

Welsh Wreck Web Research Project (North Cardigan Bay)

Report Title: **On-line research into the wreck of the Maid of Meirion (MADU Ref: 333)**

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1.0 Abstract

The Maid of Meirion was selected from a list of wrecks provided by MADU for online research as part of the Welsh Wreck Web Research Project. She was chosen as an example of a vessel carrying slate as her cargo. Because of her name (Meirionedd being the county name) and the port from which she sailed, the presumption was made that she was a vessel local to Porthmadog.

The research will show that, despite her name, Maid of Meirion was Aberystwyth built and owned throughout her working life and her links to Porthmadog and the slate trade appear to be slight. Her history, instead demonstrates more than 40 years under sail carrying a variety of the items which underpinned the industrial wealth of Wales at the time. Cargoes of slate, coal, iron and copper are all recorded before she was finally abandoned on Maen Bugail, Bardsey Island.

Following her through the archives provided an insight into the life of these relatively small vessels which took such a large role in the development of industry and trade in the region.

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Abbreviations

BNA	British Newspaper Archive
CLIP	Crew List Index Project
LRS	Lloyds Register of Shipping
MADU	Malvern Archaeological Diving Unit

3.0 Introduction

The Welsh Wreck Web Research Project aims to contribute to a wider understanding of the maritime history of North Wales by researching vessels identified as being wrecked on or around Sarn Badrig. The Maid of Meirion was chosen from an unpublished list (Wessex Archaeology, 2009) of wrecks carrying a cargo of slate and her name, Maid of Meirion cross referenced with the list of wrecks identified for the project by MADU.

The wooden sailing ship, the Maid of Meirion was launched on the 3rd August 1859 and wrecked, without loss of life, on Maen Bugail (Shepherd's Rock), Bardsey Island, North Wales on the 19th October, 1900.

This research seeks to trace her history as one of the many Cardigan Bay working vessels connected with the rapid development of industry and development of maritime communities during a time of great commercial growth and change in Wales in the 19th Century.

4.0 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 www.rhiw.com and www.welshmariners.org.uk.

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 Archaeology, 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'. Dates of events were also useful in searching newspaper articles.

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

5.0 Results

I. Description of Vessel:

The Maid of Meirion was a wooden sailing dandy, built in 1858 in Aberystwyth and owned by Aberystwyth individuals and families until her sinking on 19th October 1900 on Maen Bugail, Bardsey Island.

Her tonnage is registered as 62 tons and her dimensions were 65.2/18.4/8.6. She was constructed using iron bolts (LRS).

She was 'dandy' rigged taking the name from the triangular sail (dandy), sheeted to an outrigger. It was also sometimes used to describe the rig when the mizzen-sail was about one-third the size of the mainsail, the true ketch rig having a mizzen-sail about half the size of the mainsail and the true yawl rig having a mizzen-sail a quarter the size, or less (Oxfordreference.com).

II. Historical information relating to the vessel:

Despite her name and links to Bangor and Porthmadog, Aberystwyth remained her home port. While records of her journeys and cargoes link her to the wider development of trade in North Wales with destinations throughout the UK and includes continental channel ports (BNA).

The Maid of Meirion was built, in the Jacob's Yard, Aberystwyth and registered on 3rd August 1859 (www.crewlist.org.uk/data/appropriation/27861 (CLIP)). She is registered as an Aberystwyth

coaster in the 1860-61 Lloyds Register of Shipping with Gwen Lewis (Spinster), of 45, Bridge Street, Borth (CLIP) as her owner and T. Davies as her master.

She remained with the Lewis family until 1888 when Lloyd's Register of Shipping records a change of ownership to Richard Jones, a master mariner also of Aberystwyth, on 21st April 1888 and she is registered to Mrs Mary Jones at the time of her sinking in 1900. (CLIP)

In Lloyds Register (LRS) for 1874, some repairs to the hull of the ship are noted and she is assigned a special survey to take place in Bangor, where she is then registered, in 2 yrs time. She does not appear in the register for 1877, which seems consistent with a further overhaul around this time. By 1883 she has already been subject to major repairs, salted and subject to a bi-annual survey at Bangor and classed as A1, i.e. first class and sufficiently equipped. A year for salting would be added to the classification term of a new ship and could also be added after large repairs, it may be that this was the case for the Maid of Meirion.

A notice of sale in 1888 describes her as a fast sailing schooner. "*MAID OF MEIRION at Aberystwyth, now lying at Heral, Bangor, North Wales. Registered Tonnage 60; Dead weight capacity 105 tons or thereabout. Dimensions—Length, 65. 2; math[sic], 18.4; depth, 8.6. This vessel has been well kept with all gears and tackles. She expired A 1 Red at Lloyd's in 1886, and since that time has been well overhauled.*" (Cambrian News, 18/3/88, BNA)

The Lloyds Register (LRS) for 1889-91 sees the ship back in action and gives details of her overhaul noting large repairs to her hull which had been salted in accordance with regulations and is now classed '*as fit for conveyance of dry and perishable goods on short voyages and cargoes not in their nature subject to sea damage on any voyage*'. It is difficult to ascertain whether this is the earlier overhaul or further work.

