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THE EIGHTEENTH-CENTURY FIFE FROM THE WRECK OF THE  
 GENERAL CARLETON OF WHITBY

In 1995 a team of divers from the Central (now National) Maritime Museum in Gdańsk discovered the wreck of a British merchant ship from the second half of the eighteenth century.<sup>1</sup> The ship, belonging to Nathaniel Campion of Whitby and afterwards to his widow Margaret, sailed primarily from England to the Baltic ports.<sup>2</sup> On 27<sup>th</sup> September 1785 a strong gale damaged the vessel near the village of Dąbki, by the Piaśnica estuary. The catastrophe was remembered by the local population in the form of a local legend, which helped the research team to find the wreck, designated as W-32.<sup>3</sup>

During the first season of the excavations operation, several well-preserved organic artefacts were found. The wreck was identified from the ship's bell, bearing an inscription with the vessel's name and the date the bell was cast: GENERAL CARLETON OF WHITBY 1777. The bell itself has been described in an article by Elżbieta Wróblewska included in a monograph of the shipwreck, and it will be mentioned here only briefly. Cast from bronze, it weighs 68.4 kg, and its clapper weighs 1.7 kg. Also preserved are its wooden headstock and the iron fittings that connected it to the belfry. Acoustic analysis fixed the bell's fundamental tone at b<sup>7</sup> (1951.5 Hz).<sup>4</sup>

On that fateful voyage, the General Carleton was transporting a cargo of tar and iron, which helped to preserve the artefacts: the spilled tar formed a shell, which protected the artefacts from seawater.<sup>5</sup> So the wood was not damaged or deformed. Those conditions allowed the divers to find another musical instrument, which happened to be a wooden fife.<sup>6</sup> It was lying in the south-eastern part of the wreck,

1 Waldemar Ossowski, 'Archaeological Underwater Excavation of Wreck W-32', in: *The General Carleton Shipwreck, 1785*, ed. Waldemar Ossowski, Gdańsk 2008, p. 50.

2 Stephen Baines, 'The History of General Carleton and of Some of Those Connected with Her', in: *The General Carleton Shipwreck*, op. cit., pp. 65–6.

3 W. Ossowski, op. cit., pp. 42–3.

4 Elżbieta Wróblewska, 'The Ship's Bell (1777)', in: *The General Carleton Shipwreck, 1785*, op. cit., pp. 151–158.

5 W. Ossowski, op. cit., p. 50.

6 National Maritime Museum in Gdańsk, inventory number: CMM/HŻ/3267.

behind the mainmast step, where most of the crew's personal belongings were discovered. It is in this area that the officers' quarters are often situated on sailing ships – a fact that could have led to the conclusion that the fife might have belonged to one of the officers, such as the captain, Nathaniel Hustler. However, as the wreck was lying in a coastal area, it was prone to substantial water movement in the direction of the coast. That may have transported the lighter artefacts towards the stern.<sup>7</sup> Therefore, one has to be extremely careful with conclusions based on the location of movable artefacts on the wreck.



Fig. 1. Fife from the W-32 shipwreck, National Maritime Museum in Gdańsk, inventory number: CMM/HŻ/3267. Photo: courtesy of Archive and Documentation Department, National Maritime Museum in Gdańsk.

