



Welsh Wreck Web Research Project

(North Cardigan Bay)

On-line research into the wreck of the:

Dewi Wyn 1083 (MADU 152)

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1.0 Abstract

The Dewi Wyn was selected from a list of wrecks provided by MADU for online research, as part of the Welsh Wreck Research project. She was chosen as an example of a slate carrying vessel, with what appeared to be, strong ties to the area and her home port of Porthmadog. This proved to be true for most of her story.

The research uncovered the story of two wrecking incidents rather than one. The first in 1861 and then, following a further 50 years as a working vessel, a final shipwreck in 1911. As the research was based on Cardigan Bay wrecks, the time up until the first wrecking incident has been covered in most detail while the period following from 1861 until 1911 is given only as context for her story. What became apparent was the huge role of the National Lifeboat Institution in the survival of this ship. Two interventions, the first by the Cardigan Lifeboat (1861) and the second by the Clovelly Lifeboat (1911) were responsible for saving the lives of 10 men in all. A small number though it may seem, this intervention was repeated around the British Isles and Ireland, saving the lives and livelihoods of many seafaring families.

Research suggests that the Dewi Wyn continued to be owned and run by the same local family, Jones and Co. for most of her working life, at the height of world demand for Welsh Slate, only changing ownership and location to Bideford and Appledore in 1892.

She presents an example of a small working sailing vessel built for purpose, owned, built and crewed by largely local men and surviving treacherous conditions with heavy cargos for almost 60 yrs.

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2.2 Abbreviations

BNA	British Newspaper Archives
CLIP.	Crew List Index Project
Drp	Damage Repair to Ship
LRS	Lloyds Register of Shipping
MADU	Malvern Archaeological Diving Unit
MNL.	Merchantile Navy List
RNLI	Royal National Lifeboat Institution.

2.3 List of Pictures

Map of wrecks in the Teifi Estuary.

<http://cardigan-maritime.com/wp-content/uploads/Shipwrecks-better.jpg>

3.0 Introduction

The Welsh Wreck Research Project aims to contribute to a wider understanding of the maritime history of North Wales by using on-line research of vessels identified as wrecks in North Cardigan Bay. The Dewi Wyn was chosen from unpublished lists of wrecks, the first compiled by MADU (Malvern Archeological Diving Unit) and the second of wrecks specifically carrying a cargo of slate (Wessex Archeology 2009) also provided by MADU.

This research has been an attempt to investigate the history of a ship which was locally built, owned and crewed at Porthmadog. By investigating the background and reports, as found via online resources and reading matter, it is hoped to gain a better understanding of the contribution of such ships to the development and growth of the community and to gain insight into the day to day life of a small merchant sailing vessel of the era.

The Dewi Wyn is an example of the ships built, owned and trading from Porthmadog in the 19th Century, and appearing to be typical of her class of working vessel. She is described as a wooden schooner or sometimes a skiff, registered on 10th May, 1852 at Caernarfon, official number 1083 and was added to the lists above as wrecked on the bar at Cardigan Bay in 1861.

4.0 Background

Porthmadog harbour opened in 1825, largely to supply W.A Maddocks's scheme to reclaim land and provide a safe route across Treath Mawr by building an embankment across the Afon Glaslyn. Thus this was not a natural harbour, and entrance involved negotiation of both a bar at Ynys Cyngar and the dangers of Sarn Badrig (Patrick's Causeway), which runs parallel to the Lleyen peninsular. Along with the frequent South Westerly gales causing unusually stormy seas in the area, it was a difficult port to enter from an already hazardous area of Cardigan Bay.

Ship building on beaches, such as those at Borth Y Gest and Pwllheli had long been a feature of the coastal industry of North Wales, when the discovery of large deposits of slate in the Moelwyn mountains was made in the 1830s. The subsequent development of the industry required new infrastructure as population and production rapidly expanded. This resulted in the emergence of new towns such as Blaenau Ffestiniog and Porthmadog, the development of the port in 1825 and the opening of a narrow-gauge railway in 1836.

