

**Welsh Wreck Web Research Project  
(North Cardigan Bay)  
On-line research into the: SS VIC-33**



**Clyde Puffer on which VICs were Designed**

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Date: **January 2021**

Report Ref: ***Leave blank***

## **1.0 Abstract**

Since 2001 the Malvern Archaeological Diving Unit (MADU) has developed a database of vessels known to have wrecked around the coast of Wales.

This project is to discover information relating to the history of the SS VIC-33 which ran a drift after losing its propeller near St Patrick's Causeway, North Cardigan Bay.

The SS Vic-33 was a small cargo steamship built in 1944 in Northwich, Cheshire by Pimblott. The name VIC means Victualling Inshore Craft and she formed part of a coastal fleet working for the Ministry of War Transport (MOWT) during the final years of WW2. In 1947, SS VIC-33 was bought by Warnock Brothers of Paisley and renamed SS Smeaton. The SS Smeaton worked in Scotland before being sold to Mersey Docks and Harbour Board in 1951 and then to H G Pound of Portsmouth in 1961. The SS Smeaton was scrapped in 1972.

The research has been conducted from information gathered from MADU and on-line sites as I do not reside in the U.K.

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### 2.4 Contributors

Ian Cundy      MADU Archaeological Diving Unit,  
 Nautical Archaeology Society (Regional co-ordinator for Wales)

## 2.5 Abbreviations

MADU Malvern Archaeological Diving Unit

## 2.6 Appendices

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### **3.0 Introduction**

The SS VIC-33 was chosen as:

- it covered a period of sea history from WW2.
- it was a similar ship (although smaller) and time period to other ships I had researched from the MADU Wreck list.
- I live overseas online information would be my priority research tool and similar to my previous research a ship from this period should be reasonably well documented online.

The following topics form the basis of the research:

- What were the vessel's specifications?
- What historical information is available relating to the vessel?
- What was the story leading up to the incident?
- What happened after the incident? Has anyone previously investigated or researched the vessel back story?

## 4.0 Background

Prior to starting this research the only known data available to me was from the MADU Master Wrecksite Database Listing (Table 1) supplied by Mr Ian Cundy.

**Table 1: Extract from MADU Master Wrecksite Database**

MADU Ref. No.	Date Wrecked	Name	Location 1	Location 2	Details	Vessel Type	Matls	Ref.
	05/01/1945	Vic-33	N. Cardigan Bay	St Patrick's Causeway	mechanical failure	Steamship	Stl	iwj

In Jan 1945, the SS VIC-33 broke its propeller and was left adrift off St Patrick’s Causeway (Sarn Badrig, Fig 1). The Barmouth lifeboat came to the assistance of the SS VIC-33 and the following day HMS Loch Tulla towed SS VIC-33 to Fishguard.

