

Welsh Wreck Web Research Project (North Cardigan Bay)

On-line research into the wreck of the *Prince of Wales*



Wreck of the Prince of Wales (hole edged in red)

Photo credit: Screenshot from Archif ITV Cymru/Wales video , available at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ULJ7XEqddml> (accessed 4.1.21)

Prince of Wales Tragedy, 1966

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Report Title:

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Date:

28 March 2021

Report Ref:

1.0 Abstract

The Welsh Wrecks Web Project was formed following work done by the Malvern Archaeological Diving Unit to compile a list of wrecks in the North Cardigan Bay area, most of which had had very little research done of them. The idea of the project was to enable interested volunteers to research one or more of the ships on the list of wrecks using only online resources. The *Prince of Wales* Wreck was chosen by the writer to test whether modern wrecks were easier or harder to research online than older wrecks. Researching a modern wreck turned out to be no easier or harder than an older wreck, but the availability of contemporaneous photographs and video made for a more visual research project. The writer successfully identified all the fatalities from the wreck and what happened to the wreck after the Board of Trade Inquiry.

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2.3 Abbreviations

NAS	Nautical Archaeology Society
WWWP	Welsh Wreck Web Project
COFLEIN	Online database for the National Monuments Record of Wales (NMRW)

3.0 Introduction

The *Prince of Wales* was an ex-Royal Navy cutter. According to the 1967 Merchant Shipping Act Inquiry Report by Mr Justice Sheen ('Inquiry Report'), she was a clinker-built boat about 32 ft 6 inches in length, about 9 feet in beam, and having a depth of 3 ft 6 inches. Prior to 1921 she was owned by the Admiralty. She would have served as a cutter to a larger Royal Navy vessel, but it is not possible to identify her service any further due to any markings that may have been visible on her structure having been destroyed (see Section 6.3 below). Figure 1 shows the kind of markings that would have been present on her stern, but even these are insufficient to identify a particular ship the cutter was associated with.

