

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

Sam Slick



'Levant' A Two Masted Brixham Schooner of 1871

Sam Slick MADU 264

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

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Date: February **2021**

Report Ref:

1.0 Abstract

The Welsh Wreck Research Project aims to contribute to a wider understanding of the maritime history of North Wales by using on-line research into vessels identified as wrecks in North Cardigan Bay.

The schooner *Sam Slick* was amongst those vessels listed by MADU (Malvern Archeological Diving Unit) as wrecked in Cardigan Bay (MADU 264).

Earlier work by the researcher while investigating another vessel, had suggested that this was the name of one of the vessels lost on the beaches near the Welsh port of Pwllhelli ,on the Llŷn Peninsular, in the severe gales of December 8th-9th 1886.

The aims of the study were to establish whether the identity of the vessel reported as broken up and spilling a cargo of tar pitch was indeed the *Sam Slick* mentioned in a number of eye-witness reports as being in difficulties in the area at the time.

The task was then to look into the background of the ship; where and how she was built; her story and how she came to be in the area of Cardigan Bay at that time and, overall, to gain a better understanding of the life of a ship of her class in the mid 1800's.

2.1 Index	Page No.
1.0 Abstract -----	3
2.0 Index -----	4
3.0 Introduction -----	5
4.0 Background -----	6
5.0 Research Methodology -----	7
6.0 Results -----	8 -16
Table of Results -----	17
7.0 Analysis -----	18
8.0 Conclusions & Recommendations -----	19
9.0 References -----	20

2.2 Appendices:

Appendix a - Captain T Biscumbe -----	21
Appendix b. - Timeline of voyages (1862,63,64,65,69) -----	22-23

2.3 List of Pictures: **Page No.**

Schooner 'Levant' of Brixham 1871, by Luigi P. Renault -----	1.
<i>The 17th -18th Century Newfoundland Triangular Trade</i> (Barret, 2018.) -----	11.

2.4 Abbreviations

BNA - British Newspaper Archive

CLIP - Crew Lists Project

Coflien - Online database for the National Monuments Record of Wales (NMRW)

LRS - Lloyd's Register of Shipping

MADU - Malvern Archaeological Diving Unit

NMW- National Museum of Wales

3.0 Introduction

The *Sam Slick* was one of the many vessels caught up in the severe storms of 8th – 9th December 1886, some of which have already been studied (*Endeavour*, MADU 269). From newspaper report descriptions, it was ascertained that a schooner of Portsmouth, or Plymouth was one of those wrecked near Pwllheli Beach. It was unclear whether the *Sam Slick* mentioned in some reports is the ship destroyed seen on her 'beam end' with a cargo of coal tar spilt or whether this is some other vessel.

The smack " Endeavour" of Porthmadog (Capt. R. Evans), is high and dry on Pwllheli beach. She is loaded with slates. Close to the "Endeavour," and under the Towyn Farm is a Plymouth schooner, loaded with coal tar pitch. She is on her beam ends, her cargo washed out by the sea. (Caernarvon & Denbigh Herald – 10th December 1886.)

"When the storm began there were several vessels at anchor wind-bound, in St. Tudwall's roadstead. It was soon seen that they could not ride the gale out in the roadstead, and they were seen to drive their ancores or to slip them. Some of them tried to make for the inner shelter of LLanbedrog promontory but the wind was so terribly strong that they were soon entirely at its mercy. Therefore the Sam Slick; Endeavour and John and Ann and the " Mary Ann" ran ashore between Pwllheli and LLanbedrog."

The questions which then arise concern the business which brought the *Sam Slick* to the area at the time of the storm, her working life and the story of the wrecking.

4.0 Background

In early December 1886 the weather in the UK had been disturbed for some time but by the 8th December, the barometer fell to the lowest level previously recorded for Ireland, Northern and Central Britain. It then remained low for an unusually long period of time. The resulting storm was of the first magnitude and unusual in the length of its duration and its wide distribution, from Norway as far as Spain, encompassing the whole of the UK (Harding, 1887).

The initial information on the 'Plymouth Schooner' and the *Sam Slick*, from newspaper articles reporting on the storm of December 1886 is confused by the number of vessels which were in the area at the time. It suggests that she was either the 'Plymouth Schooner' or the 'Portsmouth Schooner' mentioned but is unclear whether these were the same vessels. There appeared to be an area of doubt in the name of the home port and identity of the owner.

