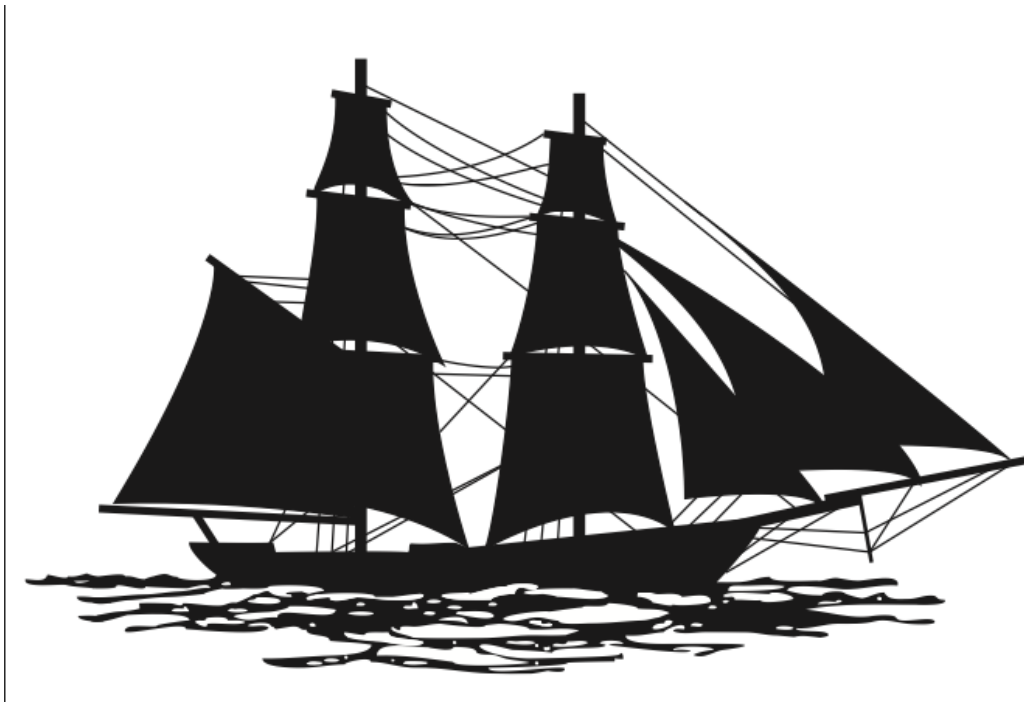


**Welsh Wreck Web Research Project**  
**(North Cardigan Bay)**  
**On-line research into the wreck of the:**  
***Luther***



*Silhouette image of a Brig*

Report Title: **Welsh Wreck Web Research Project  
(North Cardigan Bay)  
On-line research into the wreck of the:  
*Luther***

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Date: **December 2020/January 2021**

Report Ref:

## **1.0 Abstract**

The Malvern Archaeological Diving Unit (MADU) currently has an updated database of 535 shipwrecks dating from 1590 to 1993 in the north end of Cardigan Bay in North West Wales with very few having been investigated in any depth.

Following the COVID 19 virus outbreak and a call for online volunteers to assist in researching a selection of the wrecks, this report was compiled during the latter part of 2020/beginning of 2021, by online research only, gaining more insight into the history and loss of the brig Luther and her some of her crew on 24th January 1884.

The objective was to establish and collate facts, articles and reports on the event, verify and correct where possible, details on the ship, wreck and crew.

## 2.0 Index

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## **2.4 Acknowledgements**

With thanks to Kevin Heath and Chris Holden for references, with assistance from Ian Cundy.

## **2.5 Abbreviations**

Abbreviations used in this report -

MADU	Malvern Archaeological Diving Unit
NAS	Nautical Archaeology Society
NPRN	National Primary Resource Number
OS	Ordnance Survey
URL	Uniform Resource Locator
CLIP	Crew List Index Project
LRS	Lloyds Register of Shipping
BNA	British Newspaper Archives

### **3.0 Introduction**

I recently joined NAS wanting to expand my knowledge in shipwrecks, the research and reporting of them.