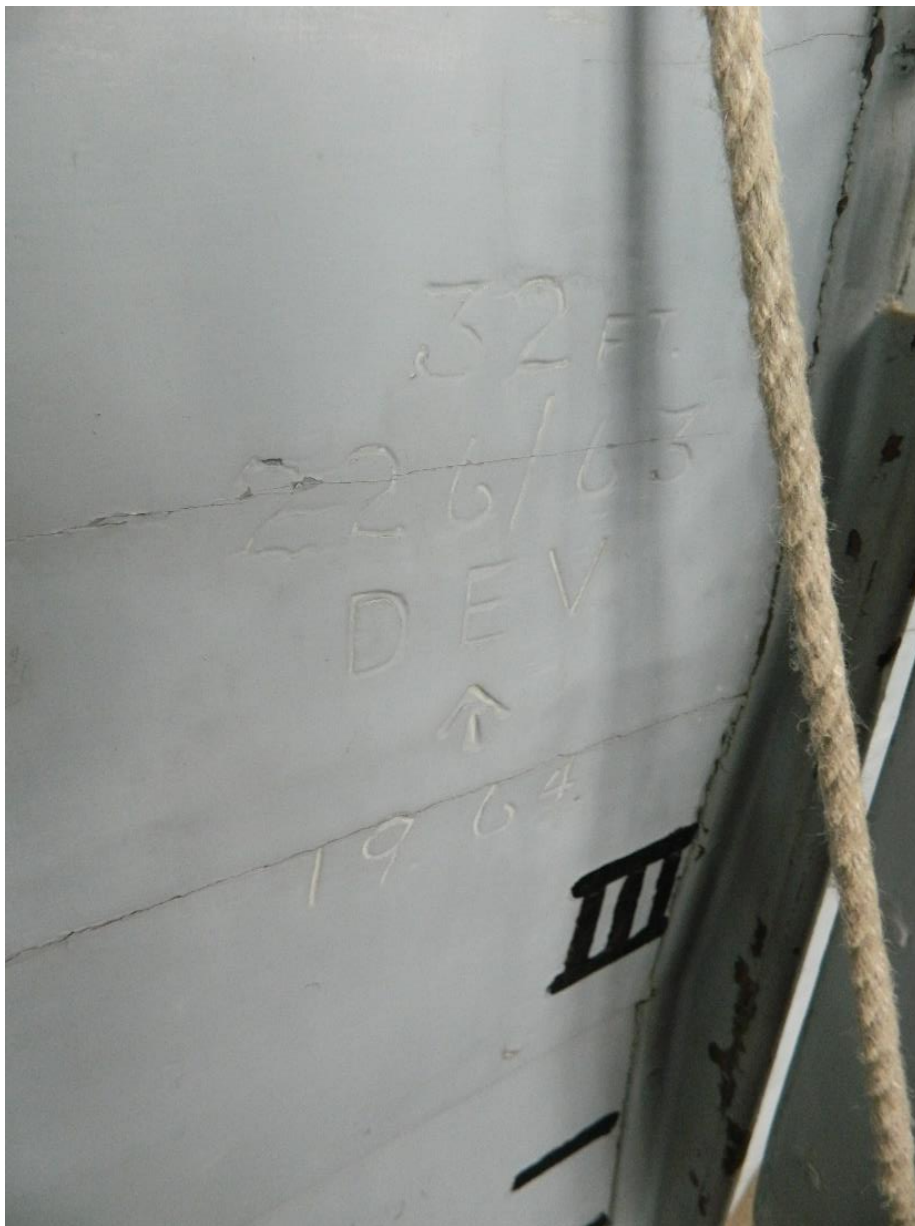


Figure 1: Stern markings of a 32ft Naval cutter at Chatham Historic Dockyard

Photo credit: Sam Woods-Peel, August 2020

32ft cutters were very common in Naval Service around the world. Figure 2 shows a drawing an Australian cutter.

