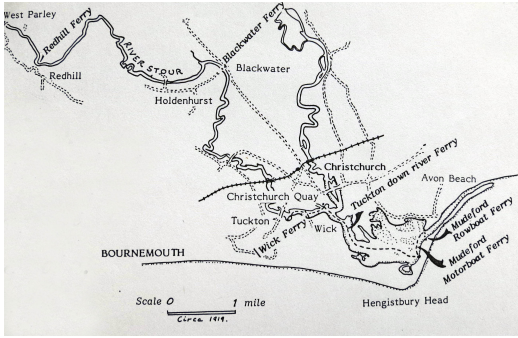


RIVER STOUR FERRIES.



REDHILL FERRY, now no more, was once important as the only link between West Parley and Bournemouth. Before the building of the New Road Bridge, road traffic had to travel via the ancient Dorset Bridge at Longham. The ferry was sited at Redhill on the River Stour, about half a mile downstream from West Parley, where the Wimborne Road runs very close to the river. Here, in earlier times, was a ford, once known as Riddlesford (Red Hill ford), and this place name appears on several maps dating from 1791. The recent 2½" Ordnance Survey map of Bournemouth

(sheet 40/09) marks the ford. At this point the Roman Legions under Aulus Plautius are said to have crossed the Stour on their way to attack the Britons at Badbury Rings, c. AD 46. The ferry plied at the site of the ford, and must have been in operation from early times.



By Victorian times the ferry was well patronised by courting couples and others who enjoyed its romantic setting. Now, more than 40 years after closure, it is hard to visualise the scene as it must have been at the turn of the century. Marshalls' Riverside Tea Gardens flourished then on the south bank and offered 'strawberry tea' in season. Passengers were poled across in a punt, but in later years the ferry was worked by rope. A lease of the ferry tea gardens dated 18.7.1931 is in Bournemouth Library. This five-and-a-half years agreement between

landlord Mrs. Florence Lamey and tenant ferryman William Bannerman provides for an annual rent of £50 in respect of the Tea Gardens with building and two tennis courts, the landing-stages and the ferryboat: subject to the lease of the ferry right being confirmed by Colonel Prideaux Brune.

The ferry carried 6,000 passengers in 1931, 8,000 in 1932 and 14,000 in 1933. Yet it was closed in March 1934 in the face of strong local protest. Petitions were signed, and arguments for and against appeared regularly in the local newspapers. The petition to re-open was opposed by the Rector of West Parley and the tenant of the adjacent farmland, and the ferry stayed closed. My curiosity was aroused by the closure of a ferry which the public wanted and which was paying its way. Mr. Sansom, the verger, who had held that office for more than 50 years, remembers the ferry and the manner of its closing. It appears that the wife of the influential yeoman who farmed the land by the ferry came one day across a party of people cavorting in the nude at the river bank, after (presumably) having crossed on the ferry from Bournemouth, which she regarded as Vanity Fair. Outraged, she demanded of her husband that he persuade the Rector, who also had a right in the ferry, that it should be closed down in the public interest. Rector and farmer found themselves in agreement, and public outcry was in vain. Certainly, an unusual story for a ferry closure.

BLACKWATER FERRY, derives its somewhat ominous name from the village just north of Christchurch. It connected the east bank of the Stour, where the road to Hurn runs very close to the river, with the west bank opposite, where the right of way from Holdenhurst village meets the Stour. It was vested in the Heron Court Estate and the rights belonged to successive Earls of Malmesbury. A receipt in the possession of Bournemouth Library, dated 12th December 1909 acknowledges half a year's rent (£4.1.3.) paid to the Earl of Malmesbury by ferryman Alfred Chalk; this was in respect of land at Ringwood Road, the ferry boat, and the old ferry cottage and garden. The receipt includes a reference to a contra account for ferrying estate workmen.



The ferry cottage was most picturesque, a stone, two-storied house with a fine thatched roof. The rustic porch was half-overgrown with honeysuckle and the leaded windows had diamond panes. There was a stable at one end. In the early years of this century the ferry was particularly busy in June, bringing admirers to the Earl of Malmesbury's nearby rhododendron plantation, described by Ward, Lock & Co.'s guide as "one of the finest sights that even lovely Hampshire can afford."