I chose this wreck partially wanting to investigate the crew as well as research the Luther story - as a non diver and with no nautical background I wanted to broaden my horizons in maritime research. I created the HMS Vanguard Crew Photo Project in 2017, searching for a photograph of all 843 casualties in the dreadnought's 1917 explosion. Last year I co-founded Lost in Waters Deep, where I concentrate on researching lost sailors of the First World War in and around Orkney and North Scotland waters. I wanted to expand my abilities and discover how much detail could be found purely online primarily regarding a ship, what caused it to sink, were there any survivors and was the wreckage ever discovered? Initial investigation into the event showed that there were varying reports, so I was keen to unearth some definitive facts. And learn something new.

## 4.0 Background

On selecting Luther to study, the first links provided as some background information were to LRS - Lloyds Register of Shipping and Coflein.

Coflein's information on the vessel gave two maps (Figures 1 & 2) with two possible wreck positions as well as historical information. Lloyds Register of Shipping gave a starting point of basic details on the vessel. (Fig 3).

Wrecksite.eu and NA held no entry or details on Luther.

Crew details as below were varied and required verification.

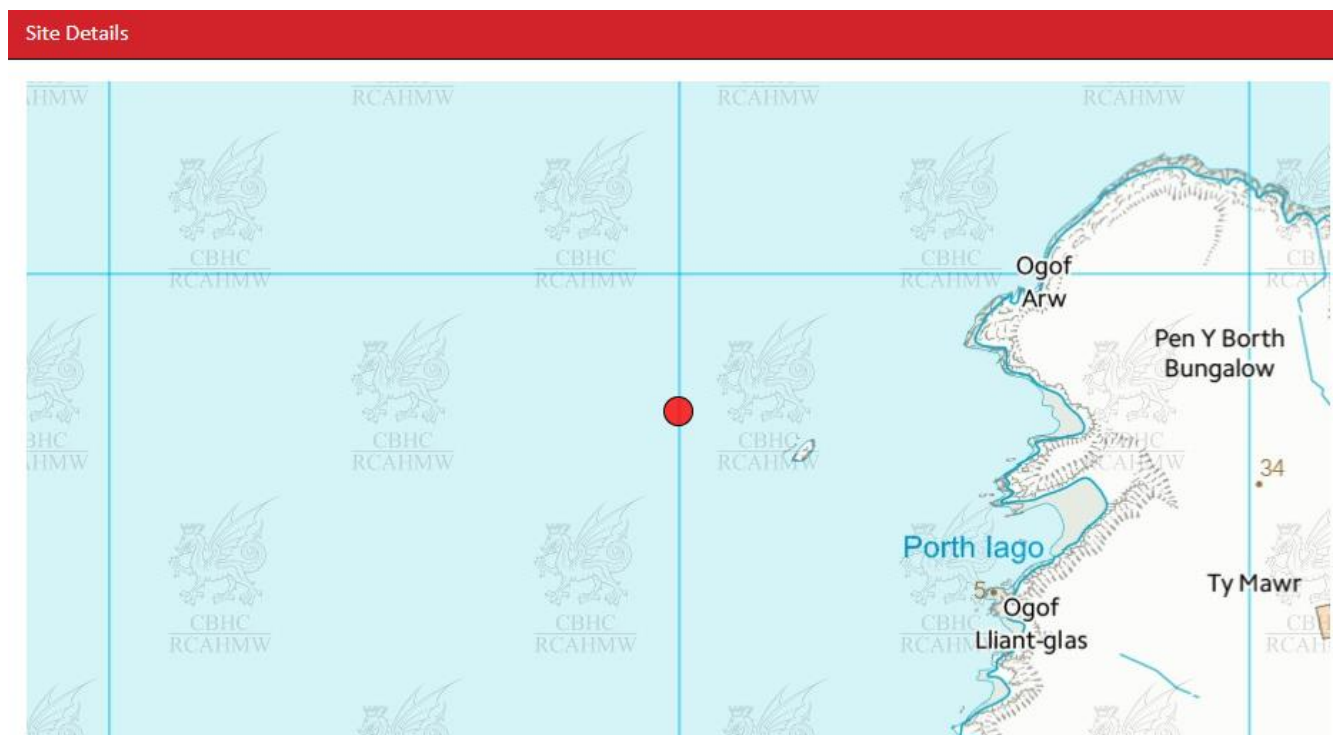


Figure 1 - Coflein possible site of Luther wreck

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**NPRN** 240353

**Map Reference** SH13SE

**Grid Reference** SH1599631759

**Unitary (Local) Authority** Maritime

**Old County** Maritime

**Community** Maritime

**Type of Site** WRECK

**Broad Class** MARITIME

**Period** Post Medieval

**Site Description** Timbers, pottery and an anchor were reported close to the shore in 1979, but have been recovered since.

