

Report

Queensferry Passage

18th May 1836

EDINBURGH, MAY 18, 1836.

AT A GENERAL MEETING of the Trustees appointed by Act of Parliament to direct the affairs of the Passage over the Frith of Forth at Queensferry, called by their Committee of Management, to consider of Measures to be adopted for adding to the Craft of the Ferry a Steam Boat of Forty Horse Power,

P R E S E N T,

The Right Honourable VISCOUNT MELVILLE,
The Right Honourable LORD ABERCROMBY,
The Right Honourable CHARLES HOPE, Lord President of the Court of Session,
The Right Honourable DAVID BOYLE, Lord Justice Clerk,
The Right Honourable WILLIAM ADAM, Lord Chief Commissioner,
The Honourable GENERAL PATRICK STEUART, Commander of the Forces,
JOHN CUNINGHAME, Esq. Solicitor-General,
ADAM ROLLAND, Esq. of Gask,
ROBERT CLARKE, Esq. of Comrie,
JAMES HUNT, Esq. of Pittencrieff,

LORD MELVILLE, Preses.

THE LORD CHIEF COMMISSIONER, Preses of a Committee of Management which met in March last, by their direction, laid before this Meeting the following Statement :

That the object of the Trust, from its commencement in 1809 to the present time, has been, *1st*, to secure perfect safety to passengers ; *2dly*, to promote the utmost dispatch. These two objects have been attained, it is believed, as perfectly as any transit across an arm of the sea will permit. The Trustees have also another duty to perform, namely, to secure to the creditors of the Trust the regular payment of their interest ; and for the safety of the principal, to limit the debt agreeably to the statute* under which they act.

The Committee of Management are well aware of the loud call for more steam power upon the passage ; and it would be a matter of the utmost gratification to them if they could hold out to the Trustees at large, and to the public, an immediate supply of that power. But not being able to do so without extraneous pecuniary assistance, the Committee of Management think it their duty, shortly, to mention

* “ Provided always, that any sum or sums of money so to be borrowed shall not, with the money already advanced or borrowed, exceed upon the whole, at any time, an amount which one-third part of the rates and duties hereby granted, shall not be equal to pay the interest thereof.”

the causes of the inadequacy of the funds of the Trust to accomplish what is so much desired.

The improvement of the Queensferry Passage commenced in 1809, several years before it was contemplated that steam could be applied to navigation. The Piers were therefore placed at distances from each other, and so formed as to suit all winds and state of tides. This was done under the able direction of the late Mr John Rennie, who planned them in 1808 and 1809. Mr Scott, a Master of the Royal Navy, of high character and great experience, was appointed superintendent of Passages in April 1810, and has acted unremittingly, and has given great satisfaction in that capacity ever since. The Ferry Regulations were then framed—intelligent skippers, well acquainted with the Ferry, and able boatmen, were provided—and it may be said, because it was universally acknowledged, that nothing could be more satisfactory as a Ferry, where the transit was by sailing vessels—the only means of navigation then in existence. But providing substantial new boats, pinnaces, and yawls, all of increased size; building the numerous Piers, the approaches to them, houses for boatmen on the south side, and for superintendants on each side, Signal-house and other lodges, store-house, boat-house, and light-houses, and the purchase of lands, and of the Ferry rights, (which had long been the property of individuals,) and making roads, so as to render the communication to the Piers quick and easy, caused a great expenditure, and very nearly exhausted the funds of the Trust.

The Ferry attained and continued in a state of the greatest perfectness for transit by sailing vessels for ten years; its traffic, and consequently its funds, were greatly increased by passengers of every description resorting to it, in preference to any other transit across the Frith; when in 1820, the use of steam was introduced at the broad Ferry from Newhaven to Burntisland, and the prosperity of the Queensferry passage was, for the first time, broken in upon. One public coach was immediately taken from Queensferry to the Burntisland Ferry. A new and commodious line of road from Burntisland to the Great North Road, together with the certainty of steam passage, induced many foot-passengers to quit Queensferry. When steam was established between Newhaven and Stirling, still more serious inroads were made upon the number of passengers at the Ferry. This commodious and cheap means of transportation not only deprived Queensferry of the great number of foot-passengers who used it as the means of getting to the numerous considerable towns, and to the populous country on the north side of the Frith, (in a stretch of more than forty miles,) but also induced many of those who travelled on horseback and in carriages, to give up these means of conveyance.* All this lowered, to a very considerable amount, the annual income of the Queensferry Trust, and made it necessary to make an effort, notwithstanding a heavy