**Fig 1: St Patrick’s Causeway, a.k.a Sarn Badrig, Cardigan Bay**



## 5.0 Research Methodology

### Computer System

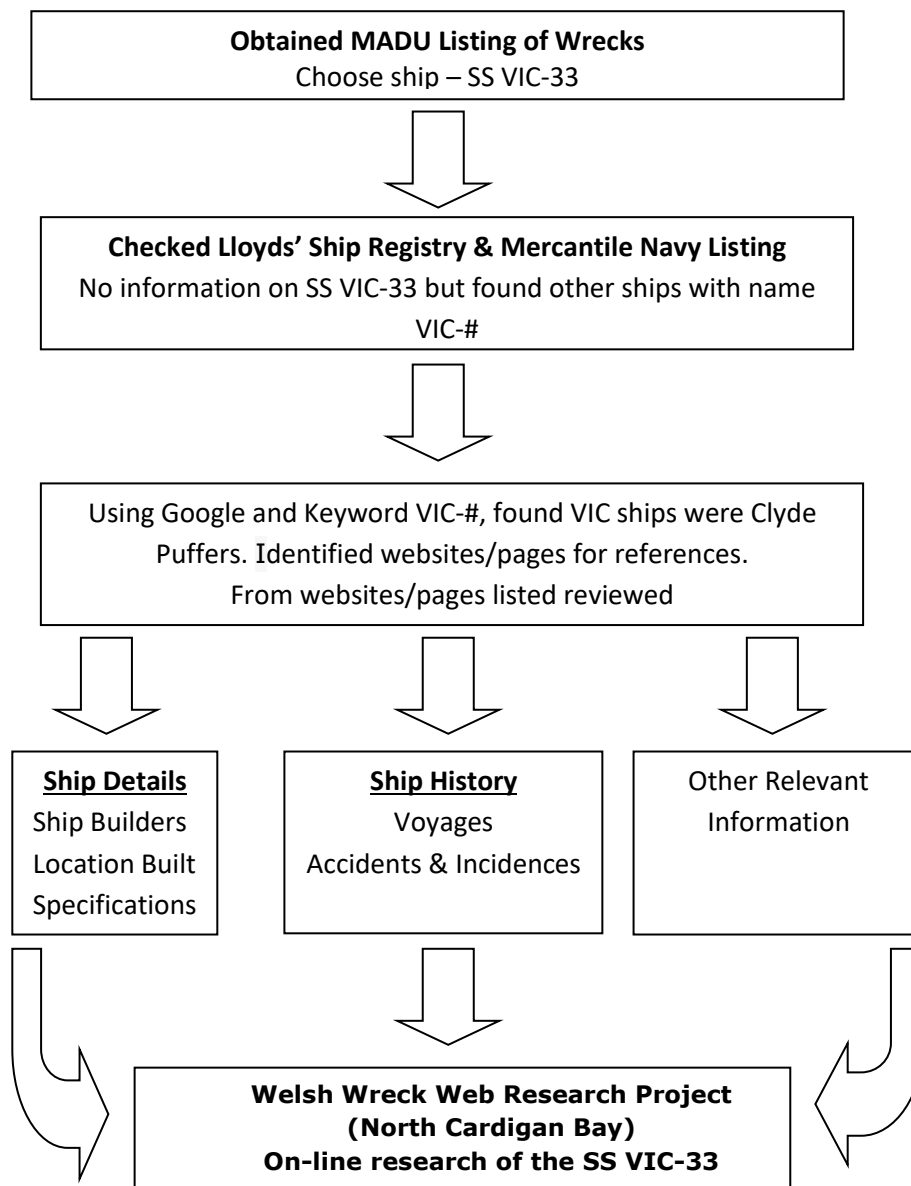
Acer Desktop 64 bit OS; 8 GB Memory, wireless connection.

Windows 10Pro

Microsoft Office 2007

Search engines used: Google Chrome

### Methodology



**This report has been written using the ship name as it was at that time**

**See Section 9 for list of websites viewed**

## 6.0 Results

**Table 2: SS VIC-33 Specification and History**

Vessel	Name/s	SS VIC-33 (renamed SS Smeaton in 1947)			
	Type	Lighter VIC (Victualling Inshore Craft)			
		General Cargo			
Built	Date	Laid Down: N/A			
		Launched: 2/11/1944			
		Delivered: 12/1944			
		Cost:			
	Builder	Issac Pimblott & Sons			
		Weaver Yard, Northwich, Cheshire; Yard #656			
Construction	Materials	Steel			
	Decks	1			
	Bulkheads	N/A			
Propulsion	Type	Engine, Steam			
	Details	1 screw			
Engine	Details	2 cyl, compound			
		Size: 10.5, 22x14in			
		HP: 100 rhp			
		Manufacturer: Crabtree			
Drive	Boilers	1			
	Type	Propeller			
	Number	1			
Dimensions	Length	66ft	8ins	20.3 m	
	Beam	18ft	4ins	5.6 m	
	Draught	Stern	8ft	8 ins	2.6 m
		Bow	4ft	0 ins	1.2 m
Tonnage	Gross	96 grt			
	Net	41 nrt			
	Deadweight	140 dwt			
Owners	First	Ministry of War Transport (MOWT), London 1944			
	Second	Ministry of Transport, London, April 1946			
	Third	War Department (Army), Jan 1947			
	Fourth	Warnock Brothers, Paisley; 1947-1951. Renamed SS Smeaton			
	Fifth	Mersey Dock and Harbour Board; 1951-1961			
	Last	H.G. Pound, Portsmouth, 1961			
Registry	Port	Liverpool; 08/11/1944			
	Flag	U.K			
	Number	168888			
	Codes	M.J.J.Y			
History	Routes	British Isles			
	Cargo	Various			
Incident	From	Holyhead			
	To	Portsmouth			
	Date	5/01/1945			
	Location	St Patrick's Causeway (Sarn Badrig), Cardigan Bay			
	Cause	Lost propeller			
	Loss of life	0			
	Outcome	Towed to Fishguard by HMS Loch Tulla			
Scrapped	Date	?1972			
	Location	Portsmouth			

