.
7. Wrecksite.eu is an excellent website <https://www.wrecksite.eu/wreck.aspx?203200> A very reasonable fee of 4 eu is charged for further information and HD image (if available).
8. Uboat.net is very useful for ships sunk during WW1 and WW2 <https://uboat.net/>
9. Anecdotal – sometimes elaborated over the generations but often an element of truth so well worth researching.

## 6.0 Results

TABLE 1

Vessel	Name/s	Turkestan	
	Type	Full rigged ship	
		Cargo	
Built	Date	Launched 17/02/1874	
	Builder	Richardson, Duck & Co	
		Thornaby, Stockton on Tees	
Construction	Materials	Iron	
	Decks	2 decks, Poop= 40' Forecastle= 38'	
	Bulkheads	1	
Propulsion	Type	Sail	
	Details	Square Rigged.	
Engine	Details	N/A	
Dimensions	Length	225.0 ft	68.58 m
	Beam	38.5 ft	11.73 m
	Depth of hold	23.3 ft	7.10 m
Tonnage	Gross	1467 tons	
	Net	1418 tons	
Owner	First	The British and Eastern Shipping Co Ltd	
		Liverpool	
	Last		
		One owner	
	Others		
Registry	Port	Liverpool	
	Flag	U.K.	
	Number	O.N. 69345	
History	Routes	From Liverpool	
		To New York (Lost on 2 <sup>nd</sup> voyage)	
	Cargo	General cargo	
Final Voyage	From	New York USA Depart about 1 <sup>st</sup> February (17 Day passage noted)	
	To	Liverpool UK	
	Captain	J. Brown	
	Crew	30	
	Passengers	0	
	Cargo	100 bales of cotton, 7 bushels wheat, 400 barrels of flour, 181,000 lbs of tallow, 964,394 lbs of oil cake, 3,600 staves, 71 bags clover seeds	
Wrecking	Date	Midnight 17/18 <sup>th</sup> February 1876	
	Location	Near Harlech Castle	
		Position 2013 by Jan Lettens - Wrecksite.eu in 2013 52°51,469'N 04°07,898'W WGS 84 approx only	
		Position by COFLEIN SH5717630033	
	Cause	Stranded	
	Loss of life	None – one man lost overboard 2 day previously in other incident	
	Outcome	Broken up	

## **The Builders**

**Richardson, Duck and Company** was a shipbuilding company in Thornaby-on-Tees, England that traded between 1855 and 1925. *(From Wikipedia)*

The yard was founded as the South Stockton Iron Ship Building Co in 1852. Its premises were the former yard of engine builders Fossick of Stockton and its first vessel was the iron-hulled steamship SS Advance. In 1855 Joseph Richardson and George Nixon Duck took over the yard. They built fifty iron steamships, a paddle steamer, ten sailing ships and 29 barges in their first ten years.

In 1859 Richardson, Duck took over the Rake Kimber yard at Middlesbrough. They built about 11 vessels at Middlesbrough and then sold the yard to Backhouse and Dixon in 1862.

In the 1900s Richardson, Duck started building steel hulls. By the end of that decade Richardson, Duck had built five hundred tramp steamers, other merchant ships and lighters. It had also become licensees for the Isherwood system of longitudinal framing.

In 1912 Richardson, Duck built 12 ships and became a limited liability company.

During the First World War the yard built the Arabis class sloop HMS Rosemary and Aubrietia class sloop HMS Tulip. It also built a further dozen tramp steamers, eight standard War "A" tramps and a standard "AO" tanker.

In 1919 Richardson, Duck became a public company and in 1920 James and Walter Gould acquired a controlling interest in it. In 1922 the yard suffered industrial action and a lack of orders. Richardson, Duck's final ship was SS Southborough in 1924. In May 1925 the Gould Group went into liquidation and in 1933 the yard was demolished.

## **The Incident**

From the Liverpool Mercury. Saturday, February 19, 1876.

LIFEBOAT SERVICE ON THE WELSH COAST.

On Thursday night the ship Turkestan, bound from New York to Liverpool, **struck on the bar off Porthmadog (sic)**. The lifeboat John Ashbury put off to her and safely landed the whole of the crew. This valuable lifeboat was presented to the National Lifeboat Institution some years since through its Manchester branch by Mr James Ashbury, M.P. for Brighton, in memory of his late father. Another correspondent, telegraphing from Porthmadog yesterday says 'This morning, the weather being hazy and the wind fresh, the fine iron ship Turkistan, Capt. Brown, the property of the British Shipping Company, Liverpool, 1,500 tons register, bound with a general cargo from New York, ran ashore near Porthmadog, and remains. No land had been seen for several hours. The crew, 30 hands all told, excepting the captain and officers, who stayed on board, were taken off by a Criccieth lifeboat and a Porthmadog tug. One man was lost overboard.'

