

FREE

A wee bit of maritime history... 38



Maritime Snippets from the Jim Blaney Collection

August 9. 1902.

HISTORIC PORTAFERRY BOAT.

A very curious old boat arrived at Whitehaven the other day from Strangford Lough. She has an extraordinary history. At one time, a hundred years ago, the vessel sailed regularly from Portaferry to Whitehaven, and was then called the Portaferry frigate; and afterwards the name of the Three Sisters was bestowed upon her. But, most extraordinary of all, it is solemnly alleged that she was used in 1689, at the siege of Londonderry, to carry provisions up the famous Lough Foyle in those stirring times. If this be so, and the statement seems to be founded upon fact, the Three Sisters is the oldest vessel in actual use. The antiquarians, who have been devoting time to studying up the history of this remarkable vessel, state that a curious privilege was given to her more than a hundred years ago. She is permitted to come into Liverpool port, to use all 'the wharings and piers,' without the payment of any quay or pier dues.



MARCH 7 1908

There is no more madcap month Portaferry. in the year than March, and we have still the stormy weather that began towards the end of February, the same keen, cold winds, and wild tossing seas. Off the headlands vessels apparently in distress have been observed. Yesterday intelligence was received to the effect that two schooners had been driven ashore on the Louth coast. Probably, therefore, there is some salvage work in store for Mr. M'Causland, who is at present engaged with a couple of tugs in raising the Belfast Harbour Commissioners' tug, Musgrave, which was sunk in Belfast Lough the other day.

JANUARY 12 1905

IT MAY not be commonly known that Mr. James M'Causland, of Ballyhenry-house, Portaferry, is on the Admiralty list of salvage contractors. He has had the offer of a lucrative engagement to raise sunken warships in the Yellow Sea, which local business exigencies alone prevented him from accepting. Mr. M'Causland has successfully undertaken many difficult and arduous salvage operations round our coasts. Only recently the breaking up of three discarded and dismantled warships, purchased by him from the Admiralty, provided employment for a considerable number of men in Portaferry.

JANUARY 2 1909

About 11 p.m. on the 26th ult. Portaferry. Sergeant Reynolds and Constable Ledwith heard shouts from the direction of the dock. On hastening thither, they found that Peter Grant, engineer on the tug, Susan M'Causland, had fallen into the dock between the little quay and the s.s. Duke of Edinburgh, which was lying alongside, and that a companion, Andrew Rogan, had descended into the dock to try to rescue him. The night was pitch dark, nor was the lamp at the end of the dock lighted. Until he obtained a lifebelt and rope, Sergeant Reynolds rolled his cape, and Rogan gave one end to Grant and Constable Ledwith held the other end above. When the rope was brought, Rogan tied it round Grant, and the police hauled him safely to the quay, the process being repeated in Rogan's turn. Meanwhile, Mr. H. M'Grath and some members of his family arrived and rendered valuable assistance. It was found that John Maxwell, a diver in Mr. M'Causland's employment, had his foot jammed between a beam of wood and the quay, from which dangerous position he was duly extricated. Mr. and Mrs. H. M'Grath extended generous hospitality to rescued and rescuers. Grant received a slight injury to his leg, but the wonder is how he escaped being killed, and certainly the greatest credit is due to Rogan. The place in question is a veritable death-trap; it is insufficiently lighted, and a plank which was along the side of the quay has been removed, rendering it very dangerous for anyone going on board or leaving a boat.

AUGUST 3 1912.

Portaferry. A sturdy personality, Mr. William John Murdoch, one of the stokers of the ill-fated Titanic, sojourned last week with his sister, Mrs. James H. Finnigan, at Ballyherley. To his friends he has recounted his experiences in the tremendous tragedy which united the British and American peoples in a common sorrow over the waste of sea. At the moment of the ship's impact with the berg Murdoch was on deck for a breather. He agrees that there was no general realisation of immediate danger. For not only had years of immunity from serious marine disaster engendered a sense of security, but the Titanic, the last word in shipbuilding, was supposed to be unsinkable. Soon, however, disillusionment came. Murdoch assisted the women and children to safety, and he bears out all that has been said of the chief officer's unflinching courage. 'Can't you die like a Britisher?' said the officer to one man trying to burst through the press of frightened women. The last boat was a cable length off when Murdoch jumped overboard at the order of Captain Smith, and it was some time before he was picked up. He confirms the story of Captain Smith rescuing a baby in the water, and himself refusing to be taken into one of the boats.

With his wife, Mr. Roland Crangle, one of the foremost lawyers in Buffalo, is now on a visit to Ballyquinton, his native place, after an absence of seven years. It is hardly too much to say that Mr. Crangle deserves a niche in such a gallery as that of Smiles. Emigrating as a mere lad, he worked hard and studied hard, until he qualified for the Bar. Some men are great because their compeers are little; but Mr. Crangle has risen to a recognised position in a wealthy, populous city.