Coflein offers a fairly comprehensive report on the *SAM SLICK* but identifies her as the Portsmouth Schooner. Initial investigation also suggested that she was a Brixham boat owned by the Hall family:

The SAM SLICK was a wooden schooner built by Gibbs at Galmpton in 1860. Technical and configuration specifications are given as 146nt; 88ft 5in length x 21ft breadth x 12ft depth; sheathed in felt and yellow metal; partially fastened with iron bolts.At time of loss on 8 December 1886, the schooner SAM SLICK was owned by W Allport of Padstow and registered at Portsmouth. It was carrying pitch from Fleetwood to Swansea under the command of master S Biscumb, when it was caught in a west-southwesterly force 11 gale and blown ashore on Pwllheli beach.
(<https://coflein.gov.uk/en/site/271621/details/sam-slick>)

5.0 Research Methodology

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

Online sites recommended for the project were followed up. These included Lloyds Register of Shipping (LRS), the Crew List Index Project (CLIP), Coflein and local sites such as Rhiw.com. The Crew List Index Project also gave access to the Mercantile Navy Lists.

General Google searches using the name of the ship produced sites with further information such as the website of the Friends of Purton where information on the cattle boats was found and the Gempton family site, on Brixham shipbuilding (see reference list) which gave valuable information on William Gibbs, builder. Investigation into cargos and trade routes were searched by following links between south coast ports and Newfoundland. This revealed the Salcombe Maritime History Paper which was valuable in explaining the development of a number of trade routes from neighbouring ports.

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

Access to the British Newspaper Archive was available and provided background material of both ship movement and significant events.

The key search word was mainly the name of the ship, sometimes prefixed with 'wreck of'. In searching for the voyages and events in the life of the vessel, the name of the master was affixed to identify the ship accurately. Shipowner and master's names and particularly dates of events were useful in searching newspaper articles.

The name of the master of the vessel in each phase of her life was essential in establishing the identity of the ship in the newspaper record and was determined from Lloyds Register of Shipping or the few crew records available (CLIP).

Searches for the other ships involved in the events of the 8th-9th December have produced the material which began this search, particularly those related to the *Endeavour* of Porthmadog. An example of this is use of the *Quarterly Journal of the Royal Meteorological Society* which provided information on the storm itself and was accessed through a Google search for 'Storm of December 8th 1886'.

6.0 Results

6.01 A description of the vessel.

The *Sam Slick* was a wooden sailing vessel built in 1860 in Glampton in Devon at the Gibbs yard. William Gibbs (1806 – 1880) founded the yard at Glampton, near Brixham in 1836 having begun in premises near Churlston Quay and was well regarded for building mainly wooden sailing trawlers. The yard was small and situated on the banks of the River Dart, well protected by being some way into the Dart estuary.

The *Sam Slick* was built for Varwell & Co, and her first master was P Varwell of Brixham (Lloyds Register of Shipping, 1861). She was classed as a Schooner, a sailing ship rigged with fore-and-aft sails on two or more masts, in this case two masts. The foremast could also be rigged with one or more square topsails but more often, with one or more jib sails. Schooners, or Fore-and-afters, were known to handle well in coastal winds, having shallower drafts, and requiring a smaller crew in proportion to their size.

She was named for a popular fictional character, Sam Slick, created by (Judge) Thomas Chandler Haliburton of Nova Scotia. When, in 1856, he moved to England his satirical books were already very well known. Sayings and observations of his main character, Sam, a Yankee peddler, were already being absorbed into the English language, with sayings such as 'going to the dogs' (www.britannica.com) still used today.

Her dimensions were 88.5/21.0/12.9 and her tonnage 145 tons. She was of wooden construction sheathed with yellow metal and with a wheel over point of 60, which was reassessed as 64 in the 1864 register. Felt was also used in the construction of the sheathing and she was fastened with iron bolts. This method was used in the construction of composite ships such as the *Caduceus*, researched by the Maritime Archaeological Trust (www.maritimearchaeologytrust.org). The Lloyds Register notes that she was built *under special survey*; their records did not differentiate between wooden and composite ships until 1866. (Composite ships were wooden planking over an iron frame, fastened with copper or copper alloy fastenings and as with other wooden ships, their hulls were sheathed with copper alloy or yellow metal. An insulator such as a layer of felt, was placed between the outer wood and the sheathing which then separated the two types of metal to prevent electrolytic action). As she was built using iron bolts in a small yard, this however, seems unlikely. The 'Yellow Metal' mentioned, also called Muntz metal, is an alloy of brass consisting of 60% copper and 40 % zinc, named after the English businessman George F. Muntz and patented in 1832 (www.britannica.com). It has good resistance to corrosion however, slight corrosion of the copper within the alloy creates an environment which

inhibites marine growth so that the sheathing remained relatively clean but wasted away at a faster rate and required changing every few years.

