

Four Masters at Silloth

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A century ago, tall ships came frequently to Silloth, bringing cargoes of grain from places as distant as Australia and America. The largest of these were the four-masters, and Silloth was graced by at least four of these giant sailing vessels in it's past. Research by me over the last few months has brought these majestic vessels to light again, and we can now look back at their visits.

The first four-masted sailing ship to visit Silloth was the 'Drumburton'. She arrived on August 20th, 1887 with more than 3,000 tonnes of wheat from Kingston in South Australia. Her arrival was reported in the local press. She was at the time regarded as the largest ship ever to enter the Solway, and was certainly the largest ship to enter Silloth up to then. Crowds packed the pier and dock side as the tugs brought her into port, and during her stay in port, which lasted over three weeks, many people visited the vessel. She departed on September 14th. Launched in

1881 by Russell & Co of Port Glasgow, the 'Drumburton' was square rigged on all masts, her hull being 270ft (84m) long, 40ft (12m) beam, with holds 24ft (7.5m) deep. She could carry up to 3,500 tons. Her operators were Gillison & Chadwick, whose ships were prefixed 'Drum' - giving them the title the 'Drum Line'.

Silloth didn't have long to wait for it's second four-master. 3½ months later, on December 30th 1887 the sailing ship 'Fort George' arrived in port. She was carrying 2,700 tonnes of wheat from San Francisco, a journey which had taken five months, and included the challenging Cape



'Mayhill' built in 1890 in Dundee and wrecked 1895 near Australia

Horn. The Clyde tug 'Flying Dragon' towed her



A tug struggles to line-up a Barque entering Silloth

into port, assisted by the Silloth tug. Few people witnessed her stay, as it was in the middle of winter, and she departed on 21st January, for Newport, South Wales, in tow of the tug 'Flying Serpent'. The Glasgow-registered 'Fort George' was a vessel of 1,770 gross tons, launched in 1884 at Belfast. She was 270ft (82m) long, 40ft (12m) wide and 24ft (7.5m) deep and square rigged on all four masts.

Another four-master to visit Silloth was the 'Mayhill'. This huge sailing vessel arrived on March 26th, 1895 with 3,500 tonnes of wheat from Geelong, Australia. Reports in the news at

the time regarded her as the finest vessel ever to enter the Solway, and this majestic barque



A busy Silloth Docks in the late 1800's

is possibly the largest sailing vessel ever to visit Silloth. A Liverpool tug towed her up the Solway, and she had to anchor offshore for several days until there was a high enough tide to dock her. She was launched at Dundee in 1890. Rigged as a barque, (square rigged with three or more masts but with only

fore and aft sails on her mizzen mast), she was 300ft (93m) long, 41ft (12.5m) wide and 23ft (7m) deep. Her operators were none other than Ismay, Imrie & Co of the famous 'White Star' line (of which Titanic was part).

The final four master to visit was the 'General Gordon'. She was an ex-British ship, now sailing under the flag of Norway and registered in Haugesund. She arrived on July 16th, 1908 with 2,550 tonnes of wheat from Bahia Blanca in South America. The 'General Gordon' was built at Liverpool in 1886, originally as a fully square rigged ship, but later rigged as a barque. She had a gross tonnage of 1,650 tons and was 260ft (80m) long, 38ft (11.8m) wide and 22ft (7m) deep.

By the time the last four-master visited, the days of sail were numbered and few of these vessels were engaged in ocean trade. Steam ships had replaced them, but fortunately we have photographs showing these great tall ships while they graced the quays of ports like Silloth.



A Barque being towed into Silloth by 'The Petrel' past the pier

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