From the Liverpool Mercury (Liverpool, England), Saturday, February 19, 1876

A full-rigged ship is ashore under Harlech., the crew having not been landed

London Standard - Tuesday 22 February 1876

Turkestan ashore at Harlech, is lying upright, embedded in sand, 8 feet and 11 feet around her at high water; vessel tight.

From the Caernarvon and Denbigh Herald 25<sup>th</sup> February 1876

PORTMADOC. STRANDING OF A LIVERPOOL VESSEL.—About five minutes to twelve on Thursday night, the 17<sup>th</sup> inst., a fine iron ship called the Turkestan, belonging to the British Eastern Shipping Co., was stranded near the Portmadoc bar. The weather was very hazy, the wind very fresh, and neither land nor lights had been seen for several hours. One man was lost overboard two days before this mishap. The vessel was commanded by Capt. Brown, an experienced officer, and was now on her second voyage, being bound from New York to Liverpool with a general cargo of cotton, tallow, oilcake, &c. On Friday morning the Portmadoc tugboats, the James Conley and the Wave of Life, went to her assistance, but owing to the roughness of the sea, they were not able to get alongside of the ship. The Criccieth lifeboat, "James Ashbury," was able to reach her, and brought twenty-two of the hands to Portmadoc in the afternoon. The captain and the other officers remained on board. The crew consisted of thirty hands all told. Up to Saturday evening last the ship was making no water, and hopes are entertained at the time we write (Monday) of getting it off, should the weather be favourable. Tugboats and lighters from Liverpool have arrived, and the ship is being lightened as fast as possible. It is expected that with the spring tides nearly due, she will be get off with but little damage, but the weather is threatening to-day and it is next to impossible to get near her.

**The Board of Trade Inquiry**

From the Liverpool Mercury - Wednesday 22 March 1876

## THE STRANDING OF THE SHIP TURKESTAN

The Board of Trade Inquiry into the stranding of the Liverpool ship Turkestan, on Harlech beach on the 17<sup>th</sup> February, was continued yesterday at the police buildings, before Mr. Raffles, stipendiary magistrate, and Captain Seales and Lieutenant Broome, R.N., nautical assessors. Mr. Tyndall appeared for the Board of Trade. Mr. Potter, barrister, instructed by Mr. I. H. E. Gill, appeared for the master, Captain Brown. Several witnesses were called, after which the court adjourned until to-day, when it is expected the inquiry will terminate.

From The Cambrian News 24<sup>th</sup> March 1876

THE STRANDING OF THE TURKESTAN. On Wednesday Mar 22, Mr Raffles delivered the judgement of the court appointed by the Board of Trade to inquire into the circumstances attending the stranding of the ship Turkestan on the Welsh coast, near Harlech Castle, as follows :— The court were satisfied, upon the whole of the evidence in this case, and from the high character given to the master of the Turkestan, that he was a good and careful navigator. They were therefore all the more surprised that on entering the channel in thick weather, when the observations were at least doubtful, he should have been so confident of his position on the morning of the 17<sup>th</sup> February as to neglect the constant use of the lead in such weather while going up channel. Had ordinary precaution been taken, the probability is that this disaster would have been avoided; but, be this as it may, the court feel compelled to pronounce the master in default for not availing himself of this most useful and necessary aid to navigation. Considering, however, his high character and favourable antecedents, the court suspend the certificate, of Mr James Brown for three calendar months only, dating from the 17<sup>th</sup> February, the day on which the vessel was stranded

