

CHAPTER II

THE STEAMBOAT QUAY

Steam navigation, which had been pioneered on the Clyde by Henry Bell with his famous Comet, was not long in reaching Rothesay. "The first Steamer reached Rothesay in 1814; its speed was six miles an hours," records the Visitor's Guide Book to Rothesay and the Island of Bute of 1858. On the 22nd of April 1815 the Council met to consider what harbour dues should be charged on a steamboat which it was proposed to sail between Rothesay and Glasgow in the ensuing six months. The sum of £5 was fixed. Unfortunately the steamboat was unnamed. 10th May 1816 is the next date upon which steamboats were on the Council's agenda. On that occasion £5.5.-d. was fixed as a composition for harbour dues for the period of twelve months for each of the Rothesay Castle and the Dumbarton Castle. In 1818 the Albion is recorded as sailing to Rothesay twice a week.

The coming of the steamboat made harbour repairs even more imperative and at last on the 29th of December 1819, on the instigation of the then Provost, the second Marquess of Bute, a subscription list was opened for the repair of the harbour.

On the 20th of November the following year Councillor Archibald Moore laid before the Town Council a Scheme which had been prepared by the Marquess for financing the rebuilding of the Harbour. The Scheme envisaged by the Marquess recorded that £2000 had been raised by subscription from the inhabitants of the town. Of the £2000, £1000 had been contributed by the Marquess himself. Judging by the terms of a letter written to the Marquess by his factor on the 30th of March 1819 the £1000 contributed by the townspeople must have involved personal sacrifice for many. The factor, referring to the then proposed public subscription, wrote . . . "I am afraid the heavy part of such advance will lye upon your Lordship. I know all the people look for it, and they really in general, can ill afford to advance much themselves."

The Marquess suggested that, additional to the £2000 raised by subscription, the Council should borrow £5000, £4000 from the Exchequer Bill Commissioners and £1000 from

himself. The Marquess further undertook to act as cautioner to the Government for the Exchequer loan provided the Council made over to him the sum of £2000 and undertook to pay the interest on the Exchequer loan. By means of this scheme £5000 could be expended on the harbour at no other charge than payment of interest by the Council on the nett sum of £3000. Although the Burgh had by this point in its history a nett free income of approximately £150 which was just sufficient to service such a loan, it was envisaged that a small "exaction" would be required from the inhabitants and traders of Rothesay.

The Scheme received the unanimous support of the Council who recorded their thanks for the "great attention paid by His Lordship to the interests of the Burgh." In a letter of appreciation sent by the Council to the Marquess the hope was expressed that were the work to be fairly begun and some progress made in the erection of a pier properly adapted on a moderate scale for the trade of the place, that the inhabitants at large and particularly the ship owners would come forward and voluntarily assess themselves to assist in the payment of interest.

Only fifteen months later on the 22nd of February 1822 the Council considered a plan and specification for rebuilding and improving the piers and harbour which had been drawn up by Hugh Baird, a Civil Engineer of Kelvinhead. The plan and specification was for the rebuilding of the northmost section of the new or west pier, the erection of a drawbridge to link the rebuilt section of the west pier with the head of the old or east pier and the dredging of the two harbours. Baird's proposals were accepted by the Council with the exception of a planned parapet wall along the new quay, the drawbridge and the dredging. The surface for the new quay was however upgraded to whinstone cobbles.

At the same meeting the Council considered tenders which had been received for the work and received a report that the loan of £4000 had been received from the Exchequer Bill Commissioners.

On the 9th of March 1822 the Council awarded the contract for extending and rebuilding the northmost section of the west pier to Robert Napier, a Greenock architect, and his

brother Andrew, a Largs mason. The plan of the rebuilt and extended pier no longer exists, but the contract was engrossed in the Minute Book of the Council. Thus although the exact form of the rebuilt and extended pier can only be gleaned from a map of Rothesay drawn in 1825 the details of its construction are well recorded.