In 1905 the 'Bournemouth Graphic' was only mildly enthusiastic about this scene at Blackwater passage. The issue of 16th February stated '.....a cottage and an old punt is what you will see. It sounds uninteresting, but if you are thirsty you will be interested to know that you can get within that tiny cot a nice tea for 4d. or 6d., or even a bottle of ginger beer'. A couple of years earlier a correspondent to the same newspaper was lavish with praise:- 'In this quiet secluded spot there is no sound save the singing of birds.... or the lapping of water on the stones.....the whole atmosphere seems to be filled with natural music....A girl with handsome face and figure, well developed by work and exercise in the open air, often takes the passengers across the ferry in the absence of her brother, and is accompanied by two pet cats, who seem to think that the boat could not go without them, and accordingly take their places at her feet as she stands holding the rope to guide the boat upon the surface of the clear water...."

There were times of course when the scene was less entrancing, for in winter the Stour could overflow its banks, and make it impossible to work the ferry. This was awkward for farm labourers who crossed daily to get to their work. In its earlier days Blackwater was very much a farmer's ferry, as Thomas Miller's poem reminds us:-

"Now moves the ferryboat across the river,
Bearing the wealth produced by many a farm!
Oxen and sheep and fruit and mid them all
The sun brown cultivators of the soil".

It is sad that the thatched ferry cottage was pulled down about 1934, while the ferry ceased to ply during or shortly after the first World War. The remains of the ferry steps are all that can be seen today.

WICK FERRY: A passenger ferry has undoubtedly existed at Wick for centuries as the natural communication between the village and the town of Christchurch. No direct road nor bridge connected Southbourne and Christchurch until a private company built the first bridge at Tuckton in 1882. Very probably the early ferries were run by local residents using their own boats to travel from Wick to the Quomps - the five-acre meadowland on the Christchurch side. For the greater part of its history the ferry must have been vested in the lords of the manor but research has uncovered nothing prior to the eighteenth century. Mrs. Arthur Bell in her book 'From Harbour to Harbour' (1916) writes of Wick ferry: "The ferry across the Stour must have been in use before the college of Augustinian canons was founded" (i.e. prior to Domesday Book).



The first ferry service of which we have any detailed knowledge was started in 1814 or 1815 by a farm worker named Marshall. He was employed on a farm tenanted from John Sloman of Wick House, but had broken his leg and was unable to resume farm work. Mr. Sloman provided him with a boat and gave him land on the Wick side of the river which has been the ferry landing-place ever since. Sometime after this, a rival ferry was established by Eli Miller, based on the Christchurch side, and it remained in his family

till 1903. The Millers then sold out to a Mr. J.C. Edmonds, who did not retire till 1946. Writing the following year in the 'Bournemouth Times' of 4th July, he recalled that in his early days the ferry began running at 5.30am. and continued till 11pm. In the Miller family's time and in Edmonds' earlier days, there was an old houseboat moored on the Wick side, beneath overhanging willow trees, where teas were served. Mr. Pope, a senior citizen of Christchurch, recalls that at the beginning of this century a square ended punt (as now) was used in the summer, and poled across. In the winter a salmon punt was substituted and was rowed with oars.

From 1900 to the 1920s the regular ferryman was Jack O'Brien, who was paid fixed wages, first by Eli Miller's widow and later by Mr. Edmonds. Jack O'Brien was a big built man, and it is on record that he required outsize boots which were made for him by his devoted sister! But Jack himself was clever with his hands. Mr. Pope recalls that one of his specialties was making working model windmills of wood, which he erected and displayed by the ferry waiting-hut. His Christmas dinner was always a cygnet - "beats all yer turkeys" he would say. Mr. Pope tells how perhaps on a miserable foggy night one would whistle for the ferry and hear Jack's "O-er!" (over!) through the gloom as he unhesitatingly rowed across for a single ½d. passenger. Jack O'Brien was a favourite subject of artists, and his portrait appeared several times in the Royal Academy. In 1927 Mr. Edmonds built a Boathouse on the Christchurch side and started a caravan camp which he sold after giving up the ferry. In 1947 an outboard engine was fitted to the ferry punt for the first time and the crossings made in half the time. On the 1st February 1954 Wick ferry was put out of action by ice on the river for the first time since 1855. After an hour, ferryman 'Brigham' Young cut a channel in the ice and restarted the service; but he became frozen in, later that afternoon and had to 'rescued'. On the Southbourne side the ice was four inches thick at the landing slip and landings were made on the adjacent bank.