## **The Aftermath**

From the Cambrian News 14<sup>th</sup> April 1876

PORTMADOC THE Loss OF THE TURKESTAN.—CLAIM FOR SALVAGE.— At the Bangor District Admiralty Court, on Monday, April 10<sup>th</sup>, before Mr Horatio Lloyd, the British and Eastern Steamship Company were sued by the Portmadoc Steam tug Company for £3100 salvage in connection with the loss of the Turkestan, an iron ship of 1,500 tons register, which was wrecked on the Welsh Coast near Harlech, on February 17. Mr R. Jones (Messrs Breese, Jones, and Casson) was for the plaintiffs, and Mr J. W. Hughes for the defendants, who had paid £50 into court. Information of the wreck reached Portmadoc early on the morning of February 18, and the tug James Conley, owned by the plaintiffs, at once went out, but, owing to the heavy sea, could not get near the Turkestan. The tug went on to Criccieth, and towed the lifeboat thence to the wreck, and with some trouble twenty two of the crew were taken on board the Wave of Life, another tug belonging to the plaintiffs, which had come up whilst her sister tug was on her way from Criccieth. At the request of the Captain of the Turkestan, the James Conley remained by the wreck all night, and was joined by the other tug, which had the lifeboat attached to her. For the defence it was contended that £50 was ample compensation for the services rendered by the tugs. £40 having been paid for the services of the lifeboat. Judgment was given for £25, and costs, exclusive of the sum paid into court.



Fig 5. Model of the WAVE OF LIFE at Porthmadog Maritime Museum

The following is chronological information of the aftermath derived mostly from on-line newspapers

### **Salvaging the Cargo**

From the North Wales Chronicle - Saturday 01 April 1876

#### THE TURKESTAN

- An auction sale of a large quantity of the damaged cargo of the Turkestan took place on the beach, near the vessel, on the 14th ult. We reported at length a few weeks ago the stranding of this fine ship near Harlech, and since that time the unloading of the cargo has been carried on with as much despatch as the rough weather and tides would allow, the uninjured portions being forwarded by trains to Liverpool, and the remainder left on the beach for sale. As the unshipment has progressed, the vessel has been gradually driven further inshore, until at low tide, she is now left far up the beach, and the carts engaged in conveying her cargo to Harlech station are enabled to go to the seaward side for loading. Her position is also changed considerably, the wind and tide having carried her much nearer to Harlech, and swung her broadside round to the seashore. Being also listed over to sea-ward at a considerable angle, her position appears very precarious, and at high tides the waves, during the tempestuous weather which has continued almost without intermission since she struck, wash high above her deck. She is half full of greasy water, in which large barrels of tallow were floating about on the day of sale, and it is feared that the side upon which all her weight is now thrown is yielding under the immense strain. Powerful pumping machinery has been placed on board, including one of Wynne's centrifugal pumps, capable of ejecting about twenty tons of water per minute and when the 500 tons of cargo, which still remained in her on Tuesday, is unshipped, there will not be much difficulty in pumping her out if any attempt is made to get her off, about which however, there seems great uncertainty, the captain himself apparently knowing nothing. The total weight of cargo is said to have been about 2,600 tons, and although a large proportion of this has been forwarded to Liverpool, the great quantity remaining on the beach occasioned the utmost surprise at the enormous stowage capacity of the vessel. Bales of cotton, oilcake, saturated wheat, barrels of flour and sacks of oatmeal lay spread over the beach in large quantities, and the large number of people who assembled on Tuesday to witness or take part in the sale gave the beach an appearance which could only be likened to a well-attended fair. The auction was entrusted to Mr. David Jones, auctioneer, Tremadoc, but in his absence, through pressure of business, the sale was conducted by Mr R. S. Williams, auctioneer and estate agent, Pwllheli, by whom the goods were sold in a very short time and went at advanced prices, the oatmeal varying from 11s to 12s per bag, each weighing from 80 lbs. to 90 lbs. clover seeds.

North Wales Chronicle 22<sup>nd</sup> April 1876

PORTMADOC. THE TURKESTAN—On the 3rd inst, a second sale of damaged cargo unshipped from the Turkestan took place on the beach near Harlech. The auction was conducted by Mr Robert Jones, auctioneer, Tremadoc, and the total amount realised by the sale was £1300. All the cargo is now unshipped, and a considerable number of men are engaged on board the vessel in an endeavour to stop a large leak in the starboard bilge, caused by the enormous strain of the vessel's weight. In the hope of rendering the leak accessible for repairs an attempt is now being made to alter the vessel's position by causing her to list in shore, instead of to seaward as at present. To effect this large spars have been fixed, projecting over the port side, and upon them are hung heavy cables and weights, and by the enormous leverage thus obtained it is expected that she will be brought over as required during the next Spring tide. This accomplished there will be reasonable hope of saving the ship.

