



Extracts from various letters and other documents relative to the Union Canal, the originals of which will be shewn to any gentleman requesting a sight of them from Dr Borthwick Gilchrist.

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EXTRACTS

FROM

Edinburgh

VARIOUS LETTERS and other DOCUMENTS relative to the UNION CANAL; the Originals of which will be shewn to any Gentleman requesting a sight of them from Dr BORTHWICK GILCHRIST.

London, 5th March 1814.

SIR,

* I duly received your favour of the 27th ult. About a week ago I received a parcel that had been mis-sent to another person of my surname, and he, by a mere accident, after it had been ten days with him, found out my address, and sent it to me. It contained all the printed documents, plans and reports of Messrs Baird and Rennie, concerning the intended Union Canal. I have perused them, and entirely approve of Mr H. Baird's very judicious plans, and the line he has proposed; and I take this opportunity with much pleasure, of saying, that I have the highest opinion of Mr Hugh Baird, and of his very superior abilities as an engineer, which, joined to his experience and general and local knowledge in this matter, render him, in my estimation, more competent to direct and plan such an undertaking than any other engineer in these kingdoms, whatever may be his reputation; and I consider your Canal Company as fortunate in having so very skilful and accurate an engineer to do justice to their intentions and useful projects. I can well imagine

* The writer is a gentleman of character, much local knowledge, experience, and eminent talents in his professional pursuits, as an engineer, superintendant, and proprietor of various great works, whose name, however, need not prematurely be submitted to the Public.

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that there may be great opposition to your bill, *first*, From the proprietors of land on Mr Rennie's line, who would be benefited by a Canal going through their barren wild country; and, *secondly*, By those who are interested in the lower and more northerly line; but the principal, and, I fear, the most weighty opposition, may arise from those opulent coal proprietors to the east and south of Edinburgh, who have expended large sums of money, and employ large capitals, in fitting their deep coaleries with expensive large steam engines and machinery, viz. * * * * *. Of course their interest must be very naturally affected by any great depression of the price of coals at Edinburgh, or in its vicinity. The arguments these great people will use may have weight with Parliament when they assert, "That, relying on the present state of the coal market at Edinburgh, they, for the public benefit, as well as with a view to the advantage of their property, have ventured and employed large capitals on purpose to supply the Edinburgh market with a most indispensable and necessary article of life, which, by the unlooked-for interference of this Canal, will be entirely lost to them, from the expected reduction of the price of fuel which may be brought to Edinburgh by the Union Canal, as they will be necessitated to give up working their collieries." I think it not at all unlikely, that the political influence of these potent landholders, with * * * * *, may urge them to find out some plausible, ostensible reason to resist your project in Parliament, while the real cause is, as I have stated; however, as virtuous men they ought not to be so biassed.

I have very much local knowledge of the particular part of the country, and of its minerals, through which the Union Canal must be cut. This has been acquired from my early youth in the prosecution of * * * * *, extensive business as a coal and iron master and lime burner, and more lately on my own account, and that of some of my friends; and, *so far as I am able to form an opinion, I think the advantages so distinctly and ably pointed out by Mr Baird are likely to be realized in this undertaking*, which cannot fail to be of great national benefit, as well as of the utmost importance to the splendid metropolis of Scotland. I am, Sir, yours, &c.

SIR,

—, *March 7. 1814.*

IN going to Parliament, the general bias of the two Houses will be in your favour, and against your opponents. It is always the case in public works, and more especially in Canals. See how many horses are saved, and what is of more consequence, how much corn for their use, where Canals are; 800 horses used to work in waggons between Manchester and Liverpool, in carrying goods backwards and forwards, before the Canal there, no one of which was necessary when the Canal was made. Thus, great quantities of corn are saved. Besides this, the roads of the country are saved wherever Canals are. In manufacturing countries, it is difficult to keep them up even in a wretched state, where there is no water-carriage. Cut a Canal, and at an easy expense afterwards they are kept in fine repair. These two cases would apply to your intended Canal; but you have other advantages to state. I apprehend there would be great advantage to the Public in passage-boats,* daily going between the two greatest cities in Scotland; and as the price of coals must be lowered, the advantages would be very great to the poor of Edinburgh. You, however, know your own advantages best: I have merely stated what I have to show, that there is always a strong Parliamentary bias in favour of supporting a Canal. I am yours, &c.

* The citizens of Edinburgh cannot yet be so well aware of the incalculable advantages of regular passage-boats between it and Glasgow, as the inhabitants of this last city already are, from their experience of this comfortable mode of travelling to Falkirk, Greenock, &c. which has, in fact, almost entirely superseded the use of Mail-coaches and land-carriage in general, wherever these come in competition with water-conveyance. Loss of time, comfort, health, limbs, and even life itself, are all greatly avoided, at a comparatively small expense, in a convenient boat, where sound sleep may be enjoyed all night, and business, innocent amusement, or literary studies, can be prosecuted the whole day, with little or no interruption from irksome confinement, incessant pecuniary demands, bad weather, roads, horses, and a long catalogue of the little galling miseries of human life, to which an excursion on shore, however short, is constantly obnoxious. A man in business, whose precious time forms no small share of his stock in trade, will be enabled, through the Union Canal passage-boats, to open a most profitable Dr. and Cr. account with sleep, in all his excursions between Glasgow and Edinburgh. With a small share of common prudence; he may balance his books at the close of each revolving year, by a round sum to the credit of profit and loss on time saved by night voyages, which, moreover, will enable him to start from the snug birth of a boat as light as a lark in the morning, perform his intermediate duties in the way of his profession or calling, and, in the evening, return back towards his fixed abode, in the self-same pleasant way he left his own home, without having suffered much unnecessary fatigue on these journeys, which will have been comfortably performed at a moderate expense, both of money and time.