The sea provided obvious advantages over the mountainous road routes as a distribution outlet. While the building of quays by individual quarries replaced the difficult and hazardous practice of taking the slate in small open boats for loading ships at anchor at Ynys Cyngar.

The ships built at local shipyards during these years have been described as "probably the finest all-round small merchant ships ever built in Britain" (Hughes & Eames, 2009). Almost 300 ships were built at Porthmadog and nearby Borth-y-gest over the period from 1824 until 1913. Porthmadog also became largely self-sufficient in equipping, fitting and provisioning these ships (<https://portmm.org/the-museum/shipbuilding/>). Their design appears to have been developed for the requirements of the area and with the earlier experience of heavy cargo such as lime. The holds needed the strength to carry slate wedged to prevent movement, a skilled job in itself, with a shallow hull to allow approach to beaches and rigging suitable for 'short tacks' for the manoeuvrability required by the difficult approach to the quays.

Another unusual feature of the shipbuilding industry in Porthmadog was the high level of involvement of local people as owners and commissioners of ships. Those who have made money from sail making, ship's fitting and chandlery and also local doctors, shopkeepers and private individuals bought shares in local ships over an extensive time. Shipbuilders, owners and masters of these small ships appear to be mainly local people, or are from nearby shipbuilding areas such as Anglesey, Aberystwyth, Liverpool or the Lleyen Peninsular. Additionally, those involved in the day to day work of the port; crew, pilots, dockers and even the agents of the quarry owners responsible for managing the slate cargo from quarry to shipboard, would be largely local men. This resulted in a largely welsh speaking community, both off and on-board ship.

5.0 Research Methodology

Research was undertaken as an online exercise with an Apple Mac laptop computer. Using Google as a search engine and Chrome as the browser.

Online sites recommended for the project were followed up. These included Lloyds Register of Shipping, the Crew List Index Project, Coflein and local sites such as Rhiw.com. To these was added the RNLi Lifeboat Magazine Archive.

Other reference material included unpublished lists from other researchers, made available by MADU.

An unpublished list of slate wrecks was also made available by MADU (Wessex Archeology, 2009).

Access to the British Newspaper Archive was available and provided rich background material of both ship movement and significant events (see individual reports).

Key search words used were the name of the ship, sometimes prefixed with 'wreck of'. Ship owner names and particularly dates of events were useful in searching newspaper articles.

The RNLi Lifeboat Magazine archive was found to be an additional useful resource in recovering the details of both wrecking incidents researched in this study.

Several hard-back books were also used in reference and to provide information and context (see reference list).

6.0 Results:

I. Description of the vessel

The Dewi Wyn, possibly named for the celebrated Welsh bard David Owen (Dewi Wyn o Eifion), was a wooden build schooner of 90 gross and 51 net tonnage. Her dimensions were 57.3/ 15.6/ 8.5 with a single deck and she was built using iron bolts (LRS).

It is likely that the Dewi Wyn had the proportions typical of a Porthmadog built ship of the time. In 1856, Owen Morris wrote that unlike the previous 'tub' shape ships, these were modelled with "*greater regard to sailing and weather*"(Jones, 2016). They were comparatively short and shallow with tall masts and a large spread of canvas, '*distinctively*' squared off at the back with planking stretching about 6 foot or more downwards and with a '*smooth half moon shape*'. They rarely exceeded 110ft in length. The prow had a gradual upward curve with a long, substantial bowsprit. Underwater, the front edge curved downwards and backwards. They are described by Owen Morris as having "*prescence and elegance*"(Jones, 2016). Although the Dewi Wyn, as a small, working vessel probably did not meet all the grace of later models, it is likely that she shared some of this distinctive shape, developed to suit conditions of entry to Porthmadog harbour.

