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## Dublin Core

### Title

The Smalls Lighthouse Tragedy | Trasiedi Goleudy'r Smalls

### Subject

Smalls Lighthouse

Goleudy'r Smalls

Pembrokeshire

Sir Benfro

Tragedy

Trasiedi

### Creator

Natasha de Chroustchoff

### Publisher

Ports, Past and Present Project

### Date

2023

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### Relation

<https://perma.cc/9PMP-TQ3B>

**Format**

Curatescape story

**Language**

English

Welsh

**Coverage**

51.72119396889194, -5.669830705672184

## Curatescape Story Item Type Metadata

**Lede**

An 1801 story of death, paranoia, isolation and Hollywood adaptation and how it changed the rules of lighthouse keeping.

**Lede (Welsh)**

Stori o 1801 am farwolaeth, paranoia ac unigedd, addasiad gan Hollywood a sut y newidiodd y rheolau ar gadw goleudai.

**Story**

The cluster of rocks known as The Smalls, 20 miles off the coast of south west Wales, was a major shipping hazard, notorious for ferocious rip tides, until 1777 when an unorthodox timber lighthouse structure was erected consisting of nine stout oak pillars embedded in the reef and secured with molten lead. A two-man cabin was perched on top, accessed from below via a rope ladder, and the lantern light was located above. An exterior walkway allowed for maintenance of the lamp and a storeroom for water and fuel was hacked out of the solid rock beneath. The wooden pillars offered less resistance to the wind than a stone column but caused the structure to rock in the almost incessant winds.

In the winter of 1801 two local men, Thomas Griffith and Thomas Howell, took up their tour of duty at the lighthouse. Very little information on them exists but they were reputed to have been on bad terms already. This unfortunate pairing took a turn for the worse when Griffith sickened and died after a few days. Living at close quarters with the corpse soon became intolerable but Howell knew that the finger of suspicion would point at him if he disposed of the body into the sea. A cooper by trade, he used his carpentry skills to cobble together a wooden crate from the bulkhead planking and shoved his companion's body inside. He fastened the makeshift coffin to the external walkway. However, although the wild weather carried away the smell, it also began to break up the box. Before long, the dead man's arm fell out and started to flap up and down in the wind, tapping on the window as if to draw attention.

Thomas Howell managed to keep the lamp lit from dusk to dawn according to the terms of his duty but the prolonged bad weather meant that he was not relieved for many weeks. Passing ships saw a figure waving frantically but since the lamp went on and off as normal there was no reason to suspect a disaster – or risk one by approaching the rocks in the heavy swell. But by the time he was rescued Thomas Howell was a broken man. Some reports say he was barely recognizable and his hair had turned white.

In consequence of this tragic event the minimum number of lighthouse keepers per shift was thereafter required to be three. The story caught the popular imagination and provided inspiration for stories and drama including in 2016 the British film *The Lighthouse* directed

by Chris Crow: “Based on real events... the film tells a tale of death, madness and isolation, a desolate trip into the heart of human darkness.”

In 2019 the much-lauded American film *The Lighthouse*, directed by Robert Eggers and starring Willem Dafoe and Robert Pattinson, also revolved around the tense relationship between two men confined to a lighthouse in bad weather. Although the original inspiration came from a story by Edgar Allen Poe, Eggers acknowledged a debt to the Smalls episode and explained he had been struck by the fact that both men were called Thomas: “I was like, “Okay, this is a movie about identity, and can devolve into some weird, obscure places.” he said in an interview.

The original wooden lighthouse, dismissed at the time as ‘*a raft of timber rudely put together*’, survived for almost 80 years. It was replaced by a stone one in 1861 but not before a second tragedy in 1831 when a gigantic wave slammed the floor of the keepers’ cabin up against the roof killing one man and injuring the other two. Today the Smalls Lighthouse is operated automatically by Trinity House. It was the first in the UK to be powered by wind and solar energy. With aid of lenses its 35 watt bulb can be seen 34 km away. Serviced by helicopter, it remains the remotest of all the lighthouses around the coast of Britain.

### Story (Welsh)

Roedd y clwstwr creigiau o’r enw The Smalls, 20 milltir oddi ar arfordir y De-orllewin, yn berygl mawr i longau, ac yn adnabyddus oherwydd y deufor-gyfarfod ffyrnig, tan 1777 pan gafodd goleudy pren anghyffredin ei godi. Roedd ganddo naw colofn o goed derw praff wedi’u gwreiddio yn y riff ac wedi’u sicrhau â phlwm tawdd. Ar y brig cafodd caban i ddau ddyn ei osod, ac ysgol raffau i’w gyrraedd, ac roedd golau’r llusern wedi’i leoli uwchben y caban. Roedd rhodfa y tu allan yn caniatáu i’r lamp gael ei chynnal a’i chadw a chafodd storfa ar gyfer dŵr a thanwydd ei hagor yn y graig solet isod. Roedd y colofnau pren yn llai agored i nerth y gwynt na cholofnau carreg ond yn peri i’r strwythur siglo mewn gwyntoedd oedd bron yn ddi-dor.

Yn ystod gaeaf 1801 aeth dau ddyn lleol, Thomas Griffith a Thomas Howell, ar ddyletswydd yn y goleudy. Ychydig iawn o wybodaeth amdanyn nhw sy’n bodoli ond dywedir bod y ddau yn anghydweld â’i gilydd yn barod. Aeth pethau o ddrwg i waeth pan aeth Griffith yn sâl a marw ar ôl ychydig ddyddiau. Cyn hir, aeth byw yn agos at y corff yn annioddefol ond gwyddai Howell y byddai pawb yn ei amau pe bai’n gwaredu’r corff yn y môr. Ac yntau’n saer casgenni wrth ei waith, defnyddiodd ei sgiliau gwaith coed i lunio crât pren o estyll y pared a gwrthio corff ei gydymaith iddo. Clymodd yr arch dros dro i’r rhodfa allanol. Ond, er bod y tywydd gwyllt yn gwaredu’r drewdod, dechreuodd y bocs dorri. Cyn hir, syrthiodd braich y dyn marw allan a dechreuodd chwifio i fyny ac i lawr yn y gwynt, gan daro’r ffenestr fel pe bai’n ceisio tynnu sylw.

