

The Cyprian

Interview John Harold Morris (2013)

My name is John Harold Morris of Porthmadog. At the time I lived in Criccieth and belonged to the Gwynedd branch of the British Sub Aqua Club. One of the members of the club became aware of the Cyprian through a book. The Cyprian belonged to Frederick Leyland and Company of Liverpool which was on route to Genoa, when she was wrecked during a fierce storm onto the rocks of Penrhyn Rhosgor, on the northern coast of the Llyn Peninsula.

With the knowledge of the existence of the wreck, a small group of us went out in search of it. Before I went out with crew, another person had already been out and claimed to have found the remains of it. On the day we went out, I was partnered with a man called Ron Cooper. This was something we did, the club's policy. The others, 8 or so, went further down the coast. Not much further, about 100 yards.

When we got in the water, it wasn't very clear and it wasn't very deep- around 10ft. But very quickly I lost Ron. He was looking for an anchor, but I lost him. As I was looking for him, I found the bell. The bell was lying in the sand with at least half of it poking out. But I had to go and look for Ron. So I took out my knife and hit it against the cylinder on my back. The 'ting' noise it produced, carried quite far through the water, and after swimming around I found Ron, and we went back to the bell. We began to dig it out, but all of a sudden I felt that I couldn't get air. The air in my tank was coming to an end. I had to get out and get to the shore.

Some 5 minutes later Ron emerged, with the bell, and climbed over the rocks, with the bell under his arm, with a look of 'I own this'. I wasn't very happy with this, as it was me who found the bell in the first place.

Whatever, the boys from the club decided that it was right for the person who found it, to keep it. And that's what happened. Ron took it home, but returned it. The bell's been with me since. And I've not seen him for years. I don't know if he is even still alive. And so the bell's with me, and so I brought it home.

I took it to the Customs Officer, as there was one based in Porthmadog at the time. They contacted Frederick Leyland Co., and at a company meeting it was decided that the finder of the bell could keep it. And it has been in my possession to date.

It was usual for us to dive in places where there was no problems with the weather. Therefore the winter was out of the question, so we dived in lakes and old quarries during those times. But for the Cyprian, we chose, I don't remember exactly, the spring or summer. The weather was fine, but you didn't need much of an increase to disturb the sand on the seabed, which makes it difficult to see what's there.

There was a lot of remains of the Cyprian visible at that time, and we dived numerous times afterwards.

The problem was as more people heard about it, the more people came to dive the sites with their 'Ribs' and it was dangerous. As you could have been underwater, and the next thing a boat speeds past overhead, and as I said before the water wasn't deep, maybe at its deepest it was only 20ft.

There were a lot of remains- mostly steel, a few lead pipes and the portholes which are mostly brass and bronze.

I was very lucky whilst diving one time to find some plates, eating plates. There was around 10 of them, all stuck together. But as I pulled them out, they broke up. During that dive I looked up, to my friend who was sitting in an inner tube of the lorry tyre. As I made my ascent to him, there was a lot of detritus coming down. What it was, was he was sea sick in the tube, and it was the sick! I reached the surface and gave him what plates I had managed to salvage.

I gave one of the plates to a farmer, well he was an agent to the owner of Penrhyn Cwmistir farm, and that was good because he had helped us a lot to get to the dive site.

Like I was saying about the other people flocking to the wreck to dive it, I lost interest in the Cyprian. It was only a short period of time I actually dived the site, in 1963, and by then I was trying to move on to other sites. I felt like we had recovered what was there. But a lot still remains.

I got a number of small items, like pins, crochet needles. They were in pieces of the seabed, which were as hard as concrete. Small rocks that were stuck together with iron. It was very hard to get it out. I'm sure there is a number of stuff still there, even though most of the ship has eroded away and after the wrecking, the ship was salvaged and carried a lot of stuff from there.

Around 2008, I began kayaking around the coast, something I hadn't done before. I kayaked into a little bay next to the rock reef on which the wreck of the Cyprian lies. I discovered a tea spoon on the beach, folded in two. On it were the manufacturer symbols and the words Nevada Silver. Well, there is no silver in Nevada Silver. It has an old appearance, as looks as if it has been knocking around the rocks and beach for a years, and I believe it is from the Cyprian. I'm sure a number of items have come from the Cyprian over the years- souvenirs.

The bell, which is obviously the main thing. It is made of lead, and is very heavy, and weighs around 34 lbs, and by now with my age it is getting very difficult to carry.

Apart from the bell, I got some plates. Plates the same as you would use to eat your dinner. With a blue line around the plate, with the image of a women standing with what appears to be a stern and rudder and the words Primavesi & Sons. Swansea. Well, they were a ship chandlers, but I'm not sure if they made the plates or bought them to sell on again.

Apart from the plates are brass or bronze ports, which are very heavy.

Apart from the crochet needles, small lamp bracket, a possible anchor light which would have been used when the ship was anchored. If it wasn't that it might have been for a much smaller lamp, possibly a hand held one, that is also bronze, but the lamp has gone.

There was a lot of lead. At that time there wasn't much of a price for lead, and as a result we didn't collect much of it.

One thing I remember seeing, but it was unfortunately stuck to the bottom of the ship was a Kingston valve, which was bronze. The first thing you did when you found something like that was to scratch it to see what colour it was- and it was bronze, but it was stuck to the bottom of the ship. I'm not sure if it is still there, it would be a lot of work.

People concentrate on the Cyprian because of the criticisms towards to lifeboat from Trefor I believe, for not going out to attempt to rescue the ship. But the truth is the lifeboat had been doing a lot of work that evening/ day, and the crew were tired, and we have to consider the amount of the shipwreckss on this coast.