* It may be remarked, that the transit by steam to the northern parts of Scotland, has also had some effect upon the passage of Queensferry; and the transportation of live and dead stock from Aberdeen, and other northern ports, to the London markets, is likely to be of further prejudice to it, by reducing the number of cattle and sheep which have hitherto resorted to the Queensferry.

debt and a falling income, to consider how a steam boat could be introduced as part of the craft of the passage. For this purpose the Committee of Management hired the Lady of the Lake steam boat in 1820 ; and established sufficiently, by the trial of that vessel, that if a steam vessel was made to suit the Piers, which are all inclined planes, (which the Lady of the Lake steam boat could not approach except at high water, and even then the embarking and disembarking was very inconvenient,) that the use of steam would be very advantageous. An approved model of a steam vessel being prepared by Mr Scott, the Queen Margaret, of twenty horse power, was built; and a proportional abatement of the sailing establishment took place. The original expense of building this vessel, and the annual expenditure which she caused beyond that of sailing craft, bore very heavy upon the diminished funds of the Trust, so that several improvements upon the Piers, both for safety, for convenience of navigation, and for wharfage for boats of large size, could not be undertaken. Some very important improvements on the sailing craft, conducive to safety and dispatch, were for the same cause deferred.

By means of a pecuniary aid, about to be mentioned, one of the most essential of these improvements to the Piers, the elongation of the Signal-House Pier, has however been accomplished.

The Queensferry Trust has an allowance of L.200 a year from the Post-Office. An arrangement was made, and carried into effect by a Treasury minute, directing the Postmaster-General to suspend the payment of the annual sum, and to advance at once eight years of the annuity, (L.1600.) By this aid the Trustees were enabled to complete the Signal-House Pier, which, besides other great advantages, secured safe wharfage for a sailing boat of much larger construction than those hitherto in use. Accordingly, at a meeting of the Committee of Management at North Queensferry, in Sept. 1835, when Sir Philip Durham gave most important nautical assistance, it was resolved to make an exertion, notwithstanding the unfavourable state of the funds and of the income of the Trust, to build a sailing boat of additional size. That boat, (now launched,) is so constructed, that carriages of all descriptions are run in from the Piers, and not hoisted in by tackling, as formerly ; and it is also much more capacious and convenient for cattle, the passage of which forms a very important portion of the annual income of the Ferry.

During all this period, it has been the anxious wish of the Committee of Management to find the means of adding to the present steam conveyance a steam boat of forty horse power ; and to do so, they made an attempt by advertisement, in April last, to let the Ferry on contract for three years, (the longest period that, according to act of Parliament, they can let for,) to a lessee who should furnish such a vessel ; but no contractors appeared.

The Committee of Management are enabled to state, from the report of Mr Rolland and Mr Hunt, (two of their number,) who had been appointed to examine minutely into the state of the finances of the Trust, that their funds appear to be sufficient to discharge all claims up to Whitsunday 1836.

Their report represents that the debt due by the Trust at that term will be, the principal sums held by the British Linen Company, and others, on bond, amounting in all to L.15,375, bearing interest at 4 per cent.

That the state of the Trust-affairs will approximate to the result brought out under the two following heads.

I.—STATE of the Revenue and Expenditure for each of the three years of a lease for that period after Whitsunday 1836, under a continuance of the present management and establishment.

It is contemplated that L.50 will be added to the yearly value of the lease by the substitution of the new large sailing boat, in place of one of the present craft. But even upon the supposition that L.100 *short* of the current rent should be realized, the yearly revenue would be

L.1508 0 0

The average yearly expenditure from the Trust-funds is,

L.1057 0 0

To which is to be added the average expense of steam-boat repairs,

300 0 0

1357 0 0

Leaving a surplus revenue of

L.151 0 0

II.—STATE of the probable Revenue and Expenditure, with an additional Steam Boat of forty horse power during the first year of lease, one of the large sailing boats with its crew, being dispensed with.

The total number of the present establishment of men is twenty-nine; but the proposed reduction would leave only twenty-four.