## **The Salvage Attempt**

Belfast News-Letter - Tuesday 09 May 1876

THE IRON SHIP TURKESTAN 1,467 Tons; built by Messrs. RICHARDSON, DUCE, & Co., in 1874, and classed 20 years in red in the Liverpool Iron Book. THE COMMITTEE OF THE LIVERPOOL SALVAGE ASSOCIATION invite TENDERS for the PURCHASE of this VESSEL, as she lies stranded on Harlech Sands, together with her Materials, Fittings, and sundry of her Stores there and in Liverpool. Tenders should be sent in on or before MONDAY, the 15th inst., addressed to the Secretary, 19A, Exchange Buildings, and should be endorsed, "Tender for Turkestan." (By order of the concerned) N. RUNDELL, Jun., Secretary. Liverpool, May 4th, 1876.

From the Cambrian News 19<sup>th</sup> May 1876

PORTMADOC THE WRECKED TURKESTAN.-The Messrs J. H. Williams and Sons, Britannia Foundry, Portmadoc, have just purchased the Turkestan, which was stranded on the coast under Harlech a few weeks ago, for about £2500. They expect to float the vessel, and if they succeed the purchase will be a very fortunate investment. In any case, even if it will have to be broken up it will be a good bargain. The Messrs Williams have more facilities either for floating her or breaking her up than anyone else here.

From the Cambrian News 25<sup>th</sup> August 1876

PORTMADOC A CHAPTER OF DISASTERS.—It appears that the stranded ship Turkestan is to be attended with nothing but disasters to the end of the chapter. A few Months ago, Messrs J. H. Williams and Sons, Britannia Foundry, Portmadoc, bought that vessel as it lay on the beach under Harlech. For some weeks past scores of their workmen have been engaged on it staunching the holes, there being some steam pumps employed to get the water out of it. About a month ago an attempt was made to get it off, but that attempt failed. Mr J. H. Williams, the senior- member of the firm, then caught a slight cold on the lungs, and this, combined with a tendency to disease of the heart, prostrated him. He lingered on until noon on Monday, Aug. 21, when he died. The attempt to get the Turkestan off on Monday evening failed, but another attempt was made on Tuesday evening, but with what result we do not know at the time of writing this.

From the North Wales Chronicle - Saturday 26 August 1876

ATTEMPT TO FLOAT THE TURKESTAN - Much interest has lately been concentrated upon the ill-fated ship Turkestan, which has been lying a useless hulk on the beach near Harlech since she ran aground there in February last. It will be known to most of our readers that the ship was sold by tender some months ago, and that she was bought by Messrs J. H, Williams and Sons for the sum of £2,700. Since that time the firm have been actively working with the view to repairing the damaged hull and floating it. Great difficulty has, however, been experienced in consequence of a large quantity of sand - about two hundred tons having entered a rent in the side, and this has rendered it almost impossible to arrive at the leak. Last week the rent was so far repaired that an attempt to remove the ship during a spring tide on Saturday evening was decided upon. It, however, proved unsuccessful in consequence of the pumps failing at the critical moment. A second attempt on Monday night was determined upon, and the chances of success were increased by the high spring tide than anticipated. A wide channel had previously been dug in the sand, extending from the stern of the vessel obliquely to the sea, but the action of the waves rendered it necessary that this should be renewed prior to each attempt. Consequently the Messrs. Williams sent the crier through the town early on Monday, appealing to their friends and

