

*A wee bit
of maritime
history... 19*



FREE

Portaferry in the 1700s



**In a quarter league stands the market town
of Portaferry, where great barks do anchor,
and at low ebb lye dry, and as much sea further
brings great ships up to a Land's end called
Ballyhendry point, giving them under shelter
thereof a spacious harbour, safe from the
North and East winds' fury.**

William Montgomery -1683

From the year 1700 Portaferry grew rapidly and many industries flourished. By 1780 fifteen ships belonged to Portaferry and many others traded with the town. Imports included coal, timber, iron, and flax.

'For a century or so Portaferry was a busy thriving coastal town full of master mariners, shipowners and shipbuilders, ropemakers and ships' chandlers. Its fishermen too flourished: sand smelt were sold in Belfast as 'Portaferry chicken.'

A distillery, a brewery, a watermill, a salt works and a windmill were built. There was a bleach green, a ropeworks, a tobacco factory, a malt house, a tan yard which could cope with over 2000 hides, a linen market, a kelp industry and three shipbuilding yards.

There were weekly fairs and trading took place to Irish, British and foreign markets. Linen was carried regularly between Portaferry and Chester.



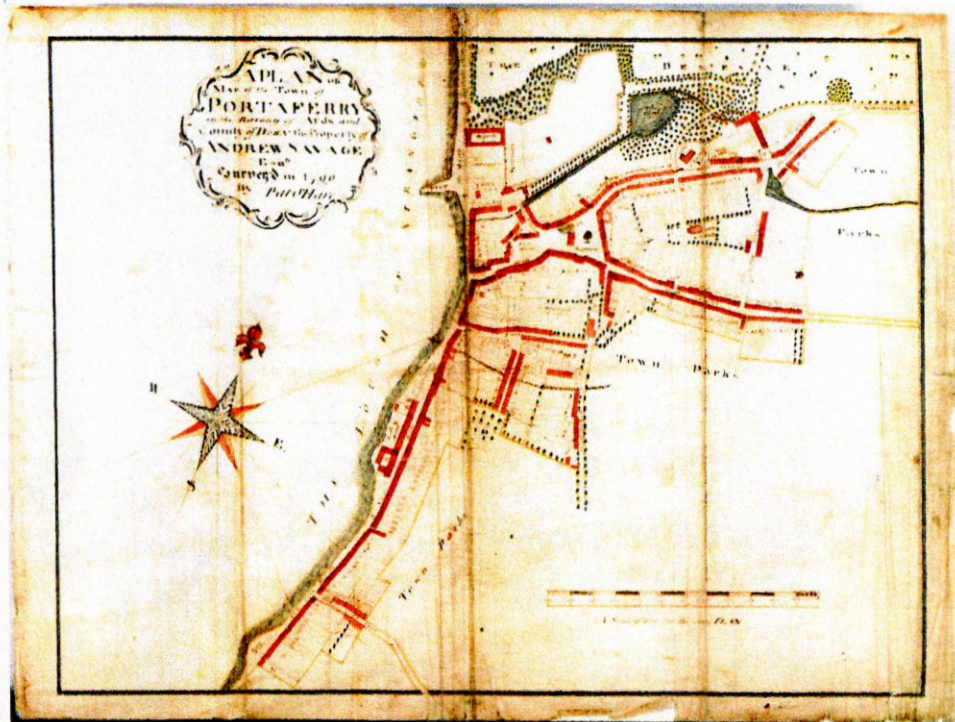
To accommodate the wealthy merchants and master mariners who came to live in Portaferry grand houses were built along the shore, in Ferry Street and The Square and can still be seen in the town today.

As was written in The Life and Times of Reverend John Orr:

'In the mercantile Ireland of that day Portaferry was a name to be conjured with. Its ships were found on every sea, and the wind could blow from no point of the compass without bringing our sailors home.

Its captains crossed the Western ocean and rounded the Cape to furnish English and Irish homes with the spoils of two Continents.

Its vessels carried emigrants from the County Down to the El Dorados of the Western world and timber vessels discharged the logs of Quebec in front of our town.'



This 1799 map shows the extent to which the town had grown in the 1700s and, as the 1800s began, where the three shipyards were operating in Portaferry.

1802

“the largest vessel ever built in Ireland”

On Tuesday last (6th April) there was launched from the dockyard of Captain Edward Conway of Portaferry, the ship **BESS** of 500 tons burthen and upwards, the property of George Mathews of Springvale and Capt. John Downey of Portaferry.

‘This ship is esteemed by judges as one of the handsomest merchant vessels ever built in Ireland and is intended for a West Indian trader.’

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