**Event and Historical Information:**

The LUTHER was a 249 ton brig carrying coal and general cargo from Troon to Newfoundland when it was wrecked on 21 January 1884. The captain, 3 seamen and a boy were drowned.

Sources include:

Gater, D, 1992, Historic Shipwrecks of Wales, pg9

Maritime Officer, RCAHMW, January 2010.



Figure 2 - Coflein possible position of Luther wreck

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**NPRN** 271415

**Map Reference** SH12NE

**Grid Reference** SH1631829931

**Unitary (Local) Authority** Maritime

**Type of Site** WRECK

**Broad Class** MARITIME

**Period** Post Medieval

**Site Description** Archaeological remains associated with the loss of this vessel are not confirmed as present at this location, but may be in the vicinity.

**Event and Historical Information:**





## 5.0 Research Methodology

Online research was undertaken on a HP Pavilion laptop, running Chrome as the browser and using Google as the search engine.

Initial links suggested were approached - Lloyds Register of Shipping and Coflein. A quick key word search of "brig Luther 24th Jan 1884" brought up various sites such as Rhiw.com and the Amazon ebook by G.Stewart McIntosh. Variations of this were also used, as well as the Captain's name and the date.

Ancestry.com was used to construct a "family tree" of the crew mentioned in newspapers and by G Stewart McIntosh, resulting in details regarding the Master and verifying other crew members in official registers.

Access to BNA, British Newspaper Archives provided several accounts of varying detail into the ill fated final journey, as did the free website of [newspapers.library.wales](http://newspapers.library.wales)

As well as the online book by G Stewart McIntosh, as referenced, a small section of information from Chris Holden's online book was also referred to as well as dimensions of the ship by Larn & Larn. An entry of the Luther's fate was also discovered in "Wreck and Rescue on the Coast of Wales" by Henry Parry.

## 6.0 Results

### Summary of results

Vessel	Name/s	Luther		
	Type	Brig		
		General Cargo		
Built	Date	Launched 30th June 1855		
		Registered 25th July 1855		
	Builder	Dundee Shipbuilding Company		
		Dundee		
Construction	Materials	Wood		
	Decks			
	Bulkheads			
Propulsion	Type	Sail		
	Details			
Dimensions	Length	100ft	3 ins	
	Beam	23ft	3 ins	
	Depth	15ft	1 ins	
Tonnage	Gross			
	Net	216		
Owner	Last	James White, Ferryport on Craig, Fife		
	First	John Whyte, Tayport		
Registry	Port	Dundee		
	Flag	GB		
	Number	7232		
History	Routes			
	Cargo	General Cargo		
Final Voyage	From	Troon, departing Hogmanay, 1883		
	To	St John's, Newfoundland		
	Captain	Duncan Stewart		
	Crew	9		
	Passengers	None		
	Cargo	200 tons Coal - 50 tons of wines & spirits		
Wrecking	Date	24/01/1884		
	Location	Possibly off Porthor		
	Cause	Violent Storm - Gale Force 11 winds		
	Loss of life	5, including the Captain and his apprentice Son.		
	Outcome	Total Loss of vessel, some materials and cargo salvaged.		

Luther was built by the Dundee Shipbuilding Company which was based at Panmure Yard on Marine Parade, Scotland. Registered on the 25th July 1855 with the number 7232, the 215 ton sailing brig was launched on Saturday 6th July 1855 (Reported in the Forfar & Kincardineshire Advertiser). Summary information above was sourced from CLIP.

Luther's last voyage should have originally begun on 31st October 1883 leaving Greenock Harbour for St John's, Newfoundland. Having sailed past Mull Lighthouse and entering the North Atlantic, the vessel hit bad weather, resulting in the ship taking in water, the aft mast and rudder broken. Limping back to the mainland, the Captain and crew had to delay the journey, harbouring at Troon on the 26th November 1883, waiting 15 days for repairs. On the evening of 12th December 1883 the weather worsened enough to have effect in Troon harbour - in the wind an unsecured iron barque named *Neva of Belfast* hit Luther, damaging the bulwarks. It was a further 2 weeks delay to their journey. Upon the third attempt to sail to Newfoundland storms again developed, culminating to gale force 11 winds which broke the ship while her Captain was looking for further safe harbour. 5 of the 9 crew were killed.