well-wishers for aid in the preparations to move the vessel that night, undertaking that the railway fares of all should be paid. The result of this was a spontaneous response from every quarter of the town, and by twelve o'clock some six hundred willing hands had assembled by boat and train on the beach, variously equipped with spades, shovels, hammers, and tools of many descriptions. In a short time the whole number were vigorously working at the watery sand, and carts and barrows were filled with astonishing rapidity. The excavated sand was conveyed a short distance away, and during the afternoon, many hundreds of tons of it accumulated, and the channel was rapidly widened and deepened to the required extent. Never have men worked with greater assiduity in self-interest than the generous army worked at Harlech on Monday in behalf of those who had appealed for their aid; and though their indefatigable exertions proved futile to bring about the desired success, they served to demonstrate the gratitude by which, as by a common impulse, they were actuated. By the time the advancing evening tide compelled a cessation of labour, a broad and deep channel had been formed, fully equal to the requirement, and the perspiring toilers sought the rest which was the only reward they thought of. The tide was at its height by about nine o'clock, and at that time, the two Portmadoc tugs, "Wave of Life" and "James Conley", and the screw vessel "Rebecca" (which plies with merchandise between Portmadoc and Liverpool) were attached to the Turkestan, and their combined power was exerted again and again in vain attempts to set in motion the embedded and leaky hull. The moment was of exiting interest. Every eye peering through the darkness in eager hopefulness of witnessing the resisting object succumb to the enormous forces acting upon it, but only to turn away with a disappointing look after repeated failures. So great was the strain on one or two of the tugs, that the hawsers were snapped. The utmost efforts proved useless, for in consequence of one or two of the pumps refusing to act, the water rapidly gained upon the others, and before long, the hold of the Turkestan contained many feet of water. The tugs accordingly cast off, and the Rebecca (which had been telegraphed for from Pwllheli purposely to assist the others) proceeded on her way to Liverpool. It was at this juncture that the misfortune of the night was embittered by a circumstance which resulted fatally to one of those most actively interested in the Turkestan. Captain Morgan Davies, previously master of the "Ocean Child", had been on board all day, and at this time, thirsting and fatigued, he went into the cabin in search of water to drink. He found a jar containing a liquid, and without ascertaining its nature, hastily drank it. He then discovered that he had swallowed a quantity of paraffin oil. Shortly after, he became insensible, and in that condition he was taken to Portmadoc, where he died on the following morning. (Full particulars of the inquest will be found elsewhere). Numerous groups of people were assembled on the prominences at and beyond Borth, and on the quay, eagerly watching for the movement of the light at the masthead of the Turkestan, which would indicate success. They were, however, doomed to disappointment, as the numerous expressions of regret heard on every side proved how truly they had wished that success might have rewarded the exertions of the Messrs Williams. Among the almost unexampled signs of good feeling which have been displayed in Portmadoc during this week in connection with the Turkestan, one or two instances may be specially noted. It is understood that many of the men employed by the Messrs Roberts, Steam Flour Mill, were sent by the firm to Harlech to assist at the vessel. The Rebecca was also generously sent by the proprietors free of charge (provided the ship was not floated), to assist the two ordinary tugs, and she was delayed in her departure to Liverpool especially for that purpose.

**THE FATAL MISTAKE ON THE TURKESTAN.** - The inquiry into the circumstances of the death of Captain Morgan Davies, late master of, the "Ocean Child", to which reference has been made elsewhere, was held in the police station, Portmadoc, by Dr. H. Hunter Hughes, coroner, on Wednesday last. Captain Evan Roberts, Bank-place, Portmadoc, was foreman of the jury. From the evidence of Capt. Edwards, of the schooner "Rose", it appeared that deceased entered the chief cabin of the Turkestan during the evening in search of water to drink. Shortly after he went in, he returned, and told witness that he had drunk some paraffin oil in mistake for water. Witness recommended him to take some means to cause a vomit, and at once called for help. A small quantity of milk was brought, which deceased drank, and in the meantime, Dr.

Roberts, Portmadoc, who happened to be on the beach, was sent for. Dr. Roberts said he was called to the deceased on board the Turkestan on Monday evening, and found him in a very dangerous state, His tongue was contracted, and he was near being suffocated. Witness was



informed that the deceased had drunk a quantity of paraffin oil, and he accordingly administered a little salt water to induce vomiting. Witness remained with him while he was conveyed to Portmadoc in a tugboat and till about two o'clock in the morning, keeping the deceased's tongue out to prevent suffocation. When he left at the above hour there was a slight improvement, and witness left his assistant with the patient for the remainder of the night. At eight o'clock in the next morning he called again, and the deceased was then able to speak, and stated that he had drunk the oil by mistake, thinking it was water. A relapse occurred soon after this time and he died at about noon. Mr Williams, clerk to Messrs Williams, Britannia Foundry, stated that the paraffin oil had been brought from Harlech during the day in the place of naphtha, which could not be obtained there. He could not say where it was placed in the vessel. This concluded the evidence and the jury returned a verdict of "Accidental Death." - Captain Morgan Davies was 46 years of age. He was much respected in the town, and as he gave up the command of the Ocean Child expressly to assist in the removal of the Turkestan, his untimely end was still more melancholy.