## 7.0 Analysis

- SS VIC-33 was built at Pimblott & Sons, Northwich Cheshire in 1944 for the Ministry of War Transport (MOWT). In all 106 VICs were built between 1941 and 1946, the great majority were steam and only a few diesel propulsion.
- Requirements of Victualling Inshore Craft (VIC) were to transport a variety of cargoes, including fuel, ammunition and food, to ships at anchor in and around ports, and between coastal locations.
- On Jan 5<sup>th</sup> 1945 at 12:15pm while on passage in ballast from Holyhead to Portsmouth and with a crew of five, SS VIC-33 lost her propeller and started to drift near St Patrick's Causeway on the Cardigan Bay coast. The Barmouth lifeboat "Lawrence Adern Stockport" was launched at 12.42, and an hour later found SS VIC-33 near St. Patrick's Causeway. The life-boat brought ashore her first officer at 3:00pm to get food and other stores and took him out again to the steamer by 6:00pm. As the SS VIC-33 was helpless, and the weather was threatening, the life-boat stood by throughout the night. On the morning of Jan 6<sup>th</sup>, HMS Loch Tulla arrived at 9:00am and made preparations to take the SS VIC-33 in tow. After attaching a towing line, at 10.25am HMS Loch Tulla and SS VIC-33 started on their way to Fishguard. The Barmouth lifeboat "Lawrence Adern Stockport" returned to Barmouth at 12.15pm. Rewards: first service, £10 18s; second service, property salvage case. This was the last effective war service of the "Lawrence Adern Stockport" lifeboat.
- SS VIC-33 was transferred to the Ministry of Transport in April 1946 and to the War Department (Army) in Jan 1947.
- Sold by the UK government to Warnock Brothers of Paisley in 1947 and renamed SS Smeaton. Used as a sand dredger on the West Coast of Scotland (Appendix B)
- Sold to the Mersey Docks and Harbour Board for £5000 in 1951.
- Sold to H G Pound of Portsmouth in 1961 for dredging around lock gates.
- In Jun 1972 SS Smeaton was sold for breaking at Portsmouth by H. G. Pounds Ltd. (Appendix C).

### History of Clyde Puffers & VIC (Victualling Inshore Craft)

- The Clyde Puffer is a type of small coal-fired and single-masted cargo ship, built mainly on the Forth and Clyde canal, and which provided a vital supply link around the west coast and Hebrides of Scotland (Appendix D).
- Clyde Puffers characteristically had bluff bows, crew's quarters with table and cooking stove in the focsle, and a single mast with derrick in front of the large hold. The funnel and ship's wheel stood aft above the engine room, followed by a small captain's cabin in the stern. Their flat bottom allowed them to beach and unload at low tide, essential to supply remote settlements without suitable piers. Typical cargoes could include coal and furniture, with farm produce and gravel sometimes being brought back.
- Three varieties of Clyde Puffers developed:
  - inside boats continued in use on the Forth and Clyde canal.
  - shorehead boats extended their range eastwards into the Firth of Forth and westwards as far as the Isle of Bute and from there up the length of Loch Fyne, their length kept at 66 ft (20 m) to use the canal locks.