(www.maritimearchaeologytrust.org)

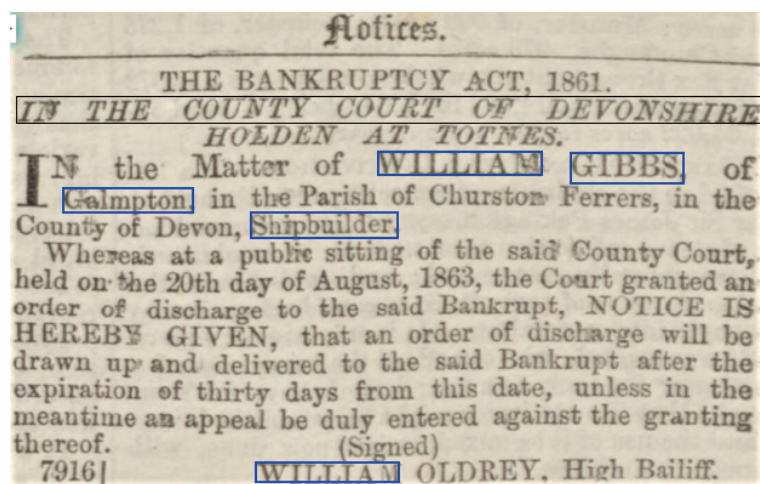
6.2 Historical information relating to the wreck:

Brixham was known for the development of large sailing trawlers in the early 19th century. With the demise of the inshore fish numbers around Torbay, their powerful rigs allowed them to sail quickly to the sailing grounds and were powerful enough to drag large nets behind them when fishing. The building of a schooner in the Gibbs Yard appears, at first to be unusual as William Gibbs' reputation was as a builder of fine fishing trawlers.

" the average output of this yard is twelve trawlers a year, and it gives employment to between sixty and seventy men , who live mostly at Dittisham, taking a boat to and from work each morning and evening".

(Harper,G 1927, cited <https://sites.google.com/site/familygempton/brixham-shipbuilding>)

It also appears that the yard had been in financial trouble at this time as seen in an extract is taken from Exeter and Plymouth Gazette, 28th August 1863. It is difficult to know whether building a large sailing ship had helped or hindered the affairs of the Gibbs family.



(<https://sites.google.com/site/familygempton/brixham-shipbuilding>)

The vessel changed her port of registration a number of times during her early years, William Mortimer is registered as her first owner. Although in Crew Lists in 1863 she is registered in Dartmouth it is noted that her owner is Peter Varwell, Bolton Street, Brixham, while her master is Samuel Varwell, age 24. This is explained by The South

West Heritage Trust's two early records from the Port of Dartmouth shipping registers relating to the vessel, which give the names of all those owning shares in 1866 and 1877.

'Sam Slick', 28162, schooner, length 91.6' and GT 145.51, built at Galmpton 1860, registered 10th May 1860. Title owned by William Carwell, Peter Carwell, Edward Fox, Joshua Collings, Samuel Heron, William Mortimer. Transferred to Brixham 10th October 1865. (<https://devon-cat.swheritage.org.uk/records/DSR/DAR/1/10>).

From the second item it would appear likely that the surname Carwell is a mis-transcription of 'Varwell'. The connection with the Varwell family is the most prevalent and lasts until she appears to change hands to the Hill family in 1877.

'Sam Slick' 28162, sailing vessel, schooner, built at Galmpton in 1860, formerly registered at Dartmouth, transferred to Portsmouth, 16th November 1877, title owned by Samuel Hodder Slade, William Varwell, Peter Varwell, William Henry Wills, Elizabeth Grover.

(<https://devon-cat.swheritage.org.uk/records/DSR/DAR/1/10>).

6.3 **Working life of the Sam Slick**

The working life of the vessel appears to fall into three phases. Firstly, what appears to be general trading over a wide range of destinations between 1860 and 1878. Then as a cattle ship, under the Hill family from 1879 until 1885, when she was bought by Allport & Co of Padstow. The records available for the third period are her entry in the register for 1886 and also 1887 (LRS), where she is noted as wrecked, and reports of her final voyage to and from Fleetwood with coal tar pitch.

