

TALES OF TWO SHIPS

Story of The Ashmore

Nearly 140 years after a trading vessel was shipwrecked off the coast of northern Japan, an English teacher intends to trace the Welsh descendants of the marooned sailors.

The mostly Welsh crewmembers faced certain death had they not been spotted by two Japanese fishermen, who came to the rescue.

Sixteen were saved from the rough seas and spent the next 10 days living with Japanese fishing families before they could go home.

For the people of this remote region of Japan, it was their first ever contact with westerners.

And while the wreck of *The Ashmore* has been all but forgotten in Wales, the Japanese still remember their first meeting with the outside world.

An engraved gold watch sent to the fishermen by Queen Victoria to thank them for the rescue, is still on display at the town hall in Oma, near where the rescue took place. And a special society was set up in the country to remember and research the events of 1864.

Now, five years after a delegation from the small north Japanese town visited Fishguard - home of the ship's master John Jenkins and many of the crew - but failed to find any Welsh descendants of the sailors, an English teacher working in Japan has taken up the challenge.

Sarah Kinney, who is working in a Japanese High School in Itayanagi in the county of Aomori, is hoping to find out more about the men who were saved with the aim of eventually reviving the ties between the two communities.

"It's essential that we do not allow this event to be forgotten," she said.

"The event of the shipwreck is pretty well remembered here. However, many have failed in their attempts to find more information or establishing relations in order to educate another generation.

"Aomori is a very isolated part of Japan and life here is very different to that of Tokyo, for example.

"Foreigners are few and far between and I can imagine what those British fishermen's encounter with the Japanese was like - even now.

"I still remain a novelty here in my community and wherever I travel in Northern Japan because I'm British.

"I want people to remember that the British were here long before I was."

The 473-tonne trading vessel The Ashmore left Liverpool for the Far East on April 19, 1862.

Although she belonged to a Bristol company, her master John Jenkins and most of her crew were from Fishguard.

In November 1864, on her way from Yokohama to Hakodate, she sank in rough seas near Oma, on the northern most coast of the main Japanese island.

Although 16 of the crew were rescued from the water by Japanese fishermen, another two died and one was never found.

Shipping records show that among those rescued were Thomas Llewellyn, Benjamin Holyfield and David Rice from Fishguard, Aaron Pryce and William Davies from Anglesey and Llewellyn Jones and John Davies from Cardigan.

In 1998 the mayor of Oma and a delegation of 12, including descendants of the rescuers, visited Fishguard for the first time.

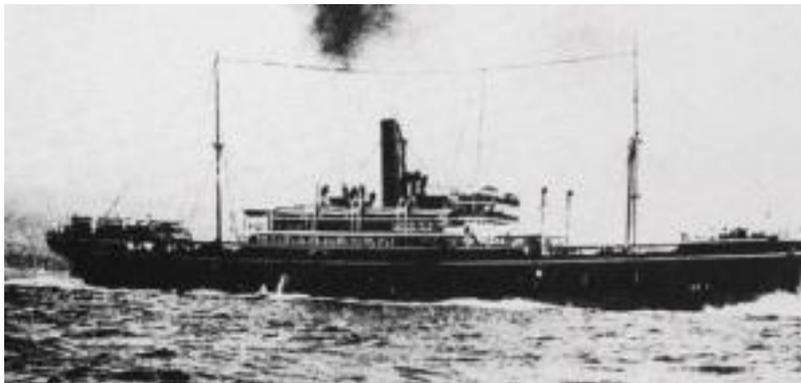
Fishguard councillor Alwyn Luke, who as chairman of the council in 1998 had welcomed the delegation, said yesterday he hoped the new search for information would have better luck than earlier attempts.

"It's a remarkable story and it was disappointing that we could not find any descendants of the crew at the time of the visit," he said.

Story of Hino Maru

St Mary's Church, Angle Pembrokeshire

Grave to Japanese sailors who went down with the Hirano Maru when it was torpedoed by an enemy U boat on Oct 4, 1918. Built in 1908 in Nakasaki by Mitsubishi Dockyard. It was en route from Liverpool to Yokohama. 292 casualties included a number of children.



<http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-wales-south-west-wales-35431252>