II. Information relating to the vessel.

The Dewi Wyn was built in Porthmadog in 1852, in the yard of Henry Jones, at Canol y Clwt, for John Richard Jones, a mariner of LLanealhearn and Thomas Christian, sailmaker of Brougham Terrace, Porthmadog (Hughes & Eames, 2009).

Thomas Christian is an example of a local business man, originally from Liverpool, prepared to put his money into the developing shipbuilding trade. He appears to have commissioned around nine vessels between the late 1840 to early 1850's (Hughes & Eames, 2009). In an earlier venture he had shares in the Jane & Ellen, a smaller slate carrying vessel built at Beaumaris (www.rhiw.com). He played an important part, in the life of Porthmadog, adding his name to a petition for improved water supply, drainage and sewerage for the town in 1857 (Hughes & Eames, 2009). Co-owner John (Richard) Jones is less easy to follow up, although a John Richard Jones is named as master and part owner of the Eagle, built at Porthmadog in 1837 (Hughes & Eames, 2009) there are a number of other possible candidates in the Welsh Mariners Index.

The Dewi Wyn was registered on 4th March 1852 at Caernarvon but does not appear on Lloyds Register of Shipping(LRS) until 1855, when her master is named as J Jones. The master in 1861, at the time of the first wrecking incident is a Richard Jones so that this could be an example of owner/masters. However, it has not been possible to establish definite links between the numerous people involved with the vessel surnamed Jones. There is, however, a level of continuity as the vessel continues to be noted (LRS) as belonging to Jones & Co until its sale in 1892.

The main cargo, outward bound is likely to be slate, as by far the main export from Porthmadog and the main reason for its existence. References to her cargo on early trips are few but on the 15th August, 1855 welsh slate from the Dewi Wyn is advertised in the Aberdeen Press and Journal (BNA), as available at Newburgh. The Banffshire Journal and General Advertiser is helpful in providing further detail, from a later voyage on the 25th August 1857, "*SUPPLY of SCOTCH and WELSH SLATES, of superior quality and thickness, is*

on hand at NewburghExpected daily, the Dewi Wyn," Captain Jones, with cargo of Holland's best blue Slates from Wales. " As Porthmadog developed, Slate Companies were responsible for building their own quays. The first of these was that of Samuel Holland who was involved in the creation of the narrow gauge railway (Hughes & Eames, 2009). Holland's Gesail quarry therefore became one of the first to send slates to the wharves at Porthmadog. "The north end of Snowdon Wharf, part of which is cut into bedrock, is the earliest section and was used by Samuel Holland of Liverpool from c.1836 when the Ffestiniog Railway opened." <https://diogel.gwynedd.llyw.cymru>.

An overview of examples from the newspaper archives provides a picture of some trade activities during the early years, all interspersed with sailing to and from Porthmadog.

Date	Arrivals/destination	Other information.	BNA source
19.11.52	Toul an Héry (Brittany) for London	450(?)Oats	<i>Shipping & Mechantile Gazette</i>
17.06.52	Braake (Bremen)	To Hull	<i>Hull Packet</i>
02.07.52	Hull	To Braake (Bremen)	<i>Hull Advertiser and Exchange Gazette</i>
16.6.53	Liverpool	From Hamburg	<i>Liverpool Mail</i>
14.01.54	Porthmadog	Poole to Runcorn	<i>Lloyds Lists</i>
18.05.54	Kingston (Dublin, Ireland)	From Dunkirk	<i>Shipping & Mechantile Gazette</i>
07.07.54	Leer (Saxony)	To Dublin	<i>Shipping & Mechantile Gazette</i>
29.10.56	Peterhead	From Newburgh	<i>Shipping & Mechantile Gazette</i>
13.04.56	Bremen		<i>Public Ledger& Daily Advertiser</i>

It is interesting to see Hamburg included in her early destinations as in May, 1842 the city of Hamburg was devastated by fire and Ffestiniog slate was in great demand for reroofing the city in the years which followed (Eames and Hughes, 2009).