Phase One:

The *Sam Slick* is at first registered with her 'destined voyage' as Plymouth to the Mediterranean. Newspaper listings show that whilst with her first owners, under Masters Samuel Varwell, JP Varwell and , from 1867, Thomas Mugford, she undertook voyages not only throughout the Mediterranean but much further afield (see appendix B). Crew records suggest that she worked with a crew of around 7-8 persons. First records show a young crew, the eldest being 28yrs old under a young captain Samuel Varwell, age 24yrs in 1863.

In this first phase, her travels to the Mediterranean are interspersed with voyages as far as the Bahamas, the Caribbean and later Nova Scotia. Tenerife and Madeira are also included in the reports, although possibly as ports of call for the longer voyages. A list of

voyages during some of these years is available in appendix B. These indicated the variety of journeys undertaken, although establishing patterns and relating this to cargoes has been difficult as very few are noted in detail.

Salcombe and Brixham having emerged in the 1830's as the leading players in the Mediterranean fruit trade (Barrett, 2018), it is possible that voyages to the Mediterranean were part of the fruit trade, but nothing definite has been found.

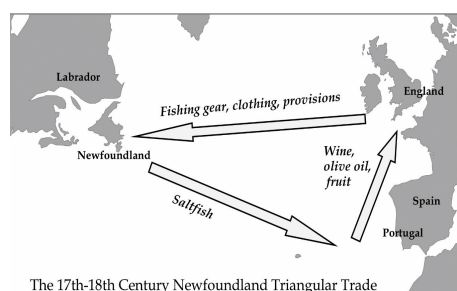
The details of storm damage to the ship in June 1862 provide evidence that she carried sugar from Barbados to Dublin, although it is unclear whether Dublin was her intended destination. On a later voyage from Barbados to the Clyde, in August 1865, sugar is also listed as the return cargo.

A specific reference is made to a cargo cotton in an advertisement the Liverpool Mercury of 2nd September 1864.

This Day /Friday the 2nd instant at Twelve o'clock, at the Brokers Sale Room, Grosvenor-buildings. Titebarn-street, 6 Bales COTTON, all faults, ex Sam Slick, from Nassau, lying In Graham's Warehouse, Rumford-court. For further particulars apply to Messrs. Frasar, Trenholm & Co. merchants or to 'DANIEL O. BUCHANAN & Co., Brokers.

A report from the *Cardiff and Merthyr Guardian, Glamorgan, Monmouth, and Brecon Gazette*(BNA) tells us that the *Sam Slick* left Cardiff on 30th August 1864 for Tenerife with 235 tons of Coal from Barter & Co. arriving in Tenerife on 7th October. This would be the next destination for the vessel which suggests coal as the export with imports including cotton.

The recorded trips to St John's Newfoundland and Halifax Nova Scotia, may be part of a triangular trade route (see diagram) but perhaps coal was taken to Newfoundland with a cargo of salt cod then taken to the Mediterranean port, returning with general cargo to a British port. The saltfish trade enjoyed a revival from the 1860s when the Newfoundland merchants, rather than using their own vessels, chartered schooners from the West Country and Welsh ports. It was suitable trade for small ships and, because of the nature of the terrain was suited to topsail schooners. Salcombe History Society's paper No.6 *The Newfoundland Cod Trade* (Barret, 2018.) gives a useful account of the trade between the UK and small British ports.



(Salcombe Maritime Museum)

Phase Two:

In 1879 the vessel changed ownership to the Hill family, with Joseph Hill as Master. Throughout this time the only destination outside the UK is to Corunna, while Plymouth, Looe and Falmouth are the home destination ports. This appears to be a completely different picture to her previous trade routes which were extremely varied. This was explained when a reference was found to the hulks at Purton, Gloucestershire investigated by the Friends of Purton which made reference to the *Sam Slick*. The following was found on their website

Between 1855 and 1880 cattle were imported from Spain for the Army and Navy commissariat. The contract was in the hands of a Simon Hine, and he chartered a lot of little schooners, which picked up cattle at Corruna and landed them either at Falmouth, Plymouth or Portsmouth. The following were the best known of these cattle schooners: Pandora of Salcombe, Little Vixen and Elfrida of Plymouth, Sam Slick of Brixham, J. B. Gray and Little Dorrit of Fowey, and the Florence and Hezibah of Truro. These little vessels carried 60 head of cattle, the bullocks standing on the ballast, which was stowed on top of the water tanks. Back and forth across the Bay of Biscay, these little schooners plied the year round.

