

CRAIG PIER

It was a Saturday morning during the summer of 1964. My best friend Pauline called at the house and we set off for the city. We had the choice of taking the train or the ferry from Newport –on- Tay to Dundee and had decided on the ferry which was more of an adventure. As we hurried down the High Street to the Tay Ferry terminal the blue summer sky was rapidly becoming veiled in the haar* which ruins many a sunny day in the vicinity of the river. It was rising off the water like smoke and we shivered in our thin tee shirts and short skirts.

The ferry was berthing as we arrived and bought our tickets. We watched from the waiting room as it disgorged cars, cyclists and passengers. Wishing we had worn warmer clothes we joined the queue.

There were three ferries or Fifies as they were affectionately known. The two more modern diesel run vessels were called the Abercraig and the Scotsraig and the old paddle steamer the B L Nairn which awaited us. It took on a supernatural appearance as the mist swirled and crept around its hulk. The ramp was damp and slippery under foot.

We headed for the saloon from where we could view the engines in motion which I had always found mesmerising. The odour of oil permeated the atmosphere as the engines started up and the ferry chugged laboriously away from the pier into the gloom. We heard the deep blast of the fog horn as she headed towards Dundee across the still, mist- shrouded river.

After about ten minutes we decided to venture out on deck where we were met by a strange phenomenon.

The sea mist was hovering above the Tay in a horizontal line and we could no longer see Newport behind us but as we sailed through the ribbon of haar the sky suddenly became clear and the Dundee Law loomed proudly above the city clustered by jute mills, most of which were in decline. Cox's Stack, the towering mill chimney in Lochee lorded it over the other more insignificant structures.

To the west the Tay Railway Bridge stood in defiance, more robustly constructed than the original which collapsed during a storm in the winter of 1879 killing all the passengers and crew on the fateful Edinburgh to Dundee train.

To the east, past the ship yards, Broughty Castle stood majestically at the mouth of the estuary. The sandy beach which had attracted holiday makers from all over Scotland to the seaside village of Broughty Ferry was also visible.

We disembarked at Craig Pier then crossed over to Whitehall Street to Largs music shop, near John Menzies book shop where I was to work as a Saturday girl four years later.

I had saved up 6s 8d, the equivalent of 34p to buy the Beatles latest single, A Hard Day's Night but first of all we asked to listen to three or four other records in one of the music booths provided. The other booths were occupied by teenagers sampling their favourite pop music. The acoustics were so much better with the headphones on than listening at home on our early mono speaker record players.

By the time we returned to Craig Pier the haar had lifted and we sat on deck in the warmth of the sun watching the early stages of the construction of the Tay Road Bridge.

I watched this progress over the next two years from my bedroom window fascinated by the temporary bridge built first and listening to the pulsating sound of the construction rhythms day and night.

This was to provide easy access between North Fife and Dundee and was opened by the Queen Mother on 18th August 1966.

Sadly, this much improved transport link led to the demise of the much loved Fifies.

The grand old lady the R R S Discovery is now berthed at the site of the old Craig Pier and sits side by side with the magnificent V & A museum.

*a cold sea fog on the east coast of England or Scotland.

Sue Baxter
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