On 28th September 1957 the ferry temporarily closed down. Wick ferry-Holiday Camp declared they had made a loss of £267 over the past year and did not propose to restart the service till the demand increased in the Spring. There was considerable public outcry, and the matter was discussed by the local authority. After nearly five weeks of closure, on the first of November the ferry was restarted by Christchurch fisherman Bob Bishop, using a salmon punt. He ran daily from 8am. - 1pm. and 2pm. - 4.30pm. and said he hoped to use a larger boat in course of time.

In 1958 the previously used ferry punt was given a Lister engine and a tunnel stern, and was mostly worked by Bob Bishop's daughter, Dawn. In the early 1960s the ferry was bought and run for awhile by Tuckton Riverside Services (owners of the Funnel Boats).

Today the former Wick Ferry Holiday Camp of 1965 has become a self-catering chalet camp run by the Warner Organisation (Pontin Group). They own the ferry rights, but the tenancy is held by Bournemouth Boating Services, who also operate the Tuckton Tea Garden Down-River Ferry. Since 1963 the Wick ferry service has been summer-only. The ferry crosses the Stour from a pontoon landing stage (with toll-hut) on the Christchurch side to the old stone slip inherited from Marshall's time on the Wick side. The punt, which has a green hull with red waterline, is the same that was fitted with an outboard engine in 1947. Since then the sides have been raised to increase freeboard, space has been made on the foredeck for carrying buoyant apparatus and a 6hp. Lister engine installed and given an air-inlet funnel. Capacity is limited to twelve passengers.

THE TUCKTON FERRY: The Christchurch down-river ferry was started by a Mr. Hodges in 1910 with two motor-boats, the **Pioneer I** and **Pioneer II**, both petrol-engined. Ralph Elliott put a boat on the service in 1919, followed by his brothers Ben and Frank. Frank ran only for a short time but held the licence until the early 'fifties; Ralph operated till the end of 1953 and died in January 1954. No attempt was made to form a company: boats remained individually owned, but worked together as a 'combine'. Ted Stride was working the service from 1926 and three more

boat-owners - Thornton, Keynes and Kendall were taking part from 1927. George Derham was another early starter, but left a few years later to run an independent service based at Convent Walk on the River Avon. About 1930 Ted Budden, Bert Stride and W. Croucher joined the original combine which henceforth traded under the name of United Service Motor Boats. A reputation was established for smart, clean boats, and good timekeeping.

The Convent Walk service, started in 1930, changed hands in 1933 when George Derham sold out to new owners. This concern ultimately had five boats on the ferry:- **Venture** (1930), **Avon Belle** and **Lady of Avon** (1932), and **Avon Vanity** and **Ocean Queen** (1935). It survived the interruption of World War II but eventually closed down in the early 'fifties. The United Service faced further competition when 'The Funnel Boats' began running in the mid-thirties. This venture, run by Edwin Mens and his son Norman, worked from the Christchurch side of the river at Tuckton Bridge and ran to Mudeford beach. By 1939 it had a fleet of seven 12-seater boats, each of which had a dummy funnel on the engine-box. The Funnel Boats service (together with a boat yard) changed hands about 1949, and again about three times before its closure in 1968. During the 1950s it had a fleet of four 48-seaters and two older boats with a capacity of 22, and made an intermediate call at Wick Holiday Camp (now Pontin's). From 1955 they worked from the Bournemouth side of Tuckton Bridge. Their fleet latterly included **Tuckton Belle**, **Tuckton Maid**, **Stour Queen**, **Stour Belle**; and the **Avon Belle** and **Lady of Avon** bought from Convent Walk when that service closed down c. 1953.