(B Lubbok, 1927, cited www.friendsofpurton.org.uk/island-maid).

The Island Maid, also a Plymouth registered ship had initially also operated in the Mediterranean, possibly in the fruit trade but her strong construction made her suitable for the 'booming cattle trade from Corunna' to the English South Coast. A similar picture can be considered for the *Sam Slick*. She is often found in port at the same time as other ships mentioned above, particularly the *Little Dorrit*.

A news article has been found which provides further evidence of her life as a cattle ship.

On April 9 the Master of Thessalia on arrival in Liverpool, reported that on the 5th (April), he spoke with the Sam Slick, on its way from Corunna for Plymouth, with cattle dying for want of supplies. They asked the Thessalia for bearings to Ushant and wished their situation to be reported. There were strong easterly winds and high sea at the time. (Shipping and Mercantile Gazette - Monday 11 April 1881 BNA.)

It appears that having not made good enough progress due to strong winds, the problem was resolved by the *Sam Slick* turning back to reprovision in Corunna. (Greenock Telegraph and Clyde Shipping Gazette - Monday 18 April 1881, BNA)

Corunna, April 9.—The Sam Slick, schooner. Hill, sailed this afternoon, after having taken in a fresh supply of food and water for cattle. Wind 8.W.; very fine.

Phase Three:

The vessels time with its last owner Allport & Co was very short. A voyage from Fleetwood to Swansea was interrupted by the fatal storm, leading to her final beaching on Pwllheli Beach.

Incidents in the life of the Sam Slick:

A few reports found in newspaper articles of the time give an account of some of the incidents which a sailing ship could encounter during her working life:

The *Penny Despatch and Irish Weekly Newspaper* of 28th June 1862 (BNA), reports the following which matches accounts of the ships movements at this time under her master Mr Varwell and provides another cargo clue:

The schooner Sam Slick, which arrived at Kingstown on Saturday for Dublin with sugar from Barbados,experienced the full effects of a hurricane from the north-east and hove to under bare poles and small tarpaulin in the rigging. She carried away her fore-masthead, gibbeon, fore and main topmasts, top gallant-mast, topsail, and top-gallant-yards. The greater part of her sails were lost overboard. The captain was injured by the starboard anchor washing in onboard This gallant little craft, are informed, behaved well in the hurricane, and made her way in this disabled condition for about 1,300 miles.

The *Shipping and Mercantile Gazette*, 1st May 1882 (BNA) reporting the effects of a severe storm even while ships were in the protection of Plymouth Sound relates a list of damaged ships including the following. 'SAM SLICK schooner drove down on the Shortest Day, moored at the Cattedown Quay, causing slight damage to both vessels.' Further explanation for this was found in the chaos of the storm:

Gale of extreme severity on 29th April 1882, at Plymouth, she (Sam Slick) dragged both anchors and went ashore in serious peril as her stern was dragged towards the quay, she was secured to the shore by warps thrown from the ship and made taut to the shore.

Cork Constitution reports on 6th September 1884 (BNA): "*Sam Slick arrived in Portsmouth with her mainmast head gone as well as her back mainsail.*"

In 1879 a crew member, Able Seaman John Lacey, a Londoner aged 38 was lost overboard (CLIP). Lloyds Lists reports from Corunna on 9th January that he was lost in a heavy gale at 2 p:m on 1st January. Captain Hill reports that 'everything possible was done to save him but to no purpose' (BNA). It is ironic that on 25th January the vessel arrived in Plymouth from Corunna with the only two survivors of the 24 man crew of the Baynard, a steamship of Newcastle on Tyne, lost in the Gulf of Florida, picked up by a Spanish brigantine after surviving for a week in an open boat.

In a very different vein, we can see that life on board could provide other problems for the crew:

John Williams, a seaman on board the Sam Slick schooner, now lying Brixham harbour, was brought up in custody, charged with stealing a pair of stockings, belonging to E. Boish, one of the crew, and with assaulting Boish, and Bastard, another of the crew. On the voyage from Shields to Brixham, prisoner, who was not well found in wearing apparel, made rather free with Boish's, and on Saturday he was found by him wearing a pair of his stockings. When charged, he denied having them, and assaulted prosecutor a violent manner, beating him with fish he had in his hand. Hore, the mate, gave evidence to the assault, both on Boish and Bastard. The Bench did not think, under the circumstances, that loans of clothes had been made, that the charge of felony could be proved, but as the assault was a violent one, they sent him goal with hard labour for one month. (Exeter and Plymouth Gazette Daily Telegrams, 5th December 1876, BNA).