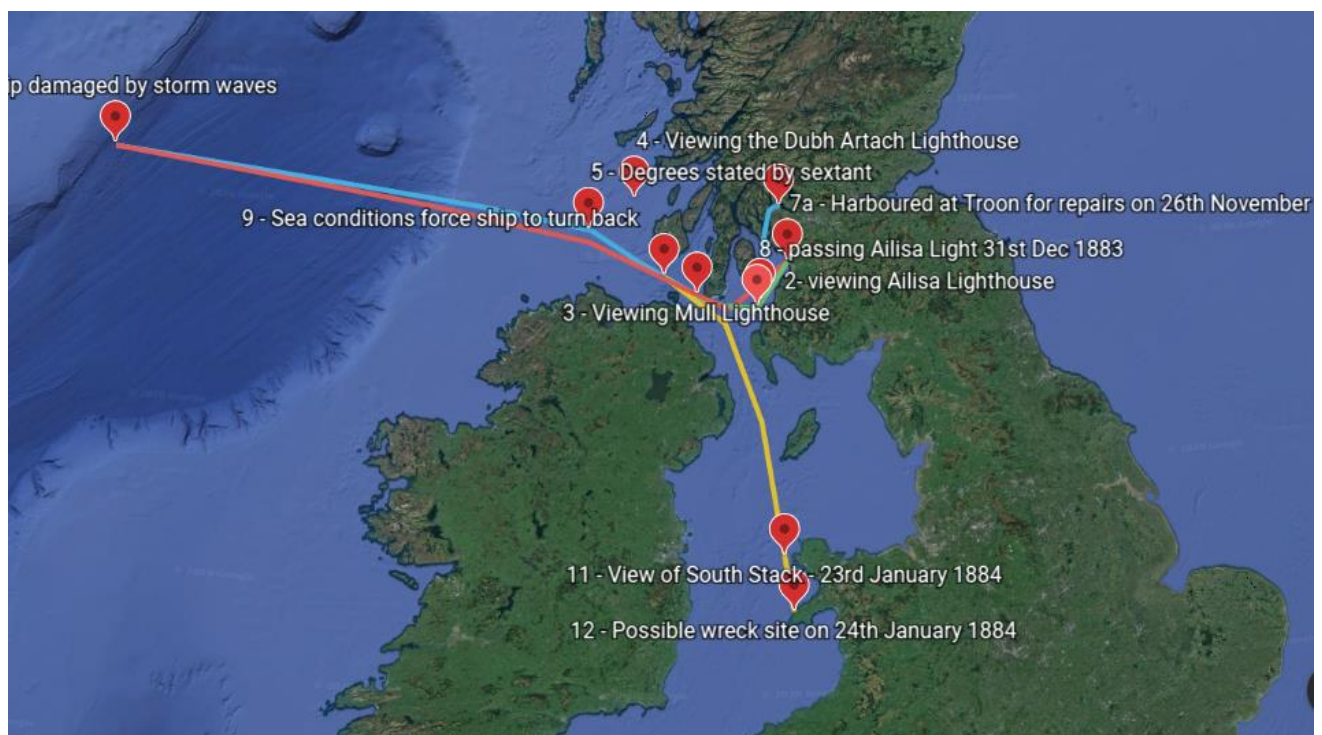


Fig 4 - Path of Luther and her crew on leaving Greenock 31st October, to the wreck on 24th January 1884, W Sadler

<https://earth.google.com/earth/rpc/cc/drive?state=%7B%22ids%22%3A%5B%221I5PrEQwwP9xTMIpdTv8bszxAXhGTIt1p%22%5D%2C%22action%22%3A%22open%22%2C%22userId%22%3A%22109119853259961241257%22%2C%22resourceKeys%22%3A%7B%7D%7D&usp=sharing>

There is a detailed account of her final journey from 31st October 1883 until she was wrecked on 24th January 1884 in **"The Last Voyage of the Brig Luther of Dundee, Scotland 1884"** by G

**Stewart McIntosh**, the Great Grandson of Captain Duncan Stewart, a Kindle version available on Amazon. It was points from this narrative that gave the basis of the above diagram. The book also provides a personal history into the life of the Master.