Originally the ferries of Hodges and his United Service successors ran from Christchurch Quay to Mudeford Beach (Sandbanks). At the Mudeford end all three concerns had their own landing-stages, while two of them (United Service and Convent Walk) had tea-boats moored there. These were house-boats converted to floating Cafes, with hulls approximately 45ft. x 20ft. beam. Between 1930 and the outbreak of World War II the United Service had about 9 boats (all 12-seater) working between Christchurch Quay and Mudeford Beach under licences issued by Christchurch Council.

Their long, two-pontoon landing-stage at Mudeford adjoined a two-deck tea-boat which served locally caught salmon, lobster and prawn teas. The tea-boat was owned by Mr. Croucher, one of the ferryboat owners. Trade was blossoming and in 1931 five of the operators decided to invest in a larger boat to be owned between them. This boat, the **Unity**, was the first large passenger boat designed for and fitted with Hotchkiss cone propellers, the patent of a Poole engineer. Convent Walk boats already had the small 12-seater **Venture** with this new form of propulsion, but the **Unity** represented a considerable advance on her, and was sometimes used by Donald Hotchkiss for demonstrations before the R.N.L.I. and other interested parties. On one occasion a trip was made to Mudeford through reed beds and over weeds, returning all the way in reverse! The arrangement however utilised valuable seating-space in the boats and after a few years they were converted to diesel, with single-screws.



In 1934 trade was still on the increase and five of the operators decided on a design by Eric French for a 50-seater boat with the propeller in a tunnel and a draught of 15 inches when loaded. Five of these sister-craft were built and named with a **Headland** prefix, e.g. **Headland Queen**, the **Headland** being presumably a reference to Hengistbury. All fares were collected on the boats, return tickets being sold initialled on the back so that the skipper who brought the passengers back sold the tickets back to the seller for half the return fare: this system continued until 1954, when, as will be seen, the service was worked to and from Tuckton Tea Gardens.

During World War II, Christchurch Harbour and river were closed to traffic from 1940 to June 1945, but the ferryboats went on 'Active service'. **Headland Pal**, **Headland Queen** served with the R.A.F. at Chichester, **Headland Belle** on the Beaulieu River, and the **Avon Vanity** at Poole: while the **Headland Maid** went to the west coast of Scotland. What had been a freak boat was bought by Ted Budden soon after the war, and was later acquired by the combine in 1963 and converted for use on the ferry. This was the **Chunky**, originally built in Hull in 1935, and was a hull bearing an Armstrong-Siddeley car body and engine, complete with car seats and doors! At Mudeford, after the war, the Christchurch Council provided a public landing-stage for the 19 boats working the service. Today there are only five United Boats, and the Mudeford motor ferry making use of the landing stage. The teaboats have long disappeared. The boom years of pre-war were not to return. Trade declined, Covent Walk ferries disappearing in the mid-fifties and Funnel Boats in the late 'sixties.

In 1954 the name of the combine was shortened to United Motor Boats. That year the proprietor of Tuckton Tea Gardens asked that the service might run from there. As the potential of Tuckton for trade was unknown, it was decided that all the United boats would share a toll box on Christchurch Quay and at Tuckton Tea Gardens and pool all the takings. During the 'sixties two further calls were added to the ferry route - Double Dykes from 1964, and Pontin's (Wick ferry) from 1969. Today there are five boats working the ferry, owned by John and Richard Elliott (sons of Ben) and Robin Stride (son of Ted Stride). They own their fathers' three Headland boats and share the **Headland Pal** and the ex-Convent Walk **Avon Vanity**. They also own the self-drive boating business at Tuckton Tea Gardens and the Wick ferry under the name of Bournemouth Boating Services.