6.4 **The story leading up to the wrecking and cause of the wrecking incident:**

On the 26th November 1886 a ship named the *Sam Slick* was reported at Fleetwood having arrived from Plymouth with a cargo of clay. She sailed on the 2nd December 1886 from Fleetwood bound for Swansea with pitch (Blackpool Gazette & Herald - Friday 10 December 1886, BNA) under Captain Biscumbe, the first mention we have of this master. In order to ascertain that this was the correct *Sam Slick*, links with the named master and the incident were required. A possible link was found in the *Blackpool Gazette & Herald* for Friday 17 December 1886 (BNA). "*The Sam Slick and*

Ann Mitchell, two schooners that have frequently been at Fleetwood were wrecked in Studwell Roads during the gale of last week."

As the ship changed hands in 1885 it is conceivable that the captain also changed and that the "Studwell Roads" mentioned here is St Tudwell's Roads. A link was then found in the South Wales Echo of 20th July 1891 in a report which names a Timothy H Biscumbe surviving another incident, two years later as Master of the brigantine Annie Harris, lost in a collision with a steam ship (see Appendix a) off Portland Bill. The Annie Harris was also owned by W.S. Allport & Co. establishing that a T Biscumbe was Master of ships owned by W.S. Allport.

There is contradictory information as to who her master at the time of her last voyage, as the 1887 registration (LRS), while noting that she was wrecked, registers her master as 'Hill'. Although this appears unlikely to be the case.

6.5. The wrecking incident.

When the storm began there were several vessels at anchor wind-bound, in St. Tudwall's roadstead. It was soon seen that they could not ride the gale out in the roadstead, and they were seen to drive their anchors or to slip them. Some of them tried to make for the inner shelter of LLanbedrog promontory but the wind was so terribly strong that they were soon entirely at its mercy. Therefore the Sam Slick; Endeavour and John and Ann and the "Mary Ann" ran ashore between Pwllheli and LLanbedrog. News of this soon reached Pwllheli, scores of people ran to the assistance of the crews..... The "Sam Slick," soon after it struck, toppled on its beam end and the crew on to the side of the vessel, where they remained for hours exposed to the wind and waves. The weather was bitterly cold. It was thought that the crew of the "Sam Slick" were not in such imminent danger of being washed away, as the men in the other vessels were. Immediate attempts were made to save the lives of the latter. When the "Sam Slick" men saw this, during every lull that took place they piteously cried out, "O' save us. We shall be washed away". To these cries the men on shore replied "stand on. The tide is going out. We shall be able to come to you shortly." About ten o'clock, the crew of this vessel were saved. (Caernarvon & Denbigh Herald - Friday 17 December 1886. BNA)

The treatment of the crew of the *Sam Slick*, sounds harsh but the decision appears sound, as the rescuers were then able to help the imperilled remaining crew of the *John and Jane*. The *Mary Ann* was not so lucky, the crew could not be reached, and the onlookers watched as a young boy and then two adult crew members were swept away when the ship broke up. Pwllheli beach was known locally to be a safe beach for running ashore in emergency

situations as it is composed of soft sand with a gently sloping profile. This meant that, during the gales of that night when many vessels were in trouble, the lifeboats and coastguard apparatus would be used elsewhere in more hazardous locations. In this case it was left to local residents to rescue the seamen using manpower and ropes.

Great indignation is felt at the neglect in not providing the place with rocket and such-like life-saving apparatus, whereby several more lives could easily have been saved. (Western mail, 11th December 1886, NLW).

6.6 The aftermath of the wrecking

The remains of the ships appear to have been sold as salvage. *'All the vessels ashore on Pwllheli Beach have been sold by auction'. (Caernarvon and Denbigh Herald, 17th Dec 1886-BNA).*

There is a possibility that some wreckage would have been abandoned on the beach. Coflein notes that *'Archaeological remains associated with the loss of this vessel are not confirmed at present at this location but may be in the vicinity'*. Establishing a positive connection between any remains and a particular wooden schooner beached and wrecked on that day alone would seem to be a challenging task.