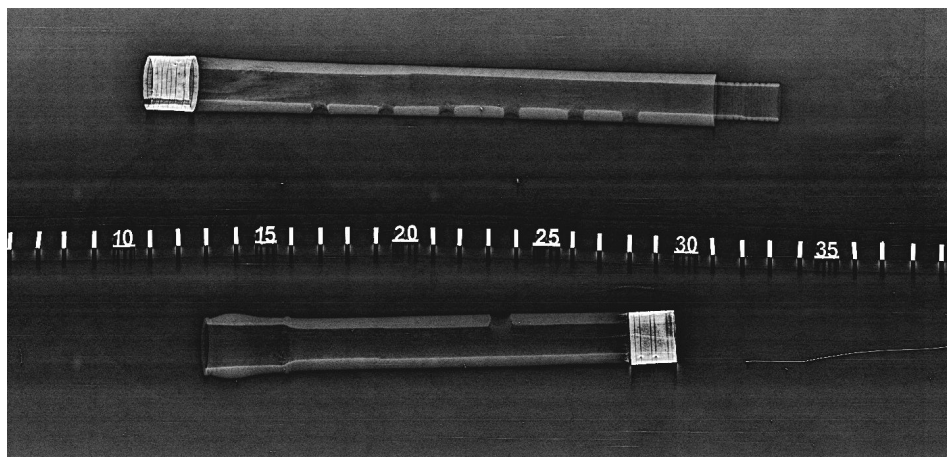


Fig. 2. Fife from the W-32 shipwreck, National Maritime Museum in Gdańsk, inventory number: CMM/HŻ/3267. Photo: courtesy of Conservation Department, National Maritime Museum in Gdańsk.

<sup>7</sup> W. Ossowski, *op. cit.*, pp. 57–58.

The fife is well preserved. After salvage, conservation work on this artefact lasted six months: it was cleaned from the aforementioned tar accretion, saturated in polyethylene glycol (PEG) 1500 and dried. The dimensions of the fife were not diminished by the conservation process. Both parts of the instrument are preserved. The longer one is a body, 215 mm long with six finger holes. Its foot end has an outward diameter of 18 mm and inward diameter of 10.5 mm, and it is fitted with a thin brass ferrule 14 mm wide decorated with three grooves. The other end has a 21 mm long inlet with an outer diameter of 13 mm. The head joint with embouchure hole is 160 mm long. Its end is also fitted with a 16 mm wide ferrule with circular grooves. The head end has an outward diameter of 17.6 mm and inward diameter of 10 mm. The joint is fitted with a barrel. An X-ray photograph confirmed the cylindrical cross section of the fife. The cork is not preserved. After assemblage, the total length of the instrument is 354 mm, and the distance between the embouchure hole and the foot end is approx. 294 mm.

The fife has been turned and carefully finished on its outer surface and on the inner side of the barrel. The other parts of the inner surface are rugged. The shape of the finger holes is irregular; it has not been established if this is an original feature or the result of the post-deposition processes or conservation. The instrument is slightly damaged, as the ferrule on the body is partly broken off. The wood species has not been identified; however, such fifes were made of boxwood or rosewood, with a cork of cork oak bark.

Notwithstanding its atypical two-part construction, it should be classified, according to the Anglo-Saxon nomenclature, as a fife, that is, 'a small cylindrical transverse Flute, but with a narrower bore and hence a louder, shriller sound than the flute proper'.<sup>8</sup>

The maker's marks are visible on the surface, under the embouchure hole and between the 3rd and the 4th finger holes. Both parts are signed:

C

SCHUCHART

The letter 'C' undoubtedly indicates the key. Fifes were marked in this way, according to their key, in the eighteenth century (by the Stanseby family, among others). The name indicates that the fife was made by John Just Schuchart or Charles Schuchart, with the dating suggesting Charles. He had a shop on Chandos Street in Covent Garden, London, called 'Two Flutes and Hautboy'.<sup>9</sup>

8 Howard Mayer Brown et. al., 'Fife', in: *Grove Music Online*, <https://doi.org/10.1093/gmo/9781561592630.article.09610>, accessed 13 August 2019.

9 David Lasocki, 'New Light on Eighteenth-Century English Woodwind Makers from Newspaper Advertisements', *The Galpin Society Journal* 63 (May 2010), pp. 73–142.



Fig. 3. Maker's marks: letter C above and SCHUCHART below: left (under the embouchure hole) and right (between the third and fourth finger holes).

Charles Schuchart (1720–65) was a son of the German immigrant John Just Schuchart, who settled in London and founded a woodwind instruments workshop there. Charles took up the profession after his father; as newspaper advertisements indicate, he sold 'German and common flutes'. Charles probably founded his own shop after a family quarrel, and between 1753 and 1758 father and son signed their instruments SCHUCHART/ SENIOR and SCHUCHART/ JUNIOR respectfully. After John's death, Charles used only the surname.<sup>10</sup> The signature on the described artefact seems complete, so the fife can be dated to the period 1759–65, which would mean that it was in use for at least twenty years.<sup>11</sup> Collections around the world include 8 recorders, 26 transverse flutes, 3 oboes, a clarinet and a bassoon from the workshops of father and son.<sup>12</sup> One of them is a flute from the Library of Con-

<sup>10</sup> Ibid., p. 91.

