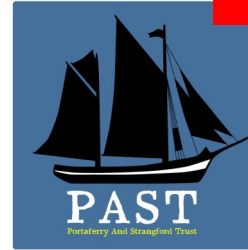


FREE

A wee bit of maritime history... 22



The Catherine Miller Sketch Book

Almost 200 years ago a young lady living at the Strand in Portaferry began to make sketches of everyday life and scenes in her town. Over a period of 30 years or more she captured in her detailed drawings an age before photography, when Portaferry was a busy port,



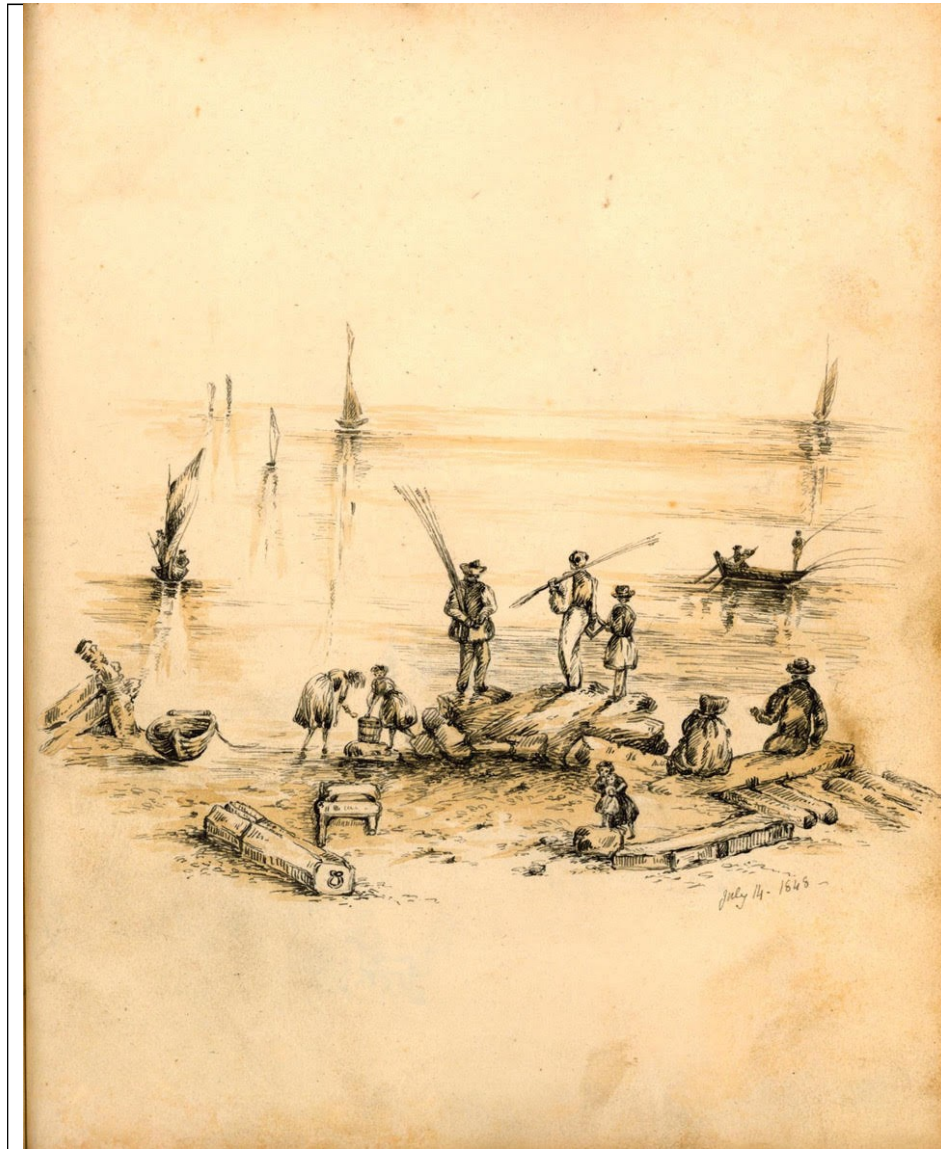
building its own ships and boats. Her name was Catherine Miller, born about 1813, the daughter of Conyngham and Isabella Miller. Her father, Conyngham Miller (1783-1870) was the Land Agent of the Nugent Estate for Andrew Nugent. Living at the Strand, in the property now known as Barholm, Catherine, with her 4 sisters and 3 brothers, would have had an uninterrupted view of all the activity on the busy shore. It is fortunate for us that Catherine, as a talented young artist, began to record many of these scenes in her sketch book, giving us an amazing insight into life at that time.

During her lifetime Catherine would have witnessed many of Portaferry's events and activities along the shore, in front of her family home. She would have observed passengers strolling along, waiting to board ships which would have taken them across the Atlantic on the 'next fair tide.'

Next to her home stood Portaferry Castle beside which Thomas Gelston had his shipbuilding yard, where vessels up to 400 tons burthen were constructed.

It is likely that Catherine was among the many spectators who cheered the launch, on 26th January 1836, of the 'Andrew Nugent,' a beautiful vessel of 300 tons, from the shipyard of Mr Gelston. Catherine would have watched as timbers from North America were unloaded from ships at the quay in front of her home to be used in the building of ships and boats.





Living in a busy port, with ships coming and going, Catherine would have heard stories of emigrants going to America, Canada and Australia while ships arrived at the port bringing coal from England or timber from Quebec. Catherine would also have heard reports of ship losses such as that of the 'Andrew Nugent' or the 'Maria McCleery.'

Sadly tragedy came to Catherine's own family. Her brother John and three others drowned when their yacht capsized between Audley's Point and Killyleagh on 12th August 1834.

Catherine herself died on 31st December, 1899 and is buried in the family grave in the Church of Ireland graveyard, Ballyphilip.



We are most grateful to Gerard McPolin and the McPolin family, the custodians of this sketch book, for giving their consent to PAST to tell the story of this amazing record of Portaferry's maritime history.



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