Ships on return voyages were in ballast which could be a cargo in its own right, such as iron ore or gravel. They additionally brought goods back for trade in other ports or to fill the shops of their home town. An example of this is the cargo of oats from the port of Toul an Héry in Brittany, London bound.

Freeman's Journal, 17th October 1859, records a strange tale which gives another clue into the 'triangular' trade practiced by small merchant ships. *'William Tuite, of Sligo, merchant, had on the 8th of December, 1858, shipped on board the Dewi Wyn, eighty barrels of potatoes for delivery in London, to shippers orders for which the master duly signed bills of lading of that date. It was further stated that the master, under stress of weather, having put into a Scotch port there abandoned the voyage, never sailed for London, and having sold the potatoes applied the proceeds to his own use. The deponent estimated his loss at a sum of £341. 15s. 7d'.* The case is later reported as settled by payment following confiscation of the ship. (Saunders's Newsletter (BNA)). If Captain Jones was indeed a master/owner it can be imagined that, with a cargo of perishable goods, he might decide that an available market in Scotland would be a better option than waiting for fair weather and that the losses encountered by such a delay would be his first consideration.

III. Incidents in the life of the vessel.

Lloyds Lists (BNA) record for the 19th June, 1856 that she put into Holyhead while taking in a foot of water per hour and continued on her journey on the 21st June. Registration notes indicate that damage repairs took place in 1858 but it has not been possible to ascertain whether this was a result of any particular incident (LRS).

IV. Report of the wrecking incident.

The North Wales Chronicle of 2nd February 1861 (BNA) records the event. *"During a heavy ground sea and wind blowing fresh from the North West, the schooner Dewi Wyn from Porthmadog was stranded on a bar in Cardigan Bay on Monday last. As soon as the signals of distress indicating the perilous position of the ship were seen, the lifeboat of the NLI was launched. On approaching the wreck the sea was breaking completely over her, but after some difficulty, the schooner's crew of 4 men and 4 passengers were taken off by the boat."*

The account goes on to explain that this was the Cardigan Lifeboat crew's first opportunity to save life. In recognition of their actions, the lifeboat crew were subsequently awarded 'expense of service. 51' by the then National Life Boat Institution. The incident is mentioned in the Journal of the National Life-boat Institution for 1st Jan. 1862 *"On the 21st January [1861] the schooner Dem[sic] Wyn, stranded on Cardigan bar during a heavy ground-swell, the sea breaking completely over her. The Cardigan life-boat, was thereupon launched, and succeeded in taking off the crew of 8 men, and in landing them safely."* (www.lifeboatmagazinearchive.rnli.org.)

Lloyds Lists from 23rd January, 1861 (BNA) further tells us that the Dewi Wyn was carrying a general cargo when she grounded crossing the bar and adds that she has since sunk. Those rescued are listed as 4 crew members and 4 others, sometimes described as passengers but in some accounts as 'hovellers'. A dictionary definition of the word 'hoveller' describes unlicensed pilots and their men, or a boatman going out to a wreck (www.collinsdictionary.com).

