



Chapter Five

Ships and Shipping



SHIPS AND SHIPPING

Background Information

The mouth of the Mersey is armed with lighthouses, beacons, telegraph stations and private signal poles, as a mouth with teeth wrote a German visitor to Liverpool in 1842. Now, as ships enter the estuary the view is dominated by cranes, an army of them, standing like sentinels from Seaforth dock on the north shore to Cammell Laird's yard on the south.

It was at the turn of the 18th century that far-sighted merchants saw the possibilities of using Liverpool as a trading port. Geographically it provided an ideal location due to its proximity to the industrial Midlands. The first wet dock was built in 1715 to accommodate the increasing number of ships based on the port. Liverpool became a major port trading with the West Indies, North America, Africa, Europe, India and China. There was also a thriving and profitable coastal trade serving other British ports. The river became a hive of activity. In 1766 the Liverpool Pilotage Service began. This meant that pilot ships would ferry pilots out to larger ships to guide them on their journey up the estuary to the port. It was a hard and dangerous life, boys of 16 applied to become trainee pilots whilst still at school. If accepted they might spend two years at sea as a cadet.

Even more dangerous was the life of a privateer. Privateers had permission from the government to attack any ship on the high seas that did not belong to an ally of Britain. Privateers could amass great wealth from the cargoes they captured.

The introduction of steam power increased the size of the ships and even larger docks had to be built to accommodate them and to provide separate berths because of the fear of fire and their need for coal. In 1840 Samuel Cunard established the first shipping company which eventually owned many famous ships including the Lusitania and Mauritania, which were really grand floating hotels!

It was not long before further shipping lines were established. Many carried the increasing numbers of emigrants leaving for America and Australia. T H Ismay founded the White Star Line in 1869 whose liners were renowned for their luxury and comfort and were formidable rivals to the Cunard liners. Perhaps the best known liner of all was the Titanic which hit an iceberg on its maiden voyage in 1912.

Steamships cut the travelling time from Liverpool to North America from 28 to 3 days and the Cunard ships in particular were noted for their speed – the Mauritania was presented with the Blue Riband, an honour given to the ship making the fastest crossing between Bishop Rock in Scilly Isles and Ambrose Light off New York. The "Mauri" as she was affectionately known, held the record until 1929. The Cunard Company and the White Star Line amalgamated in 1934 and the last liner left Liverpool in 1966 as sea crossings were unable to compete with the increasing competition from airlines.



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By the turn of the 20th century, Liverpool had become the nation's second port (after London) and boasted one of the most impressive waterfronts in Britain. On the Liverpool shore six and half miles of docks, once boasting the world's biggest dry dock, stretched from Gladstone Dock to North Dingle Oil Jetty. On the southern side of the estuary the dock system included the Birkenhead Docks, which extended inland, Cammel Laird and Co. shipyards, the Tranmere Oil terminal, Port Sunlight, Bromborough Dock, and the Eastham Locks which form the entrance to the Manchester Ship Canal, a grand total of 65 wet docks and 22 dry or graving docks, and over 36 miles of quays and 600 acres of dock space.

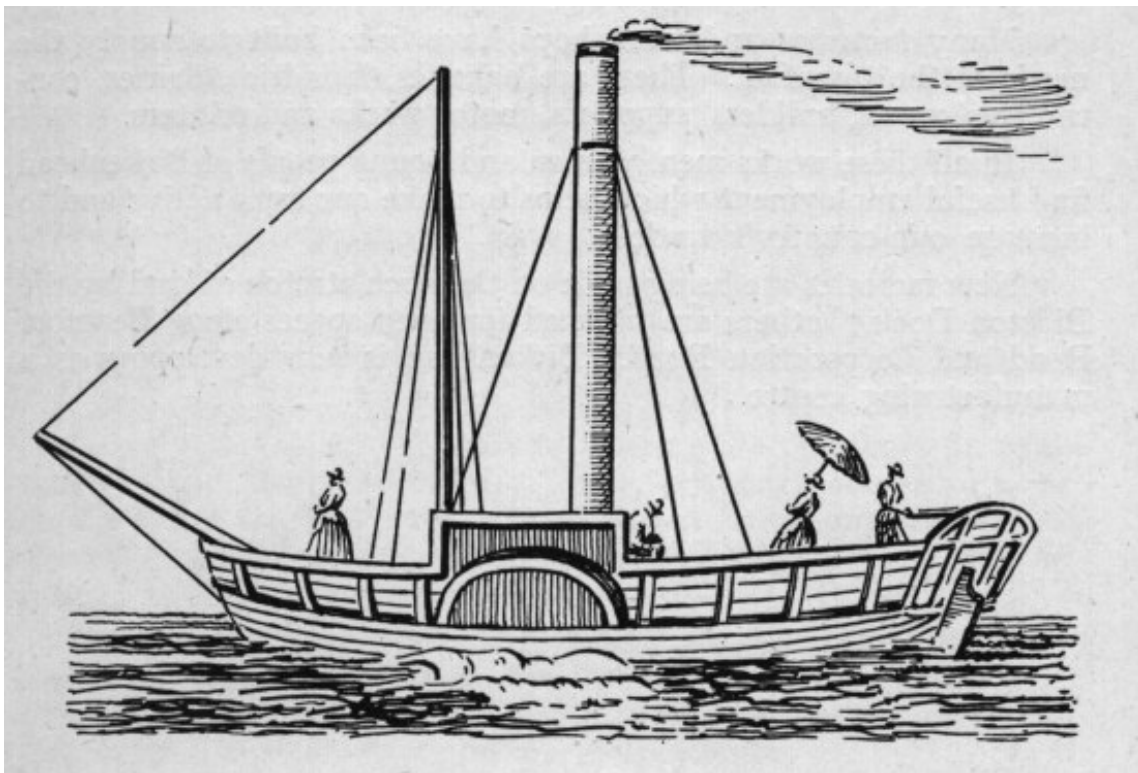
Many of the ships that have sailed on the Mersey including some of the Mersey Ferries were built at Birkenhead's famous Cammell Laird's yard. In 1824 William Laird set up the Birkenhead Iron Works and four years later received his first order for a ship. In 1903 what had by then become Laird Brothers Ltd. joined forces with the distinguished Sheffield steel manufacturers, Charles Cammell and Company. Today, ships are built in sections under cover and then towed into the fitting out basin where they are joined together to make one ship. The shipyard is one of the most revered in the world. Most of their work recently was for the Royal Navy, sadly however, Cammel Laird shipyard's launched her last ship on the Mersey in 1993.

