

Welsh Wreck Web Research Project (North Cardigan Bay)

On-line research into the wreck of the: **Va sans Peur**



Va sans Peur portrait by Henry Kérisit

Report compiled by:

Morgane Mahaud

Report Title:

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

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Date:

July-December 2020

Report Ref:

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1. Abstract

The "www Research Project" is a project from Malvern diving Unit aiming to catalogue and extensively investigate ship incidents in Cardigan Bay during confinement caused by covid-19.

This report aim to understand better what happened to the Va sans Peur on St-Patrick causeway at the end of march 1948.

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2.3. Contributors

Ian Cundy

Malvern Archaeological Diving Unit

Henry Kérisit (indirectly)

3. Introduction

I choose the *Va sans Peur* in combination with another vessel, the *Equateur*, from mid-nineteen century. I wanted to study ships from different time periods.

I purposefully choose two French vessel since, as a French native speaker, I would have access to both English and French sources. I'm looking to know:

- What this French vessel doing in Cardigan Bay?
- What were the vessel's specifications?
- What historical information is available relating to the vessel?
- What was the story leading up to wrecking?
- What caused the wrecking?
- What has happened since the wrecking?
- Has anyone previously investigated or researched the vessel back story?
- Has anyone dived, recorded, surveyed or worked on the site?
- Has any salvage, etc. been carried out?
- Have there been any previous reports produced relating to the vessel?

4. Background

All information I initially had were given by the MADU initial search.

Jones, I.W., 2001, *Shipwrecks of North Wales*. Landmark Publishing Ltd. P32

the Barmouth lifeboat the Lawrence Ardern, Stockport gave help to the fishing vessel Va-Sans-Peur, of Concarneau on 25th March 1948."

Parry, H., 1969, *Wreck and Rescue on the Coast of Wales*. Vol 1: The Lifeboats of Cardigan Bay and Anglesey. D. Bradford Barton Ltd. P27

"Vans sans peur, a Breton trawler (25 march 1948, later towed off)" wrecked on St Patrick Causeway

<https://web.archive.org/web/20070425234855/http://freespace.virgin.net:80/r.cadwalader/maritime/lifeboat/wreck.htm>

VA SANS PEUR	FISH	?	BRITTANY	25th MAR 1948	CAUSEWAY?	Ran aground then refloated.
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5. Research Methodology

5.1. Internet access

I've done most of my internet research from my PC. With Firefox and using Ecosia and DuckDuckGo as search engines

5.2. *Va sans peur* or *Vans sans peur*?

We have a first incoherence for the vessel name from the initial 3 sources.

As a French native speaker, *Vans sans peur* does not sound like a ship name. *Va sans peur*, however, literally meaning "Go without fear", does. The ship name is most likely *Va sans peur*.

5.3. Beginner luck: Henry Kérisit portrait

I start by searching some variation of "Va sans peur navire", just in case, and found this page: https://www.henrykerisit.bzh/index.php/fiche_bateau/va-sans-peur/ This page contained the beautiful ship portrait by Henry Kérisit on the first page of this report, and technical information about the vessel.

- Is that the same ship?
- the name matches
- the port, Concarneau in Brittany, matches
- the role (fishing vessel) matches
- the construction year means the *Va sans peur* would have been 13 years old by time of the incident, which sounds reasonable
- *Va sans peur* while not unique, isn't that common a name for a ship

I'm going to assume it's the same ship.

From there I get the trawler dimensions, year of construction, owner, builder...

Mr Kérisit detailed his methodology in his website. He begins with photographs or postcards from the ship (in this case a photograph from the Merdy collection, AMM 1939, plan de chantier, François Le Derout) then use the ship name and id number to inquire about the ship at the service historique de la Marine, or at the Inscription maritime. He completes the information with oral witness if available (not noted if that was the case for the *Va sans Peur*).

The ship portrait appears in a black and white version in the book *Ar Vag, tome 1, page 365, 1978, Bernard Cadoret et Cie, 4 Seigneurs*.

5.4. A haul of Concarneau's photographs

I first thought about getting a photo from the ship. Quick researches show me that the Le Merdy collection was a sort of institution in Concarneau. The photo studio was bought by Germain Le Merdy in 1920 along with 19th century glass photos. The studio is still kicking with the 4th

generation of Le Merdy photographers taking care of it. A lot of photographs are numerised on their facebook page. I didn't find an ordered online database so I tried to contact them (05/12/2020). They are currently putting up such a database but the task is still in progress.