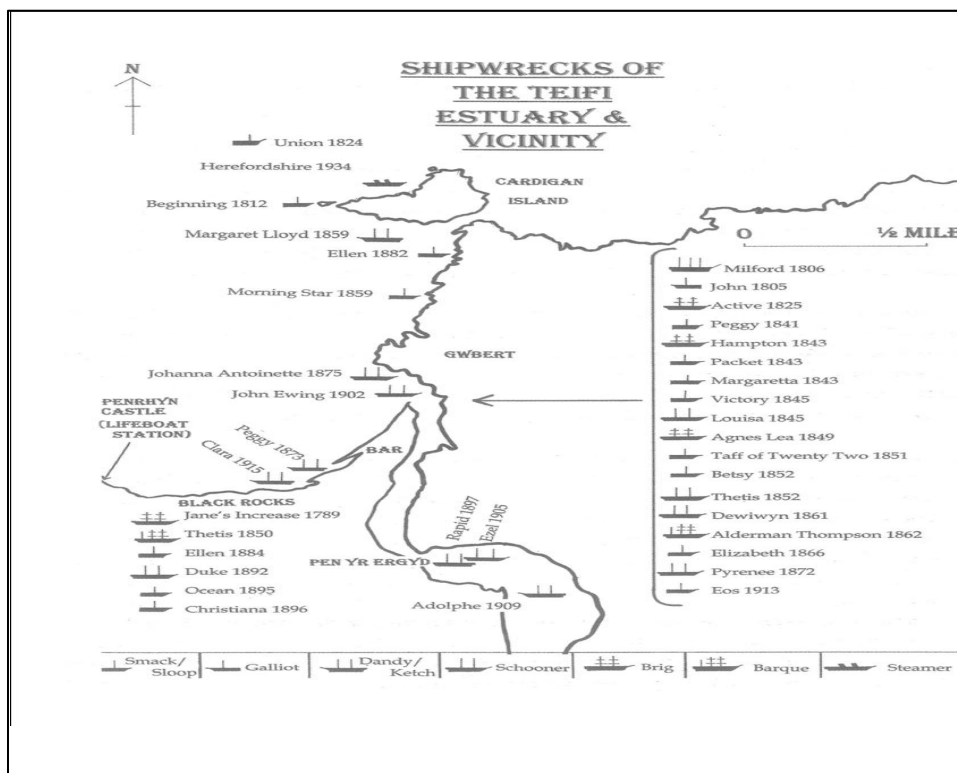
Cardigan's first lifeboat station opened in 1849 on the south side of the river Teifi, below Penrhyn Castle, funded by public subscription after an earlier wrecking incident on the bar. The RNLi took over the station the following year. The existing 24ft lifeboat was considered too small and subsequently replaced with a 27ft boat, at a cost of £116. These boats were both described as 'pulling,' or open rowing boats and not self righting. (www.historypoints.org)

The rescue of the men of the Dewi Wyn was subsequently added to a list of lifeboat interventions in many subsequent funding appeals. Her name also appears in the Catalogue for the International Exhibition of 1862 (Anonymous, 1862) relating to the new design of lifeboat and with a plan of the lifeboat included. A link to this is supplied in the reference list.

Two masters are noted in the register for the year 1861, R Jones and Pritchard. As R Jones is mentioned alone in the previous year, 1860 and Pritchard in 1861, it is likely that the master at the time of the incident was Richard Jones (LRS). No crew list has been found to date.

IV. Location of the wrecking incident of 1861:

The position of the bar at the Teifi entrance with the Dewi Wyn named among the vessels wrecked at the site. <http://cardigan-maritime.com/wp-content/uploads/Shipwrecks-better.jpg>



V. Later history.

The Dewi Wyn continues on record for a number of years as owned by Jones & Co, Porthmadog until her eventual sinking near Clovelly in North Devon. It appears that she had been refloated and repaired after the 1861 sinking, for further service (LRS notes a build date of 1852 but adds an additional date of 1861.)

She disappears from the Lloyds Register of Shipping from 1870 and the register itself is missing at the end of the 1870's. However, The Merchantile Navy Lists (CLIP) lists her owner in 1870 and 1880 as Richard Rowlands of Bangor, registered at Beaumaris. She appears in the Lloyds Register for 1883 (LRS) with the owner is still recorded as JR Jones and the registered port is Beaumaris. It is also noted here that she has been restored in December 1882, at Milford. So it would appear that JR Jones still has involvement with the Dewi Wyn.

