

Ferry Green



A ferry between Renfrew and Glasgow has operated at this spot for over 200 years. Renfrew has however benefitted from the “right of ferry” since medieval times. Early records tell us that a ferry service existed as far back as 1614 although at this time it crossed the Clyde slightly further east. The move to its present location came about during the 1780s when Alexander Speirs, a Glasgow tobacco merchant, built a mansion on the King’s Inch. Finding that the southern crossing point ran through his property, he asked that the ferry be moved half a mile west. In exchange, Speirs offered to build two quays, a ferry house and a new road. Within a few years all works were in place and people, horses and carriages were making the short crossing from Renfrew to Yoker in what was described by the Parish Minister in 1790 as “... a most complete Ferry Boat ...”

Originally the ferries were moved using ropes or chains fixed at each bank. In the early days these were hauled by hand before machines took over in the mid to late 1800s. With steam power came successively bigger ferries and this crossing grew in significance over the following fifty or so years. Old maps show Ferry Green as a public park, confirming this location as an important meeting point for residents and visitors. In those days the Clyde was not only busy with people crossing it, but also with many working and pleasure boats travelling up and downstream. One working vessel that could be seen regularly on the river between 1861 and 1912 was the paddle tug boat “Clyde”. The side lever engine from “Clyde” is an impressive feature of Ferry Green today. The



ferry was particularly busy when shipbuilding on the Clyde was at its height, running round the clock, seven days a week. On Sunday 8 March 1936 when the new Queen Mary was docked at Clydebank a census recoded that 21,386 passengers, 946 motor cars, 141 motor cycles, 819 pedal cycles and 67 vans had crossed.

The decline of the shipyards in the 1950s had a huge impact on the ferry as did the opening of the Clyde Tunnel and the Erskine Bridge. Running a vehicle ferry became uneconomic and, while this service came to an end in 1984, a pedestrian service continues to this day. The southern ferry house remains in active use as the Ferry Inn.

Sources and further information:

- Renfrewshire Council: “Out There – 10 Walks around Renfrewshire”
- www.clydewaterfront.com
- www.myrenfrew.com