#### From the North Wales Chronicle 23<sup>rd</sup> September 1876

FURTHER ATTEMPTS TO FLOAT THE TURKESTAN.—On Tuesday last further attempts were made by Messrs Williams, of the Britannia Foundry, to float the hull of the Turkestan from the sandy hollow into which she has sunk under the influence of the waves. As many of our readers are aware, the Turkestan has settled down some feet into the sand on her starboard side, and is listed seaward at a considerable angle. The immense strain thus thrown on the lower side has caused the plates to open, and through the aperture one or two hundred tons of sand have entered the vessel. Owing to the quick nature of the sand it was found impracticable to clear it out to arrive at the leak, fresh sand being washed in by every tide, A platform, made as far watertight as possible, was therefore constructed over it, and any leakage through this or elsewhere could, it was thought, be counteracted by the pumps. These were four in number and of considerable capacity, but unfortunately happened once or twice that when an attempt to remove the ship had been decided upon they were choked by the sand, and the water gained rapidly in the hold. Moreover, the dead weight of sand which the platform covered sadly lessened the vessel's buoyancy. Under these adverse circumstances the persevering efforts of the Messrs Williams have not yet been successful, and so great has been the public interest taken in the ship that it is not too much to say that a general feeling of regret pervades the town at the repeated failures. On the occasion of a former attempt public aid was solicited for digging a channel in the sand, and on Monday last a similar course was adopted, and in response about one hundred and fifty men went from Portmadoc, to do all in their power to promote the success of the next day's attempts. On Tuesday morning at flood tide the two Portmadoc tugs, Wave of Life and James Conley, and the Great Emperor, a powerful tug from Liverpool, were attached to the helpless hulk. The nominal horse power of the tugs was nearly 210, and the effective force exerted again and Wednesday morning in futile attempts to move the resisting mass would therefore be about 1,200 horse power. A judicious alteration of the towing arrangement was made, in the hawsers of two tugs being carried from the bottom of the hull, whereby a tendency to lift it was established. In the morning attempt it was understood that the ship moved about twelve feet, but this can scarcely be accepted as an encouraging circumstance, for probably she was merely jammed against one side of the excavated dock. At the evening flood tide the Great Emperor and Wave of Life were again attached, but they were unable to do any good, and the Liverpool tug returned to its port. It is probable that if these attempts are not final a different, course will in future be adopted. A favourite idea with many who have watched the previous efforts with interest and good wishes, has been the causing of the ship to list inshore, which would be effected by attaching pontoons or lighters to the lower side at low water, which, assisted by counterbalancing weights on the landward or port side, and other means suggested. would, it is believed, cause her

with the rising tide to fall over to the port side. By this course the aperture in the bottom would be exposed to view and could eventually repaired, which would in turn allow of the removal of the burden of sand, and the heavy pumps, etc., from within. She would probably be lightened to the extent of about 300 tons. In the meantime whatever course is adopted the Messrs Williams may derive some satisfaction from the knowledge that the cordial good wishes of the entire public of Portmadoc are with them.

From the Cambrian News February 9<sup>th</sup> 1877

STORMS.—The late storms were severely felt, though no great damage has been done, so far as we could hear, in this neighbourhood. Some of the ships in the harbour got loose from their moorings, and knocked against the wharves or one another. The Turkestan has partly broken up. There were rumours of a vessel having been wrecked on the sands near Harlech, and all hands lost; but that has turned out fortunately to be without foundation.

From the Western Mail 14<sup>th</sup> June 1877

**SHIPS, &c., FOR SALE.**

**T**O SALVAGE CONTRACTORS; IRON MERCHANTS, &c.—  
To be SOLD by PRIVATE TREATY, the Iron Ship "TURKESTAN," 1,467 tons, built in 1874, and classed 20 years in Red in the Liverpool Iron Book, now lying on Harlech Sands, together with her Materials there and at Portmadoc.

Tenders to be sent in or before the 25th instant, endorsed "Tender for Turkestan."

The highest or any Tender will not necessarily be accepted.

**JOHN H. WILLIAMS & SONS.**  
Portmadoc, June 14th, 1877. 19028b20

Fig 6.

During 1877 there was a dispute over the ownership of the vessel. Fittings and material was salvaged but there doesn't seem to have been any attempts to refloat the ship.

From the Cambrian News 12<sup>th</sup> July 1878

HARLECH. THE TURKESTAN.—A firm from Hull have commenced work at the Turkestan, and they are confident of being able to get her off.

If an attempt was made it was not successful. A slow process of dismantling the Turkestan then commenced. In 1884 she still lay there.

By then ownership of the wreck had reverted to John H. Williams & Co.