The new pier was to be 38 feet broad at its base and 32 feet broad at deck level which was to be 14 feet above low water mark. The hearting was to be contained by two outer walls. The sea wall and the harbour wall for 50 yards inside the pier head were to be founded 4 feet below low water mark spring tides and have a breadth of 5 feet at their base and 3 feet 6 inches at their top. The remainder of the harbour wall was also to be founded 4 feet below low water mark, but was only to be 4 feet broad at its base and 3 feet broad at its top. The retaining walls were to be of slate or freestone below low water mark and of whinstone or white freestone above low water mark. All the work under high water mark neap tides was to be built dry; all above was to be done with lime mortar. A stair was to be inserted in the harbour wall. A gap of 24 feet between the east and west piers was to form the communication between the inner and outer harbours. The surface of the new pier was to be cobbled with 9 inches whinstone sets.

The work was to be executed by the Napiers over the spring, summer and autumn of 1822 and 1823.

The price for the whole work including maintenance by the Napiers for two years after completion was £4,200 payable by instalments during the currency of the job.

A human touch was added to the contract by the Council agreeing to lend the Napiers two lighters, a large quarry crane and a variety of other tools for the duration of the work.

By Michaelmas 1822 about 180 feet of the outer wall of the quay, the quay head and a small part of the inner wall had been completed justifying payments to the Napiers totalling £740.2.10d.

On the 29th of July 1823 the Council decided to improve the specification for the paving of the new quay by having the whinstone sets laid in regular courses across the quay and pitching them 6 inches at the centre of the quay. This was to involve an extra payment of £30 to the Napiers.

By Michaelmas 1823 the whole of the outer wall with the exception of about 100 feet at its western angle and the whole of the inner wall with the exception of about 60 feet near its east end had been completed. Much of the hearting was in and paving of the surface had commenced. Payments totalling a further £1716.1.3d had been made to the Napiers.

Even in these days contracts did not always run according to schedule.

It was reported to the Council on the 10th of March 1823 that several whinstone palls (i.e. bollards), ten 9 pounder guns, four 6 pounder guns and two other guns of an unspecified size for use as palls had been acquired for the quay. Six of the guns had been purchased from the Earl of Glasgow and six had been presented by the Marquess of Bute.

Without a slip at the harbour, carriages, cattle and horses etc., could not be embarked or disembarked from steamboats and other vessels. It was accordingly resolved on the 29th of October 1823 to place a further contract with the Napiers for the erection of a slip at the northwest angle of the new pier with a platform at its lower end 5 feet above low water mark. The specification for the slip was broadly the same as that for the new pier. The price was to be measured on the completion of the job.

The following year the Council turned its attention to the east or old pier and on the 3rd of May placed a contract worth £630 for the casing of the existing pier with new whinstone walls on the east and west sides to secure a wider quay. The west wall was to be founded 2 feet below low water mark and the east wall progressively 2, 3, and 4 feet below low water mark from south to north. Two sets of steps were to be built in the new quay walls. The Napier family was again given the responsibility of bringing Rothesay Harbour up to the standards of the early 19th century.

To finance their further modernisation the Council resolved to raise a further £1000 on loan.

Before proceeding further with their resolution however the Council presented a Petition to the Commissioners for the Herring Fishery for a grant under Section 9 of an Act of Parliament for the Encouragement and Improvement of the British and Irish Fisheries (5th George IV Cap. LXIV). This

Act, which came into force on 17th June 1824, authorised expenditure by the Commissioners, not exceeding £3000 per annum, in the encouraging and assisting the building, making or repairing of Piers or Quays at such parts and places on the sea coasts of Scotland as should appear fit and necessary to the Commissioners. The presentation of the Petition would be of little significance in the history of the harbour, but for the fact that the Prayer contained an excellent description of the state of the Royal Burgh at that time.