[https://www.amazon.co.uk/LAST-VOYAGE-LUTHER-DUNDEE-SCOTLAND-ebook/dp/B009GJEM2I/ref=sr\\_1\\_1?dchild=1&keywords=luther+1884&qid=1609545556&sr=8-1](https://www.amazon.co.uk/LAST-VOYAGE-LUTHER-DUNDEE-SCOTLAND-ebook/dp/B009GJEM2I/ref=sr_1_1?dchild=1&keywords=luther+1884&qid=1609545556&sr=8-1)



*Fig 5 - Google view of Porthor/Portheor*

## **Newspaper Reports**

*"Scots Brig that was smashed to matchwood"*

**It was a dark Wednesday night, January 24<sup>th</sup>, 1884, when a terrible hurricane swept over the Lleyn Peninsula, when a Scots brig named 'Luther', tossed about in a treacherous sea, and hurled against the rocks, and brought to matchwood at Porth Iago. Her port of registry was Dundee, Scotland, manned by a crew of nine all told, about 600 tons deadweight, all the crew belonged to Scotland except one who was Portuguese.**

**About two o'clock in the morning of the 25<sup>th</sup> two of the crew arrived at a farm called Ty Mawr, very exhausted, who said that they had left another two on the road to die, but a search later was made and they were found and got safely to the house. Those that were saved were the mate, an old man, the cook and two able-seamen: Gilbert Ross was the name of one, and John Jeness was the other. The captain's name was John Duncan. He was drowned together with his son, his body was found at Clynnog, twenty miles up the**

coast. One man was saved by clinging to the ship's biscuit tank, and eventually was brought ashore. She was loaded with general cargo at Dundee, bound for St John's Newfoundland, but the most conspicuous part of the cargo was beer and stout, and Scotch whiskey, all in large barrels of 40 to 60 gallons each.

[http://www.rhiw.com/y\\_mor/shipwrecks/llyn\\_shipwrecks/llyn\\_e.htm](http://www.rhiw.com/y_mor/shipwrecks/llyn_shipwrecks/llyn_e.htm)

**"Considerable wreckage is being washed ashore"** - *The North Wales Express*

**A gale of unusual severity swept over this part of the country during the latter end of last week, resulting in several shipping casualties and serious loss of life. On Tuesday, the brig 'Luther', of Dundee, was wrecked at Porth Iago, Llyn, when five men were drowned, and four rescued. SAME NIGHT AS ABERDARON WRECK + EULOMENE** *North Wales Chronicle. February 2, 1884.*

#### *The Loss of the Luther*

**"A widespread regret is expressed at Troon at the loss of the unfortunate brig Luther of that port, along with Capt. Stewart and four of the crew. She originally left Greenock for St John with a cargo of coal, porter, ale etc but having experienced heavy weather when about 200 miles west of Torry Island she put back into Troon where her cargo was discharged and repairs amounting to about £500 executed on her.**

**Captain Stewart also took with him his eldest son as an apprentice but it is not yet known whether he has shared his fathers fate. Owing to his prolonged stay in port Captain Stewart had made the acquaintance of many friends, many of whom it said prevailed on him not to go back with her. He leaves a widow and six of his family"** - *The Greenock Telegraph and Clyde Shipping Gazette, Monday January 28th 1884.*

#### *The Wreck of the Dundee Brig Luther*

**The following is the report of John Whitton, mate of the brig Luther, of Dundee, say 230 tons from Troon on January 15th at noon, for St Johns N.F (with coals, spirits and malt liquor) - on the 23rd at 5pm, tide flood, weather hazy, win N.W, a gale, with a heavy sea from the west ward, the vessel, supposed to be about mid channel was under two lower topsoils, when the foretopsail blew out of the bolt ropes. The vessel was heading about N. At about 7:30pm sighted Bardsey Light, bearing S.E by S distant apparently about 14 miles. The vessel was then lying to under lower maintopsail and behaving well. Between 10pm and 11pm sighted land under our lee, Bardsey bearing S, the ship driving leeward. Set foretopmaststaysail and maintopmaststaysail, foresail and main trysail reefed, when maintopmaststaysail gave way, loosed jib, winch blew in pieces. Kept ship in a wind as long as the canvas stood which was soon carried away by the severity of the storm and the ship drove bodily ashore near Porthor, on the coast of Aberdaron. about 1:30am following.**