<https://www.ouest-france.fr/bretagne/concarneau-29900/l-arriere-petit-fils-fait-revivre-les-photos-le-merdy-5919968>

<https://www.facebook.com/studiolemerdy/>

5.5. Online library limitation

I also thought about accessing the *Ar Vag* book to get more context about the ship. I focus my search on 3 books from Kévirrit and colleagues but unfortunately found no digitalised versions.

5.6. French maritime archives, a.k.a the maze

Since I had the *Va sans peur* id number, I thought I was going to obtain more information about the ship and its crew easily enough from the official archives. Naively.

French maritime archived are dispatched in different cities depending of the type of archive, the type of vessel (commercial, military...) and the vessel's port. A unification project is in progress but currently it's a maze and only few of them have been digitalised.

My guess would be that the *Va sans Peur* inscription archive would be in Lorient among the series P. They are not digitalised.

5.7. Wreck press report: plus de peur que de mal

I found only one article while browsing the British newspaper archives.

<https://www.britishnewspaperarchive.co.uk/viewer/bl/0000104/19480327/012/0001>

Western Mail - Saturday 27 March 1948

"Welsh Lifeboatmen Aid Trawler The first influx of holiday-makers to Barmouth had a thrill yesterday when Barmouth lifeboat returned to its base after having spent six hours in Cardigan Bay giving assistance to a Breton fishing trawler which had run aground on the treacherous Causeway. off Dyffryn. Coxswain Edward Jones later told a reporter that the trawler, the Vans Sans Peur, had a crew of 11 Bretons. Second coxswain Harry Lloyd Jones boarded her and explained to the crew, who knew practically no English, how to get the vessel off the Causeway. There were no casualties."

The source of the name typo has been found. It seems the date of the incident is the 26th and not the 25th.

Another article on the same page report a "splendid weather" and a "cloudless sky" for the 26th. Cause of the incident is probably not the weather.

As for the French archives gallica.bnf.fr, the only mention I found of a *Va sans Peur* around those dates is a race horse.

Wreck and refloating happened the same day with no causality and the Va sans Peur continues its sail. There is no wreck to dive.

5.8.A locally famous ship

I went back to classic duck duck go search a few months later and the keywords “Va sans Peur” thonier” gave me some interesting results:

I learned that the ship features in a diorama at the Musée de la pêche at Concarneau

<https://www.musee-peche.fr/fr/decouvrez-le-musee/item/138-les-collections-du-musee>



Figure 1: Restoration of the Va sans Peur model at Musée de la pêche, Concarneau

5.9.A locally famous crewmember

The necrology notice of François Régis Hutin, former head of Ouest France (a regional newspaper in the West of France), mentions that he was crewmember on the fishing dundee Va sans Peur in 1950. Given the name and ship type, it's probably our ship.

<https://lemarin.ouest-france.fr/secteurs-activites/divers/30168-francois-regis-hutin-un-grand-capitaine-une-ame-de-marin>

5.10. A postcard

A shop is currently (05/12/2020) selling online a postcard of the ship:

<https://www.delcampe.net/fr/collections/cartes-postales/bateaux/peche/thoniers-de-latlantique-va-sans-peur-521411809.html>

Number matches, that's our ship. Card is 15x10cm. Publication date not detailed. Since the picture came from a merchand website, the image have been disformed to avoid replication.



Figure 2: Postcard starring the Va sans peur

5.11. Second search on Gallica

Seeing how famous the Va sans peur seems to be, I decided to do a second search on Gallica for "Va sans peur" concerneau" and "'Va sans peur" peche" and for all dates after 1935. And, among mentions of the racing horse again and uses of the colloquial expression, I was rewarded by a photograph of the ship from **Hervé Gloux, Jean-Yves Manac'h, Les bateaux de pêche de Bretagne : histoire et technique, 1976**

<https://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/bpt6k48044396/f31.image.r=%22va%20sans%20peur%22>



Figure 3: Photograph of the Va sans Peur

A legend was linked to the photograph: *"Va sans peur a abandonné la voûte arrière, la surface de voilure est au maximum mais, dans les fonds, l'étambot est déjà percé pour le passage futur de l'arbre d'hélice"*

"Va sans peur has abandoned the aft arch, the sail area is at the maximum but, in the bottom, the stern post is already drilled for the future passage of the propeller shaft"

Browsing the available parts of the book, it seems Louis Krebs had built some cold chamber for the tuna on ships themselves from 1932. Given the dates and the fact the Va sans peur come from Krebs shipyard, she may have owned one of those.

