

A brief history of Queensferry

The small town of Queensferry lies on the south shore of the Firth of Forth just eight miles west of Edinburgh, Scotland's capital city. As a convenient crossing place the area may have been known before the Romans arrived, but the name is traditionally associated with St Margaret, the Anglo-Saxon princess who married King Malcolm III Canmore.

By the 14th century the town had become a Burgh of Regality along with Dunfermline, Kirkcaldy and Musselburgh, owing duties to the convent of Dunfermline, which also controlled the ferry passage. With the privilege of a weekly market and an annual fair, the town's prosperity increased.

Queensferry had become a flourishing seaport by the 17th century, trading in coal, wool and hides, and importing wine, silk, linen and timber from Europe and Scandinavia. The town's leading Burgesses were merchants, ship-owners and masters as well as local guild craftsmen. In 1627 Charles I erected the town into a Royal Burgh and freeport and in 1636 it separated from the parish of Dalmeny with the building of its own church at the Vennel. War, pirates the plague and even witches were a common threat but the town's prosperity is evident from the number of substantial 17th century buildings which still survive and for which reason the town is today regarded as an 'outstanding conservation area' with many listed buildings.

Despite the development of a soap-making industry, the first of its kind in Scotland, and the continuation of linen weaving and candle-making, the town's fortunes and its trading fleet declined. A fishing industry and a distillery brought some employment but in 1866 the industrial age truly arrived when the railway branch line from Ratho to Queensferry was completed. In 1883 the construction of the Forth Bridge and the demands of its 3000 workers brought renewed prosperity.

The bridge workers were well served by the town's hostelries like the Hawes Inn, made famous by the works of Sir Walter Scott and Robert Lewis Stevenson's 'Kidnapped'.

With the first World War came the establishment of the naval base at Rosyth in Fife and at Port Edgar, just west of the town. The Royal Navy, in particular the training ship 'Caledonia' had played an important role in the town since the 1850's, but servicing the needs of the destroyer base provided renewed commercial prosperity. There were two cinemas in Queensferry; the sailors gave the 'Rio' the code name 'R-10'.

The road bridge, opened by the Queen in 1964 brought to an end the traditional ferry passage. Today the town and ancient Royal Burgh of Queensferry is a thriving community offering a unique glimpse of times gone by as well as the fabulous prospect of two of the world's engineering masterpieces.