Over the years many well-known personalities have travelled on the Tuckton ferry, especially actors appearing in Bournemouth summer shows. But the ferry has had its own personalities who have given long service and become very well-known locally. One of these was Reg Keynes. The Keynes family have run a boat business at Christchurch Quay since 1906. They ran a 12-seater ferry from 1927-1933 and owned the **Headland Pal** from 1934-70. (The **Pal** was sold to Keyhaven but bought back for the ferry by the present operators). Reg skippered a boat for 5 years but was chiefly occupied on the quay. He died in 1979. Another personality of the ferry was Ralph Elliott, owner of the **Sally** and the **Headland Maid** from 1919 to 1954.

The service had had a remarkably accident free record, but there was universal sorrow when, during the 'fifties, one of the skippers died of a heart attack while at the helm. The varnished ferryboat Sally, going to Mudeford to pick up people for shopping in Christchurch, had left at 9.15am. empty, with Archie Frampton as skipper. When the next boat went down-river about twenty minutes later, the Sally was found circling out of control in the harbour, with Archie (who was in his sixties) lying dead beside the wheel. Although the heyday of this ferry service is in the past, and the number of boats employed is much less than fifty years ago, trade is still brisk in the holiday season, and the reputation for smart, clean boats and good timekeeping has been conscientiously maintained.

MUDEFORD FERRY: This service crosses the dangerous Mudeford 'run' at the entrance to Christchurch Harbour, between Mudeford Quay and Mudeford Sandbank. Notes we examined in Christchurch Library state 'this ferry is by right of custom operated by the Derham family', while the book "Ferries and Ferryman" declares unequivocally "the Mudeford Ferry, for years a perquisite of the Derham family". Our investigations, however, do not bear this out. In fact it would appear that the Derhams, Cokes, Strides, Edgells and indeed other fishing families were all concerned with this ferry for many years up to about 1975. In later years ferrymen Ron Foster (now, sadly, deceased) and Mike Parker have been regular operators.



The boats used have traditionally been flat-bottomed salmon punts of about 15 foot length, and broad in the beam. They were fitted with thole pins and supplied with three oars. In rough or very strong tide conditions two men would row. In the home of fisherman Parker at Haven Cottages, there is a fine sepia photograph of rowboat ferries dealing with a long queue of intending passengers on the Sandbanks side. By the mid-1960s demands were being heard for a motor boat which could deal more rapidly with the crowds, and provide greater comfort and security for its passengers. The safety factor began to be raised, in spite of the excellent record of the rowboat ferrymen. These arguments came to a head from 1969 to 70 when the local press reported constantly on the ferry issue.

In March the Christchurch Council appear to have granted a concession to run a motor ferry to a Mr. John Gelsthorpe and partners; and in April the Council were taken to task by Mr. K. Derham in the local paper in no uncertain manner: "I think the council have made a wrong decision in granting the concession to operate a motor ferry by persons who have little or no experience of operating in the Run. This job entails very expert experience of boat handling as can be obtained only through years of rowing to and fro across the Run under all conditions of wind and tides. Wind in excess of 20 knots and tide 4-5 knots and even more when the rivers are in flood". A week later the local panel of three who normally granted the ferry licences refused to meet to consider the application, and the Town Clerk suggested that the matter might have to be referred to the Christchurch magistrates. In addition, opposition was being voiced by the rowboat ferrymen. The following month the matter appeared to be closed when the applicants said they could not afford the £60 required to cover the ferry's insurance, so they were withdrawing and putting their £600 motor-boat up for sale. It next appeared that the Council had 'jumped the gun' in assuming the ferry would be motorised, for a metal landing-stage had been delivered to the Sandbank side, and ferryman Mike Parker enquired of the Mudeford and Stanpit Residents' Association how much money the Council had spent on it? No direct answer was forthcoming to this question and Mr. E.I. Grace changed the subject to the matter of safety, and overcrowding of the rowboats.

