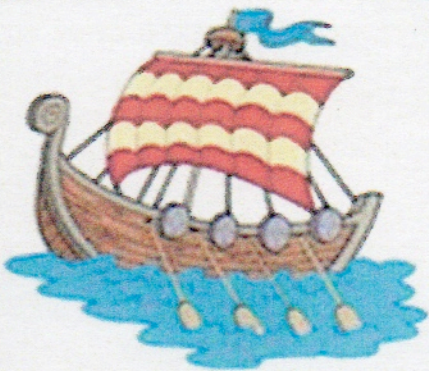


FREE

A wee bit of maritime history... 12



The Strangford Ferry



Archaeologists suggest that the early Irish settled all around what they called **Lough Cuan** and that they often crossed the lough from the peninsula to the mainland. The Viking raiders who gradually settled around the lough brought a change of name to "**Strangfjörðr**" and established a base in the early to mid tenth century.

John de Courcy arrived in Ireland in 1171 and William Le Savage, the founder of the Portaferry dynasty, was among his knights. In 1180 de Courcy granted all ferries in his possession to the abbey in Downpatrick, with the '**exception of the one that plied between Strangford and Portaferry**' - so we know that the route was a well-established one.

In 1611 James I granted a 'quarter' of land on either side of the Lough to a Peirce Tumolton to maintain **'a strong ferry boat and four able ferrymen for the transport of men, horses, and other cattle and oxen.'**

In 1629 Lord Clandeboye handed responsibility for the service to Valentine Payne and made Tumolty responsible for maintaining a boat for the use of Patrick Savage.

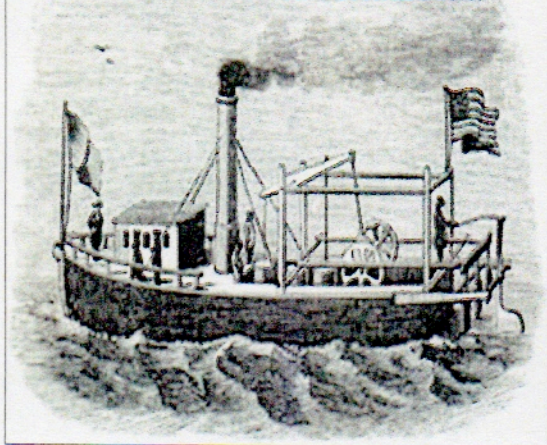
These ferry boats probably crossed from **Bankmore**, south of Portaferry, to the townland of **Ferry Quarter** south of Strangford village. The traces of the stone dykes used to offer shelter on the cleared beach area at Bankmore can still be seen today at very low tides. The ferry slips at Portaferry and Strangford came much later.

In 1835, to improve the ferry service, the Portaferry and Strangford Steamboat Company was formed by a group of local businessmen, Thomas Gelston, William McCleery and John and James Maxwell. They ordered a new steamer, **Lady of the Lake**, which was launched from Alexander McLaine's shipyard in Bel-

fast in May 1836. Built expressly to ply between Portaferry and Strangford, it was to offer, **'A safe and comfortable passage every 15 minutes.'**

This ambitious and innovative scheme, which used the first steam ferry in Ireland, was not a commercial success and the steamboat was sold at auction.

A similar American steamboat.



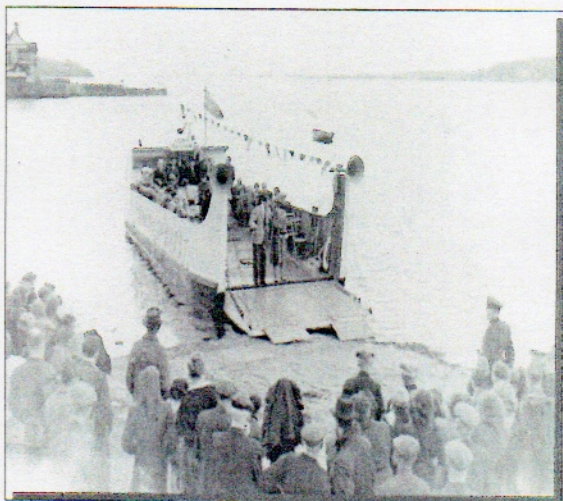
The ferry link once again reverted to smaller local boats powered by oar and sail. They included the horse ferry, the cattle ferry and passenger boats. All were manned by local people who waited to ferry folk and animals across.



Despite a variety of ferry boats crossing the Narrows including some early 'motor boats', those attempting the voyage complained about the speed and unreliability of the service.

After WW2 two motorised landing craft were acquired to make the ferry link more formal and efficient. The ferry service was officially launched by Lady Nugent of Portaferry House on June 1st 1946, pictured below.

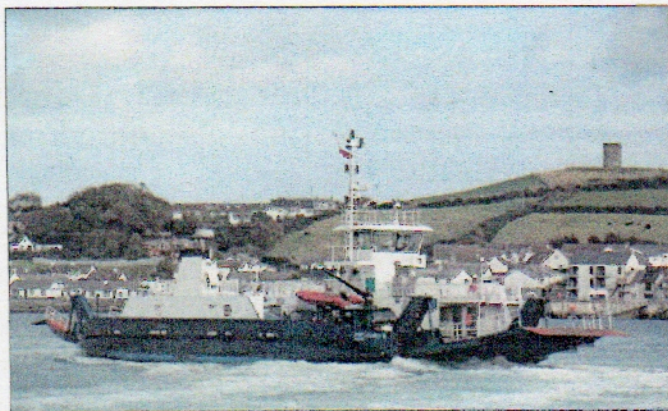
The new service ferried cars and passengers from Strangford to Portaferry in what was viewed as a modern and safe way. Unfortunately, this was not to be the case and disaster struck in 1947 when the **Malcolm** capsized and one man died. The ferry service returned to using local men and boats.



It was not until 1969 that cars were again formally transported across The Narrows between Portaferry and Strangford. Down County Council took over the running of the ferry, a new slipway was built and on 15th August 1969 the **MV Strangford ferry** came into service. It was built by the Verolme Shipyard in Cork.

In 1975 the Welsh ferry **Cleddau King** was purchased and used as reserve ferry under the name **MV Portaferry Ferry**. In 2001, a new vessel named **MV Portaferry II** was brought into service, relegating **MV Strangford** to a support role and releasing the **MV Portaferry Ferry** for disposal.

A second new vessel, **MV Strangford II**, was delivered in 2016 but her introduction was delayed until February of the following year when it was discovered that she was unable to discharge cars at high tide. In 2021 the **Strangford II** and the **Portaferry II** were both in service.



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