Table of results:

Vessel	Name/s	Sam Slick - 28162	
	Type	Sailing Ship	
		Schooner	
Built	Date	Glampton, Devon	
		1860	
	Builder	Gibbs	
Construction	Materials	Wood with Yellow metal sheathing, felt ,iron bolts.	
Propulsion	Type	Sail	
	Details	Square Rigged	
	Number	2 masts	
Dimensions	Length	88ft	5ins
	Beam	21ft	0ins
	Draught	12ft	9ins
Tonnage	Gross	145.51	
	Net		
Owner	First	1865- William Mortimer.	
	Last	1885 W.S. Allport & Co.	
		Padstow (ML)or Plymouth (LRS)	
	Others	1866- 1877 Peter Varwell jnr.Bolton Street Brixham. 1878 - W Smith 4,Nelson Street , Plymouth (MSL)? 1879 - William Hill, 4, Nelson Street, Plymouth. 4, Prospect Street, Plymouth. 1880 - Joseph Hill Snr. Looe.	
Registry	Port	10 th May, 1860-1865- Dartmouth 1876- Brixham 1878 - Portsmouth 1879- Plymouth.	
	Flag	UK	
	Number	28162	
History	Routes	Plymouth 1861 - 65, UK to European and Caribbean Ports. 1877 - 84 To Corunna	
	Cargo	Caribbean Ports - sugar, cotton, coal. Corunna - Cattle	
Final Voyage	From	Fleetwood	
	To	Swansea	
	Captain	Captain Timothy Biscumbe	
	Crew	8?	
	Passengers	0	
	Cargo	Tar Pitch	
Wrecking	Date	8 th December 1886	
	Location	Pwllheli Beach	
	Cause	Storm	
	Loss of life	0	
	Outcome	Total Loss, Salvaged.	

7 Analysis

The aims of the study were accomplished overall. These being, to establish the identity of the vessel reported as that broken up and spilling a cargo of tar pitch, to investigate her story as a working vessel from her build to her final voyage and, in doing so, to better understand the life aboard a mercantile ship of her time .

A few very minor details on the Coflein account appear to be inaccurate; the *Sam Slick* was, indeed registered at Plymouth and not Portsmouth at this time and her master is Timothy Biscumbe. Confirmation of the other details of her identity was also possible, therefore the main research remaining was to uncover the story of her working life.

Little extra detail is available on her build except what can be extrapolated from other ships built in the Brixham area at the time. Her builder, Gibbs, was known for his fine fishing trawlers which suggests a robust build. It is also suggested that ships for the cattle trade were chosen from those built in the area as being suitably sturdy.

Research has, I believe, provided an insight into the life of a small merchant ship of the time, which was as hoped. Overall, it has been difficult to establish detailed information about the trade in which she was employed other than her many years as a cattle boat. Her early working life produced a number of interesting links and possibilities, but these were often difficult to trace in detail and we are left with only occasional glimpses and supposition of the purpose of the early voyages. A history of her working life uncovered the very varied use to which these small ships were put and the surprisingly long and complex voyages which they undertook.

Again, as in the story of the *Endeavour (MADU 269)*, the newspaper reports highlight the response of the community to the events of the night and shows local people using publicity to communicate their needs, in this instance highlighting the lack of sufficient lifesaving devices in the area. The quantity of shipping in the area on the night of the storm indicates how great the need was for organised responses to events at sea.

8 Conclusions & Recommendations

This study confirms the identity of the vessel, the *Sam Slick* described in the newspaper accounts, as being the both the 'Plymouth' and 'Portsmouth' Schooner. She was found to have been in the area at the time and with the cargo suggested. It is now possible to add these extra facts, together with the reports of the storm and background information on the life of the ship to events leading up to her final voyage.

It is unlikely that there is anything remaining of the *Sam Slick* at the wreck site, as it appears that all of the vessels beached at Pwllheli that day were either re-floated or sold as salvage. It appears that she was not re-floated as no further account of her can be found in the records (LRS).

If sufficient information could be brought together, an account of that day could be of interest to the community at Pwllheli. Further work to follow up the history of the other vessels mentioned, seems the most productive way to begin this. An earlier report on the vessel *Endeavour* (MADU 269) contains, as an appendix, a list of the ships named in articles searched regarding the storm of 8 & 9th December 1886, together with any information gained.