**The sea soon stove in her stern and on the cargo washing out the ship, glided off the rocks and came into the cove. He was washed over the bows and a lifebuoy came into his hands and placed it under his arm, the sea drove him back onto the beach. The master who was an able man was drowned whilst trying to save his son, a lad of 14 years. Three able seamen were also drowned. The vessel was soon in atoms. Signals of distress were made by our vessel by burning torches just before stranding. The lead was not used at any time - Caernarvon Jan 25. - *The Evening Telegraph, Tuesday January 29th 1884.***



*Loss of a Dundee Brig and four of the Crew*

**A Lloyd's Telegram announces that the Luther (brig), of Dundee, Captain Stewart, with a cargo of coal and general, has been totally wrecked at Porthor near Nevin. The Captain and four of the crew were drowned. - Greenock Advertiser, 25th January 1884**

*Dundee Brig Wrecked. 5 Lives Lost*

**A telegram was received in Dundee yesterday by Mr James White, shipowner, announcing the loss of his brig Luther, along with five of the crew. The Luther left Troon for St John's N.F on the 15th inst with a cargo of 200 tons of coal and about fifty tons of general cargo. She encountered the gales which have prevailed with great violence during the past week and on Thursday she was driven ashore and wrecked at Porthor, near Nevin, on the coast of Carnarvon. The Luther had nine of a crew and unfortunately five of them were drowned, including Captain Stewart, Dundee and his son who had joined the vessel as an apprentice. The crew having been shipped at Troon, it is supposed that most of them belong to the west of Scotland. The Luther was a brig of 214 tons and was built at Dundee in 1855. She had met a series of disasters lately. After undergoing a thorough overhaul, she sailed from Greenock for St John's, Newfoundland on the 31st October with a general cargo and on the 18th November had got no further on her voyage than about 300 miles west of Tory. On that day terrible weather was experienced, the wind blowing a perfect hurricane and about four o'clock in the afternoon she was struck by a tremendous sea, which swept away everything moveable on deck, as well as the longboat, bulwarks, deckhouse aft, trysail and gaffsail, with the gearing attached to both. Part of her stern was also carried away and two days later another sea carries away several sails which had been placed over her stern to keep the water out. On the 21st the master determined to put back and arrived at Troon, where the ship underwent extensive repair. The vessel had just completed her repairs and was almost ready for sea when she met with another mishap, a large ship having broken adrift in Troon Harbour and collided with her, carrying away the main rail and bulwarks and doing other serious damage. The necessary repairs occupied a considerable time and the vessel resumed what had proved her last voyage on Tuesday the 15th inst. Both vessel and cargo were insured. Captain Stewart has left a widow and young family, to whom the sorrowful tidings of their double bereavement were communicated yesterday by the Rev, Mr Tait, seaman's missionary. The mate, Mr John Whitton, Carnousie, is amongst the survivors. - The Weekly News, Saturday January 26th 1884**

Other similar newspaper reports are available to read :-

The Evening Telegraph, Friday January 25th 1884

The Northern Warder and Bi Weekly Courier and Argus, January 29th 1884

The Glasgow Herald, Saturday January 26th 1884

Dundee Courier, 30th January 1884

Following the newspaper stories and descriptions of the weather it sounds unlikely that the Luther survived the gale, the rocks and the strength of the sea. There have not been any announcements of any wreck being discovered in the area which could be the vessel. The only details given about the ship and its cargo after the storm was on Wednesday 13th February 1884, from Lloyds List, stating "**Aberdaron - February 11th - The cargo salvaged and materials of the stranded brig Luther, of Dundee, will be sold by auction today for the benefit of**

**parties concerned**" as well as mentioned within a Hydrographic Office report from 1979 that various items were retrieved \*

#### *The Great Gale*

**Weather conditions which caused the loss of the Luther were described in detail. Gale in North Wales. The storm is the heaviest experienced since December 7th 1882. A frightful gale visited Flintshire, accompanied by a heavy fall of snow and rain. The wind was very high and at times it blew a perfect hurricane, removing branches of trees and slates and chimney tops from the roofs of buildings.**

