

1.0 Assignment 3: Contextualise and Synthesise Data and Results

- 1.0.1 Archaeological research frameworks are integral to the co-ordination of research in the field of archaeology. Frameworks highlight gaps in the collective knowledge of archaeology sites and features which can be used to focus research as well as assess the significance of archaeological sites (Historic England 2021). This assessment seeks to contextualise recent work undertaken by MSDS Marine to “inspect, survey, investigate, record, and monitor” the site within the appropriate research framework: the *Maritime and Coastal Research Framework for the Archaeology of Wales* (referred to here as ‘the Welsh framework’) (IFA Cymru 2017; MSDS Marine 2021). This assessment also reviews the Welsh framework and- using the Bronze Bell wreck as context- critically compares it to the equivalent framework for England: the *Maritime and Marine Historic Environment Research Framework* (referred to here as ‘the English framework’) (Adams et al. 2011; Ransley and Sturt 2013).
- 1.0.2 The Bronze Bell site is one of only six protected wrecks in Wales, designated under the Protection of Wrecks Act 1973. The wreck is believed to be that of an armed French/Genoese vessel carrying a cargo of marble and paper to an unknown destination that sank in 1709 after hitting Sarn Badrig, a shallow shingle reef extending almost 12 miles from land into Cardigan Bay (Coflein 2012).
- 1.0.3 The project undertaken by MSDS Marine in September 2021 contributed to the objectives of themes within the Welsh framework (IFA Cymru 2017). Theme 4 (Challenges for Conservation Management) includes an objective to contribute to management in the context of the natural environment; the 2021 project involved the collection of temperature and pH samples, as well as a review of the flora and fauna on the site. This data will contribute to research on the effects of climate change on heritage assets in the marine environment. A further Theme 4 objective relates to outreach, including the production of bilingual resources and the application of new technologies for public engagement purposes (IFA Cymru 2017). The 2021 project contributed significantly to this objective; a series of dive diaries were produced each day of the fieldwork in both English and Welsh, photogrammetry was undertaken to produce 3D visualisation of the site features for outreach purposes, and the MSDS outreach trailer was stationed at Pwllheli harbour during fieldwork days to engage with the local community (CHERISH 2021). Finally, Theme 4 includes an objective relating to data management and archiving, highlighting that many maritime project archives do not progress to deposition (IFA Cymru 2017). At the time of writing, the archives from the 2021 project are being prepared; data is being collated and metadata statements are being produced in line with Royal Commission on the Ancient and Historical Monuments of Wales standards (RCAMHW). The deposition of the project archives with RCAMHW was a requirement of the project tender.
- 1.0.4 The 2021 project also contributed to Theme 5 (Frameworks for Management). This theme was not expanded upon within the framework document but a brief description of the key features of the theme was included. The theme highlighted the importance of developing “coherent and well-planned management responses to significant threats” (IFA Cymru 2017). As discussed above, the 2021 project enabled the collection of data for use in studying the effects of climate change, a significant threat to heritage. This data will be used to contribute to the management of the site by the RCAHMH, the site curator. The updated site plan produced as part of the

2021 project will also be used for monitoring physical changes to the site arrangement that might indicate illegal salvage of site features, another significant threat to heritage.

- 1.0.5 Finally, the 2021 project contributed to Theme 6 (Material Culture and Preservation by Record), this theme was also not expanded upon, however, its key features were described briefly. An objective to use marine geophysical survey technology to better access underwater sites was included in this theme. High-resolution multibeam bathymetry data collected in 2020 was a key resource for the 2021 project as it provided a basis for updates to the site plan and was used as a base map for diver navigation around the site via diver tracking and through-water comms. The updated site plan produced as part of this project will contribute to a diver trail proposed by Malvern Archaeological Diving Unit (MADU) (MADU 2018), increasing access to the site by the public. Another objective included in this theme was to improve engagement between professional archaeologists and community groups to further study sites and objects (IFA Cymru 2017). The 2021 project involved interviews with members of the team that discovered the site and worked closely with members of the community archaeology group, MADU, who have undertaken previous surveys on the site, meeting this aim.
- 1.0.1 The Welsh framework also identified that an aim from the 2004-2011 iteration of the framework, relating specifically to the Bronze Bell wreck, was not sufficiently addressed. The aim was the completion of excavation reports for the designated historic wrecks in Wales, however, it is noted that a report compiling the excavation and survey history for the Bronze Bell wreck has not been published (IFA Cymru 2017). This aim remains outstanding and was not addressed during the 2021 investigation by MSDS Marine.
- 1.0.6 There are drawbacks to the Welsh framework; it can be argued that it is parochial in its approach to Welsh heritage. Rather than focusing on archaeology *within* Wales and Welsh waters, it seems to focus primarily on archaeology *of* Wales i.e., archaeology of Welsh origin. Key questions raised by the framework within Theme 2 (Sailing and Seafaring) and Theme 3 (Marine Transport) relate to Welsh shipbuilding, development of Welsh harbours, the trade of Welsh-origin commodities, among other Welsh-centric heritage topics (IFA Cymru 2017). While answering questions about Welsh-origin archaeology is an important focus for constructing the maritime history of Wales, the omission of questions relating to international-origin maritime archaeology limits the efficacy of the framework.
- 1.0.7 There is limited reference to research into international maritime interaction and trade; Theme 7 (Maritime Identities) suggests that recognising Welsh maritime archaeology in a global context is important, but it does not go into great detail on the specific research priorities associated with this topic. It also suggests that research into “networks of maritime trade, the spread of ideas, and material culture by seagoing transport” ought to be undertaken as “international research collaborations” rather than considered for Welsh archaeological research (IFA Cymru 2017). This approach does not sufficiently consider the intrinsic value of internationally derived archaeology to the Welsh maritime narrative. The Bronze Bell wreck is an excellent example of this concept. Archival research indicates that a survivor of the wreck event may have integrated into the local community; the death of Juan Benedictus in 1730 is entered into the Llanendwyn Parish Register (Coflein 2012). Further to this, it is believed that timbers from the wreck were used in a building on the ground of Cors y Gedol Hall which overlooks the wreck site, and that artefacts from the wreck were used within the hall (Coflein