- outside boats, were built for the rougher sea routes to the Hebrides islands with a crew of four and the length increased to 88 ft (27m) still allowing use of the larger locks on the Crinan Canal which cuts across the Kintyre peninsula.
- During World War I Clyde Puffers showed their worth in servicing warships and were used at Scapa Flow.
- The Clyde Puffer design remained relatively unchanged until World War 2. In 1941 the British Government established a Ministry of War Transport (MOWT) by amalgamating the Ministry of Transport and the Ministry of Shipping. It was given the remit of procuring the shipping resources necessary to serve the nation at war. One of these requirements was for Victualling Inshore Craft (VICs) to transport a variety of cargoes, including fuel, ammunition and food, to ships at anchor in and around our ports, and between coastal locations. The MOWT looked no further than the Clyde Puffers for an unsophisticated design that could be built quickly and cheaply. The first batch of 64 VICs were ordered in 1941 and were of a design identical to the immediate pre-war Puffers Lascar and Anzac.
- Although diesel engines had started to become the norm for ships of this size, the VICs were powered by the same twin cylinder compound steam engines as the puffers because the simplicity of the design enabled them to be manufactured in relatively low technology factories. Later deliveries of VICs were of a changed design, somewhat longer than the canal-limited size of their predecessors, welded instead of riveted, and with some of the last built being diesel powered.
- When the war ended, the need for the fleet of VICs diminished and by 1947 many were disposed of by the MOWT. At prices of between £3,000 and £4,000 many entered the merchant fleets of countries around the world, from the UK to the Mediterranean, Africa and the Far East.

## 8.0 Conclusions & Recommendations

The project took approximately 2 working days with half of that time spent on on-line research.

I set out with the goal of researching the history of the SS VIC-33 with basic information provided. Reading the report here, I believe I have collated sufficient information on the history of the SS VIC-33 from when it was built to her scrapping in ?1972.

I have also added some information on the history of Clyde Puffers on which the VIC (Victualling Inshore Craft) were designed.

Many different WebPages were viewed ranging from large organisations e.g. Lloyd's Registry Listings to smaller WebPages such as local history or people with a given interest in a subject. The quantity and quality of the WebPages appeared depended on the targeted audiences and the amount of work undertaken.

Initially no information on SS VIC-33 could be found apart from the incident of it breaking down and being helped by the Barmouth lifeboat. However after reviewing a few webpages it was found that the VIC were a series of small cargo steamships based on the design of the Clyde Puffer. Changing the direction of the search to that for information on Clyde Puffers found a lot of information and eventually information on the SS VIC-33. An excellent website if people wish to learn more on Clyde Puffers and WW2 VICs is <https://www.puffersandvics.org/index.htm>

Much of the data collated between websites checked out with some discrepancies observed.

From the research conducted, setting a goal and how to reach that goal should be mapped out first. Careful use of specific words in search engines is very important.

## 9.0 References

### 9.1 Online WebPages

The following websites and pages have been used in the compilation of this report:

<https://www.crewlist.org.uk/data/viewimages?&name=VIC%2033&steamsail=Steam&submit=Enter&year=1947>

<https://www.google.co.uk/>

<https://lifeboatmagazinearchive.rnli.org/volume/war-years/1945/ss-vic-33?searchterm=S.S.+Vic+33&page=1>

<https://hec.lfoundation.org.uk/archive-library/lloyds-register-of-ships-online>

<https://www.puffersandvics.org/index.htm>

<https://www.puffersandvics.org/VIC33.htm>

[http://shippingandshipbuilding.uk/view.php?year\\_built=&builder=10281&a1Page=7&ref=211526&vessel=VIC+33](http://shippingandshipbuilding.uk/view.php?year_built=&builder=10281&a1Page=7&ref=211526&vessel=VIC+33)

<http://www.tradboat2.co.uk/sourcepages/clydepuffers/clydepuffersource%20page.htm>

[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Clyde\\_puffer](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Clyde_puffer)

[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Richard\\_Dunston](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Richard_Dunston)

### 9.2 Personal Correspondences

I would like to thank Mr Ian Cundy for supplying the initial information and other information with regards to the research project.

### 9.3 Publications

Wreck and Rescue on the Coast of Wales – The Lifeboats of Cardigan Bay and Anglesey – Henry Parry

Shipwrecks of North Wales – Revised and Updated 4<sup>th</sup> Edition – Ivor Wynne Jones