5.12. A final stroke of luck: Ar Vag

I went to see my parents while I was finishing this report. And when I browse my father's library I found... *Ar Vag, voiles au travail en Bretagne Atlantique*.

The book is as complete as I expected and give a lot of information about the fishing practices in Brittany, fishermen's life, ships, etc.

The book includes some information about the building process of the dundees, which differ a bit for each region.

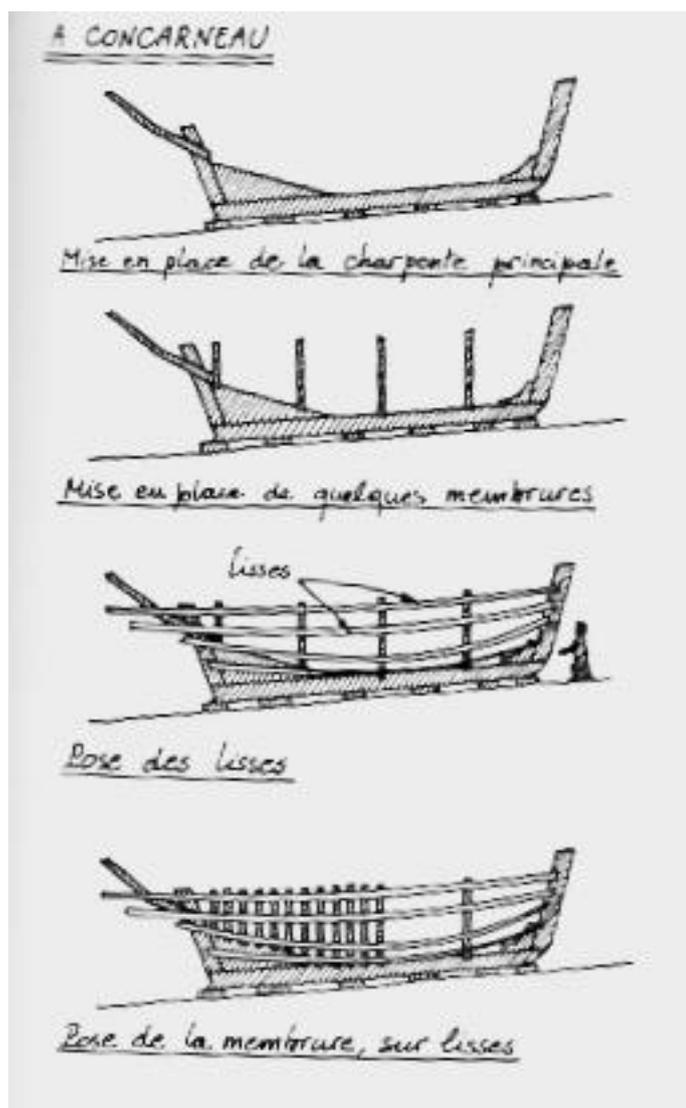


Figure 4: schema of dundee building in Concarneau

It also indicates that the dundees routes (see figure below), which can bring them far from the Breton coasts. The navigation follows intuition and experience more than precise metrics. Some indication was given by the markers, water colour, swell, ship traffic and so on. According to the book (see map below), the white tuna ("germon") season is from June to October and it doesn't go as far north as the Irish sea. So I don't know what the Va sans Peur was doing near Welsh coasts.