2012). The Bronze Bell wreck was arguably integrated into the fabric of its local Welsh community. The question to ask here is at what point does this wreck event become 'Welsh' archaeology? Under the existing framework, it would not be considered as such.

- 1.0.8 The final three themes in the framework are presented as somewhat an afterthought; indeed, discussion with those charged with reviewing the existing framework and developing an update to it for 2021 indicated that Themes 5, 6, and 7 were added to the framework towards the end of the framework in response to specific aims for existing projects at the time the framework was developed (Groom 2021).
- 1.0.9 By merit of being protected by legislation, the Bronze Bell wreck can be considered important; indeed, the Welsh framework includes the Bronze Bell wreck in its appended 'Catalogue of Vessel Sites with Significant Bibliography' (IFA Cymru 2017). This catalogue lists significant maritime sites within Wales and describes the selection as "six Designated Wrecks, significant finds in the Severn Estuary, high profile sites associated with large losses of life, the Royal Naval, and recovered artefacts" (IFA Cymru 2017). However, under the existing framework, it is unclear why these sites were selected. Wreck sites included in this catalogue include the English *Ann Francis*, Dutch *Planten Welverd*, and the Canadian *Louisa*, none of which would be considered research priorities under the current framework as they are not of Welsh origin and were not engaging in trade with Wales when they sunk in Welsh waters.
- 1.0.10 Conversely, the English framework is arguably more considerate of international-origin archaeology and recognises its significance in the context of England's heritage (Adams et al. 2011; Ransley and Sturt 2013). While the Bronze Bell wreck would not technically fall under the purview of the English framework, the wreck can be used as an example to enable critical comparison of these research frameworks. The histories and economies of Wales and England have been linked for centuries and as such, research questions or observed gaps in knowledge relevant to English history are typically relevant to Welsh history.
- 1.0.11 The English framework highlights the importance of identifying patterns of trading using material evidence from shipwreck sites (Section 8.4.3). It states, "through the analysis of ships, their cargoes, and the passenger and crew's personal belongings, in conjunction with historical records, critical views about the development of the world can be composed" (Adams et al. 2011; Ransley and Sturt 2013). This statement demonstrates the international interests of the English framework. The Bronze Bell wreck is an excellent example of the value of using material evidence to establish trading patterns; investigation into the origin of the cargo, armament, and artefacts found on the wreck site have yielded a credible narrative for the vessel. It has been proposed that the vessel was a French trader that was transporting a cargo of marble from Carrara via Genoa or Leghorn (Coflein 2012). The Welsh framework does not consider the importance of this type of research; it seeks to investigate the trading patterns of individual ships to research broader patterns of voyages, however this is only in the context of the trade of Welsh commodities (IFA Cymru 2017).
- 1.0.12 The English framework also recognises the social impact that foreign mariners had on coastal and port communities (Section 8.5.2) (Adams et al. 2011; Ransley and Sturt 2013). The integration and accommodation of these temporary residents of ports and harbours is arguably integral to the development of these settlements. The Welsh framework discusses the value of researching the lives of Welsh mariners in context of port and harbour development but does

not consider the influence of foreign mariners. The Welsh coast provides shelter when traversing the Irish sea, it is likely that many coastal towns and ports hosted foreign mariners en route to Ireland, western England, and Scotland throughout history. Indeed, as discussed above, at least one crew member from the Bronze Bell vessel is believed to have interacted and integrated with the local community (Coflein 2012).

- 1.0.13 Although the Welsh framework includes comprehensive research priorities for Welsh-origin history and archaeology, brief comparison to the English framework indicates a large research gap relating to the study of internationally derived archaeology. The Bronze Bell wreck is an excellent example of the value of researching this resource; in depth investigation of the vessel and its wrecking has yielded a rich narrative, providing evidence that the wreck became intrinsically linked with its local Welsh community. Research on this wreck was undertaken because the Bronze Bell is a designated asset; marine heritage of similar significance but with no designation would not be afforded the same research opportunities under the existing framework. The Welsh framework is currently under review, the newest iteration will ideally consider the value of internationally derived heritage assets within the Welsh marine environment.

2.0 References

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