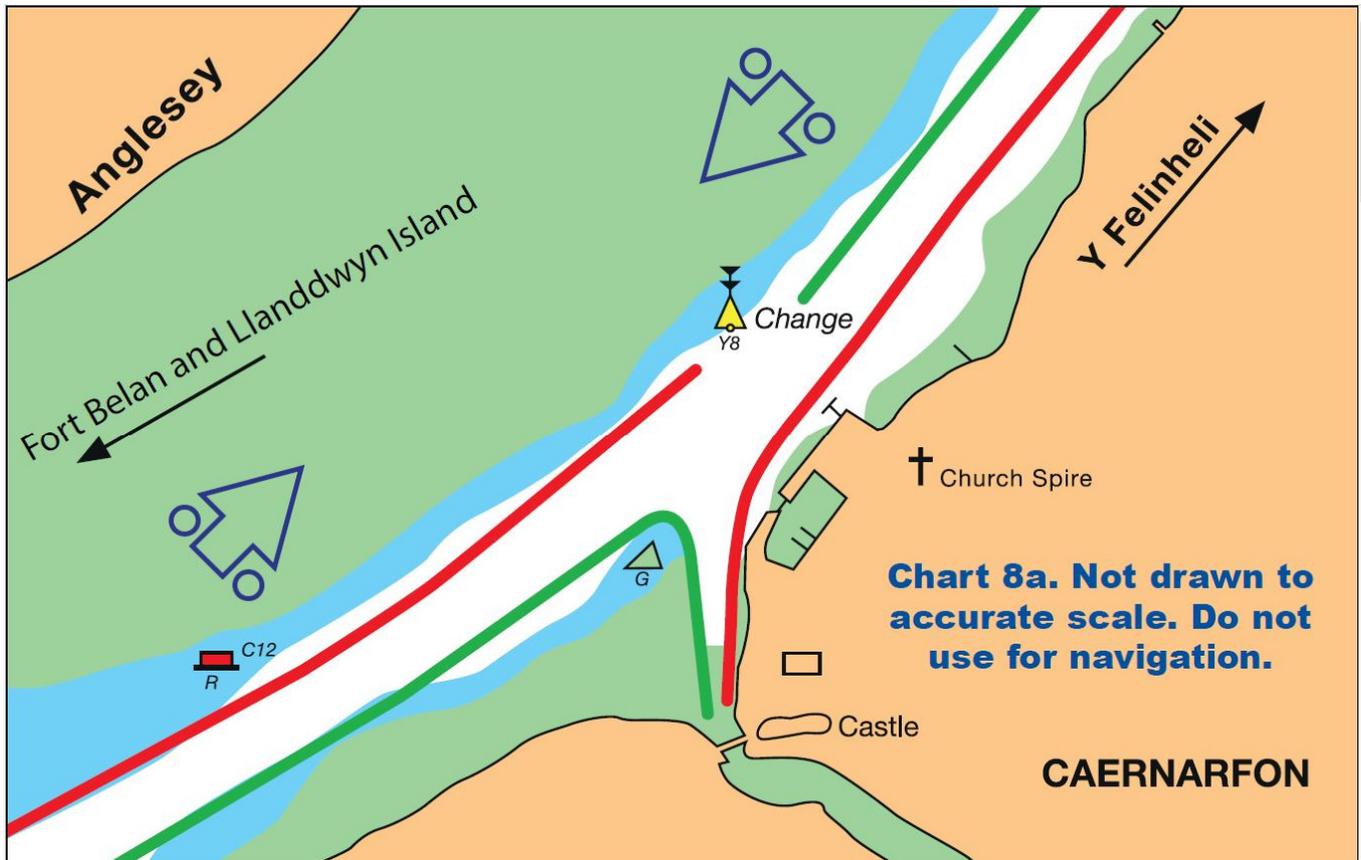


Menai Buoyage



The buoyage system through the Menai Strait is unusual and can cause confusion, especially around the Caernarfon area. For navigational purposes, Caernarfon harbour is regarded as the 'head of navigation' for the whole of the Menai Strait. Vessels approaching Caernarfon harbour from either the south-west or the north-east follow the normal navigation rules of red to port (left), green to starboard (right) all the way to the quayside by the castle. Confusion arises for those boats that are simply passing the entrance to Caernarfon harbour, as they sail or motor along the length of the Menai Strait. There is a south-cardinal buoy moored off Caernarfon, towards the Anglesey side of the seaway.

Look for the church in Caernarfon with a very prominent steeple and the buoy is moored (at $53^{\circ} 08.800'N$, $004^{\circ} 16.770'W$) on the opposite (northern) side of the channel. The buoy is painted in the normal colours of yellow over black to indicate a south-cardinal marker, but the most significant, and not immediately obvious, piece of navigational information is the word '**CHANGE**' written on the buoy. This position, the 'CHANGE' buoy, is where the two routes into Caernarfon meet. Unfortunately, this south-cardinal buoy appears simply to be a warning indicator for the sandbanks and, as the wording on it is not always visible, boat-handlers may not immediately recognise its additional significance, that of 'Changing over' the direction of buoyage.



The 'Change' buoy at low-tide

Suppose we launch our boat at Y Felinheli (Port Dinorwic) slipway and wish to dive at Llanddwyn Island. Initially, we will be travelling in a south-westerly direction towards Caernarfon, with red to port (left) and green to starboard (right). Once we reach the 'CHANGE' buoy, we will pass the entrance to Caernarfon harbour. From now on, our south-westerly passage will be away from the 'head of navigation', so it will be red to starboard (right), green to port (left). The same rules apply as we approach and pass the 'CHANGE' buoy on our return from Llanddwyn. Ignore this navigational oddity at your peril, as you could easily run on to a sandbank as you pass one or more channel-buoys on the wrong side!



The 'Change' buoy

Even after a careful explanation while travelling down the Menai Strait, I have still known several coxswains misunderstand the system and run into shallow water.

Just as alarming, every other passenger on the boat has been quite oblivious of the danger, and so failed to warn the coxswain that the boat was about to run aground!

In short, don't forget to CHANGE at Caernarfon

The Menai Strait has the advantage of being well sheltered from the wind, providing a large expanse of relatively calm water when weather conditions are too severe to take a boat on the open sea. However, localised rough seas and overfalls are present, especially when wind and tide are in opposite directions.

Take great care when taking a boat through the narrow channels at Belan, the Swellies, or at Penmon, near Puffin Island