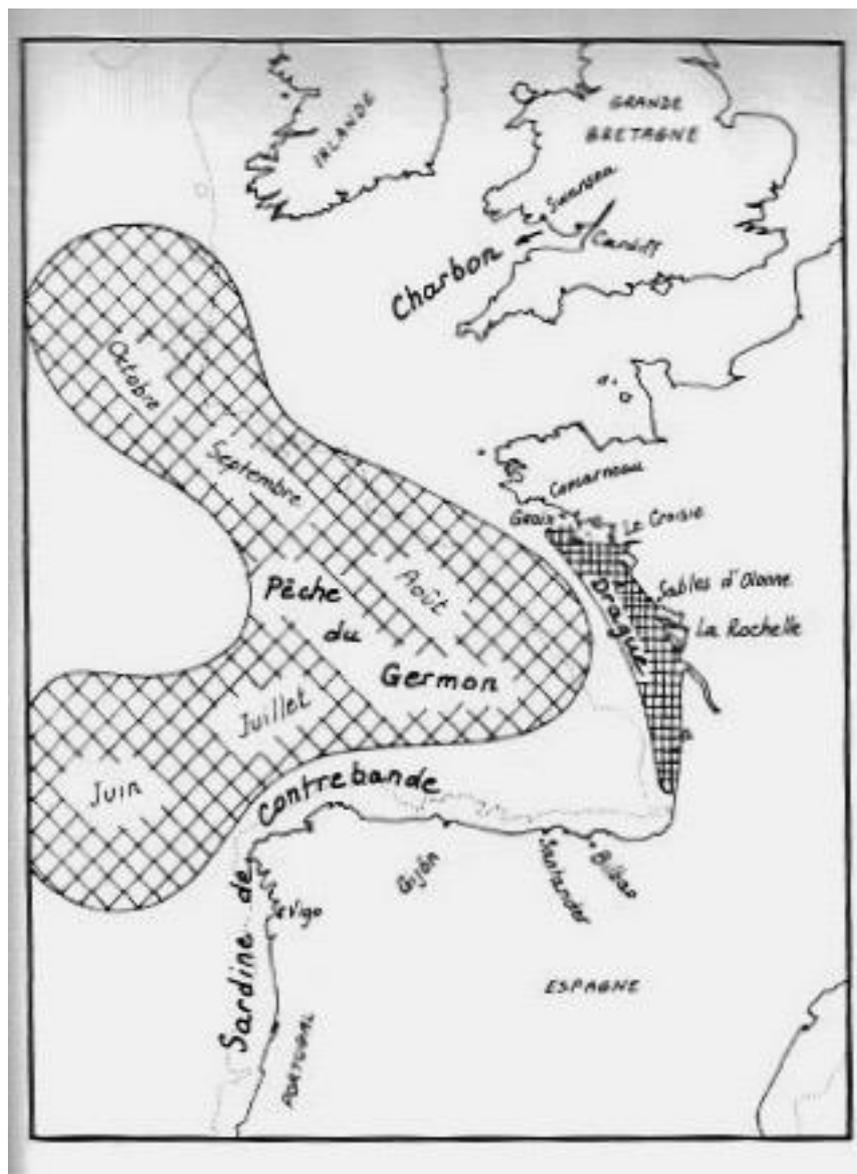


Figure 5: Map of fishing routes and season

A paragraph about the Va sans Peur was included at the end of the book, with plans, the same photograph as the previous book and a black and white version of Henry Kérisit portrait (see appendix 2). The vessel was one of the last representant of the sails fishing ships and benefit from a special innovation:

"Après 1930 naît l'ultime génération de thoniers. Les derniers voiliers seront construits en 1937 et 1938. Deux types de bateaux sont mis en chantier. Le type Classique est conserve, mais en général, son tonnage augmente un peu, atteignant 48 à 60 tonneaux à Groix. Certains constructeurs raccourcissent un peu la voute, malgré tout jugée exagérée, comme les chantiers Roy, d'Étel.

L'innovation la plus remarquable est celle réalisée à Concarneau, dont le rôle a été jusque-là peu novateur dans l'histoire de la construction des dundees. Le Va sans Peur (CC 2446) est lance en 1935. Il se différencie des dundées cul plats par son arrière pointu, destiné à soulager sans risqué par houle d'arrière, celle-ci

devant s'ouvrir naturellement sur les formes de la poupe. Mais cette transformation des derniers dundees concarnois ne se généralisera vraiment qu'après la guerre de 39-45 sur les thoniers chalutiers à moteur et voiles auxiliaires. Cette évolution des formes sera sans conséquence réelle sur l'avenir désormais limité de la pêche du thon à la voile.

Les derniers dundees construits atteignent une splendeur et une grâce qui nous semblent d'autant plus merveilleuse que, survivant jusqu'aux années 1960, ils seront les derniers forts voiliers de pêche actifs en Europe."

Once translated:

"After 1930 the last generation of tuna fishers was born. The last sailboats were built in 1937 and 1938. Two types of boats are being built. The Classic type is preserved, but in general, its tonnage increases a little, reaching 48 to 60 barrels at Groix. Some builders shorten the vault a little, despite everything considered exaggerated, like the Roy yards, Etel.