The Pension Sub-Committee met on Thursday evening at the dispensary, Mr. R. O. Young, J.P., in the chair, Dr. M'Donald, Messrs. F. Little, J.P., H. M'Grath, and P. Monan, with Mr. J. M'Grath, secretary. Four claims were considered, and the maximum was voted to John O'Prey, High-street, Ellen Dorrian, Church-street, and Robert Baird, Ballycranbeg, while Charles Savage, Ballygelagh, failed, as being under age.

Messrs. W. and A. M'Mullan, Ltd., are hard hit by the official embargo on straw and hay, as they have 300 tons of hay in bales ready for shipment to Glasgow. They have invoked the aid of Captain Craig, M.P., for exemption, and that gentleman was prompt to reply that he would do his utmost.

Mr. James M'Causland, whose maritime salvage activities are well known, has begun operations at Ballycastle to refloat the s.s. Templemore, which foundered there during one of the heavy gales of last winter.



AUGUST 10 1912.

Portaferry. An enterprising resident of Portaferry has taken up a new project—a motor boat to ply between Portaferry and Strangford, and available also for picnic parties. The launch will take place to-day; the maiden trip on Monday. Of 8ft. beam and 28ft. long, the boat is fitted with a 15-h.p. 4-cylinder motor engine, and will comply with all the Board of Trade regulations. She will be capable of facing all weather, and will be commanded by an old and experienced ferryman in the person of Mr. James Nelson, admittedly one of the best boatmen on Strangford Lough. The wonder is that a mechanically propelled boat has not been put on the ferry long ago. No doubt the sailing craft in use are safe and sound, and the ferrymen are hardy, seasoned fellows, with a record undimmed by serious accident of any kind. But during heavy winter storms the service becomes hazardous and casual. It must be to the public advantage, therefore, to have a boat designed to defy all such conditions.

Summer League football this week was eventful, for Portaferry United, after accounting for Ballyhalbert Amateurs on Saturday, 5-0, sustained their first reverse this season, 2-1, on Thursday, viz., from Slans United, on the ground of the latter. The Slans players wore crape armbands in respect for the memory of their president, Mr. E. Monan, who died rather unexpectedly on Tuesday.

The Reliance motor 'bus, travelling from Portaferry to Newtownards on Tuesday evening, near Mountstewart, had to swerve suddenly to avoid cart traffic, so that the 'bus collided with a tree, with the result that a Belfast 'commercial,' Mr. John O'Neill, occupying an overhead seat, was struck by one of the branches of the tree with such violence that his head was cut and one of his ribs broken.

On Wednesday evening, as Mrs. Trainor and three other friends were driving to the funeral of the late Mr. Edward Monan, the shaft of the trap broke, and the party were precipitated on to the road. The horse received serious injuries, and had to be attended by Mr. Gilmore, V.S.

A Belfast motor party visited Portaferry on Tuesday. In returning at Corrog, in trying to avoid a pony and trap, the motor swerved over the ditch into a field. The wheels of the car were smashed, but the occupants mercifully got off with a severe shaking.

Died 5th August.

* Son of Thomas Monan Ballyshilleek

MARCH 1 1913.

STRANGFORD FERRY.

DEMAND FOR IMPROVED SERVICE.

On Thursday evening, in the courthouse, Portaferry, a public meeting was held in support of the movement, initiated by Mr. H. M'Grath at the meeting of Down County Council on 13th February, when Mr. B. N. Johnson, solicitor to the Council, engaged to look into an old charter of James I., charging on the owners of certain townlands the cost of a ferry between Portaferry and Strangford, to see whether the County Council had power to provide a new horseboat more in conformity with modern requirements than the existing one, leaving the present owners to subsidise the service on the current rate of contribution.

General Montgomery, D.L., representative of the Portaferry division on the County Council, took the chair, on the motion of Mr. J. Greer, J.P., seconded by Mr. D. Ker, J.P., and explained the purpose of the meeting.

Mr. Ker briefly sketched the history, dating back some 300 years, of what was known as the horse-boat, but he and everyone he came in contact with considered it too cumbersome and slow, and altogether inadequate for the traffic of to-day.

Major Head, J.P., one of the parties liable by the charter for the maintenance of the service, said on behalf of himself and those associated with him that they were prepared to continue the amount of their present contributions towards a more up-to-date service.

Mr. Daniel Rice, cattle-dealer, as a user of the boat for conveying for him about 50 cattle annually from Portaferry to Strangford complained of the tremendous time lost in making the passage. The boat carried only eight or nine large beasts, and if he had say 40 or 50 head on the slip, as he had last week, an entire day was spent in getting them across. Moreover, the boat was not a safe one for cattle. He recommended a motor boat that could cross in ten or fifteen minutes instead of one or two hours under the present system.