Liverpool Mercury - Wednesday 23 April 1884

Portmadoc, Carnarvonshire. SALE OF WRECK - Mr. W. RIVA (of Holyhead) has been Instructed to Sell by Auction, To-morrow (Thursday), the 24th instant, at Three o'clock in the afternoon, at the Britannia Foundry, Portmadoc, The splendid Iron Ship TURKESTAN, as she lies on the Beach at Harlech (distance of nine miles from Portmadoc). The Turkestan is 1467 tons register. Built at Stockton by Messrs. Richardson, Duck, and Co., in 1874, of the very best materials, has fore and mizzen masts and bowsprit standing; has a steam winch and boiler fixed on upper deck - has a strong wooden bulkhead fitted close to the main mast, and this part of the ship is sound and could be floated intact. If broken up, the materials can be taken off the beach in flats or lighters. The estimated weight of iron in the ship is 750 tons, which all be had. Immediately afterwards will be sold in lots a quantity of Blocks, Smith Works, Boats, Furniture, Wire Ropes, Chains, Compasses, Rifles, Medicine Chests, Anchors, &c. For further particulars apply to Captain Donald Taylor, at Messrs. H.M. Davies and Co.'s, 52, South Castle street, Liverpool; Messrs John H Williams and Sons, Britannia Foundry, Portmadoc; or to the auctioneer, Holyhead.

From the Cambrian News 26<sup>th</sup> September 1884

HARLECH TOWN AND CASTLE. The other day I walked round the grey, weather-worn, walls of Harlech Castle, and through the narrow, hilly streets of the town. On the plain below there was an exhibition of improved Welsh cattle and of the latest inventions in agricultural implements. On the beach, between high and low water marks, the battered hull of, a large iron ship the Turkestan was lying.

***This is an extract from account by the sisters Fanny and Ethel Holland Thomas – daughters of Captain Lewis Holland Thomas of Caerffynnon, Talsarnau – from the book The Caerffynnon Story written by Heulwen Isambard Owen and Hedydd Isambard Owen published 1973***

"There was nothing left to do but to dismantle her of her luxury fittings and to write her off as a wreck. But that was just what the local mariners could not accept. Purchaser after purchaser, in love with the beautiful ship, sank his all with that embedded keel in the sands, until with time the "Turkestan" began to break up. She was a favourite with the Caerffynnon children who played up and down her meaningless ladders and silent decks for many a long day. Local children fell ill with infected throats and workmen were sent in to hasten the slow decay of the once lovely ship. The last Ethel saw saw of "Turkestan" was when, newly married, she brought her husband to see her old home and they walked along the beach at Harlech. **A vast, green pool shining on the beach marked the resting place of the proud old wreck".**

Ethel was born in 1868 and married in 1905 (Ancestry.co.uk)

But that was not the end of the story! During the First World War the price of iron was so high it became viable to dig out the remaining ironwork.

The Cambrian News and Merionethshire Standard. 7th April 1916

Wreckage. On Monday, Mr. T. O. Williams, manager of Llanfair Quarry, who has taken interest in the wreck of the old "Turkistan", an iron ship perfectly submerged in the sands on Harlech beach for the last forty years, has put men on the work of salvage.

## 7.0 Analysis

The incident is well documented in the press and in books. The information in books is often derived from the former. The writing in Victorian newspapers is frequently flowery, prone to exaggeration and sensationalism (still is!). The articles on the TURKESTAN seem quite accurate and the facts correct.

There is a considerable amount of information on the Internet.

It was reported that the vessel had sailed a fast passage from New York of 17 days. Her landfall on the SW coast of Ireland was probably by dead reckoning and her run up the Irish Sea ahead of the log readings. Captain Brown was probably unsure of his position as visibility was poor. State of the tide at the time is unknown but there is a definite set into Cardigan Bay, The master was censured in the BOT Inquiry to fail to order soundings taken as this would have indicated the vessel was heading into shallow water.

The salvage attempts and final breaking up is well documented; There are at least two accounts of attempting to list the vessel over on to the port (landward) side to access a major leak. Nick Chipchase's photo shows her over to starboard still with a large crack on that side; in fact it appears that the vessel's back is broken. This possibly was caused by the storm of February the next year.

In February 1885 it was noted in an account of another shipwreck (The SPANKER) that the stranding had occurred "near the wreck of the TURKESTAN". This indicates that the scrapping of the vessel was a prolonged operation. No other mention of the wreck has been found until 1905 in the book "The Caerffynnon Story" where it is noted that nothing was in view. However, in 1916 it was reported that an attempt was to be made to salvage further ironwork (probably covered with sand).

