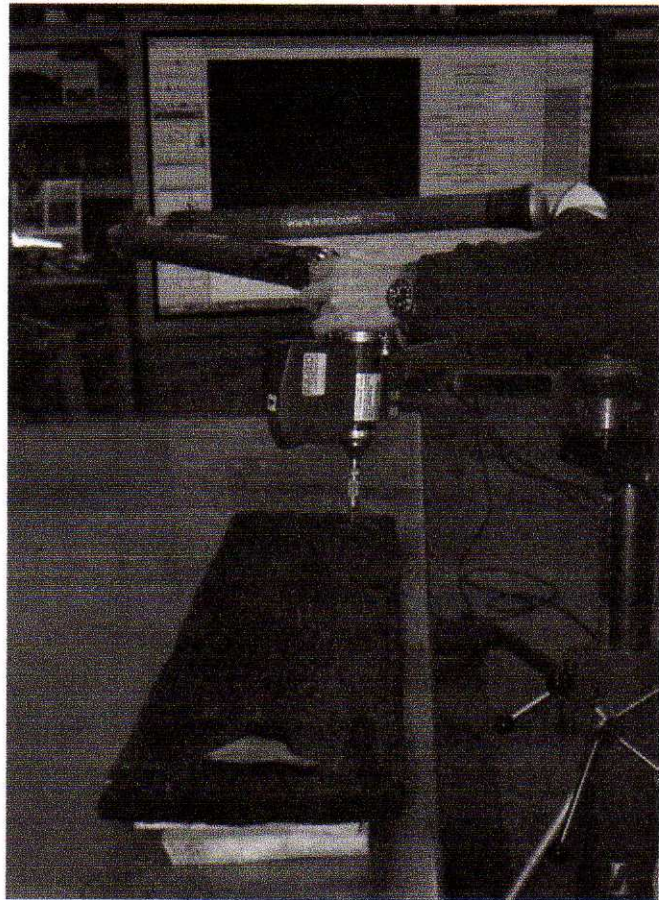


TIMBERS GALORE

Roger Forster

A frosty January morning and Nigel Nayling is talking with dynamic enthusiasm. The warehouse houses the excavated timbers from the Newport Ship (and other wooden material) and has an impressive collection of high technology devices for timber recording. We were on a timber recording course and surrounding us were "Faro" digital arms that can input data to CAD (Computer Aided Design) packages and laser scanners that can do the same and add a surface finish to the digital representation.

The ability to enter all the dimensions of a timber including nail holes etc is awesome. Then to take the digital file and create a scale model using rapid prototyping facilities brings a new meaning to reconstructive archaeology. Before you know it instead of a flattened hulk you have the original shape and form of the vessel!



Using the digital arm. Photo: Eddie Esser.

On the Saturday morning Nigel regaled us with timbers in a waterlogged environment up in their first floor office. Meanwhile Toby and Ben, the resident archaeologists, were hard at work preparing timbers. In the afternoon and Sunday they extracted timbers from the tanks and helped us to manipulate the arms to enter the data into the CAD system. The Faro arms sometimes had a mind of its own but soon a rhythm was adopted and slowly but surely putting detail in "layer" by "layer" the timbers came alive! All too soon it was time to swap stations and have a go doing the same thing by conventional drawing using offset measurements.

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UNCOVERING THE SECRETS

Janet Presley

Little did I know, when I applied to join the weekend NAS Introduction course, as part of the Purton Recording Project in June 2008, that it would lead me to the *Briton Ferry*.

The hamlet of Purton is on the foreshore of the River Severn. It is the resting place of 81 known vessels, including a number of Severn trows and Stroudwater barges, unique to the area, some deliberately placed to protect the bank. So I decided to learn more about these craft and also the skills required to carry out an initial survey of vessel remains, measuring and recording techniques.

That may sound simple but I soon became engulfed in a stream of trilateration, datum offsets and even tape measures differing in their interpretations of measuring metre, centimetre, and millimetre places. Later came the nautical vocabulary such as *keelson*, *scantlings*, *cants...* to say nothing of *futtocks*! It is amazing how these words, when applied in context, become normal parlance very quickly – but I have yet to actually meet some of them as has the spell-checker!

The skill of treading grass to enable accurate photography for use as a photo-mosaic, was put into practice a day later, when it was decided to measure the remains of the Bridgwater trow, *Edith*, which surprised everyone by the evidence revealed.

Then came the sketching and measuring of the bow-stem of *Britannia*, all that remains of the Droitwich trow. Here the camera came to the fore and continued to haunt me because I somehow forgot to remove the images from the SD for a while.

So, where did this lead?

Recently I happened upon timbers resembling the stem of *Britannia*, showing out of swathes of grass. Feeling around, I could trace the outline of what seemed like the gunwale of the port side of the vessel, although nothing much was evident on the starboard side. There was a lot of metal, and enough to fill me with general curiosity.

During the remainder of the summer I spent *Friends of Purton* 'open' weekends measuring whatever was measurable and learning how to cope with members of the public throwing sticks for the dog, across the baseline! This is where the grass cutting became essential. I now have the photographs to practise making a photo-mosaic of the visible side. It will not be accurate because distances were not precise and the ground, uneven, but it is all part of my learning process. Even more interesting was the completion of the initial recording form when I was convinced I had found evidence of a fixing for a rudder - later to discover it was a spar on a knee, in line with the bow.

I was surprised to learn the true identity of what I assumed to be a boat with three holds. It was, in fact, a pontoon for a grab dredging crane which had been purchased by A.J.Cullis, the engineer for the Canal Company, in 1911, from the Neath Harbour Board at Briton Ferry. Hence the name of the vessel, *Briton Ferry*. More excitement, unfurling information in the archives, is to come.

Join the Friends of Purton on Site in 2009!

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