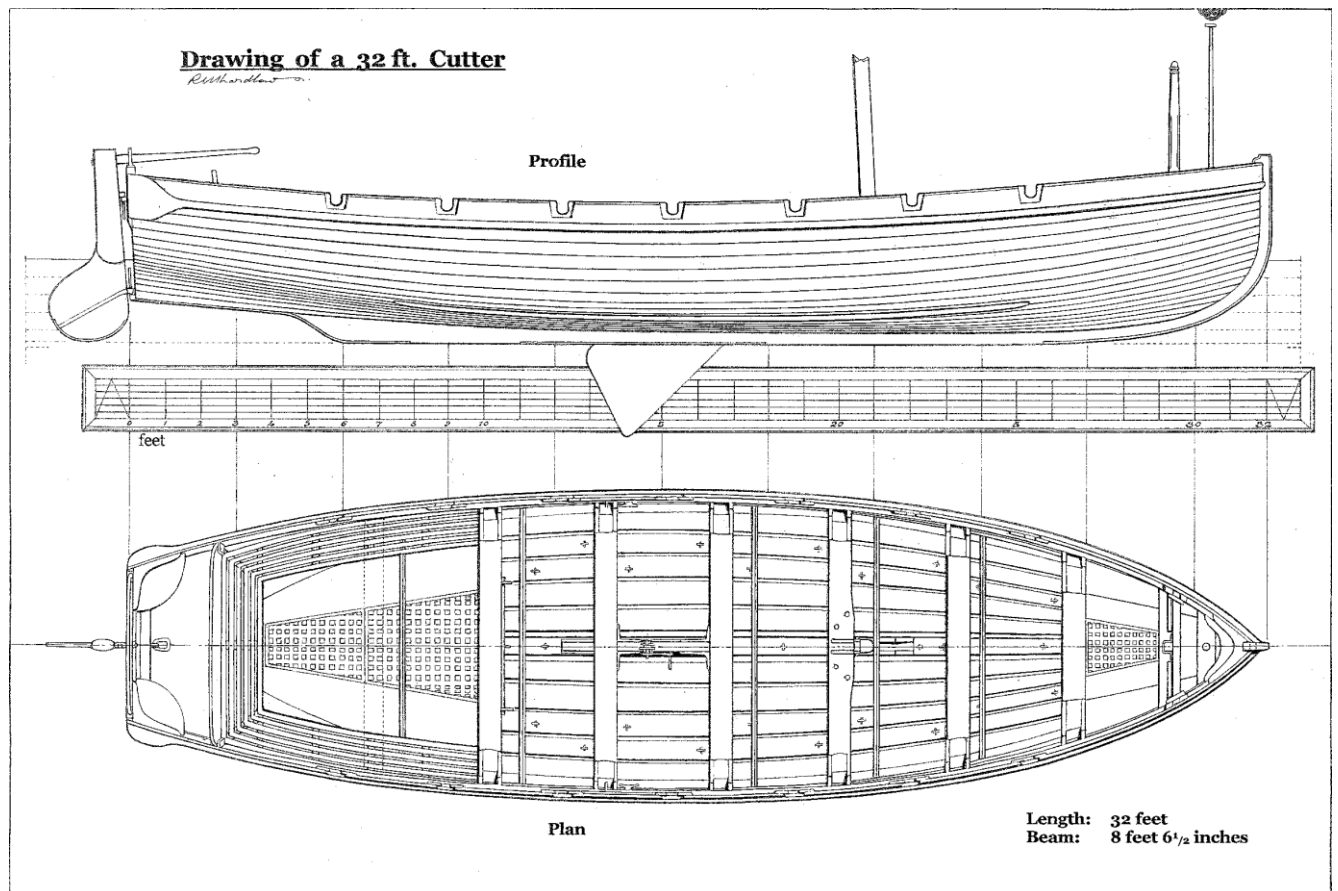


Figure 2: Drawing of a 32ft cutter

Credit: Ross Shardlow, Maritime Heritage Association Inc, *Albatross Significance and History*, available online <http://maritimeheritage.org.au/documents/Albatross%20significance.pdf> (accessed 4.1.21)

The *Prince of Wales* was purchased in 1936 by three brothers, John Jones, Edward Llewellyn Jones and Harry Lloyd Jones who ran the business of David Jones & Sons running boat trips from Barmouth.

Cutters could be oar-, sail-, or motor-powered. In 1956 a Mark II Morris Navigator 4-cylinder petrol/paraffin engine was installed on the *Prince of Wales*, driving a single screw. The speed of the vessel was said by her owners to be about 8 knots, but at the Inquiry a surveyor estimated her speed as no more than 6 knots. She had a wooden rudder operated by means of a tiller about 4 feet in length. As was noted by the Inquiry Report, the engine was situated a short distance forward of the tiller, such that the helmsman could not reach the engine controls if he was holding the tiller hard over to starboard. This feature of construction was to play an important part in her loss.

Aside from media interest around the anniversary of the loss of the *Prince of Wales* and calls from survivors for a memorial (see Section 6.2 below), no one has investigated this wreck since the Sheen Inquiry Report was published in 1967. The wreck was dived and searched for survivors, and subsequently salvaged following the incident.

The wreck of the *Prince of Wales* was selected for research as being a modern wreck, and the author wished to test whether online resources, if properly researched, could add to the information available for the wrecking of this boat easily available on the internet. In particular, the author wished to identify those people who lost their lives on this boat and, and how are they memorialised, what happened to the wreck after salvage, and what happened to the master (see Section 6 below).

4.0 Background

Brief details of this wreck were supplied by the WWWP as follows:

Date wrecked	Name of boat	Type of boat	Home port	Place wrecked	Details of wrecking	Source of information
22/07/1966	<i>Prince of Wales</i>	Cutter (ex-navy)	Barmouth	Afon Mawddach (River Mawddach), Cardiganshire	hit a pier / wrecked / 15 holiday makers drowned during a 1 hour river trip	Jones IW, <i>Shipwrecks of North Wales</i> (3 rd edn, David & Charles 1986)

The names of those who died were not easily discoverable on the internet and making a full list of those who lost their lives became a central part of this research.

4.1 Location of wreck site

The village of Penmaenpool is in Gwynedd, not Cardiganshire, as recorded in the WWWP details. The *Prince of Wales* hit a pier of the toll bridge across the river at the point marked with an arrow on Figures 3-5 below - OS Grid: SH694185.