## 8.0 Conclusions & Recommendations

The stranding of the *Turkestan* is an important incident in a historical context. It was one of the largest ships wrecked in this corner of Cardigan Bay and dominated the shoreline for several years until it was finally broken up. Many local people were involved viz, the tugboat crews from Porthmadog, the lifeboatmen from Criccieth, the people of Harlech where the wreck sat on their doorstep, those who were involved financially and in the physical side of the salvage attempts and the breaking up.

It is perhaps not so important in archaeological or diving terms as very little (or anything) remains in situ. "**Site Description:** Archaeological remains associated with the loss of this vessel are not confirmed as present at this location, but may be in the vicinity. (COFLEIN NPRN 271706)".

This stretch of shoreline has been affected by accretion for centuries with material being carried eastward along the southern shore of the Llŷn Peninsula so the site of the incident has been greatly altered. It is possible that remains could be uncovered by storms combined with spring tides. It is unknown if metal detectorists have recorded any indication. Hundreds of local men were involved with the salvage attempts and it is very likely that there are artefacts or material scattered around the district. The owners of the wreck removed many deck and cabin fittings to be stored at Porthmadog and sold these for re-use. The temptation to "salvage" items was so great that the owners hired two watchmen.

An interesting aspect is how the breaking up was practically achieved in quite a remote area. There is one mention in the press of horses and carts taking machinery from the wreck to the station. In the photo one of the yards remains and appears to be rigged. There is mention of steam pumps being used; It's doubtful whether the vessel had a steam "donkey" engine so were there steam winches brought in?. When weather and tide permitted, lighters or old hulls were brought in to transport the material to Porthmadog by sea.

The report was compiled completely at home, during the Covid-10 lockdown 2020, from books and online resources. The amount and range of digital data is continuously being added to. The database will be useful to dive clubs, historians, historical societies, archaeology enthusiasts and local schools. The references and methodology will give these and other interested parties an idea of the huge amount of data available for research projects. There is undoubtedly anecdotal evidence but there was no opportunity to visit the site or nearby communities.

## 9.0 References

Sources include:

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RCAHMW COFLEIN <https://coflein.gov.uk/en/site/271706/details/turkestan>

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

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

CLIP Crewlist project for dimensions/details of vessels <https://www.crewlist.org.uk/>

Book – "The Caerffynnon Story" written by Heulwen Isambard Owen and Hedydd Isambard Owen published 1973

**Appendices:**

**Appendix A – Table of Lloyd’s Registers entries for the *TURKESTAN***

1875-76.											TUN			
Official Number. International Code Signal Letters.	Ships' Names.	Masters.	Regist'd Tonnage Net Gross Under Deck.	Registered Dimensions.			Engines of Steamers. <i>Builders of Engines.</i> Materials. Repairs of Ships, &c.	Build.		Owners.	Port belonging to.	Port of Survey.	Years Assigned.	Character for Hull and Stores. Also Date of Last Survey.
				Length.	Breadth.	Depth.		Where Builders' Names.	When					
501 48646 <i>F.T.P.B.</i>	Tun Sin Iron	PadSr	611 774 541	241.3	26.0	12.8	2..... 140HP.	Lond'n	1863	ChinaNavCo (Lim)	London	.....		
2 68407 <i>M.D.P.G.</i>	Tunis Iron	SewSr 4 <i>B.Hds</i> Cem.73	887 1374	241.3	30.1	17.0	2Comp.L.D.A. 110HP. 27&50-33 s.c. MC.73 <i>N.E.MarineCo.Sld.</i>	Nwestl Mitchell pt doubl bottom	1873 1mo.	Nelson, Donkin&Co. s.s. <i>Narcissus</i> 1-76	London	Nwc. A.&CP.		90A1 4.73
3 69345 <i>M.R.G.N.</i>	Turkestan Iron	S J.Brown 1 <i>B.Hd</i> Cem.74	1418 1467 1339	225.0	38.5	23.3	..... P.40ft.F.38ft. 2 <i>Dks</i>	Stektn Richdsn	1874 2mo.	Brit.&East. ShippingCo. (Lim.)	Liverp'l	Lon.		100A1 3.75



## Appendix B – Items thought to be associated with the *TURKESTAN*



Fig 8. A Dresser thought to have been made from timbers salvaged from the *Turkestan*.



Fig 7. An Octant believed to have been on the *Turkestan* when it wrecked.