the late 1960's and early 1970's saw the building of the Tranmere Oil Terminal, the introduction of containerisation and the opening of the Seaforth Container Terminal north of Gladstone Docks, heralded the demise of traditional cargo handling methods. Improved air travel, new trading patterns – and shipping technology have all combined to reduce drastically the use of many of the docks.

Recently during the 1980's, a dramatic renewal has occurred with many of the old docks renovated and reclaimed to provide new business space, housing and tourist facilities. The Albert Dock has become one of the country's leading tourist attractions. In 1984 Liverpool Freeport opened and now handles cargoes from over 80 countries. Freeport status means that while a cargo mains within the Freeport it is not subjective to VAT and import duties. The northern docks and Seaforth Container Terminal are handling record cargoes from over 150,000 containers a year.

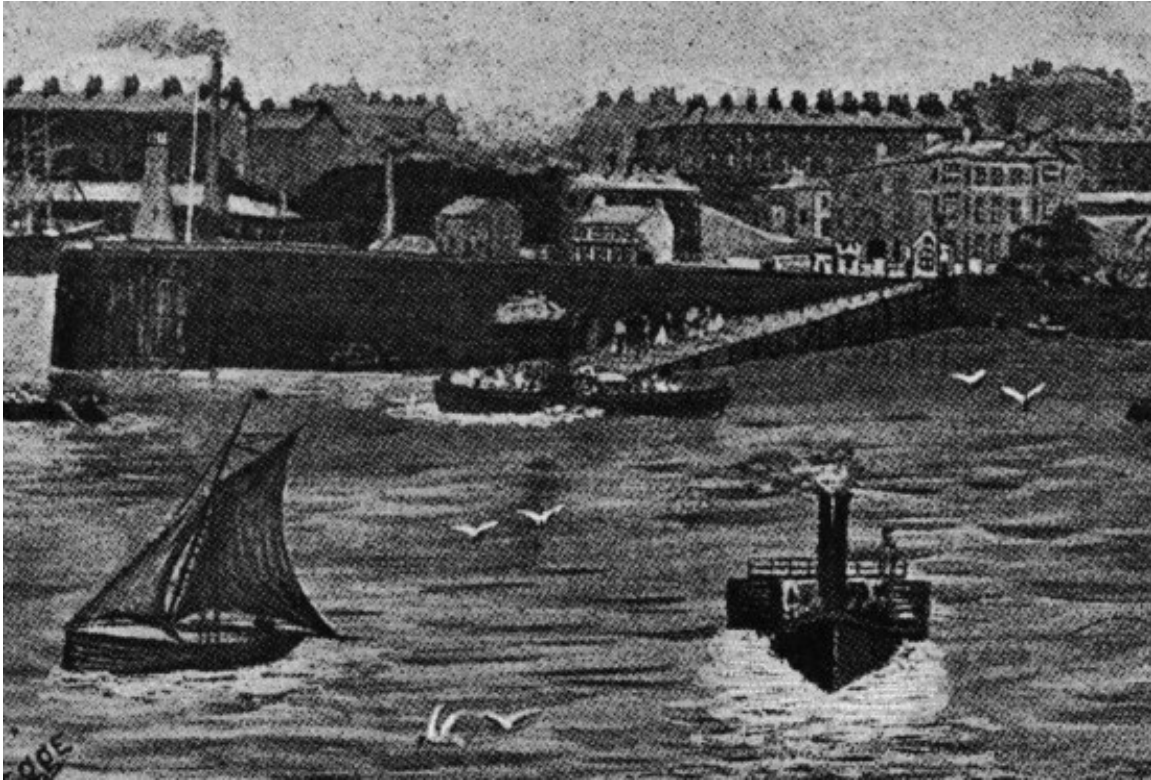


THE HISTORY OF FERRIES ON THE MERSEY



700 years ago, King Edward III granted the people of Birkenhead the right to have a ferry over the Mersey and he let them charge a fee for using the ferry. Ever since then, ferries have crossed the Mersey. One such boat is the steamer, the Etna, pictured above. As there never used to be a ferry terminal, at low tide, passengers either had to wade ashore or be carried on boatmen's backs!!

In 1822, steamboats began to run from Woodside. A solid roadway was built, sloping gradually to the water, for easier boarding of the boats. This roadway, or 'slip', is pictured below:



Year by year, the cross river traffic grew rapidly. In the days of the sail boats, like the *Etna*, the few passengers would either be people on a day out from Chester or farmers who would cross to Liverpool to sell cattle and produce. The new steam boats carried business men, who travelled on the ferries every morning and evening, or housewives on shopping visits to Liverpool. Carriages also crossed on the steam boats.

Both passenger and goods traffic increased so heavily that a better type of landing place had to be made, and better boats than the open deck vessels were required.



A floating landing stage with connecting bridge was moored to the river wall in 1861 (above). A few years later, salon ferry boats with large, bright cabins above deck took the place of the old boats with small, gloomy cabins below deck.