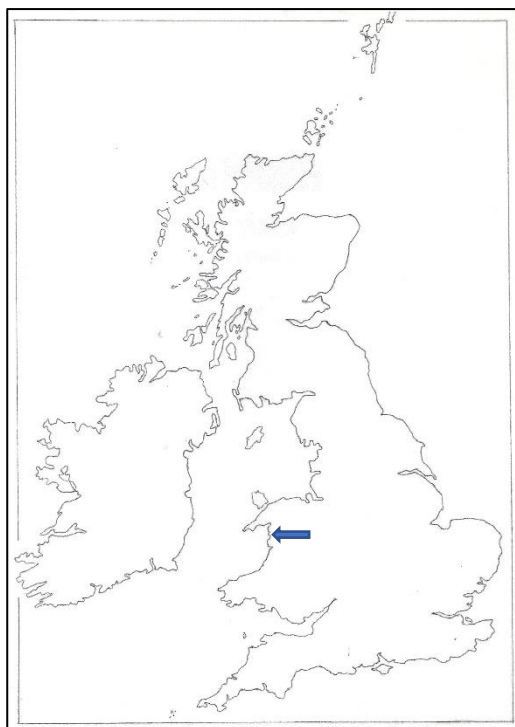


Figure 3: UK location map

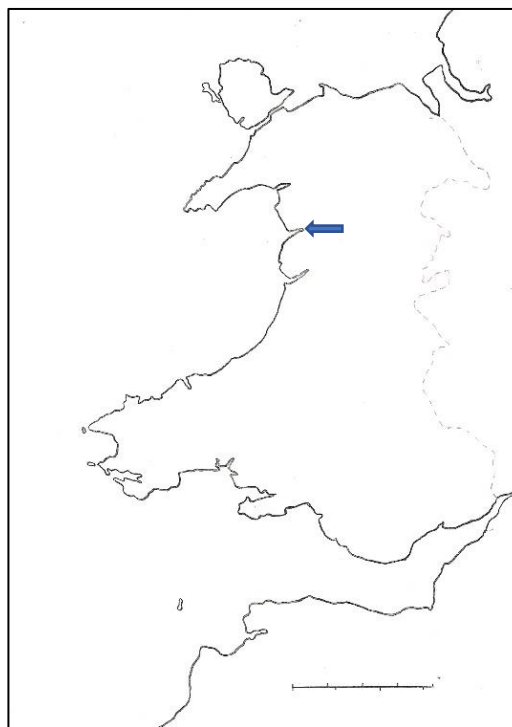


Figure 4: Wales location map

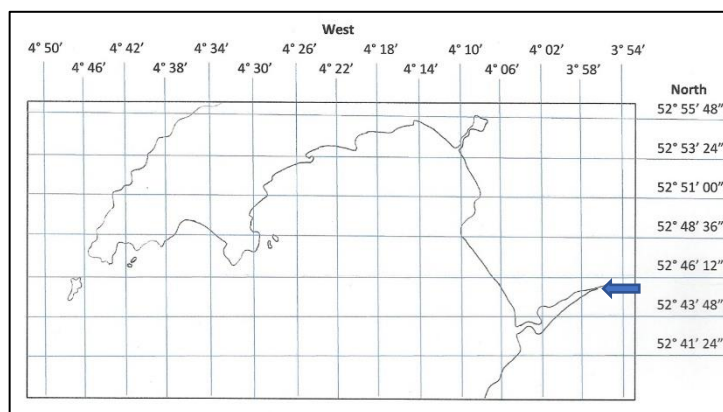


Figure 5: Detailed location map

4.2 Wrecking event

According to the Sheen Inquiry Report (Board of Trade, 1967), at about 1055 hours on Friday, 22nd July 1966, the *Prince of Wales*, under the sole charge of Edward Llewellyn Jones, aged 72 set off from Barmouth for a pleasure trip up the River Mawddach to Penmaenpool, a distance of about seven to eight miles. There were forty-two passengers on board, of whom fifteen were children between 3 and 12 years of age. At about 1145 hours the *Prince of Wales* arrived at Penmaenpool. Intending to turn to port and land his passengers on the Penmaenpool jetty facing down stream, Mr Jones reduced his speed and commenced his turn. However, the river was in flood at a speed of 405 knots and Mr Jones realised that his turn would not be completed before the boat was swept into the Penmaenpool Bridge trestles, so he let go of his tiller in order to reach the engine controls and increase the boat speed. The turn was not completed, and the boat was carried on the flood tide into an underwater stretcher attached to one of the bridge trestles (probably number 8 from the southern end of the bridge). This holed the boat beneath the waterline, and she sank rapidly. Despite the efforts of onlookers, fifteen passengers could not be saved and drowned in the fast-flowing river.