She carried a variety of cargoes during this time and it is possible to follow her sailing schedules via the shipping reports available in the British Newspaper Archives which shows that she was actively engaged throughout her working life carrying slate, coal and other heavy cargoes to coastal ports in the UK, Ireland and the European channel ports.

Her crew throughout most of this time can be followed using the Crew List Index Project (CLIP) website (<https://www.crewlist.org.uk/data/archivecrewlists/27861>).

During her working life a few mishaps are recorded.

- Lloyds Lists for 21st January 1863 records her in tow of a steam tug into Ramsgate having lost anchor and chain following reports that she was aground on a sand bar.
- 1st January 1895 the Liverpool Mercury (BNA) reports the "*Maid of Meirion from Calais for London, in ballast put in having slipped starboard anchor and 105 fathoms of chain to avoid stranding on the Long Nore*' again at Ramsgate.
- On Thursday 1st October 1896 a report in the Barmouth & County Advertiser tells us: "*On Thursday last the schooner "Maid of Meirion " which was blown that morning on a sandbank not far from Porthmadoc was observed from Barmouth and puzzled the life-boat men, ever on the watch, not a little*" (BNA). Unfortunately, no further explanation could be found.
- There are some hints that the ship may have been less than seaworthy in her final years. There are news reports (BNA. *South Wales Daily News*, 1st Sept. 1900), from the Swansea Bay Signaling Station of the ship having discharged her cargo of slate and being subsequently in a leaky condition at Castletown, Berehaven, Ireland undergoing repair following this incident.

III. Report of the wrecking incident.

At the time of her final voyage William Roberts of Porthmadog had been her Master for ten years. A local man well acquainted with the ship and the area, he was 43 or 45yrs old at this time. A William Roberts of Porthmadog can be found(www.welshmariners.org.uk), aged 26, as mate on the *Kate Thomas* in 1881. If this is the same W. Roberts it suggests many years of experience at sea. Crews however, changed regularly. William Lewis, the mate, another local man of 53 had been with the ship for over a year. The third crew member was Robert Malone or McMaghen a young man from Belfast (CLIP).

The following report of her wrecking was found in the Montgomery County Times & Shropshire and Mid Wales Advertiser, 27th October 1900 (BNA).

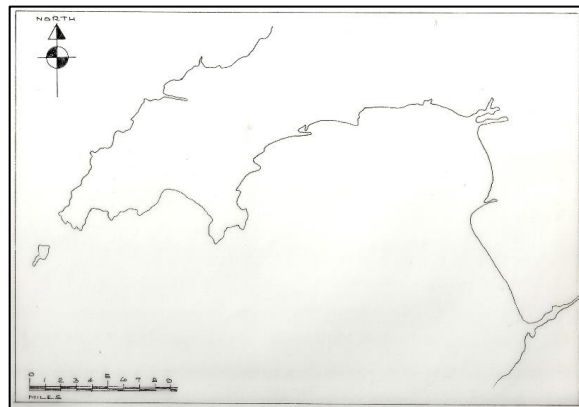
"On Sunday the news reached Aberystwyth that an Aberystwyth vessel, the Maid of Meirion, had foundered in the Irish Sea. The vessel, it appears, was on Friday, on its way from Porthmadoc to Larne, Ireland, with a cargo of slates, manned by a crew of three, Mr William Roberts, master, William Lewis, of Aberystwyth, and Robert McMaughn of Belfast. There was a moderate north-westerly wind blowing, and the weather was thick, but nothing occurred to raise any apprehensions in the mind of the Master until, when in Bardsey Sound, quite suddenly the vessel struck a rock, which afterwards proved to be the notorious Craig-y-Bugail. The crew got into the boat and the vessel very soon sank. The crew then rowed away and made for land, reaching Aberdaron in about two hours and a half. According to Captain Roberts, the treatment they received at Aberdaron was far from generous. They were not asked whether they wanted food and lodgings and slept the night in a limekiln in their clothes and with bricks for pillows. Worse than all, the painter of the boat was stolen in the night, and altogether the shipwrecked men's impression of Aberdaron is not a favourable one. The Maid of Meirion was the property of Mrs Jones, 28, South Road (Aberystwyth). Her loss was covered by insurance in the Cambrian Marine Insurance Company."

It seems most probable that the accident was due to fog as the weather was calm. Larn & Larn (2009), suggest that the NNW wind was only a force 2. The grounding, it appears, drew little attention and although she seems to have broken up quickly, the crew were able to row to shore while the ship appears to have been left to its fate. The sudden appearance of banks of fog is still recorded as a hazard in the area (Holden, 2017).

It can be noted that it had been necessary, only the month before for her cargo to be offloaded in order for her to reach Castletown for repairs. It is tempting to question whether this was more than an unfortunate accident due to fog in a spot recognised as hazardous to shipping. It seems unlikely that the loss of a valuable cargo of slate and a ship, that was still receiving an A1 rating would make any insurance claim worthwhile.

No reports of salvage attempts at the site following the sinking have been found during this report and any Board of Trade Inquiry results have not been available.