The most remarkable innovation is that made in Concarneau, whose role has hitherto been unse innovative in the history of the construction of dundees. The Va sans Peur (CC 2446) was launched in 1935. It differs from the flat rear dunded by its pointed rear, intended to relieve without risk by rear swell, this one must open naturally on the shapes of the stern. But this transformation of the last dundees of Concarnois did not really become widespread until after the war of 39-45 on the tuna trawlers with motor and auxiliary sails. This evolution of forms will have no real impact on the now limited future of tuna sailing.

The last dundees built reach a splendor and grace that seem all the more wonderful because, surviving until the 1960s, they will be the last active fishing yachts in Europe."

6. Results

- What this French vessel doing in Cardigan Bay?
Maybe fishing, most likely not tuna. It wasn't the right season nor place. Some job in-between season? Post-war smuggling?

- What were the vessel's specifications?

Vessel	Name/s	Va Sans Peur		
	Type	Dundee		
		Thonier ("tuna fisher")		
Built	Date	Laid down		
		Launched 1935		
		Commissioned		
	Builder	Louis Krebs		
		Concarneau, France		
Construction	Materials	Wood		
	Decks			
	Bulkheads			
Propulsion	Type	Sail then sail + engine		
	Details	Diesel		
Engine	Details	Type		
		Size		
		130HP		
		Sulzer		
	Boilers	0		
Drive	Type	Propeller		
	Number	1		
Dimensions	Length	61ft	8.15748031ins	18,80 m
	Beam	20ft	5.27559055ins	6,23 m
	Draught	8ft	8.33070866ins	2,65 m
Tonnage	Gross	52,67		

	Net	21,74
Owner	First	Joseph Sellin et Cie
		Concarneau
	Last	
	Others	
Registry	Port	Concarneau
	Flag	French
	Number	CC2446
History	Routes	Atlantic, Celtic Sea, Biscaye Bay
	Cargo	Fish (Tuna)
Final Voyage	From	
	To	
	Captain	
	Crew	
	Passengers	
	Cargo	
Wrecking	Date	24 or 26 March 1948
	Location	St Patrick Causaway, of
	Cause	Unknown, probably not the weather
	Loss of life	0
	Outcome	Towed off the same day

- What historical information is available relating to the vessel?

A surprising high and diverse amount. The vessel has been on the sea for a while and have achieved local recognition. Enough to fit on a museum diorama and on some postcard.

Complementary information is more likely to be found in Concarneau museum.

- What was the story leading up to wrecking?

The Va sans Peur was out in Cardigan Bay, for uncertain reasons.

- What caused the wrecking?

Probably not the weather as it was good. Inexperience of the area in to be considered.

- What has happened since the wrecking?

A Barmouth lifeboat help the French crew to extract themselves from the causeway the same day. The vessel continues its life as a fishing vessel afterward, at least until 1960 and most likely later. She was most likely still afloat in 1978.

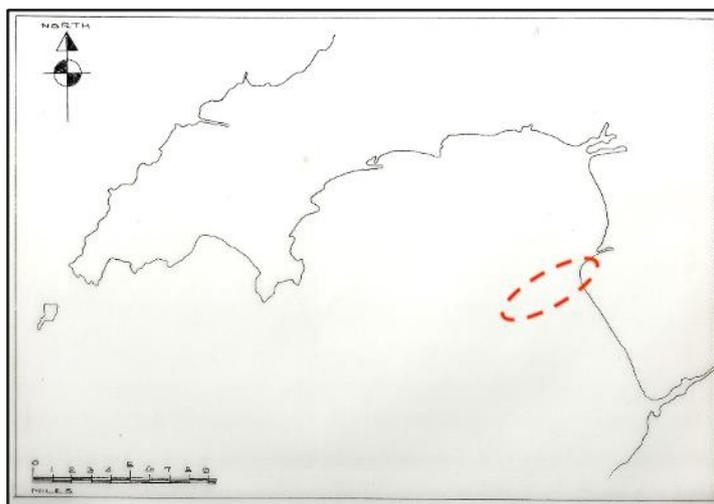


Figure 6: Map of the approximate location of the incident

- Has anyone previously investigated or researched the vessel back story?

Yes. Henry Kérisit as a preparation for his portrait of the ship and Concarneau Musée de la pêche for their diorama.

- Has anyone dived, recorded, surveyed or worked on the site?

N/A. The ship didn't stay wrecked in Cardigan bay

- Has any salvage, etc. been carried out?

N/A

- Have there been any previous reports produced relating to the vessel?

