

8th February 2024

Backstory

“If you’re not familiar with the backstory, I’ll give you a quick little run-down.”

The Angry Video Game Nerd, “CD-I Part One”, *James D Rolfe*

I love it when one of my reflections sparks off memories for one of my readers. Such was the case recently with my piece headed “Excuses”, when I wrote about trips on a steamer between Fort William and Oban when I was a child. I got a lovely message from a friend who shared her own stories about the self-same boat. I won’t divulge those here. So I’ll confine myself to expressing my thanks that she’s also given me the proper name of the steamer in question – *King George V*.

The *TS King George V* (or the KGV, or “The King George” as she was often known) was a pioneering Clyde passenger turbine steamer, built in 1926 by William Denny & Brothers, and in service for almost fifty years thereafter. Owned by David MacBrayne Ltd, she was soon a familiar sight on Scotland’s west coast, initially around Inverary and Campbeltown. From 1935, she was based in Oban, cruising round Mull, to Iona, Staffa and, of course, Fort William. In World War II, she was requisitioned as a troop carrier, initially based at Southampton, and in 1940 was used to evacuate troops from Rotterdam, Ostend, Calais, Boulogne, and, famously, Dunkirk, landing 4,300 men at Dover. She returned to Oban in 1947 and operated from there each summer, until she was withdrawn from service in 1974.

All this ... and a little boy thought she was just designed for the pleasure of a family trip at sea, and to offer my dad and grampa a chance to go downstairs to “see the engines” – *and* indulge in a small refreshment.

What a backstory! It’s a parable of the importance of listening to people’s stories and not just accepting what’s presented to you. I once went to visit an elderly church member in hospital and heard her described by the Ward Sister as “the pancreas in the end bed”. A delightful lady, reduced to one part of her anatomy, the label for her in a busy hospital Ward. But behind the dodgy pancreas there was a life, a backstory, that was both full and fascinating. What a pity no one took time to find out.

So be careful in assuming that what you see and know is all there is, when there might be an interesting backstory – like my *TS King George V* rescuing 4,300 men from the beaches of Dunkirk, and much more besides.

A prayer for today

For fullness of life, in me and those around me, today I give thanks. Amen

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