There was no evidence of overloading, but the rowboat ferry came under further attack when Councillor M. Lynk, Chairman of the Safety Committee commented that it was a 'potential catastrophic disaster', and persuaded his committee to request the Beach Committee to re-examine the possibility of a motor ferry, and to emphasise 'in the strongest possible terms' their opposition to the rowboat ferry continuing under the long-standing conditions. Thus, within a matter of weeks discussion over a possible motor ferry had led to an extraordinarily fierce attack on the established rowboats, in spite of their excellent safety record. Ferryman Mike Parker objected to an attack by a councillor 'who admits he hasn't any specialised knowledge of rowing or boats'; while Councillor Freestone told the Committee 'it had not been intended to do away with the rowboat ferry but to supplement it'. A few days later however Alderman Bell stated at a council meeting, in reply to a question, that the Council would prefer a motorised ferry, firstly on the grounds of safety and secondly because it would facilitate the running of a timetable service. In November that year an Editorial in the local paper urged a get-together between Council and local boatmen to resolve the problem - but at the same time declaring it would be unfair to run a motor boat in competition with the established ferry.

Christmas intervened and it was February 1970 before the ferry was really in the news again. At last the Christchurch Council and the local boatmen held joint discussions. It transpired that the Council were willing to spend £3,000 on a suitable motor-boat and hire it to the rowboat ferrymen. The ferrymen however showed a distinct lack of enthusiasm for working such a boat as

'employees of the Council'. A breakthrough came to the deadlock in the April, when two experienced Mudeford fishermen, Andrew Russell and William Watson, applied for permission to run the ferry with boats purchased by the Council. The application came as a surprise, both to the ferrymen and the Councillors. Mr. Ken Derham also admitted surprise, but he added "They are two good men. There is no question about that. They have had years of experience of the run, and I think the council is lucky to have them interested in the ferry".

The arrangements were for the Council to buy two 21ft. Cheverton Champ heavy duty glass fibre workboats with 15hp. Lister diesels at £1,756 each, and to sell them to the partners with repayments by instalments over 2 years. Their right to run the ferry would be for 10 years, and the boats would be licensed for 12 passengers and comprehensively insured. New landing steps at the quay for the exclusive use of the ferry, were to be provided at a cost of £425. The service would operate in the summer months and the adult single fare was agreed at 1/-.

That summer the motor ferry commenced running, and the rowboat ferry continued in opposition; the former worked from the new ferry steps to the Sandbanks jetty upstream, while the rowboats worked from the public steps straight across the Run to the beach. Trouble arose when the Council authorised a conspicuous notice advertising the motor ferry on Mudeford quay, but demanded the removal of a smaller sign exhibited by the rowboat ferrymen. This simply said "THIS IS THE FISHERMEN'S ROWING FERRY" but it had not been authorised and the quay superintendent requested it be pulled down and taken to the Council's depot. "The Council is definitely trying to force us out of business" said ferryman Mike Parker. "It is most unfair. We realise that the motor ferry will get the bulk of the trade, but we see no reason why we should not continue to operate".

Time, however, is a Great Healer and the motor ferry has now come to be both accepted and appreciated. At the end of June 1970 the service began with the two 21ft. Cheverton launches, **Ferry Lass** and **Ferry Girl**. The following year a 22ft. clinker-built relief boat, the **Wally**, was acquired but was replaced after some months by an 18ft. Cheverton, **Champ**. In 1973 William Watson withdrew from the partnership, and the **Champ** and the **Ferry Girl** were both sold. In their place was purchased a 25ft. clinker-hull Ramsgate passenger launch (built at Deal) and named **Ocean Dawn**. In 1977 this boat was sold and replaced by the **Ferry Lady**, built by Treeve at Hayle and fitted out by Andy Russell himself. Her passenger capacity is 32 and she carries a crew of two.

Over the past ten years, stress of weather has caused the ferry to be suspended on about four days. An 'as-required' rather than a timetable service is provided and the ferry does not run in winter except at fine weather weekends when a need seems indicated. Since the end of the partnership a regular crew of at least two has been employed on a part-time basis. One August evening in 1980 we watched **Ferry Lady** at work on 'The Run'. Nearby the salmon-punt rowing ferry lay keel uppermost on the beach and had apparently not run that season. **Ferry Lady** was being expertly handled with ex-rowboat ferryman Mike Parker at the helm. The old adage was proving true: "If you can't beat 'em, join 'em!"