

Red Funnel Ferries

22nd November 2005 - Roy Underdown Pavilion

We see the Red Funnel ferries on Southampton Water or the Solent, and we take them for granted. I suppose that is natural since the original company was registered in 1861, so they have been running for a long time. At our meeting in November, Hazel Nicholson told us the history and illustrated it with some very interesting pictures. Who better to tell the story than someone who worked in the Company for 46 years, starting as an office worker and rising to Company Secretary. The pictures she showed included one from the 1820's, when there was no pier on the Isle of Wight and passengers were rowed to and from the ship by dinghy. The cattle and sheep they carried were expected to swim. We saw paddle boats and packet steamers with very tall funnels, and some with open-air bridges. The present company name was adopted in 1935, and the funnels were painted red with black tops, which were easier to keep clean. And then came the roll-on-roll-off vessels with a ramp at both ends, and the inevitable question, "Which is the bow?"