At the Inquest into the deaths held by HM Coroner for Merioneth in August 1966, the jury recorded a verdict of accidental death for all of the fatalities. A Formal Investigation into the loss of the *Prince of Wales* was convened under the Merchant Shipping Act 1894, leading to the Sheen Inquiry Report 1967. Mr Justice Sheen found that the *Prince of Wales* had Passenger Certificate Class V and Passenger Certificate Class VI for 36 passengers, when the boat was crewed by two crew members. Mr Jones was in breach of those certificates when he sailed from Barmouth with 42 passengers, and only himself as crew. Contributing to the collision with the bridge was the fact that Mr Jones commenced his turn to port too late for the state of the tide. In addition, because of the location of the engine controls, he had to let go of the tiller in order to increase engine speed. Had the boat not been undermanned, Mr Jones could have held the tiller hard over while someone else adjusted the speed. Mr Justice Sheen concluded his report as follows:

"24. The Court has been informed that in this case there will be no prosecution of the owners of the *Prince of Wales*. The Court thinks that the cynical disregard of the provisions of the Merchant Shipping Acts by the owners of the *Prince of Wales* calls for the strongest censure of them. Finally, the Court thinks that because this casualty was brought about at least in part by a flagrant breach of a condition of the Passenger Certificate, those responsible should be ordered, as has been done, to contribute to the expense of the Inquiry."

What happened to the wreck of the *Prince of Wales* was one of the issues to be resolved by further research, along with the names of those who lost their lives.

5.0 Research Methodology

A home PC was used to investigate the *Prince of Wales*. Initially, a number of internet resources were searched with no results (COFLEIN, National Archives, <http://www.rhiw.com/>, Lloyd's Register or Lloyd's List, and <http://www.maritimearchives.co.uk/>, and CADW). It was not possible to trace the history of the *Prince of Wales*, save what was disclosed in the Sheen Inquiry Report (which was also located online). Admiralty cutters were built in large numbers and no register of them exists. However, information on cutters in general was found on <https://shipsnostalgia.com>, <http://maritimeheritage.org.au/documents/Albatross%20significance.pdf>, http://www.bmpt.org.uk/pnbpt_historic_boats/32-Ft-Naval-Cutter/index.htm, and http://www.kiplingsociety.co.uk/rq_navyboats.htm.

General internet searches were carried out with Google on the name of the boat, date of wreck, and more particularly the location of the wrecking at Penmaenpool. The *Prince of Wales* is a fairly common boat name and is also a living person, so that location of the wreck was needed to reduce the number of hits in internet searches. As a fairly recent wreck, a YouTube video of the aftermath of the wreck was located, uploaded by ITV Cymru/Wales Archive (2016). While a useful social history source, it did not supply any technical details regarding the boat, or the wreck incident, save a close up of the size of the hole in the side of the boat (see cover photo). Several sources of information were revealed by the general internet search, usually connected with the reporting of an anniversary of the sinking see section 6 below).

The biggest source of information, particularly with respect to the identification of the dead, was the British Newspaper Archive, <https://www.britishnewspaperarchive.co.uk/>, a searchable database, accessible using the log in details provided by the NAS. Local papers reported on the accident, the recovery of the bodies, and the identification of them at the Inquest. Without this source, the names of the dead could not have been located without physically accessing the Inquest records in local archives. The Archive was also invaluable for identifying what happened to boat after the wrecking.

As the writer was keen to see how big (or small) a 32ft ex-naval cutter would be, a visit was undertaken to the Chatham Historic Dockyard in August 2021. Fig. 6 shows a 32ft cutter in sail configuration from the stern. It is hard to imagine 42 men, women and children, and Mr Jones packed into this boat.



Figure 6: 32ft cutter, built 1964 at Devonport (SHP075)

Photo credit: Sam Woods-Peel, August 2020

Late in the research process, a copy of Ivor Wynne Jones' *Shipwrecks of North Wales* was purchased to check the information supplied by the WWWP (Wynne Jones, 1986). Internet searches on the *Prince of Wales*, also led to references to a second pleasure boat tragedy – the loss of the *Darlwynne* and 31 lives of the coast of Cornwall, just nine days after the loss of the *Prince of Wales*. A book on this by Nick Lyons (Lyons, 2019) was useful to compare efforts at memorialisation (see section 7.0 below).