IV. Location of wreck:



Maen Bugail (Craig Y Bugail) and Bardsey Island.

www.Mapcarta.com/W258912235/map

Map of the LLeyn Peninsular (MADU)

Maen Bugail (Shepherds Rock) is an isolated rock approximately 600 meters off the north coast of Bardsey Island which itself lies off the far point of the LLeyn Peninsular.

An alternative site at the base of the cliffs of Pen-y-cil two miles further west, has been suggested (Holden, 2017). Sparse remains of a wooden vessel can be seen with two admiralty pattern anchors and piles of roofing slate. From the description of the incident and the calm conditions at the time of the wrecking, this seems unlikely.

V. Diving the site.

The site should be dived only at slack water on neap tides. Maen Bugail stands up to 4 meters above water in good conditions, but is completely underwater at high springs and, with a strong rip tide and currents can be an unexpected danger to vessels. There are prevailing South Westerly winds and fog banks may suddenly appear reducing surface visibility considerably. It is recommended that only experienced divers and boat handlers undertake to dive here (Holden, 2017). In the water the seabed drops off rapidly to more than 30 meter with large boulders where anchors and some wreckage can be found. Divers report a wealth of marine life, vertical cliffs, crevices and swimthroughs. As a number of other ships were lost here it is not known whether any of the items seen can be connected with the Maid of Meirion.

6.0 Summary of findings:

Vessel	Name/s	Maid of Meirion	
	Type	Sailing ship: Dandy	
Built	Date	1859	
		3 rd August 1859	
	Builder	Jacobs	
		Aberystwyth	
Construction	Materials	Wood	
Propulsion	Type	Sail	
	Details	Two masted sailing ship; Dandy rigged.	
Dimensions	Length	65 ft	2 ins
	Beam	18ft	4 ins
	Draught	8ft	6 ins
Tonnage	Gross	60	
	Net	48 tonnes	
Owner	First	Gwen Lewis 1863 – 1888 (Aberystwyth Shipping records and crew list. <i>CLIP</i>)	
	Last	Mrs Mary Jones 1891 – 1900	
		Aberystwyth	
	Others	Elizabeth Roberts 1883 – 1888 (<i>CLIP</i>) Richard Jones 1888 – 1890	
Registry	Port	Aberystwyth	
	Flag	British	
	Number	27861	
History	Routes	Porthmadoc	
		Coastal	
	Cargo	Roofing slates.	
Final Voyage	From	Porthmadoc	
	To	Larne	
	Captain	W Roberts	
	Crew	William Roberts (Porthmadog), William Lewis (Aberystwyth), Robert McMaughn (Malone- <i>CLIP</i>).	
	Passengers	0	
	Cargo	Slate	
Wrecking	Date	19 th October 1900	
	Location	Maen Bugail, Bardsey Island; 52.46.20N 04.47.15W	
	Cause	Stranded and lost in wind conditions NNW force 2 (Larn & Larn, 2006)	
	Loss of life	0	
	Outcome	Total Loss	

7.0 Analysis

The intention of the online research was to find additional information relating to individually named vessels with the purpose of contributing to the greater understanding of the maritime history of North Wales. While working on the project a personal understanding of the scope of these small trading vessels emerged within a wider picture of the commercial activities of an ever developing industrial environment in the principality.

It was less successful in the secondary aim; that of linking the life of the vessel with the development of trade in Porthmadog as connections to the port were less strong than was expected.

Overall, the research undertaken has been helpful in familiarisation with the resources available. Printing off a list of signage used in the Lloyds Register of Shipping speeded up my understanding of what was happening to the ship at each point on the records. Useful learning points have been, the importance of using simple terms for searches; that keeping a careful log of researched information can save a great deal of time later; follow up using key dates can sometimes uncover further useful newspaper reports.

8.0 Conclusions & Recommendations

It is difficult to analyse the amount of time spent on the research as it was conducted during short periods of time between other activities. A certain amount of time was spent in background reading for my own understanding of trade in the area in the 19th century. This was largely in regard to the quarrying of slate trade in North Wales and the development of associated communities. *Porthmadog Ships* (Hughes & Eames, 2009) proved the most useful resource in this respect.

9.0 References:

Online references:

www.britishnewspaperarchive.co.uk/

www.crewlist.org.uk

hec.lrfoundation.org.uk/archive-library/lloyds-register-of-ships-online

[www.oxfordreference.com/view/10.1093/oi/authority.20110803095659512.](http://www.oxfordreference.com/view/10.1093/oi/authority.20110803095659512)

www.rhiw.com

www.welshmariners.org.uk

Other:

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

Books:

Holden, C., (2017), *The Essential Underwater Guide to North Wales: Volume One – Barmouth to South Stack*. Calgon Publications. (ebook www.calgopublications.co.uk).

Hughes E, Eames A (2009). *Porthmadog Ships (New Revised Edition)*, Institute of Welsh Maritime Historical Studies (MOROL).

Larn, R. & Larn B., (2006). *Shipwreck index of the British Isles: Volume 5 – West Coast and Wales*. Tor Mark Press.

Map: Mapcarta.com (accessed October 2020)