Llwyddodd Thomas Howell i gadw’r lamp ynghyn rhwng y gwyll a’r wawr yn unol â thelerau ei ddyletswydd ond roedd y tywydd gwael hir yn golygu na chafodd ei ryddhau am wythnosau lawer. Gwelodd llongau a oedd yn pasio ffigur yn chwifio’n wyllt ond gan fod y lamp yn cynnau ac yn diffodd fel arfer doedd dim rheswm dros amau trychineb – na mentro creu trychineb chwaith drwy fynd at y creigiau yn y tonnau mawr. Erbyn iddo gael ei achub roedd Thomas Howell yn ddyn toredig. Mae rhai adroddiadau’n dweud mai prin fod modd ei adnabod a bod ei wallt wedi troi’n wyn.

Yn sgil y digwyddiad trasig hwn, cafodd yr isafswm ceidwaid ym mhob goleudy ei newid wedyn i dri ar bob sifft. Cydiodd y stori yn y dychymyg poblogaidd ac ysbrydoli straeon a drama gan gynnwys yn 2016 y ffilm Brydeinig *The Lighthouse* a gyfarwyddwyd gan Chris Crow: “Based on real events... the film tells a tale of death, madness and isolation, a desolate trip into the heart of human darkness”.

Yn 2019, cafodd y ffilm Americanaidd *The Lighthouse*, a gyfarwyddwyd gan Robert Eggers ac a oedd yn serennu Willem Dafoe a Robert Pattinson ganmoliaeth fawr, ac roedd hon hefyd yn ymwneud â'r berthynas lawn tyndra rhwng dau ddyn wedi'u dal mewn goleudy mewn tywydd garw. Er mai stori gan Edgar Allan Poe oedd yr ysbrydoliaeth wreiddiol, cydnabu Eggers y ddyled i hanes y Smalls ac esbonio ei fod wedi'i daro gan y ffaith mai Thomas oedd enw'r ddau ddyn: "I was like, "Okay, this is a movie about identity, and can devolve into some weird, obscure places," meddai, mewn un cyfweiliad.

Parhaodd y goleudy pren gwreiddiol, a wfftiwyd ar y pryd fel '*a raft of timber rudely put together*', am bron 80 mlynedd. Cafodd ei ddisodli gan oleudy carreg ym 1861 ond nid cyn ail drasiedi ym 1831 pan hyrddiodd ton aruthrol lawr caban y ceidwaid i fyny yn erbyn y to, gan ladd un dyn ac anafu'r ddau arall. Heddiw, mae Goleudy'r Smalls yn cael ei weithredu'n awtomatig gan Trinity House. Hwn oedd y cyntaf yn y Deyrnas Unedig i gael ei bweru gan ynni gwynt ac ynni'r haul. Drwy gymorth lensys mae bwlb 35 wat y goleudy'n gallu cael ei weld 34 km i ffwrdd. Mae'n cael ei wasanaethu gan hofrennydd, a dyma'r mwyaf anghysbell o hyd o'r holl oleudai o amgylch arfordir Prydain.

### Factoid

The Smalls Lighthouse tragedy partially inspired both the [2016 British film](#) starring Mark Lewis Jones and Michael Jibson and the [2019 American film](#) starring Robert Pattinson and Willem Dafoe, both entitled *The Lighthouse*.

Trasiedi Goleudy'r Smalls oedd yr ysbrydoliaeth rannol ar gyfer [ffilm Brydeinig yn 2016](#) gyda Mark Lewis Jones a Michael Jibson a [ffilm Americanaidd yn 2019](#) gyda Robert Pattinson a Willem Dafoe, ill dwy o dan yr enw *The Lighthouse*.

It is possible to [take a boat trip](#) to the waters surrounding The Smalls.

Mae'n bosibl mynd ar [daith mewn cwch](#) i'r dyfroedd o gwmpas y Smalls.

It is also possible to get close to another lighthouse at [Strumble Head near Fishguard](#), which is set in dramatic coastal surroundings with an observation shelter close by for watching sea birds, seals and cetaceans. It's also the starting point for some of the finest coast path walking in North Pembrokeshire.

Mae hi hefyd yn bosibl mynd yn agos at oleudy arall ym [Mhen-caer ger Abergwaun](#), sy'n sefyll mewn amgylchoedd arfordirol dramatig gyda chysgodfa arsylwi gerllaw i wyllo adar môr, morloi a morfilod. Dyma'r man cychwyn hefyd ar gyfer rhai o'r teithiau cerdded arfordirol gorau yng Ngogledd Sir Benfro.

### Related Resources

Trinity House History, 'A Rock and a Hard Place: Storms, Death and Madness at the Smalls Lighthouse', 12 June 2013, archived at <https://perma.cc/VUP8-T89M>

*The Lighthouse* (2019 Film), Wikipedia, archived at <https://perma.cc/2WVE-4HP3>

The Lighthouse (2019 Film), Wikipedia, archived at <https://perma.cc/6M5K-8QAQ>

Phil Carradice, 'From the Skerries to the Smalls, the automation of Welsh lighthouses', *BBC Wales*, 30 September 2014, archived at <https://perma.cc/RLP4-MCYW>

### Official Website