Throughout this time records of her arrival and departure from ports, can be found (BNA) evidencing that she was operative from 1862 and still trading in slate. The Cork Examiner (1871) records her with a 'A large carefully assorted' cargo of slates, naming an example of sizes as Queens, Princesses and Tally Slates from Bangor. She seems to have remained a slate ship for many years, plying trade mainly out of Bangor's Penrhyn Quarry (BNA) as well as Porthmadog.

In 1890 the Merchantile Nay List records that she is briefly owned by a Mrs Ann Davis of Watchet in Somerset, still registered at Beaumaris. A crew list for 1892 (CLIP) names Louisa Ann Guard (or Gard) as owner with Thomas Slade as master. The Mercantile Navy List confirms that by 1900 she has indeed become the property of Samuel Gard (Guard) of Appledore, registered to his wife Louisa Ann, and she continued as a working ship until her final sailing in 1911.

"On the 30th September a telephone message was received at the coastguard's station, Clovelly, from the coastguard at Hartland Point, to the effect that a ketch was showing signals of distress.

The Coxswain of the Life-boat Elinor Roget was immediately informed and the boat promptly launched. She proceeded at once to the vessel, which was about four miles distant. The ketch proved to be the Dew-i-wyn of Bideford. She had had her headsails blown away in the moderate gale which then prevailed, and in addition to making a lot of water, was unmanageable, as the steering gear was out of order. The crew of three hands were rescued in an exhausted condition, and the boat landed them at Clovelly in a very heavy sea. This was a very expeditious service and was carried out in a very creditable manner. At the time of the casualty the ketch was bound from Plymouth to Pembroke with a cargo of bricks. She subsequently foundered at her anchors."
(The Lifeboat, 6th May 1912)

North Devon Journal (BNA) provides a few more details of the incident;

"The ketch " Dewi Wyn," belonging to Appledore, was sunk on Sunday morning off Clovelly. She was caught in a strong north-north-easterly gale, which raged in Bideford Bay on Saturday morning, and sprang a leak. After anchoring their vessel in Clovelly Roads the crew hoisted signals of distress, which were seen by the Coastguard at Clovelly, who immediately called out the Clovelly lifeboat. The lifeboat, which was in charge of Coxwain Pengelly, took off the crew, consisting of three men, one of whom, the master, Stephen is the son of the owner, Samuel Gard, of Appledore. When they left the vessel it was hoped she would ride out the gale, but she sank at her moorings about a quarter past nine on Sunday morning. The ketch, built in 1852, at Portmadoc, was bound from Plymouth to Pembroke with a cargo of bricks. The crew were safely landed at Clovelly, and taken charge of by Captain Jewell, on behalf of the Shipwrecked Mariners' Society."

Her final resting place appears to be in the Bristol Channel, wrecked, without loss of life thanks to a second lifeboat rescue, this time by the Clovelly Lifeboat.

7.0 Summary table of results.

Vessel	Name/s	
	Type	Wooden Sailing ship: Schooner
Built	Date	1852
		May 1852
		Commissioned by T. Christian & JRJones
	Builder	Jones & Co
		Porthmadog
Construction	Materials	Wood with iron bolts
	Decks	One
	Bulkheads	
Propulsion	Type	Sail
	Details	
Dimensions	Length	57.3
	Beam	15.6
	Draught	8.5
Tonnage	Gross	
	Net	51 tonnes
Owner	First	Thomas Christian & John Richard Jones
		Porthmadog.
		John Richard Jones (1861)
	<i>Last</i>	Mrs Louise Ann Gard, Appledore (1892).
	<i>Other owners post 1861.</i>	Richard Rowlands, Bangor (1880) Mrs A Davies, Watchet (1890), Beaumaris.
Registry	Port	Porthmadog
	Flag	British
	Number	1803
History	Routes	Porthmadog
		Coastal
	Cargo	Roofing slates.
Final Voyage	From	Porthmadog
	Master	R Jones
	Crew	4 crew members
	Passengers	4 (Hovellers?)
	Cargo	Slate
Wrecking	Date	21 st January 1861
	Cause	Stranded in Moderate winds and High seas.
	Location	Cardigan Bar
	Loss of life	0
	Outcome	Recorded as abandoned and sunk but appears to have been refloated and repaired.