<sup>11</sup> It is worth noting, however, that some of the Schucharts' students may have been using that signature, as Waterhouse suggested based on artefacts dated to around 1800, see William Waterhouse, *The New Langwill Index. A Dictionary of Musical Wind-Instrument Makers and Inventors*, London 1993, p. 364.

<sup>12</sup> Christian Ahrens, 'The London Woodwind Instrument Maker John Jost Schuchart (Schuchardt)', *The Galpin Society Journal* 62 (April 2009), pp. 287–288.

Some of these instruments are digitised and can be searched online in the MIMO, MINIM, MIMEd and LOC collections: Library of Congress, inv. DCM 1183: John Just Schuchart, transverse flute, <https://www.loc.gov/item/dcmflute.1183/>, accessed 25 November 2019;

Library of Congress, inv. DCM 1233: Schuchart, transverse flute, <https://www.loc.gov/item/dcmflute.1233/>, accessed 25 November 2019;

Bate Collection, Oxford, inv. x11: John Just Schuchart, transverse flute, <http://minim.ac.uk/index.php/explore/?instrument=3416>, accessed 25 November 2019;

Bate Collection, Oxford, inv. X1152: John Just Schuchart, transverse flute, <http://minim.ac.uk/index.php/explore/?instrument=3427>, accessed 25 November 2019;

Bate Collection, Oxford, inv. 101: John Just Schuchart, transverse flute, <http://minim.ac.uk/index.php/explore/?instrument=3428>, accessed 25 November 2019;

Horniman Museum and Gardens, inv. 3989: Schuchart [Family], transverse flute, <http://minim.ac.uk/index.php/explore/?instrument=45988>, accessed 25 November 2019;

gress collection (cat. No. DCM 1233<sup>13</sup>), with the same signature font as the General Carleton fife, described as type (iii)<sup>14</sup> by Maurice Byrne and as type [e] in the New Langwill Index.<sup>15</sup> To date, searches for analogies for the W-32 fife have not yield any results. It is possible that there are no preserved analogies for this instrument, which enriches the known collection of the Schucharts' instruments by one fife.

Such fifes were used in marching bands and as signal instruments. The General Carleton was a trading vessel, yet the Royal Navy often used civilian vessels and pressed the sailors into service. The General Carleton sailed in naval service in 1782, taking part in the evacuation of British troops during the American Civil War.<sup>16</sup>

The war ended in 1783, which means that two years later, when the catastrophe happened, the crew was all civilian. The fife was used probably only for entertainment. In earlier periods, wind instruments were often used for regulating the rhythm of work, but the General Carleton had a crew of only eighteen people, who could probably have managed without additional sound tools. A regulating function was fulfilled primarily by the ship's bell, which was found on the wreck. It was used to signal the passage of time during the watch. Eight bell signals meant that a four-hour watch had ended. Time was measured with an hourglass, turned every thirty minutes, and signalled by the bell; the number of bell signals increased with each turn of the hourglass.<sup>17</sup> Boatswains used also 'bosun's calls' to pass orders.<sup>18</sup> Such a call may have been used aboard the General Carleton, but none was found on the shipwreck. It is doubtful that an instrument such as a traverse flute was used for that purpose, as the player uses both hands, which are needed for work or gesticulation. A fife could be used to accompany the singing of sea shanties. Such working songs are widely known in the English maritime tradition, and it is likely that music and song accompanied the crew of the General Carleton.

