



TRANSFORMED BY WAR 1939 - 1945

Clyde Anchorage Emergency Port – Making it work



London's reduced port operations due to bombing made available spare equipment and a labour force with experience of overside work. Clark Halliday of Scruttons (a leading stevedore business) visited the Clyde and saw that by using mobile battery-electric cranes and trucks, which Scruttons had pioneered, railway piers offered a solution. As well as moving this equipment, tugs, barges and other vessels from London to the Clyde, Scruttons brought 600 of their employees, mainly stevedores. Many brought wives and families and were billeted in Gourrock or near the landing places.

Soon after starting operations off Greenock, the anchorage was relocated to the more sheltered Holy Loch. Fairlie Pier, the former railway steamer pier (now demolished), together with Craigendoran, were the main landing places for barge traffic while other Ayrshire ports including Troon, Ayr, Irvine, Largs were used by coasters. Scruttons estimated that in total the anchorages handled 1,885 vessels, over 2 million tons of cargo and 10 million packages.

As disruption in other ports eased the need for cargo operations declined but the anchorage continued to be essential for the operation of troopships such as the liners "Queen Mary" and "Queen Elizabeth". Part of Gourrock pier was equipped with electric trucks and cranes to handle their cargo.

Providing the barge services in the Clyde involved a great variety of small vessels including 15 Thames Sailing Barges (motorised and with sailing gear removed) and a fleet of around 30 Dutch motor coasters (schuyts).

From its opening on 12 September 1940, the port worked well with only a handful of days lost, no bomb damage. Though now little known, it remains one of the great achievements of the war.



View of Craigendoran Pier c.1940

Oil painting by Arthur James Wetherall Burgess

Collection of Scottish Maritime Museum, Irvine - 2016-037



Motor coaster and crew

Photos: Dutch National Archives 935-3161, 935 – 3180, 935 – 3181