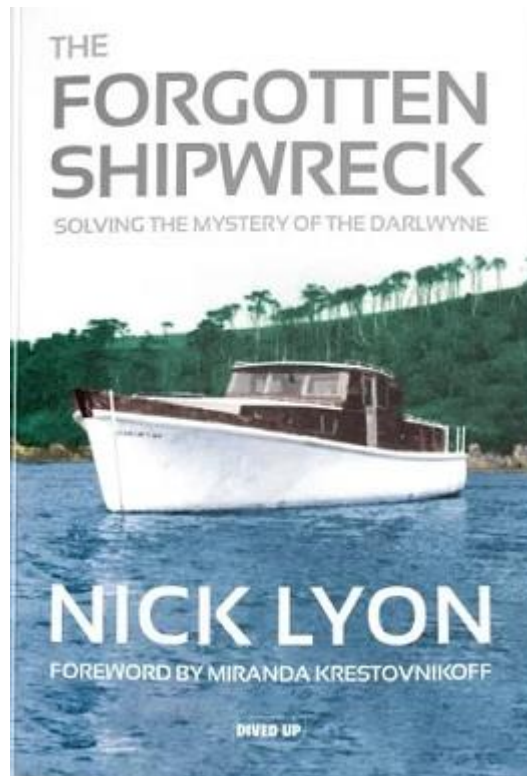


Figure 7: The book on the *Darlwynne* tragedy

6.0 Results

6.1 Fatalities

This list of fatalities was compiled from the British Newspaper Archive. As bodies had been swept away, some were not located for some time, hence the names were not all reported as a single list in any internet resource that the writer located.

Mrs Phyllis Dovey, 55 [1]
Mr Douglas Cheald, 46 [1]
Mrs Edith Fowler, 41 [1]
Mr Frederick Watts, 44 [3]
Mrs Doreen Watts, 41 [4]
Angela Watts, 9 [3]
David Watts, 10 [3]
Mrs Ethel Harding, 69 [1]
Mr William Prebble, 54 [4]
Gwyneth Prebble, 9 [2]
Mr Thomas Fraser, no age recorded [3]
Mrs Elsie Miles, 54 [1]
Lynn Vickerman, 6 [3]
Mrs Barbara Boardman, 31 [3]
Craig Boardman, 6 [3]

[1] Birmingham Daily Post, 23 July 1966
[2] Coventry Evening Telegraph, 23 July 1966
[3] Liverpool Echo, 23 July 1966
[4] Liverpool Echo, 27 July 1966

6.2 Memorials

A memorial service for the 15 victims was held at Penmaenpool, Merioneth, in the ruins of Cymmer Abbey on 6 August 1966. On the 50th anniversary of the tragedy a memorial plaque was unveiled by Dolgellau town council (BBC News, 2016). Figure 7 shows that plaque, and the flowers that day. Research has uncovered a letter to the Cambrian News in 2018 from Peter Watts, who lost his parents, a brother and a sister in the tragedy, calling for there to be a proper memorial listing the names of those who died (Cambrian News, 2018). It is hoped that by listing all the victims in this report their names will be more accessible to future researchers.



Figure 8a: Memorial Plaque at Penmaenpool

Photo credit: Amelia Shaw, Daily Post <https://www.dailypost.co.uk/news/north-wales-news/gallery/service-mark-50th-anniversary-penmaenpool-11651284> (accessed 21/3/21)



Figure 8b: Close up of Memorial Plaque at Penmaenpool

Photo credit: Amelia Shaw (as for Fig. 8a)

6.3 What happened to the wreckage of the *Prince of Wales*?

After the wreck of the *Prince of Wales* was pulled from river and remained on the riverbank guarded by police, until the local Coroner ordered it to be moved to a safe location a few miles away (Liverpool Echo, 2 August 1966). After the Sheen Inquiry, the owners wanted nothing more to do with the boat and it was bought from the Board of Trade by Barmouth Urban Council, who ordered it to be set alight with paraffin on the shore front on 28 October 1966, to prevent 'morbid curiosity' in the boat (Birmingham Daily Post, 27 October 1967).