Yes. One in French I found on Henry Kérisit's website. I extracted most of the vessel's specifications from it.

7. Analysis

This was an interesting exercise. It's been a while I have done some research and I could have been more methodical while compiling the information, especially the dates at which I accessed a website. I'm also more used to scientific articles research only, which is difficultly applicable in this case.

I feel that this report is probably not very useful as a wreck report since the incident was solved in the day without much damage. It is however interesting to see a French trawler in Cardigan Bay. Was that common at the time? For which purpose since it's not tuna season nor place? What does the fishing legislation say about it? I'm pretty sure I would have found more information in Concarneau museum and in registers but I was limited by my online status and my unfamiliarity with historical research.

I definitely underused French maritime archives. Because of my lack of understanding of it, and because of my lack of time to learn more about it. A collaboration with French archaeologists would be a plus for the project.

Fortunately, I found some other sources. A portrait, photos, books, a postcard and a diorama: this was quite heteroclite. It seems the *Va sans Peur* had a long life and a local notoriety. It looks like she was a good late representant of the 20th century Breton fishing dundeeds.

I was especially thankful and impressed by Henry Kérisit work on his ship portraits. The technical details and sources were extensive and the portraits themselves a bliss for the eyes.

8. Conclusions & Recommendations

I spent around 50h of online research plus compilation and writing. Most of it online.

The only conflict I saw was on the name, and that was most likely a typo. I found mention of other ships named *Va sans Peur* but the relative rarity of the name coupled with the mention of Concarneau and its role as a fishing vessel were enough to avoid confusions.

I don't know where the *Va sans Peur* finished her life (if she did) but it's most likely not in Cardigan Bay. It will not be possible to dive her wreck.

Since the ship is barely related to the Wales, I don't think it's worth carrying further research for this project.

I'm hoping this report can give some ideas to people looking for French vessels and some data about the tuna dundeeds and their fishing practices, but I think my own unfamiliarity with the French archives limits its use.

9. References

9.1. URLs

- <https://web.archive.org/web/20070425234855/http://freespace.virgin.net:80/r.cadwalader/maritime/lifeboat/wreck.htm>
- https://www.henrykerisit.bzh/index.php/fiche_bateau/va-sans-peur/
- <https://www.ouest-france.fr/bretagne/concarneau-29900/l-arriere-petit-fils-fait-revivre-les-photos-le-merdy-5919968>
- <https://www.facebook.com/studiolemerdy/>
- <https://www.britishnewspaperarchive.co.uk/viewer/bl/0000104/19480327/012/0001>
- <https://www.musee-peche.fr/fr/decouvrez-le-musee/item/138-les-collections-du-musee>
- <https://lemarin.ouest-france.fr/secteurs-activites/divers/30168-francois-regis-hutin-un-grand-capitaine-une-ame-de-marin>
- <https://www.delcampe.net/fr/collections/cartes-postales/bateaux/peche/thoniers-de-latlantique-va-sans-peur-521411809.html>
- <https://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/bpt6k48044396/f31.image.r=%22va%20sans%20peur%22>

9.2. Books

- **Jones, I.W.**, 2001, *Shipwrecks of North Wales*. Landmark Publishing Ltd. P32
- **Parry, H.**, 1969, *Wreck and Rescue on the Coast of Wales. Vol 1: The Lifeboats of Cardigan Bay and Anglesey*. D. Bradford Barton Ltd. P27
- **Hervé Gloux, Jean-Yves Manac'h**, 1976, *Les bateaux de pêche de Bretagne : histoire et technique*, Fayard (Paris). P28
- **Bernard Cadoret et Cie**, 1978, *Ar Vag, tome 1, voiles au travail en Bretagne Atlantique*, 4 Seigneurs. P267, 303, 364-366

9.3. Newspapers

- Western Mail - Saturday 27 March 1948

10. Appendices

10.1. Appendix A – The Timeline for the Va sans peur

1935 :	Launched from Krebs shipyard
25 or 26 March 1948 :	Encounter with St-Patrick causeway. Towed off the same day
Between 1935 and 1976 :	The Va sans Peur get an engine
1950 :	François Régis Hutin was part of the crew
Around 1960 :	End of use for the fishing sailboats
1978 :	Henry Kérisit drew the ship portrait (black and white)
????:	Features in a diorama at Concarneau musée de la pêche

