

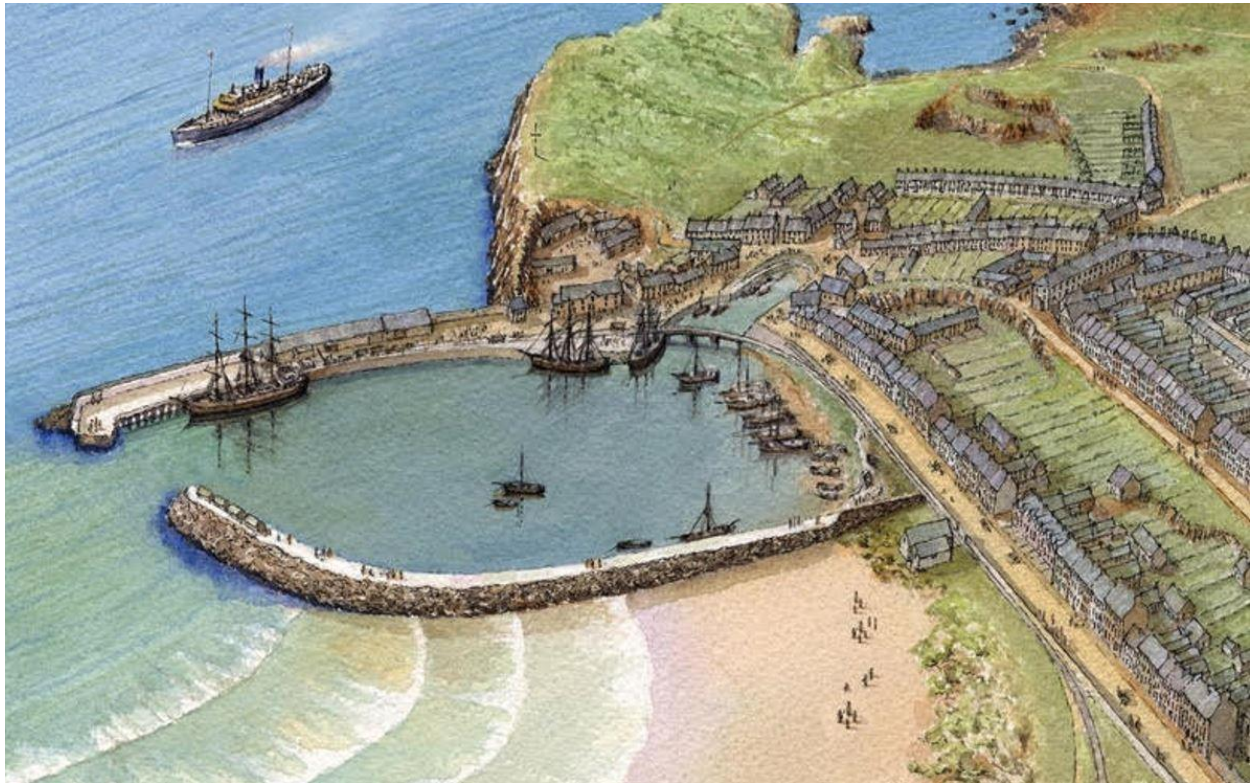
Last Port of call for an old convict Ship From Golden Strands by Maurice McAleese

One of the most unusual ships ever to drop anchor at Portrush was an old convict ship named, rather strangely, "Success" and although there is some doubt about this, the visit most probably took place sometime during the summer of 1912.



SUCCESS in Hobart, Tasmania

A tattered old poster describes the ship as “the sight of a lifetime” and it surely must have been: no doubt it would have attracted a good deal of curiosity and interest among visitors and residents alike. On that old poster someone has scribbled “1904 approx.” and that is the only reference there is as to the time of the visit.



Portrush Harbour c1905: From a painting by Philip Armstrong copyright Portrush Heritage Group

But I am fairly certain that it was much later than that and the old poster gives a couple of clues which would tend to confirm this. For example, it notes that the visit of the “Success” was while the ship was “en route to America.” Records show that the old ship crossed the Atlantic in 1912 and spent the next twenty years or so touring around various ports in America. So Portrush could well have been her last port of call before her Atlantic crossing.

That old poster also highlighted the fact that the “Success” had been 17 years on tour as a museum ship at the time of her Portrush visit. Again, her seafaring history states that after a thorough refit she began touring Australian ports before heading for England, arriving in Dungeness on 12 September 1895.

So, by 1912, as the poster announced, she would have been 17 years on tour. I'm sure the chance of being shown over a former convict ship would have been a huge attraction for many people, visitors, and residents alike, but alas I can find no reference to the visit in the local newspapers.

The "Success" was an impressive looking vessel of 621 tons, full masted, and she had been built at Tenasserim in Burma in 1840. In May 1852 she arrived at Melbourne – most of the passengers were emigrants. It was the time of the great gold rush in Australia and the ship's crew deserted and headed for the goldfields. At this time prisons were packed to overflowing and so the Government of Victoria tried to solve the problem by purchasing large sailing ships for use as prison hulks.



SUCCESS in Melbourne: Image State Library of South Australia

When no longer needed as a prison ship, the "Success" was bought by a group of entrepreneurs and fitted out as a museum ship, the intention being that she should travel the world, putting on display "the perceived horrors of the convict era". And that is how, one day in the summer of 1912, she sailed into Portrush. How long she stayed is not known but undoubtedly her visit must have been a great attraction for the area.



Success as a Museum Ship

One last sad note: the “Success” fell into disrepair in the late 1930s and was destroyed by fire while being dismantled for her teak on 4th July 1946 at Cleveland, Ohio.

Our thanks to Maurice for allowing us to reprint the above text from his excellent book Golden Strands. 15th January 2022