The Prayer narrated: "That the Burgh of Rothesay contains a population of between 4000 and 5000 persons and is on the increase. Rothesay has long been known to be a most eligible place for carrying on and prosecuting the British White Herring Fishery and many individuals have embarked much of their capital in it. At the Port of Rothesay there are at present no less than 83 registered vessels forming rather better than 3700 tons besides many wherries, boats and other vessels some of them licensed, but none of them requiring to be registered and of course not alluded to in the number above mentioned. It is known that in some successful fishing seasons fully 700 persons have been employed from Rothesay at the White Herring Fishery many of whom have found their way into His Majesty's Navy and some of them have been by their faithful and distinguished service in the late Wars gradually promoted to the Rank of Lieutenants and Commanders thus confirming what is mentioned in the Statute 48 George III Cap. 110 that the British White Herring Fishery is of most essential importance to the Naval strength of the Kingdom, and it must be always looked upon as an excellent nursery for the Navy. From the Printed Report by your Honors made up for the year ended 5th April 1821, being for fishing 1820, it appears that the number of Vessels, including their repeated Voyages, which have cleared outwards for and entered inwards from the British White Herring Fishery at the Ports of Scotland exclusive of the Ports of Glasgow and Greenock were, outwards 365 vessels forming 11,625 Tons and inwards 332 vessels making 11,140 Tons of which 101 vessels cleared outwards and 90 entered inwards extending to 6,798 Tons at the Port of Rothesay alone. The Old Piers or Quays of Rothesay being very small and almost ruinous the Petitioners were convinced

that to afford the necessary protection and needful accommodation to the fishing interest of Rothesay it was necessary to build a New Pier and strengthen and enlarge the old one and in the year 1822 the work was commenced and is now so far completed but a considerable part yet remains to be done. The estimated expense of the whole amounts to £6,500 Sterling. The revenue of the Burgh is very small, not amounting to more than £173 annually of nett income after paying Cess or Land Tax, Ministers' Stipend, Schoolmaster and Burgh Officers' Salaries and other ordinary expenses, and even out of this sum sundry miscellaneous incidental expenses have to be paid. Towards accomplishing the work before mentioned the Petitioners were obliged to resort to private voluntary subscriptions and borrowing money on the security of the net Burgh Revenue small as it is (amounting to less than £170), and out of this sum the annual interest amounting to £150 falling due yearly on the borrowed money has to be paid. In consequence of the money so borrowed, assisted by the voluntary subscriptions, the Petitioners were able to command a fund of £4000 which has been already wholly expended and laid out in the work much to the satisfaction of the Petitioners and others who have had occasion to see what has been done, but the Petitioners regret much that they have not any funds wherewith to carry on and complete the remaining parts of the projected and very necessary improvements in their Piers without receiving some public aid."

The eloquence of the Petitioners unfortunately did not bear fruit and on 19th November 1824 it was once again resolved to borrow the additional £1000.

It was reported to the Council on 26th August 1824 that the only part of the harbour which had not as yet been rebuilt, namely the north/south leg of the west pier — which in 1824 had sea to both east and west — was likely to become ruinous unless speedily repaired. It was accordingly decided to repair that part of the west pier according to an approved specification. The repairs only involved the taking down and rebuilding of three courses of the east wall and consolidating the top course of the west wall. Old stones then lying in the Inner Harbour were salvaged for the job, the contract for which

was awarded to the Napiers. The agreed price was £46 plus not more than £6 for lime.

At the same Council Meeting it was agreed that it would be to the advantage of the harbour and public, as well as the neighbouring proprietors, if a breastwork 30 feet broad were to be erected parallel to the northmost boundaries of the properties on the north side of Princes Street (now West Princes Street) situated between the head of the East Pier and the north end of Bishop Street. Provided the Princes Street proprietors would pay for erecting the wall in so far as ex *adverso* their properties the Council undertook to meet the expense of extending the new wall so as to unite it properly with the lower end of Bishop Street and of filling in behind the new wall. The wall was to be founded so as to allow vessels drawing $7\frac{1}{2}$ feet to moor at it at high water. This was the beginning of Albert Place.

The additional loan of £1000 sought by the Council was found through the generosity of the Marquess of Bute who, the Council learned on 16th December 1824, had agreed to lend the Burgh the sum in question. This enabled the Council to pay the balance remaining due to the Napiers in relation to the various pier contracts. The same day the Council resolved to carry out what was to be the last major harbour improvement of the decade, namely the erection of a breast wall at the south end of the Inner Harbour adjacent to Guildford Street (now Guildford Square). The new wall united the southern ends of the east and west piers and provided additional wharfage.

In 1826 dredging was carried out, and during the winter of 1827/28 fairly extensive storm damage was sustained by the pier which necessitated the taking of borings off the damaged parts to ascertain the nature of the sea bed.