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Appendices:

Appendix A – Captain Timothy Biscombe (Biscumbe)

The North German Lloyd's mail steamer Dresden, bound from Bremen to Baltimore, early on Saturday morning ran into and sank, off Portland Point, the coasting brigantine Annie Harris four of the crew of the latter vessel being drowned. The sailing ship was on a voyage from Swansea to West Hartlepool, and at the time of the collision was going up the Channel, close hauled, with whole sail set. The Dresden struck the Annie Harris on the port bow, cutting her clean in two, and carrying away the masts of the vessel, which sank almost immediately. Timothy Biscombe, the master, and George Couch, mate, jumped clear, but the other four men must have gone down with the vessel, as they were not seen after the collision. Biscombe and Couch were in the water three quarters of an hour before they were picked up by one of the Dresden boats. They were subsequently transferred to a Plymouth fishing vessel, which landed them at eleven o'clock. The survivors state that at the time of the accident the weather was fine, and the moon was shining brightly. For some time, previous to the collision the Dresden was seen by the crew of the brigantine, who frequently sounded the foghorn and fog signal to attract the attention of the steamer. The names of the men drowned are:—Ellett, able seaman, Brixham, Porter, able seaman, Lowestoft and Mace, apprentice, Hull. The cook was also drowned.

(South Wales Echo - Monday 20 July 1891 BNA.)

Appendix B – Timeline of voyages

Covering 1861 – 1865, Masters S Varwell & 1868 – 69, Thomas Mugford.

Date	Arrived	From	Destination	Notes
30.10.1860	Plymouth	Patras		Captain: Varwell
02.01.1861	Penzance	St Michaels		
15.01.1861	Liverpool	St Michaels		
28.02.1861	London		St Michaels	
05.03.1861	Liverpool		St Michaels	
09.03.1861	Portsmouth	London	St Michaels	
04.05.1861	Hull	St Michaels	London	
06.08.1861	Genoa	Newport, Mon		
16.08.1861	Genoa		Patras	
06.09.1861	Patras		Genoa	
10.10.1861		Patras	Bristol	
11.11.1861	Gibraltar		Bristol	Arrives 23 rd Nov.
02.12.1861	Newport	Bristol	Valencia	
07.01.1862	Valencia	Newport		
06.03.1862	Liverpool		Barbados	
12.04.1862	Barbados	Liverpool		
13.06.1862	Barbados		Dublin	
23.06.1862	Dublin	Barbados		Sugar
07.08.1862	Liverpool		Civita Vecchia	
13.09.1862	Civ. Vecchia	Liverpool		
11.10.1862	Patras		Civita Vecchia	
24.11.1862	Patras			
02.01.1863	Gravesend	Patras		
19.01.1863	Patras		Gravesend	
08.04.1863	Ancona	Cardiff		
25.04.1863	Ancona		Port of Ferino	
28.02.1863	Cardiff	Ancona		
29.09.1863	Zante	Manfredonia(Italy)	Catacolo(Greece)	
19.12.1863	Swansea		Madeira	
15.01.1864	Madeira	Swansea		
09.02.1864	London	St Michaels		
11.03.1864	London		Nassau (N.P)	Cotton bales
19.08.1864	Barry Dock	Tenerife		
30.08.1864	Cardiff		Tenerife	235ton Coal.
07.10.1864	Tenerife	Cardiff		
02.01.1865	Dartmouth	London		
06.02.1865	St Michaels	London		
27.03.1865	London		St Michaels	
07.04.1865	Brixham	St Michaels	London	
19.04.1865	London		Barbados	West India Dock
27.04.1865	Gravesend		Barbados	
08.07.1865	Tobago		The Clyde	
07.08.1865	Greenock	Tobago		Sugar
25.08.1865	Ardrossan	Greenock		In ballast
12.09.1865	Ardrossan		Dieppe	
23.09.1865	Dieppe	Ardrossan		
05.10.1865	Dieppe		Cardiff	
21.12.1865	Hull		St Michaels	

01.01.1868	St Michaels	Rotterdam	Cardiff	Captain: Mugford
08.01.1868	Newport	Rotterdam		
30.04.1868	Torbay	London		
04.05.1868	Gravesend	Zante		
27.05.1868	Halifax (N.S)	London		
28.07.1868	Halifax (N.S)	Liverpool		
19.11.1868	Messina		London	
30.11.1868	Messina	Genoa		
21.01.1869	Brixham	Hull	St Michaels	
01.04.1869	Genoa		Cardiff	
19.06.1869	Swansea		Carloforte- Sardinia	
02.07.1869	Swansea		St Johns N.F	coal
23.08.1869	Swansea		St Johns N.F	
11.12.1869	Genoa		St Johns N.F	