

CHAPTER VII

BREASTWORKS

As at other piers on the Clyde the Sabbath breakers were not initially welcome at Rothesay. The Minutes of 11th July 1853 record that "a conversation ensued regarding a proposal which had been publicly announced by parties in Glasgow to sail a steamer to Rothesay on the Sabbath day. The Trustees unanimously expressed their strong disapproval of such a desecration of the Sabbath and expressed their resolution to discourage the attempt by all the means in their power." Although the steamer concerned — the Emperor — did not visit Rothesay on Sundays until 1854, it called at various piers around the shores of Gareloch, Holy Loch, and Loch Goil on Sundays in 1853. Its reception varied from a passive acceptance of changing times at Kilmun to staged battles with Sabbatarians at Garelochhead. The Trustees' defence of the Sabbath day was short lived and Sunday sailings soon became a normal occurrence. For example on 17th June 1859 the Harbour Collector reported to a meeting of the Harbour Committee that the Captain and owners of the Emperor had refused payment of harbour dues for a trip and call at the Harbour and Pier on Sabbath last 12th June although demanded at the time by the Harbour Master. There had actually been Sunday mail runs from Rothesay to Greenock by the Castle Company's steamers in the early 1820s, but these were regarded as social necessities, whereas excursion sailings were definitely not.

1853 also saw the start of a protracted discussion to rebuild the breast wall along Princes Street from the East Quay to the foot of Bishop Street. The work was eventually carried out in the spring and summer of 1856 using stone from the Bogany Quarry. The Guildford Square breast of the inner harbour received similar attention the following year.

On 11th June 1855 the Trustees approved expenditure of £14:14:-d. on a clock for the harbour and a further £6 for its erection. The clock, which was erected on the north end of the roof of the shed opposite the drawbridge originally had

only one face, but had additional faces and lighting added the following year.

It was not until 23rd November 1858 that any further improvements were considered by the Trustees. On that date Mr. John Napier suggested to a meeting of the Harbour Committee that the outer harbour breastwork should be continued as far as the lower end of the late Dr. McAllister's property in East Princes Street for the purpose of erecting the public crane thereon and providing landing accommodation for weighty materials and so relieve the existing piers to that extent. Dr. McAllister's property was at the northeast corner of what is now Bishop Terrace Brae.

Four days later the committee deliberated the propriety of extending the existing west pier into the inner harbour with a view to erecting sheds and increasing the accommodation for passengers and goods.

Both suggestions were considered simultaneously in some detail by the Trustees. Various alternatives were debated and various plans obtained.

The extension of the west pier into the inner harbour did not materialise but an additional shed did. In May 1859 the contract for erecting the shed (excluding its roof) was awarded to Mr. J. A. Mackechnie and the contract for its roof to Mr. John Moodie, a Blacksmith. The respective prices were £95 and £38:10:-d. The position of this shed is not clear.

The East Princes Street breastwork was slower to materialise. In 1860 Lord Bute's Tutor-at-Law gave the scheme his blessing by agreeing to release a piece of ground required for the project for a nominal consideration. This enabled more concrete proposals to be formulated, detailed plans to be considered and estimates obtained for the intended breastwork, a small pier at its north eastern extremity and for suitable cranes.

The estimates for the pier and breastwork ranged from £2953 to £2191 inclusive of causewaying and filling. The lowest estimate which was submitted by Mr. John A. Napier of Rothesay was accepted on 14th May 1860. The 1860 Ordnance Survey Map shows the precise form of the pier and breast as originally designed, but unfortunately the details of their construction were not recorded. All that is known is that

the sea wall was to be of whinstone and the contract was to be completed by 1st October 1861.

Work proceeded exceptionally slowly one reason being the difficulty Mr. Napier encountered in obtaining whinstones as large as specified in the contract. The Trustees decided to allow Mr. Napier to substitute two courses of freestone next to the foundations instead of whinstone in order to allow work to proceed and also allowed Mr. Napier a further year within which to complete the work. By October 1862 however the pier and breast were still nowhere near completion and the time allowed for the contract was extended yet again this time till 7th October 1863.

On 14th September 1863, with still a considerable amount of work undone, it was reported to the Trustees that Mr. Napier had gone bankrupt. The trustee in bankruptcy could not offer a satisfactory guarantee to the Harbour Trustees that the work would be completed on his account and accordingly the unfinished work was rescheduled and offers invited.

The new contractor was Mr. William Moncrieff of Bruntfield, Edinburgh, who offered to complete the pier and breast for £2575 which was £384 more than Napier's offer for the whole job. 1st May 1865 was the completion date for the contract. Even then all was not plain sailing. In April 1864 shortly after starting work Mr. Moncrieff reported that he was doubtful of finding a suitable foundation for the outer end of the pier. As a result the pier had to be extended eastwards necessitating the acquisition of an additional area of ground from Lord Bute and two plots of grass belonging to Mr. Orkney and Captain Bannatyne. Mr. Orkney was paid £8 and Captain Bannatyne £19. Lord Bute was paid a rent of 1/-d. a year.

At long last the Trustees' luck turned. On 6th April 1865 the Harbour Committee learned that the breast and pier were finished. Four days later the full Harbour Trust recorded their satisfaction with the prompt and substantial manner in which Mr. Moncrieff had completed the works contracted for and furnished him with an extract of the Minute. The new pier was named Princes Pier.

Shortly after placing the original pier and breastwork contract the Trustees placed a contract for recausewaying the west pier with Mr. Robert McNaïr. This contract also turned

out to be highly unsatisfactory. The contractor failed to execute the work according to specification and was released from the contract being paid nothing for the work done. The contract was not re-awarded and the pier was patched up at the worst places.

The drawbridge and patent slip were also giving trouble at this time. The former required extensive repairs while the latter required to be provided with a new slip and cradle. The new slip and cradle were estimated to cost between £80 and £100.

1860 saw the erection of a 2 ton crane on the west pier — or rather two cranes — as the first one failed to stand up to its warranted strength. The combined price for this crane and for a 4 ton crane for the new breast was £115.

In 1861 the Trustees gave consideration to a Petition regarding the proposed erection of a pier near the Point of Craigmore. The view was taken that there should be no objection to the new pier provided the existing interests of the Harbour and Burgh were protected.

1862 saw the Harbour's fresh water supply system being extended by the Rothesay Water Company Limited. This was done principally to supply the steamboats.

In 1863 the Quays, in so far as still uncobbled, were metalled with crushed whinstone from the quarry at Bogany.

On 31st July 1866 a complaint was received by the Harbour Committee from the Harbour Master to the effect that "on Saturday evening last Captain Williamson of the steamer Sultan had refused to berth his steamer as directed by him and had forced it into the Inner Harbour contrary to his express orders." The Committee instructed the Harbour Master to give the necessary information to the Procurator Fiscal that he might proceed against Captain Williamson for a breach of the Harbour Act and Regulations. One can but imagine the opprobrious comments which must have filled the evening air!