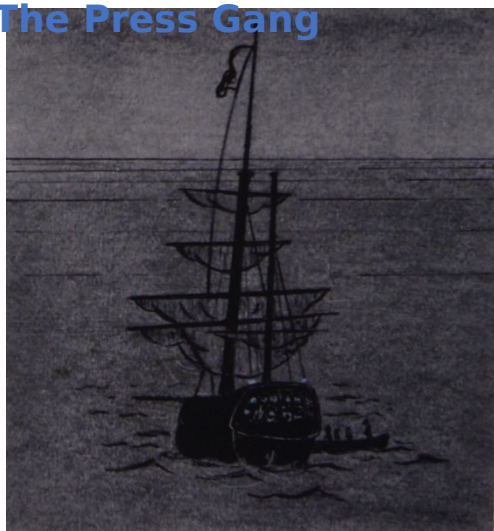


Coracle Stories

The Press Gang



To '**press gang**' was to take men by force into the Navy. It was forced recruitment into the forces.

They would normally pick on suitable men who had good sea skills and were of good seagoing ways.

The coracle men would have been exactly the sort of men they were looking for.

At the start of the 17th Century, one of the King's war ships anchored outside the sand banks at the mouth of the River Towy. That afternoon a boat full of seamen rowed from the ship to land on **Llansteffan** beach. They said they wanted to buy fresh food for the captain. After drinking enough beer to loosen their tongues, it came out that the real purpose of the ship was to send a press gang up the Towy later that night to grab hold of a dozen men from Carmarthen and take them back to the ship.

One of the **Carmarthen** boys happened to be in the pub and jumped on his horse, and within half an hour was able to warn the Carmarthen men. At this time there were at least two hundred nets being worked in the Towy. There would have been four hundred men for the Press Gang to deal with. These were hard men, popular for their persistence when it came to fight.

An ambush was prepared for the Press Gang. In the dead of night one of the king's longboats left the ship, and went up with the tide towards Carmarthen, the rowers were confident that their work was to be simple and easy. But they had fooled themselves! Suddenly, out of the darkness came swarm after swarm of men armed with boat hooks, clubs, oars with their front end sharpened like knives, stones were thrown, anything that could hurt the came in their direction. The coraclers charged screaming in a language that the '**Press Gang**' had never heard before! The King's men must have believed that they were under attack from men from the Middle Ages.

The '**Press Gang**' managed to turn their boat around to face the sea. There was not to be an easy escape: many men from the town had hidden in the bushes and had let the 'Press Gang' up the river. But when the King's men came back down the river the side of river came alive with