6.4 What happened to the master of the *Prince of Wales*?

Edward Llewelyn Jones, the master of the *Prince of Wales* at the time of the accident continued to run boat trips out of Barmouth, despite the criticism of him by the Sheen Inquiry Report. He was criticised in a newspaper report the following year for continuing to run potentially unsafe boats. Mr Jones said that he was not to blame for the accident in 1966, insisting something had fouled his propeller. This was to a certain extent supported by the Barmouth Urban Council, who granted him a further licence to operate boats. In addition, to avoid a repeat of the accident the Council required pleasure craft to obtain insurance and carry adequate life-saving equipment for all on board (The People, 15 October 1967). Mr Jones was further criticised in the same newspaper the following year for carrying too many passengers in his boat the *Elizabeth* (The People, 21 July 1968). By then he was 75.

7.0 Analysis

It is not known why the local papers reporting the fatalities were not Welsh, but from further afield, but the writer suspects this is due to the availability of Welsh newspaper archives. Further research into the most local papers to Penmaenpool may result in further details of the fatalities and the incident itself.

Local appeals were launched for the victims of the tragedy, prompting AW Webb of Solihull to write to the Birmingham Daily Post on 24 November 1966, pointing out that these appeals had raised about £3,000 for the victims, whereas the Aberfan Disaster Fund had raised £1 million by this point. Webb's point is that while the Aberfan Disaster was a tragedy, many of the victims were children, whereas in the *Prince of Wales* wrecking, children lost their parents and means of support and the boat itself was uninsured so no compensation was ever paid to the victims. This sentiment may seem strange to Twenty First Century eyes, and with the benefit of hindsight the Aberfan Disaster Fund has done a great deal of good for the local area, and indeed successor organisations still exist (see the Charity Commission website generally). However, it is perhaps true that the sinking of the *Prince of Wales*, and its victims, and the 31 victims of the sinking of the *Darlwynne* off the Cornish coast on 31 July 1966, may have received more lasting publicity had it not been for the Aberfan Disaster of October 1966 fixing the public's consciousness. It should be noted though that the victims of the *Darlwynne* tragedy have their names carved on a memorial screen in the church of St Mylor (Lyon, 2019: 94-95).

According to Dr Louise Bailey, memorialisation is a way of connecting the deceased to the living. "To memorialise is to name, is to remember the person that was and commemorate the life that was lived" (Remember Me Project, 2017). This need to name the dead certainly grips Peter Watt who lost family members in the tragedy (see Section 6.2 above), and also the writer, who felt moved to search for the names of the dead because a ready list of names was not available. It simply felt important to do so. The age of one of the male victims was not identified by the writer's research, and further research into online death archives, or local newspaper archives bring this detail to light.

Research into a wreck of the Twentieth Century is not any easier than an earlier wreck. Newspaper archives, which were invaluable for this research, are also available for earlier wrecks. As the *Prince of Wales* was a small pleasure craft, it was not registered and its earlier history could not be traced, save for remarks made in the Sheen Inquiry Report (Board of Trade, 1967). A more modern wreck does have the benefit though of photographs of the wreck contemporaneous with the events. There was even a YouTube video in respect of this wreck (see Section 5.0 above). The potential availability of live witnesses, even 50-plus years after the event is bonus, but less so for an online researcher during the COVID lockdowns of 2020-21.

8.0 Conclusions & Recommendations

Edward Llewellyn Jones always denied responsibility for the sinking of the *Prince of Wales*, but the fault was squarely laid at his door by the Sheen Inquiry Report. He, and his co-owners, were made to contribute to the costs of the Inquiry, but aside from that there was no other punishment for him, and he went back to his trade of carrying passengers at Barmouth. The local Council had the wreck destroyed, but did tighten up regulations applying to pleasure craft such as the *Prince of Wales* to ensure that such a tragedy could not happen again.

All of the questions the writer set out to answer have been resolved. However, fifteen men, women and children died in the sinking of the *Prince of Wales*, and it is only right that their names are recorded somewhere so that they might be remembered. It is hoped that this report is a step in the direction of a permanent memorial to them somewhere.

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