Museum of Army Music, inv. MAM:3: Schuchart [Family], transverse flute, <http://minim.ac.uk/index.php/explore/?instrument=43743>, accessed 25 November 2019; also [https://mimo-international.com/MIMO/doc/IFD/MINIM\\_UK\\_43743](https://mimo-international.com/MIMO/doc/IFD/MINIM_UK_43743), accessed 25 November 2019;

University of Edinburgh, inv. 14: Schuchart, flute, nominal pitch: C, <https://collections.ed.ac.uk/mimed/record/17242>, accessed 25 November 2019; also <http://minim.ac.uk/index.php/explore/?instrument=27393>, accessed 25 November 2019 and [https://mimo-international.com/MIMO/doc/IFD/MINIM\\_UK\\_UEDIN\\_14](https://mimo-international.com/MIMO/doc/IFD/MINIM_UK_UEDIN_14), accessed 25 November 2019;

Victoria and Albert Museum, inv. 287-1882: Johann Schuchart, treble recorder, <http://minim.ac.uk/index.php/explore/?instrument=15098>, accessed 25 November 2019;

13 Library of Congress, inv. DCM 1233: Schuchart, transverse flute, <https://www.loc.gov/item/dcmflute.1233/>, accessed 25 November 2019.

14 Maurice Byrne, 'Schuchart and the Extended Foot-Joint', *The Galpin Society Journal* 18 (March 1965), pp. 7-13.

15 W. Waterhouse, op. cit., pp. 363-364.

16 W. Ossowski, op. cit., pp. 79-85.

17 E. Wróblewska, op. cit., pp. 156-157.

18 Wendy Lawson, 'The Boatswain's Call: Its Role in the European Maritime Tradition', in: *Second Conference of the ICTM Study Group on Music Archaeology*, vol. I, *General Studies*, Stockholm 1986, pp. 131-140.

OSIEMNASTOWIECZNY *FIFE* Z WRAKU GENERAL CARLETON OF WHITBY

W 1995 r. nurkowie z Narodowego Muzeum Morskiego w Gdańsku odkryli wrak brytyjskiego statku handlowego z II poł. XVIII w., który zatonął w pobliżu wsi Dąbki u ujścia rzeki Piaśnicy. Wrak, oznaczony jako W-32, zidentyfikowano dzięki znalezionemu dzwonowi, na którym widnieje nazwa statku oraz data odlania: GENERAL CARLETON OF WHITBY 1777.

Podczas swojego ostatniego rejsu General Carleton przewoził ładunek żelaza i dziegiu. Ten drugi surowiec przyczynił się do doskonałego zakonserwowania zabytków drewnianych, tworząc skorupę chroniącą je przed wodą morską. Wśród licznych przedmiotów należących do załogi znaleziono drewniany flet poprzeczny, według nomenklatury angielskiej zwany *fife*. Zalegał on w południowo-wschodniej części wraku, za gniazdem grotmasztu, gdzie znajdowało się najwięcej przedmiotów należących do marynarzy. Przypuszczalnie była to własność jednego z oficerów.

*Fife* zachował się w bardzo dobrym stanie. Pomimo nietypowej dwuczęściowej budowy, identyfikację instrumentu potwierdziło zdjęcie rentgenowskie, ukazujące jego charakterystyczny cylindryczny przekrój. Flety tego rodzaju odznaczają się wąską średnicą, a w grze ostrzejszym i wyższym dźwiękiem w porównaniu do pozostałych fletów poprzecznych.

Na powierzchni instrumentu, poniżej otworu zadęciowego oraz pomiędzy trzecim i czwartym otworem palcowym, widoczna jest sygnatura wytwórcy. Wskazuje ona na warsztat Charlesa Schucharta (1720–65), który posiadał sklep pod nazwą „Two Flutes and Hautboy” przy Chandois Street, Covent Garden w Londynie. Ponad nazwiskiem umieszczono literę C informującą o stroju instrumentu.

Typ sygnatury wskazuje, że *fife* powstał pomiędzy 1759 a 1765 rokiem. Wśród zachowanych w światowych kolekcjach instrumentów sygnowanych przez Johna Justa Schucharta i Charlesa Schucharta znajduje się osiem fletów prostych, dwadzieścia sześć poprzecznych, trzy oboje, klarnet i fagot. Instrument z wraku statku General Carleton wzbogaca ten zbiór o prawdopodobnie jedyny jak dotąd *fife*.

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