**The brigantine BETTY was caught in the gale**

**The pilot cutter PRINCE ROYAL was dismasted and the crew had a narrow escape.**

**The Norwegian barque SVEA slipped the anchor and chains.**

**The LUTHER, of Dundee, was the brig which was wrecked off Porthor, Aberdaron, on the Carvornshire coast, during the gale on Thursday. The captain and 5 seamen drowned. Considerable wreckage is being washed ashore. - *The North Wales Express*, February 1st 1884**

<https://newspapers.library.wales/view/3560836/3560842/19/luther>

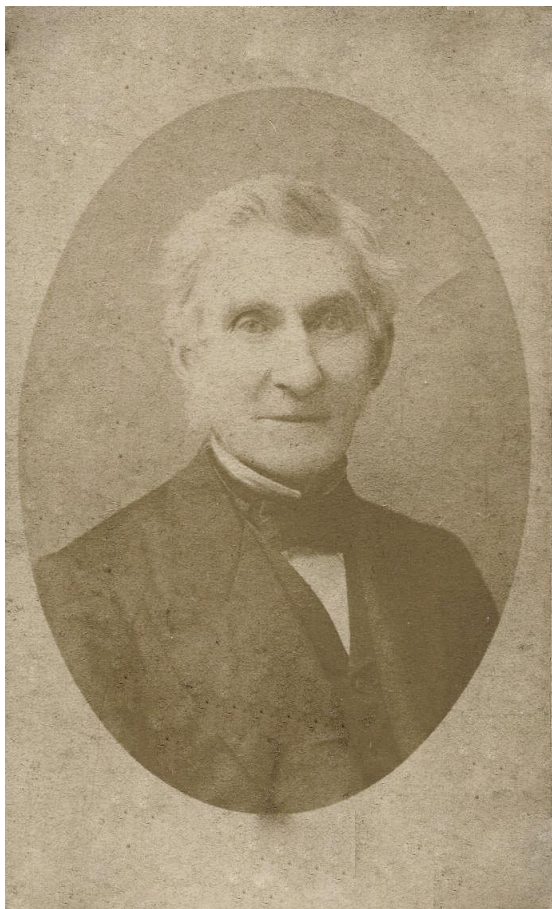
Chris Holden also mentions in his book - **\**The Essential Underwater Guide to North Wales: Volume One - Barmouth to South Stack*** that timbers, pottery and an anchor were discovered in 1979 following a shore dive. Further dives failed to locate the wreck but it was believed to be the 249 ton Scottish brig Luther which was wrecked on 21st January 1884" ^

^Note, weight and date differ from other sources.

A passage written in *Wreck and Rescue on the Coast of Wales* by Henry Parry tells of "another fierce gale lashed the coast on June 24th 1888 (note incorrect date). The Scottish barque, Luther, on a passage to Newfoundland, was caught helpless on the lee shore and was driven on the rocks at Porth Iago, near Aberdaron. Only four of her crew of eight managed to reach the shore, early in the morning. Two of these survivors reached a nearby farmhouse in a very exhausted condition, having left two behind who were unable to continue any further. A search was made and they were eventually found lying by the roadside, whilst the bodies of the captain and his son were later recovered many miles away at Clynnog".

## **THE CREW**





**Name** - Captain Duncan Stewart

**DOB** - 11th June 1840

**Place of Birth** - Dundee, Scotland

**Early History** - He began his seafaring career around the age of 14/15 - aged 19 he was recorded in the Dreadnought Seaman's Hospital Admissions and Discharge book (1856>1859 entries) recuperating from buboes (inflamed lymph nodes)

By the age of 23 (approx) he had gained his First Mate Certificate, issued 27th March 1863 and by 1871 (recorded on the census) he was Master of the vessel Trio, at the time moored at Hudsons Wharf River Thames. On the 1881 census he mastered the vessel Osprey with a crew of 4. He married Margaret Traill in 1867 their eldest child being William. After her death in 1873 he married Agnes

**Rank** - Master

Duncan perished on 24th January reportedly attempting to save his son. At the time of his death his address was 15 Peddie Street, Dundee. His body was never recovered.