10.2. Appendix B – Va sans Peur figures from Ar Vag vol. 1



Figure 6 Same photograph of the Va sans Peur near Glénan Isles, with rowing boat

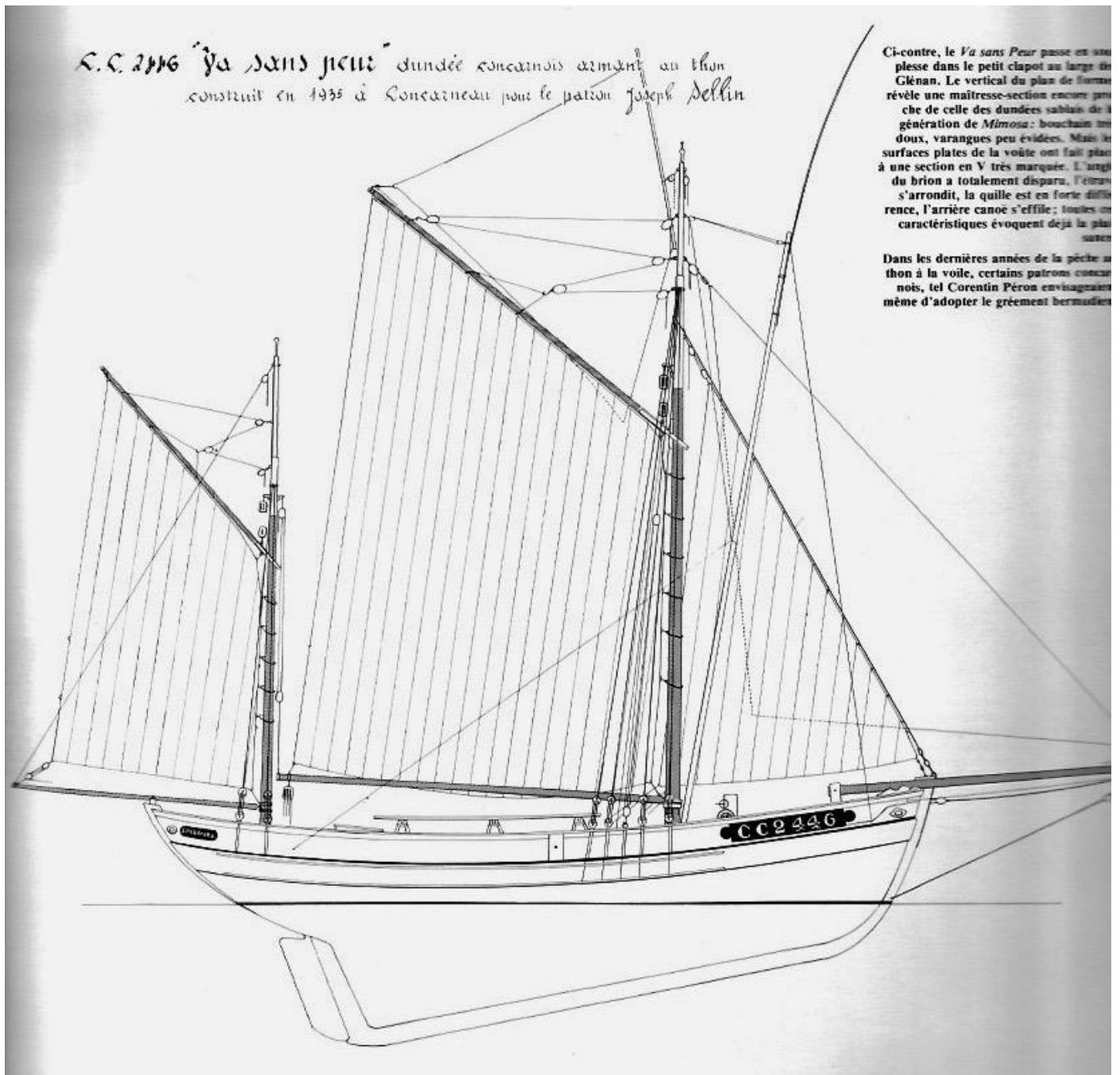


Figure 7 Va sans Peur portrait by Henry Kérisit (black & white)

Caption from the book:

"Ci-contre [position de la photo], le Va sans Peur passe en souplesse dans le petit clapot au large des Glénan. Le vertical du plan de formes révèle une maître-section encore proche de celle des dundées sablais de la génération de Mimosa: bouchain très doux, varangues peu évidées. Mais les surfaces plates de la voûte ont fait place à une section en V très marquée, l'angle du brion a totalement disparu, l'étrave s'arrondit, la quille est en forte différence, l'arrière canoë s'effile: toutes ces caractéristiques évoquent déjà la plaisance.

