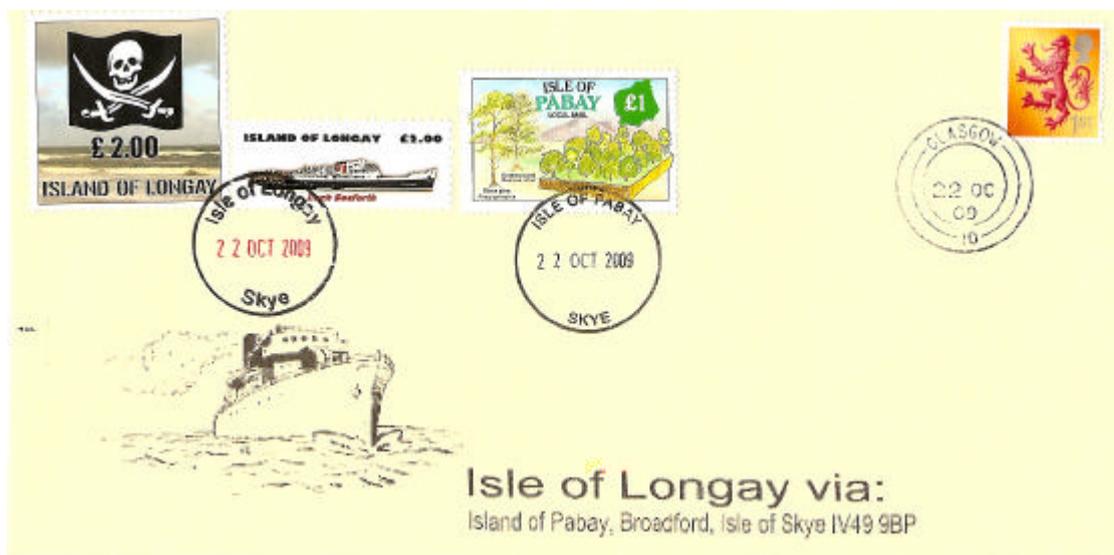


November 2009

## Pabay Philatelic News issue 20



For the first time this new Pabay First Day Cover shows stamps from the Island of Longay . The text included in this Philatelic Bulletin gives the history of the Loch Seaforth that ran aground on the Island of Longay on 22<sup>nd</sup> October 1971.

### Island of Longay

Covering an area of 50 ha (124 acres), the island of Longay is situated to the east of Scalpay, north of Pabay and in the Inner Sound, between the mainland and the Isle of Skye. Associated with pirates in the 16th Century, who plundered many of the ships traversing the Inner Sound, (hence the Skull and Cross Bones Stamp!). The island was once heavily forested, though now it is used for sheep pasture. It is uninhabited apart from countless seabirds. The name Longay means 'longship island'.

### The Loch Seaforth History

By the time she hit the island of Longay, off Broadford, on 22nd October 1971 – her passengers were rescued by Bruce Watt's launch WESTERN ISLES, which happened to be passing. By this time LOCH SEAFORTH had, to say the least, something of a reputation with the Press.

**LOCH SEAFORTH**, if not quite the last, was the greatest of the motor-driven mailboats built for David MacBrayne Ltd. For a quarter-century she sailed from Stornoway, capital of the large and populous Isle of Lewis, to Mallaig and Kyle of Lochalsh. She is still fondly remembered for the reliability of her service and the wit and warmth of her crew. But for the car ferry revolution, she might have lasted many years longer; only one of her successors has matched her for faithfulness, and none in Lewis esteem.

**At Stornoway**

**LOCH SEAFORTH** was, in fact, the last and long-overdue of the two new ships MacBraynes committed themselves to build in return for 1938 renewal of the mail contract. In the years immediately succeeding, of course, the country had better things to think about, though plans were drafted and in February 1945 the Provost of Stornoway (a notoriously hard town to please) allowed he was rather impressed with them. It was for the Mallaig-Kyle-Stornoway route the new vessel was earmarked; though built only in 1929, the steam-driven **LOCHNESS** was already too small.

The new ship was finally ordered, from the reliable Denny's of Dumbarton yard, later that year. In the decay and shortage and post-war British industry there followed inordinate delays, and it was 19th May, 1947 before the new Stornoway steamer was launched. Thus, to the musical accompaniment of two pipers. **LOCH SEAFORTH** was floated out, being named after the lovely fjord of that name dividing Lewis and Harris.

She was an imposing and handsome vessel of purposeful appearance. She was much larger than any of her predecessors on the Stornoway station and, indeed, would be the biggest MacBrayne ship until the 1964 car-carriers. Some elements of her design drew clearly from **LOCHNESS** – the big forecastle, the shade-deck and cruiser stern – but her accommodation was far better and especially the third-class saloons – indeed, the third-class lounge was superior to the first-class saloon of some MacBrayne veterans. Both classes of passengers, too, had cubicles and sleeping cabins.

