



OLD DAYS, OLD WAYS:

Slow boat to Liverpool

Brendan Matthews charts the history of the Town (2010)

The following extract is taken from the book, Irish Passenger Steamship Services Volume 2 by DB McNeill, which was published back in 1971.

'In the late 1840s, there was a daily service between Drogheda and Liverpool. This was worked by the Drogheda Steam Packet Company, which was founded in 1826 and taken over by the Lancashire and Yorkshire Railway in September of 1902.

'The service first opened on November 26th 1826, when the paddle steamer, Town of Drogheda, sailed for Liverpool which was reached some 14 hours later. For the next three years a weekly service was operated with the steamer sailing from Drogheda on Fridays and returning on Tuesdays.

'Over the following decade the traffic from Drogheda across the Irish Sea continued to grow and by the later 1840s, five sailings each week were required and, in 1849, a daily service was first introduced. By the late 1870s there were four sailings a week from Drogheda to Liverpool and this number of sailings was maintained until after the takeover by the Lancashire and Yorkshire in 1902.

'Drogheda is the only port of consequence on the east coast of Ireland which has no railway sidings on its quays. This is because of the considerable distance in level between the harbour and the Dublin/Belfast main line, which crosses the Boyne on a high viaduct immediately east of the town. The absence of rail facilities has meant that the greater part of the goods traffic passing through the port has generally been consigned to places in the immediate vicinity of the town.

'Before the advent of the motor lorry, traffic for places further afield had generally to be transported by horse drawn carts to the railway, a process that involved double handling and considerable expense.

'Several attempts were made to overcome this handicap by making efforts to develop water borne traffic on the Boyne, for the cross channel steamers could be off-loaded directly onto lighters and the latter towed to Navan and other places along the river. The carriage of livestock however was little affected by lack of railway facilities on the quays, for Drogheda is within 'cattle walking' distance of the fat grazing lands of Co Meath.

'The company encouraged this traffic by providing a reliable service at competitive rates and by providing free transport to drovers and others in charge of the animals.

'During the mid 19th century Drogheda was one of the ports through which thousands of Irishmen passed through on their way to England and the New World. In the spring of 1849 the Drogheda – Liverpool steamers carried an average of 200 deck passengers per trip, a number which gave them third place in the Liverpool cross channel trade.

'The Drogheda Steam Packet Company was also the first company to introduce sleeping accommodation for ordinary steerage passengers. Its Colleen Bawn ship of 1862 was the first steamer on the Irish Sea to have a compound engine and its Tredagh ship of 1876 was the first to have steam steering gear and steam cargo winches. Its Kathleen Mavourneen ship, in 1885, was the first steamer working from Liverpool to Ireland to have electric light and, in contrast, its Iverna ship was the last paddle steamer to be built for the Irish cross channel trade. She was launched in August 1895'.