Dans les dernières années de la pêche au thon a la voile, certains patrons concarnois, tel Corentin Péron envisageaient même d'adopter le gréement bermudien."

Once translated (hopefully with the right nautical terms):

"On the left [photo position], the Va sans Peur passes flexibly in the small lapping off the Glénan. The vertical of the plane of shapes reveals a master-section still close to that of the sablais dundees of the Mimosa generation: very soft chain, varangles little envied. But the flat surfaces of the vault have made way for a very marked V section, the angle of the brion has completely disappeared, the bow become rounded, the keel is in sharp difference, the canoe rear get thinner: all these characteristics already evoke the leisure sailing.

In the last years of tuna sailing, some Concarnois owners, such as Corentin Péron, even considered adopting Bermuda rigging."

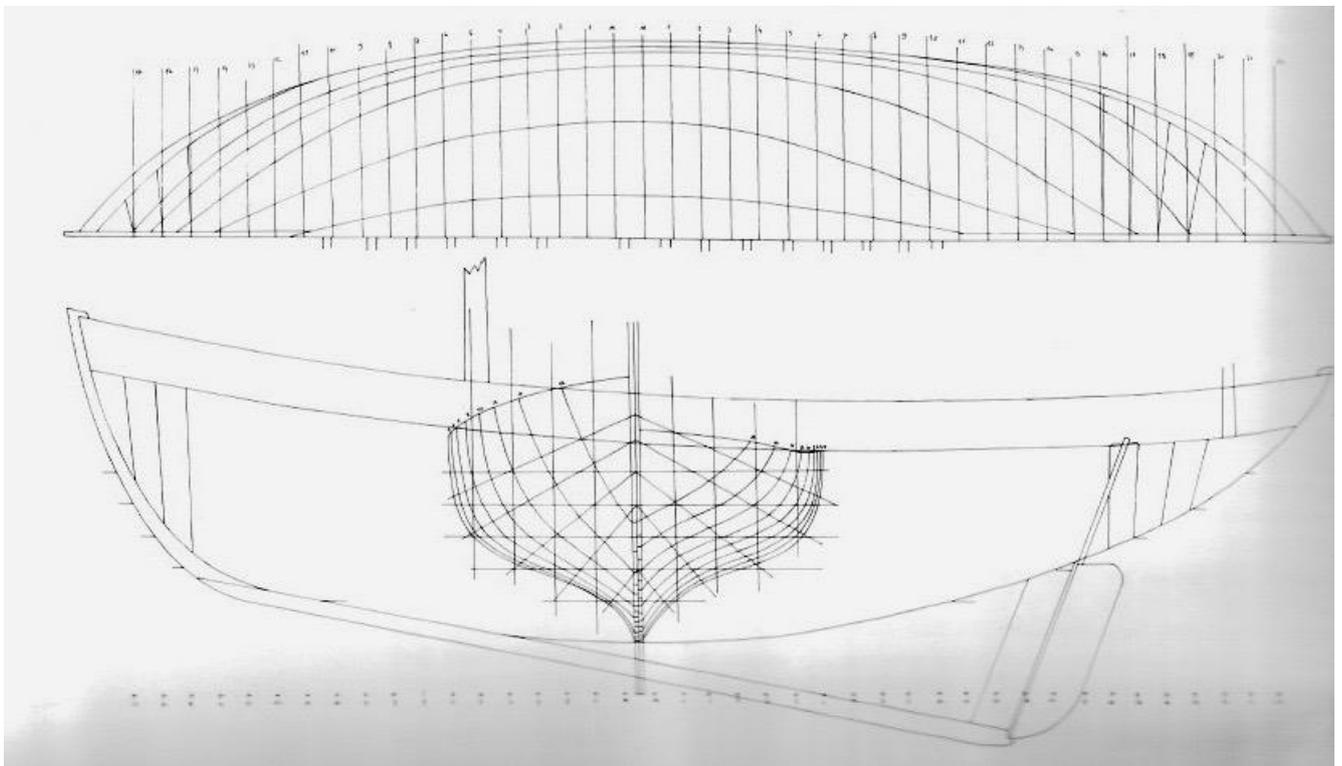


Figure 9 Plans of the Va sans Peur