

FREE

A wee bit of maritime history... 9



The Portaferry and Strangford Steamboat Company



**The first steam
ferry in Ireland:
36 years before
Belfast had one on
the Lagan!**

Draft memorandum of the Portaferry and Strangford Steamboat Company 1835

The said parties have agreed to form a company and co-partnership for the purpose of running one or more steamboats between Portaferry and Strangford...and have resolved that the capital stock of the said co-partnership shall for the present be a clear sum of one thousand pounds (£1000)...to be comprised of two hundred shares after the rate of five pounds per share.

Andrew Nugent, **Portaferry**, Co. Down.

Patrick John Nugent, **Portaferry**, Co. Down,

William McCleery, Jnr, **Portaferry**, Co. Down, Merchant,
Conyngham Mill, **Portaferry**, Co. Down, 1st part.

Jas. Brown Warnock, **Portaferry**, Co. Down, Merchant,

William Anderson, **Portaferry**, Co. Down,

John Maxwell, **Portaferry**, Co. Down, Merchant,

Thomas Henderson, **Strangford**, Co. Down,

William Russell, **Strangford**, Shipbroker,

James Maxwell, **Portaferry**, Co. Down, Merchant, 2nd part.

Hugh Bowden, **Portaferry**, Co. Down, 3rd part.

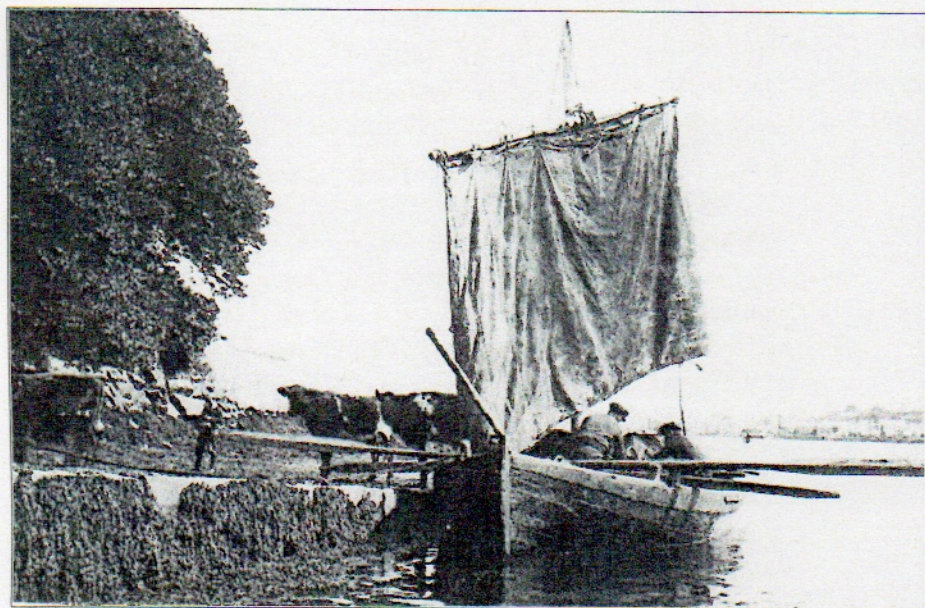
Thomas Gelston **Portaferry**, Co. Down, Merchant.

On May 29th 1836 a new steamer, *the Lady of the lake*, was launched from Alexander McLaine's shipyard in Belfast. She was built expressly to ply between Portaferry and Strangford. The ferry was to be 62 feet long and 13 feet wide and paid for by a company consisting of gentry about the country.

On May 29, 1836, the Belfast Commercial Chronicle reported:

"The inconvenience and delay hitherto felt in crossing Strangford Lough will now be removed by a safe and comfortable passage every 15 minutes, and will afford to all who travel an opportunity to visit a beautiful and interesting part of the country."

It was hoped that the new steam ferry would greatly reduce the amount of time that was taken to transport livestock between Portaferry and Strangford. Local farmers reported that it was often a day's work just to ferry a dozen cattle across the lough in the cattle boat and that several men were needed to stay with them on both sides while the journeys were made.



The maiden voyage of the *Lady of the Lake* took place on the day of the boat's arrival in Portaferry on June 18 1836 after the marriage of Selina, eldest daughter of Andrew Nugent of Portaferry House and granddaughter of Viscount de Vesci, to James Stronge, son of Sir James Stronge of Tynan Abbey Co. Armagh. The ceremony was performed in Ardquin Church by the bride's uncle, Rev. William Savage. Newspaper reports stated:

"After the ceremony the company partook of a splendid dejeuner at Portaferry House. At three o'clock the happy couple embarked on board the beautiful new steamer Lady of the Lake, which had just arrived from Belfast only two hours before. They sailed amidst a salute of artillery from the old castle, Windmill Hill, and the steamer, on their route to Narrow Water House, the seat of Rodger Hall, Esq., to spend their honeymoon."

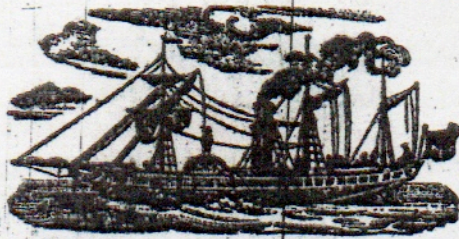
A number of letters appeared in the press expressing appreciation of the boat's services and mention is made in one of them that she could take across a horse and chaise. The venture, however, was not successful and three years later had amassed great debts. At a meeting in May 1839 it was agreed to put her up for sale.



MEETING

Of the Proprietors of the Lady of the Lake Steamer.

A GENERAL MEETING of the Proprietors of the *Lady of the Lake*, Steamer, will be held in the MARKET-HOUSE, PORTAFERRY, on Wednesday next, the 8th instant, precisely at 12 o'clock, noon, in order that they may assent to, or dissent from, the said Vessel being immediately disposed of by Auction, in order to liquidate the debt with which said Vessel is now burthened.
Portaferry, 2d May, 1839.



STEAMER, LADY OF THE LAKE.

A GENERAL MEETING of the PROPRIETORS of the *LADY of the LAKE*, will be held in the MARKET-HOUSE, PORTAFERRY, on MONDAY next, the 19th instant, precisely at ELEVEN o'Clock, for the purpose of taking into consideration the necessity of disposing of said Boat by Auction, at as early a day as may be thought advisable, and for transacting any other business that may come before them.

Portaferry, 16th August, 1839.

Unsuccessful in Portaferry, the *Lady of the Lake* was sold to the legendary engineer William Dargan. He was the chief contractor on the Ulster Canal project and brought the steam ferry to Lough Erne in 1842.

She was renamed the *Countess of Erne* and caused amazement when she arrived on Lough Neagh to tie in with the rest of his fleet, which was towing barges from Newry.

Soon after, though, she was dismantled and delivered, on the afternoon of Friday 23 December 1842, to Wattlebridge on Lough Erne. Her arrival was greeted with great excitement.



The
Community Foundation
for Northern Ireland

This leaflet is produced
by Portaferry and
Strangford Trust.



www.portaferryandstrangfordtrust.org