**Appendices:**

**Appendix A: Mercantile Navy List 1947, VIC 33**

Official No.	Name and Description of Ship.	International Code Signal (Visual).	Port and Year of Registry	Where and When Built	Material	Dimensions			Registered Tonnage		Horse Power of Engines.	Owner, or Part Owner, and Manager (if recorded). × Signifies Managing Owner. Italics signify <i>Manager</i> .
						Length.	Breadth.	Depth of Hold.	Net.	Gross.		
168888	<del>Vic-33</del> (Supply) (L)	MJYY	Liverpool . . 1944	Northwich . 1944	S	66.8	18.5	8.8	42	97	10	Minister of Transport, London. <i>Thomas Phelan, c/o T. Phelan &amp; Co., Lim., Bank Chambers, Woodside, Birkenhead.</i>
181021	<del>Vic-34</del> (Supply) (L)	GLXW	Liverpool . . 1946	Northwich . 1946	S	66.8	18.5	8.8	42	97	7	Minister of Transport, London. <i>Thomas Phelan, c/o T. Phelan &amp; Co., Lim., Bank Chambers, Woodside, Birkenhead.</i>

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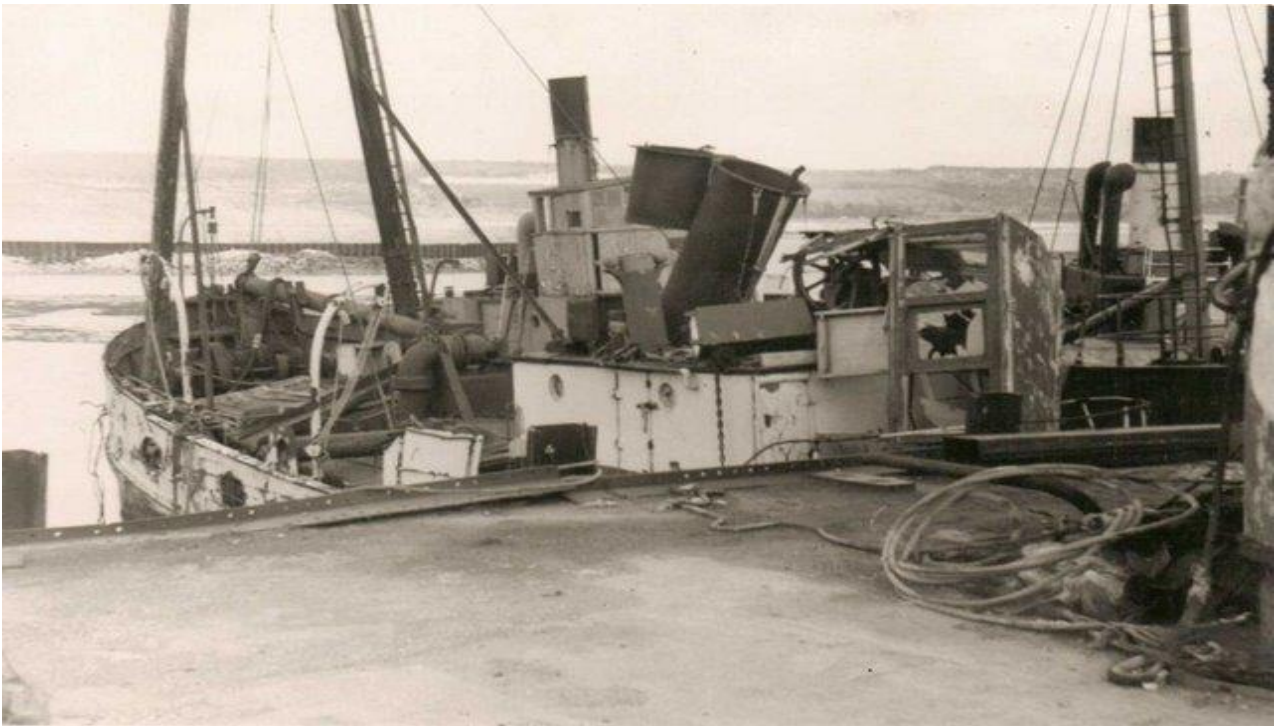
REGISTRE

**Appendix B: SS Smeaton (previously known as SS VIC-33)**



[https://www.puffersandvics.org/VIC\\_index.htm](https://www.puffersandvics.org/VIC_index.htm)

### Appendix C: SS Smeaton being Scrapped



[https://www.puffersandvics.org/VIC\\_index.htm](https://www.puffersandvics.org/VIC_index.htm)

### Appendix D: Clyde Puffer (1943)