8.0 Analysis

The research indicates how the development of industry and need for slate worldwide led to the upsurge of trade in this remote part of the UK and paints a picture of a busy and prosperous new port. The newspaper archive material, especially, shows thriving maritime trade activity during this time. It is not difficult to imagine from the reports, the busy life of the quay side and the complex industrial infrastructure supplying it. Ship movement is reported in every major and regional newspaper as well as those with specialist merchantile interests.

Background reading and local online sites support the links between the development of Porthmadog and local ship building. A particular feature of the industrial expansion of the area appear to be that, although the development of slate quarries in Ffestiniog was largely the domain of owners from outside the area, Holland from Liverpool, the Casson family from the Lake District for example, the development of the port, building and manning vessels and equipping and supplying them was largely through local initiatives. Between 1851 and 1881 the population of the town had doubled due to slate export and ship building (Hughes & Eames, 2009). Workers from a wide local area brought their skills as shipwrights, chandlers, sailmakers, metalworkers, grocers and publicans to the new town; a place of opportunity for local people in a society which was less class restricted than the norm for the time. This meant that it gained in opportunity but also sometimes suffered in community resources, from a lack of a 'paternalistic' aristocracy (Hughes & Eames, 2009). The lack of entries in Lloyds Register for the 1850s and 1870s has not been explained but a feature of this local entrepreneurial spirit, the emergence of local insurance companies such as the Portmadoc Mutual Ship Insurance Society, could possibly provide a partial explanation.

The research also touched on the development of the Royal National Lifeboat Institution which was an interesting and informative addition.

The time spent at sea by small ships appears to be extensive and although crews appear to change regularly, masters change less often. There appears to be great commitment to the running of these small slate ships, the result of which was that the Dewi Wyn was not abandoned after wrecking but restored for a further 50 years of service before finally surcoming to the final accident.

9.0 Conclusions & Recommendations

Information gathering was conducted during short periods of time over a number of months. The importance of keeping clear records during this time, can't be stressed enough and will make a difference in time consumption when writing up.

The Dewi Wyn, although registered in 1852 does not appear in Lloyds Register of Shipping until 1855, although newspaper listings record her passage to a variety of ports during this time. No explanation of this has been found.

There is also a gap in information as to how and when the ship was refloated and refurbished in a such a short time that no gap in the record is apparent. No reference could be found of salvage or recovery appart from a note 'Abandoned' in the register for the year (LRS) which could relate to the ship listed above.

Resources vary in their use with individual vessels studied. The Lloyds Register of Shipping and British Newspaper Archives remain the most useful starting point for ground work and later, for establishing time scales. The Mercantile Marine List (Clip) supplied useful detail where there were gaps in the Lloyds Register of Shipping information.

There was little information on the Dewi Wyn on others such as the Colfein site itsef but other local sites such as History Point and the RNLI for the Lifeboat magazine archives were very helpful on both wrecking incidents.

Linking up individuals with similar names is a problem where little extra information is available and it may be possible to follow these more easily using a geneolgy site. Information on the Gard family of Appledore is available through such sites but this was seen as outside the remit of this research.

9.0 References:

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- www.welshmariners.org.uk

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- Hughes E, Eames A (2009). *Porthmadog Ships [New Revised Edition]*, Institute of Welsh Maritime Historical Studies (MOROL).
- Jones, J. I. (2016): *Slate, Sail and Steam: A History of the Industries of Porthmadog*. Amberley Publishing Limited

Other:

- List of slate wrecks from an un-published report by Wessex Archaeology "The Maritime Archaeology of the Welsh Slate Trade". (2009)
- List of the Welsh Wreck Web Research Project (Madu)