

The World of the Newport Ship 17th-18 July 2014

A major two day international conference was organised and hosted from 17th to 18th July 2014 at the University of Bristol, by Dr Evan Jones and Dr Richard Stone, to celebrate the discovery and discuss the first results of the archaeology of the Newport Ship. Found at Newport in 2002, this is the most important late medieval merchant vessel ever recovered and the conference aimed to set these unique findings in a wider historical context. Fourteen speakers from Britain, Italy, Spain and Portugal, with their professional interests in ships, trade, the economies of late medieval western Europe and contemporary politics, regional, national and international, gathered together to support the exciting and innovative archaeological work surrounding this astonishing and superbly preserved vessel. The papers revealed significant overlap in the speakers' interests, something which allowed for major in depth discussion and set an agenda for future work that is needed in order to extract the maximum return from the findings and popularise understanding of the ship on an international level.

The conference papers were organised in a series of concentric circles starting from the focal point of the Newport Ship with papers by Toby Jones (Curator of the Ship, Newport Museum and Heritage Service) and Professor Nigel Nayling (University of Wales, Trinity Saint David) who focussed in particular on the dating of the surviving timbers enabling her working life to be determined as c.AD 1449-1469. In a session on Fifteenth Century Shipping, Dr Ian Friel and Dr Susan Rose presented papers on late medieval ships and the safety of the seas for trading vessels. The conference speakers then moved outwards to consider the local context of the Bristol Channel, with papers by Bob Trett (Newport) and Professor Ralph Griffiths (University of Swansea); and the regional and political contexts, with papers by Professor Peter Fleming (University of the West of England) and Dr Rowena E Archer (Brasenose College, Oxford). On day two the sessions covered yet wider fields with papers on International Trade from Margaret Condon and Dr Evan Jones (both of University of Bristol). Iberian links, shipping and trade were then addressed by Professor Wendy Childs (University of Leeds) and Dr Michael Barkham (Naval Museum, San Sebastian) and the meeting concluded with papers on the trade between England, the Mediterranean and the Atlantic Seas by Dr Flávio Miranda (Nova University of Lisbon) and Dr Francesco Guidi Bruscoli (University of Florence). A vigorous round table discussion involving speakers and delegates followed.

A capacity audience of over 100 enthusiastic delegates from the worlds of the Newport Ship including archaeologists, heritage agencies (such as CADW and English Heritage), museums and history departments attended. This was a comparatively huge turn out for such a specialist meeting. Besides the lively discussions that followed each paper there was a powerful sense of the importance of this find and the need to make the ship and its context available to as wide an audience as practicable. If sufficient funds are available the conference proceedings will be published as a first step towards greater outreach.

The conference was made possible by support from The Cabot Project funded by Gretchen Bauta; the Friends of the Newport Ship, now numbering over 500 members; the University of Wales, Trinity Saint David; the Newport City council; and the *Matthew of Bristol* Trust. The conference also enjoyed the support of Nicholas Edwards, Lord Crickhowell, former Secretary of State for Wales. It was clear at the end of this conference that the next step, beyond continuing archaeological and historical research, has to be to find an appropriate site for the proper display and explanation of the Newport Ship and its Context. This is set to make a major contribution to the maritime archaeology and history of the British Isles and Western Europe.

Dr Rowena Archer (University of Oxford)