

g times for bonnie Oban Bay

anager Duncan MacInnes casts rapidly changing scene



‘So, 10 tonnes of hay would have to be taken on-board at 10 bales at a time.

‘It was a lot slower and there wasn’t as many sailings as there are now, but we were always kept busy’

Unsuspecting ‘stowaways’ could also cause problems for Duncan and the CalMac workers.

‘We would often get people boarding the wrong boats. If they were in the wrong car lane then it was quite easy to happen.

‘If somebody was heading to the Western Isles, or Coll and Tiree, we would have to stop the ship at Craignure to let them off and then make sure they got onto the right boat.

‘There was also a lot more visitors from Scotland and the north of England then,’ he said.

‘When I started, there was cargo boats from the Clyde which would take days heading to Stornoway - and every conceivable thing would sail.’

Duncan would also help cruise liners coming into Oban - and the requests could be very varied.

‘You could be asked to get £2,000 in British sterling - or arrange a cake for a woman celebrating her birthday on board.

‘CalMac captains would also be on call to guide cruise liners into Oban harbour as it is so tight,’ said Duncan.

He believes the introduction of roll-on -roll-off ferries has been the biggest change in Oban and CalMac’s *MV Isle of Mull* is still Duncan’s favourite.

The bay and pier area has seen many changes over the years and Duncan says that opponents to the building of a second linkspan should realise how much Oban depends on ferry traffic and the amount of revenue brought into Oban by CalMac.

He said: ‘A second linkspan badly needed as there is a real struggle for space there [pier] and it will give more flexibility to the timetables.

‘If one boat is late then there is a knock on effect for the rest of the day.

‘Anybody can see on a busy summer’s day how badly a second linkspan is needed.’

And the strong link between the islands and Oban are not all mechanical.

Duncan says those calling for a ferry service between the island of Barra and the mainland port of Mallaig don’t fully appreciate the close ties Oban has with Barra.

He said: ‘So many people from Barra have connections with Oban. They often stay with them here before sailing. It is less sailing time between Barra and Mallaig - but then you have more time travelling by road to your final destination.’

If CalMac was to lose the current tendering process for the routes out of Oban, Duncan does not believe it would have much difference to the numbers of ferry staff employed in the town. He believes any reduction would come in CalMac’s Gourock head office.

He said: ‘Whoever takes over would still need workers and I would like to think their jobs would be pretty secure.’

Oban Bay and its harbour sit on the edge of major changes but as Duncan MacInnes has already worked through changing times he believes shouldn’t hold any fears.