Messrs. H. M'Grath, F. Little, J.P., and D. Wilson shared in the discussion.

Mr. Little moved, Mr. Wilson seconded, and it was resolved, 'That the present system of transit for horses, cattle, and so forth between Portaferry and Strangford is antiquated and insufficient for the traffic of to-day.'

On Mr. M'Grath's motion, seconded by Mr. J. Moreland, the following committee were appointed to draw up a memorial to be signed for presentation to the County Council: Messrs. J. Elliott, jr., J. Greer, A. Kirkpatrick, F. Little, H. M'Grath, J. M'Mechan, W. M'Mullan, J. Moreland, D. Wilson, and D. Ker, hon. secretary.

SEPTEMBER 9 1916

A handsome monument has recently been placed in Ballyphilip churchyard to the memory of Mr. John David Sumner, R.N. Chief gunner in command of a torpedo boat, he was drowned in a collision off Gibraltar on 1st November. He belonged to naval families both by his father's side and his mother's side of the house. Two of his maternal uncles were captains in the Navy, namely, the late Captain James M'Cullen, R.N., and the late Captain Frank M'Cullen, R.N., both of Portaferry. His only surviving maternal uncle is Mr. C. A. E. M'Cullen, R.N., chief officer coast-guards, retired. Commander Sumner's father was also a Navy man. The memorial is an oblong slab of polished grey granite, chamfered on the sides and ends, resting on a strong supporting plinth of patent axed granite, with broad projecting splay. It bears the following inscription in block letters, deeply incised and finished with gold: 'In loving memory of John David Sumner, R.N., who gave his life for his King and country while in command of H.M. torpedo boat at Gibraltar. He entered the higher life and service on the 1st November, 1915, aged 42 years.' 'Dulce et decorum est pro patria mori.' 'God is love.' The memorial was designed and executed by Messrs. S. and T. Hastings, sculptors, Downpatrick.

NOVEMBER 25 1916

How many ocean ships and coast-ferrys, steam and sailing, have come to grief on the Ards coast in the last ten years? The schooner, Village Belle, owned by Mr. John Drysdale, and bound for Killyleagh with a cargo of coal, was driven on to the beach at Cloughy on the afternoon of the 17th inst., and became a total wreck.

Messrs. M'Causland & Montgomery have been entrusted with the salvaging of the s.s. Connemara, which sank off Greenore. They are at present engaged salvaging the cargo of the barque Frieda.



SEPTEMBER 8 1917.



Grave fears are entertained as to **Portaferry.** the safety of the crew of the ketch, Command, owned by Mr. George Dynes. She left Maryport on Monday evening, 27th August, with a cargo of 45 tons of coal for Portaferry. She was accompanied by the ketch Suzannah, of which Hugh Dodds is master. Fearful weather was experienced, during which the Command was lost sight of, and the Suzannah arrived at Portaferry on the evening of 28th August. Since then there has been no trace of the Command. The crew consisted of Robert Gibson, master, and his grandson, Michael Gibson, 13 years, both of Shore-street, and his brother-in-law, Thos. Cowan, Back-lane.

SEPTEMBER 4 1920

Why the Glendalough, a small **Portaferry.** wooden steamship, formerly a barge, 275 tons gross, valued at £19,000, had total insurances on her of £61,800 when, on a voyage last March from London to Belfast with a cargo of wooden blocks and barrels of pitch, she was wrecked off Ballyquinton Point, constituted one of the points of a Board of Trade inquiry opened at Cardiff this week. The Glendalough was owned by the Talbot Company, Swansea, of which Mr W. J. Jones is managing owner. Captain Hall, a former master of the Dorothy Talbot, also owned by the Talbot Company, gave evidence of a conversation in an hotel bed-room at Whitby. Captain Plummer, who was the master of the Glendalough when she was lost, was present, and also Mr D. J. Rees, secretary of the Company. Mr Rees said they had had 'so much trouble and expense with the vessel that it would be better if she was lost. It would be worth four figures both to Captain Plummer and the witness.' The witness replied that he would have nothing to do with the sinking of any ship. Captain Plummer, in a conversation with the witness's wife on the following day, said that he also had made up his mind that he would have nothing to do with the sinking of a ship. The inquiry has not concluded.

Following Jim Blaney's death on 31st December 2014, his family kindly donated much of his extensive archive to the Portaferry and Strangford Trust. It is currently stored in 120 containers ranging from box files to large storage boxes. The topic areas are mainly maritime - shipwrecks, lightvessels, local seamen and their families - and also cover local history. It includes numerous notebooks, copies of documents and newspaper articles, original correspondence, photographs and 35mm photographic slides. Portaferry and Strangford Trust hopes to digitise this valuable resource and make it available to the public by 2027.



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