“With a raked stem, recessed anchors and two masts,” writes Langmuir sniffily, “the ship would have had quite a good appearance if she had been given a taller funnel; but the latter was so short as to be invisible from forward, and was elliptical, nearly perpendicular and with a slanting top, originally with very narrow black portion; and it was at first painted Burns-Laird red but fortunately later became MacBrayne red. In 1949 it was lengthened by the depth of the black top... and then the resulting deep black top changed to a narrow one in 1966, reverting to deep in 1972.” Mr Langmuir cared about funnels.

Unlike **LOCHNESS**, the new Stornoway boat had all her cargo space forward and her foremast incorporated two derricks. She had also space for sixteen cars. The mainmast incorporated the wireless aerial, and she had four lifeboats on Welin Maclanchlan davits. The first-class lounge was a splendid room with fine big windows. Perhaps the most striking new feature on the ship was a “quasi-figurehead” on her bows – the MacBrayne Highlander, which would survive in advertising and publicity till the advent of CalMac and make a welcome return at century's end. A magnificent model of **LOCH SEAFORTH**, by the way, may be seen to this day at Museum nan Eilean on Francis Street, Stornoway.

**LOCH SEAFORTH** duly assumed the Stornoway service on 6th December 1947, after more and untold delays. Her success was immediate – more space and comfort than any previous Stornoway ship and fast enough to leave Stornoway at a quarter past midnight and still be in time for the mail trains at Kyle and Mallaig. (This was especially gratifying to Christians who had resented the

previous Stornoway steamer's 11:45 pm departure on a Sabbath evening.) The vessel had but one drawback – her Sulzer engines, recorded Langmuir, “made an appalling noise.”

Apart from her principal service LOCH SEAFORTH made a regular flitboat call at Applecross, on her outward voyage – until the commissioning of LOCH TOSCAIG in 1956 – and also provided a very sporadic “car ferry” service between Mallaig and Armadale from 1959 to 1963.

At Kyle of Lochalsh with Portree

By the late Sixties, of course, she was more than a little obsolete and Lewis haulage increasingly bypassed her on the “Hebridean ferry” - the drive-on service offered by the new HEBRIDES to Tarbert from Uig in Skye. Talk began of a car ferry service to Lewis, not from the traditional railheads but from Ullapool in Wester Ross. It reached a crescendo in 1968 with Stornoway, Ullapool and Kyle all putting in their ha'pen'orth of argument – Stornoway wanted a new car ferry; Ullapool wanted the service at any price; Kyle was determined to keep the link come what may less its rail service be jeopardised - and indeed MacBraynes committed themselves that year to starting an Ullapool-Stornoway service with LOCH SEAFORTH at some point in the future. It would never come.

It may not have helped, too, with Stornoway opinion that LOCH SEAFORTH was increasingly accident-prone. In December 1965 she grounded at Mallaig harbour and sustained enough damage to be sent to the Clyde for an early annual overhaul. Early in March 1966 she strained a plate after arguing with a pile at Mallaig pier; the following day, in spectacular mishap, she grounded at Kyle. LOCH SEAFORTH was left high and dry by the tide and indeed remained helpless perched on the reef for two days. Her master was later disciplined and suspended for two months.

By the time she hit the island of Longay, off Broadford, on 22nd October 1971 – her passengers were rescued by Bruce Watt's launch WESTERN ISLES, which happened to be passing. By this time LOCH SEAFORTH had, to say the least, some thing of a reputation with the Press.

In January 1972 she was withdrawn from the Stornoway route, to the surprise of many, and transferred to the Oban-Coll-Tiree-Castlebay-Lochboisdale run in place of CLAYMORE (1955) which was laid up to await disposal. LOCH SEAFORTH did in fact briefly reprise at Stornoway – after the CLANSMAN was damaged in a collision – but resumed the “Inner Isles Mail” on 28th May, adding a schedule call to Colonsay. Despite giving away eight years to CLAYMORE she could carry significantly more cars as well as being rather faster.

For all that, the long-term survival of LOCH SEAFORTH as a useful prop of Caledonian MacBrayne services must already have been in doubt when, on the night of 22nd March 1973, she ran aground on Cleit Rock in the Sound of Gunna. Her demise was more farce than tragedy; the passengers were safely taken off and the following day, seemingly little damaged, the LOCH SEAFORTH was towed to Gott Bay, Tiree, for inspection as CLAYMORE was hastily reactivated. Though the former Stornoway mailboat was pumped out, on 24th March a bulkhead gave way and she sank completely, entirely blocking Tiree's only pier and causing massive disruption. For weeks neither cattle nor vehicles could be loaded from Tiree and local reaction may be imagined.

On 11th May the giant floating crane MAGNUS III arrived from Southampton and the rapidly disintegrating LOCH SEAFORTH was unceremoniously hoisted and dumped on the beach. She was patched, refloated, and shortly towed to Troon for scrapping by the West of Scotland Ship breaking Co. Ltd. Near by, CLANSMAN underwent the final stages of her conversion to drive-through operation before replacing the new IONA as the dedicated Stornoway car ferry.

## **PRICES**

**First Day Cover (LPC001) £6.00 Post and Packing £2.50 (UK/Europe) £5.00 other areas**

**Set of 2 Longay Stamps and the £1.00 Pabay Stamp £5.00 Post and Packing £2.00 UK/Europe £4.00 other areas.**

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