*Fig 6 - Portrait of Duncan Stewart, Captain of the Luther*

*Fig 7 - Duncan Stewart's signature*

### Crew Details

The names of the crew differ in the short book "The Last Voyage of the Brig Luther of Dundee, Scotland 1884" by G Stewart McIntosh" and in newspaper reports compared to official records. This could be for a number of reasons; nicknames or false names being used or names misheard or interpreted incorrectly. Fig 8 shows the entries in official records.

24 Jan 84	William Stewart	14	Boys.	J.D.W.	Off the Welsh Coast
"	John Williams	45	A.B.	J.D.W.	"
"	James Morris	23	A.B.	J.D.W.	"
"	Charles Wilson	47	A.B.	J.D.W.	"

Fig 8 - (Registers of Seamen Deaths; Class: BT 157; Piece: 4 - Ancestry.com)

With the addition of Duncan Stewart there are a definitive 5 crew members who lost their lives on 24th January 1884 - William Stewart, John Williams, James Morris and Charles Wilson. If newspaper reports are to be believed of 5 crew who died, plus the survivors John Whitton (Mate), 2 Able Seamen, an old man and a cook then the crew hands tally does not total correctly. Additionally, stories of Duncan and William's bodies being found washed up after the event cannot be proven. No bodies were reported retrieved and buried - there was a report of a "young sailor" being discovered some weeks later who was buried in an unmarked grave in Aberdaron, but the identity was never discovered if this was young William.

*"Shipwrecks around the coast of Llyn" (During the last century and the beginning of the present. (20th) Hugh Jones, Bryn Villa, Llangwnadl, (written in the 1920's). In January 1884, a Scottish brig, the Luther came ashore at Porth Iago, Bodferin. She had nine of a crew; five were drowned and four saved. On board this ship were much of the fruits of Sir John Heidden's labours (WELSH AUTHOR?), as well as statues and many other goods. The captain and his son were drowned; they were Scottish and one of the crew members was Portuguese; he was a tall muscular man.*

The reference to the Portuguese hand was only ever mentioned twice, in unconfirmed sources - the nationality of one of the crew differed from Portuguese, to Finnish, to Russian.

## 7.0 Conclusions & Recommendations

I have spent approximately 38 hours researching the ship facts and crew details.

Reports and details differ from many sources which creates conflicting data. One fact is the name of the Skipper/Captain who was lost, this was definitively Duncan Stewart and not John Duncan. Dates of 21st or 24th January are also mentioned, but given the eye witness accounts and numerous newspaper reports to tie up with the severity of the gale, I would confirm that 24th January 1884 was the correct date.

Despite searching for a death certificate for Duncan Stewart, which would corroborate his burial in Clynnog as reported in Henry Parry's book, there were no positive discoveries after searching on Free BMD, FindMyPast, North Wales Death Index (1837-1966) and Caernarvonshire Burials (1542-2004).

*Logbook of the Skipper, Liverpool Daily Post, 21 August 1937* as referenced by Coflein - this source is unavailable via BNA. It may be available through bygonenews.com or historic-newspapers.co.uk but these are only by purchasing.

## 8.0 References

### Online Sources:

- <https://www.amazon.co.uk>
- <https://www.britishnewspaperarchive.co.uk>
- <https://www.coflein.gov.uk/en/mapping>
- <https://hec.lrfoundation.org.uk/archive-library/lloyds-register-of-ships-online>
- Luther Crew - Ancestry .com

UK and Ireland, Masters and Mates Certificates, 1850-1927 - Ancestry

National Archives of the UK; Kew, Surrey, England; Registers of Deaths at Sea of British Nationals; Class: BT 159; Piece: 9

Registers Of Deaths Of Passengers At Sea, 1854-1890 BT 158 page 612

Duncan Stewart Photo - Ancestry

1871 and 1881 England Census

Registers of Seamen Deaths; Class: BT 157; Piece: 4

- <https://www.maritimearchives.co.uk/lloyds-register>
- <https://www.newspapers.library.wales>
- National Records of Scotland - Statutory register Deaths 022/MR18

### Books:

G Stewart McIntosh - The Last Voyage of the Brig Luther of Dundee, Scotland 1884

Hugh Jones - Shipwrecks around the coast of Llyn

Chris Holden - The Essential Underwater Guide to North Wales: Volume One - Barmouth to South Stack

Henry Parry - Wreck and Rescue on the Coast of Wales

