

21 February 2012
[Accessibility help](#)
[Text only](#)

NORTH WEST WALES

[BBC Homepage](#)
[Wales Home](#)

The Bronze Bell

Last updated: 16 July 2007

The waters off Barmouth used to be a treacherous place.

Tony Iles helps shed light on the wreck of the Bronze Bell at the town's Ty Gwyn museum.



We found the shipwreck of the Bronze Bell, as it's known, off Talybont in 1978. It had lain there for over 300 years.

There isn't actually a wreck there - the ship broke up in the storm and was strewn across the beach. It's the heavy things which remain. So when we dived we first found a couple of rather shapeless canons and some marble blocks - the cargo.



There were 43 blocks down there in all. Two have been raised and one has been carved into a sculpture by local sculptor Frank Cocksey. It's called The Haul, and depicts three generations of fishermen bringing in the last haul and saying 'that's it, we've had enough, we can't

make a living out of this any longer'. You can find it at the entrance to the harbour here.

We'd love to get some more rock up to do another sculpture for the town. It is a bit of a waste having so much marble under the sea, but it's in the hands of CADW. It is a good idea to stop people bringing things up willy-nilly, of course, but two more blocks would be great for the town.

We think the centres of marble carving were London and Amsterdam, and so we think this cargo was destined for very important use. There is a possibility it was meant for the rebuilding of St Paul's Cathedral because there's mention of some marble coming by sea via Wales in the ledger. However, after completion there's another mention that this marble never arrived on site.

One thing that this Italian marble did perhaps confirm was an old local legend told by a family from Dyffryn.

They'd always said that they were descended from an Italian who was shipwrecked here. Their name until recently was Bennett Williams, but we believe the original name was passed down from John Benedictus, who is buried in the local churchyard. So there was some truth to this legend after all.

It's taken a group of dedicated volunteers over 30 years to



FOOD & DRINK
tasty treats

[more from this section](#)

Barmouth

- A true Barmouth girl
- Ask a local
- Barmouth's buildings
- Charlie and the Dragon
- Creating havens
- Dancing on the prom
- Far from home
- I love Barmouth!
- Island in the stream
- Keeley Brazier
- My Secret Wales
- Pugh's views
- The Bronze Bell
- The birth of Caersalem
- Village culture
- Virtual tour 1
- Walking to Barmouth
- What's in a name?

- Beach guide
- Three Peaks Race
- Local heroes
- Barmouth Arts Festival
- Seafront webcam
- Tai chi and more

living in barmouth

- Local public services
- Community events
- Useful links
- Have your say
- Local healthcare explained

Weather for Barmouth



Sunday
max 16°C
min 9°C



Monday
max 12°C
min 7°C

interact

Tell us about a web page

Found a web page we should know about? Send us the details.

[Email A Friend](#)

related bbc.co.uk links

[Maritime History](#)

more from North West Wales

[Fun](#)



- BBC Local
- North West Wales
- Things to do
- People & Places
- Nature & Outdoors
- History
- Religion & Ethics
- Arts & Culture
- Music
- TV & Radio

Local BBC Sites

- News
- Sport
- Weather
- Travel

Neighbouring Sites

- Mid Wales
- North East Wales

Related BBC Sites

- Wales
- Cymru
- Gogledd Orllewin

conserve, research and present all which was brought up from the wreck. Gwynedd Council donated this beautiful building near the seafront for us to show the relics.

We've got personal finds which show that there were very important people on this ship. We've got combs, badges, plates, seals, buttons and a gunner's rule, used to gauge which charge to put in the gun. There's an example of one on the Mary Rose, but ours is better.



There were also canons. Any ships coming out of the Mediterranean armed themselves because the place was rife with pirates, especially from North Africa.



So the ship would have been on its way to London or Northern France. But ships often ended up being blown off course. Having come out of the Straits of Gibraltar, they would head north to 'dead wreck', where they could only guess within 100 miles as to where exactly they

were.

Hopefully, by turning right, they'd reach the English Channel. But if there was a gale, they might end up anywhere, like up in Cardigan Bay which has always been a total trap.

The wreck lies only about 400 yards off the beach and people ask me why they didn't swim ashore. But on a stormy night, with gale force winds, heavy clothes and perhaps unable to swim, it would be nearly impossible. I'm a pretty good swimmer and I couldn't get ashore in those conditions.

We've found something in the nature of eight or nine wrecks in the seas off Tywyn, mostly because of the causeway which extends some 13 miles out to sea and wasn't charted until local cartographer, Lewis Morris, did so in 1740.

The technical term for the causeway is a glacial moraine, the pitch between the two glaciers which came down the Glaslyn and the Mawddach. There are several in Cardigan Bay, but this is the largest. The sea covers it most of the time, though about half a dozen times a year it stands out of the sea. You can stand on a rock up to ten miles out to sea - we do it every year. We take a few deckchairs, a bottle of bubbly and drink to it.

It's well charted these days of course, but it has caused untold casualties in previous centuries.

By Tony Iles

The Bronze Bell shipwreck exhibition is at Ty Gwyn



Brain-teaser

Reality or illusion? Try an online psychological test.

About this site



Newsletter

Keep up-to-date with changes on the website every week.

Activities



Head for adventure

Your guide to pursuits on mountains, rivers and at sea.

LLEOL I MI  **Gogledd Orllewin**

NEWYDDION LLEOL



- Sardinia: Cymry yn 'ddiogel'
- Pontio: Dim prif weithredwr

**Museum (above Davy Jones' Locker),The Quay,
Barmouth.**

Delve further into the secrets of the Bronze Bell in the company of Radio Wales community reporter Huw Jenkins, sculptor Frank Cocksey and Tony Iles of the Bronze Bell.



Listen to Huw and the volunteers.

Archive Terms of Use

This document is made available for archival or reference purposes and should only be used for private (non-commercial) purposes. These pages may contain materials or content which do not belong to the BBC and in particular materials or content which belong to members of the public whose identities may or may not be known. Whilst the BBC had the necessary rights, permissions and clearances to include and publish them as part of the former 'Where I Live' BBC website, the BBC may not have the right to allow users to use, copy or exploit them or to distribute them to others. No such usage is permitted and the BBC cannot process requests for permission to do so. For more information about deleted or discontinued web pages on the BBC, go to: <http://www.bbc.co.uk/help/web/mothballing/>