Rent, as in first view,

L.1508 0 0

To which should be added the certain saving to the lessees, consisting of,

1st, Wages of large boat's crew to be discharged, L.200 0 0

2^d, Expense of spare crew, also rendered unnecessary, 18 0 0

3^d, Saving on oil, &c. chiefly from metallic pistons, to be used in new boat, estimated at 30 0 0

4th, Saving on repair and furnishings of oil, &c. to spare steam boat, and other craft, estimated at 32 0 0

L.330 0 0

Carry forward, L.330 0 0 L.1508 0 0

Brought forward, L.330 0 0 L.1508 0 0

But the lessees will be subjected to the following *additional* charges on this new system, which should be placed to their credit; these are,

1st, Extra quantity of coal,	L.80 0 0		
2d, Extra repairs for new steamer,	30 0 0		
		110 0 0	220 0 0
Expenditure of the Trust as above,			
Expense of repairs for both steamers, average where- of estimated at		1057 0 0	1728 0 0
Interest of L.3000, which may be required for pur- chase, and complete outfit of new steamer,		400 0 0	
		120 0 0	
			1577 0 0
Surplus for first year of lease,			L.151 0 0

It appears therefore that after a sufficient trial of this establishment has been made, say at Whitsunday 1837, there is a probability that another large sailing boat with its crew, or a pinnace with its crew, may, with propriety and safety, be dispensed with; in which case the surplus revenue for the two last years of the lease, and it is to be hoped permanently thereafter, would be augmented to the sum of at least L.350, and the establishment placed in the greatest state of improvement of which it is susceptible with the present Piers.

From the above view of the funds, it appears to be probable that they would be sufficient for discharging the annual expenses of the establishment, with the addition of another steam boat, which would be very desirable, and perhaps indispensable. But the bonded debt being already to the full extent of what is authorised by the Act of Parliament, the building a new steam boat of forty horse power, cannot be obtained by borrowing.

In such an emergency however, they cannot help looking, with considerable confidence, to the same liberality which assisted them to build the important addition to the Signal-House Pier.

In another year, the advance of the Post-Office annuity will expire, and again revert, as heretofore, to the Trustees. It is the anticipation of the advance of that annuity for ten years more, which the managing trustees are anxious to have laid before the Lords of his Majesty's Treasury and the Postmaster-General. This would form a principal sum of L.2000; and the remaining L.1000, (in all L.3000, the estimated expense of a forty horse power steam vessel,) the Committee of Management are of opinion, could be supplied by savings out of their annual income.

The Committee of Management think it their duty further to mention two in-

duancements for this grant. *First*, that they should consider it incumbent upon them to endeavour, should the funds prove adequate, to discharge the Post-Office from all further claim or future application for the reverting annuity of L.200. *Secondly*, The Committee look to the probable accomplishment of releasing the Post-Office from the payment of the annuity, to the power which the superintendent will possess of so arranging the craft and the seamen, (in consequence of the great addition of steam,) as to secure the crossing of the mail at all times, and in all states of the wind and tide, without requiring the extra establishment now kept up for that purpose.

To those who are not familiarly acquainted with the subdivision of Scotland, by the great arm of the sea, the Frith of Forth, which separates the Lothians and the south, and the northern portion of Scotland, it is necessary to remark, that the Queensferry is much the most commodious place of passage, being considerably less than two miles across. All the other places of passage are from six to eight miles across; that the navigation of the Queensferry is easy, short, and regular; that with steam well applied, it is constantly passed in less than twelve minutes; that the shortest passage at the other ferries is from fifty minutes to an hour and a quarter; that to the Queensferry, on both sides, there are roads of approach in the most perfect condition; that the passage of the mail has always been by that Ferry, consequently all the north-eastern cities and towns, and districts of Scotland, and all the north Highlands, are served by this transit across the Forth; and it is the place of passage, without freight, for the King's troops, their baggage and military stores, and for many public conveyances of great importance. All these circumstances render the aid required essential, and it is hoped that the request will be thought perfectly reasonable, as the Act of Parliament prevents the trustees from raising the money by borrowing on the security of the Ferry Passage, for the purpose of carrying this important measure of additional steam power into effect.

The General Meeting of Trustees, having deliberately considered the foregoing statement, approve of the same as a fit, proper, and correct representation of the state of the facts therein contained; and give it as their opinion, that the suggestion for obtaining the fund might, with propriety, be humbly submitted to the Lords Commissioners of his Majesty's Treasury, and accordingly authorise their Preses to sign a memorial to the Treasury, referring to this minute; trusting that in an object of such general and public consequence, the advance of the Post-Office annuity for ten years may be acceded to; more especially when it is considered that the deficiency of the funds of the Trust has not been incurred by negligence or by imprudent expenditure, but is the pure result of an event which could not possibly be foreseen, namely, the application of the power of steam to navigation, ten years after the Trustees had, under the best advice, established on a most perfect system, at a great (but necessary) expense, the transit of the passage by sailing vessels.