REMARKS

Communicated by a YOUNG GENTLEMAN of
EDINBURGH,

ON THE

EFFECT which the intended UNION CANAL will
have on the Port of LEITH.

First, In regard to the colonial produce which is imported from Liverpool and the Clyde into Leith, it is perfectly clear that it will be conveyed, as at present, in large coasting vessels directly through the Forth and Clyde navigation, a distance of 35 miles of Canal navigation; for it cannot be supposed, when there are regular traders between the Clyde and Leith, that small craft would be employed to convey large quantities of colonial produce by way of lock, No. 16. 31 miles, and then to pass along the Union Canal a farther distance of 30 miles, making in all 61 miles, with a cargo of about 30 tons. The expense of conveying produce in such large quantities by small vessels in this way would be tantamount to a prohibition. Besides, bonded goods conveyed from one bonded warehouse to another must be water-borne, and therefore could not be sent from the Canal basin at Edinburgh, unless the Canal were locked down to Leith; but even if this should be done, still the merchants would, to a certainty, convey their bonded goods *via* Grangemouth.

Second, Goods which are at present conveyed between Port Dundas or Glasgow and Leith, consist chiefly of bulky articles, and will be conveyed with greater advantage in the regular traders by the way of Grangemouth; at the same time it is admitted, that there may be a small proportion of particular kinds of goods which at present go by these vessels, that might go in small vessels by the Union Canal, when the markets might require it, and when merchants were in a hurry to receive their goods.

Third, Goods which at present are carted over-land, consisting chiefly of commodities to and from London, which are valuable, and made up of small quantities to a variety of

persons, would go by the Union Canal, as they could be forwarded as expeditiously as by land, and at about one-half of the expense; and also any goods for the immediate consumption of Edinburgh, which are usually sent in small quantities, would go by the Union Canal.

Fourth, Considerable quantities of goods between Belfast and other ports in Ireland and London are sent by round sea navigation, which is attended with delay, and great expense and risk; it is therefore very certain, that as soon as a communication is opened to Edinburgh and Leith by the Union Canal, these goods, which at present have to wait the loading in large vessels that are in the London and Irish trade, would be forwarded in smaller quantities by the frequent opportunities to Glasgow and Port Dundas; and would be there dispatched without delay by the Union Canal, and shipped in the London and Leith traders, and goods from London to these ports in Ireland would be sent through the same channels. In short, the dispatch which the Union Canal will afford will be the means of a very considerable increased interchange of commodities between the ports in the west and Leith, which, but for a cheap and expeditious conveyance, would either not be sent at all, or would be conveyed by the sea navigation; therefore, an increased demand for coasting vessels at Leith may be expected.

Fifth, In regard to the importation of coal to Leith, it is apprehended, particularly if a rail-way should be made between the Canal at Edinburgh and Leith, that coals brought by the Union Canal would be in greater demand, from its quality and cheapness, than the coals in the ports of the Forth, and therefore fewer coal vessels would arrive at Leith. On the other hand, from the advantage of the Union Canal, a greater exportation would take place, as large sea vessels could be loaded with greater dispatch by means of a rail-way, than they can be loaded at present, and they would have no occasion to proceed to another port for coal.*

* The success of the Union Canal will rapidly produce many rail-roads, and several inland lateral cuts from both sides of the great Canal into the adjoining large fields of coal, whence a vast and inexhaustible source of importation to, and exportation from Leith. This large supply will, of course, proceed *via* Grangemouth, not only as the nearest and cheapest way, even were the Union Canal extended to Leith, but also as the natural stock of coals for the above purposes, which must remain immaterially affected for hundreds, if not thousands of years, while the great coal mines near the Union Canal, will necessarily be reserved for the consumption of Edinburgh alone.

Lastly, It is evident, that when a cheap and expeditious conveyance is added, by means of the Union Canal, to the present conveyance to Leith by sea and land, it must increase the export and import of all commodities to and from Leith, because it will be a medium through which goods to and from various places will naturally be conveyed, and it will particularly increase the carrying trade between Leith and London.*

The object of the proposed five feet Canal, (besides the immense advantages to Edinburgh and the intermediate country,) so far as regards Leith and its trade, is to give facility, regularity and cheapness, to the conveyance of goods between Leith and Glasgow, in place of the present expensive system of land-carriage. This object will be obtained by the establishment of regular passage-boats for goods, by which any greater or smaller quantity may be carried through the whole distance between Leith and Glasgow, in *twelve hours*.

Carrying the Canal to Leith by Locks, whether of the depth of five or eight feet, has the insuperable objection, in point of enormous expense prematurely incurred; and the lands through which it would require to be made are such, as, it is supposed, no Act of Parliament could be obtained to enable a Canal to be cut through them. The detention of the vessels also, in passing through *thirty Locks*, would be so great, that

* The Old and New rival Shipping Companies of Edinburgh and Leith may hail this Union as the harbinger of glad tidings, not only to them, but to many yet unformed, which will as instinctively arise from the well-feathered nests of their successful predecessors, as the shadow follows the substance, or the sparks fly upwards. On similar principles, one judicious Canal will progressively give birth to the same beneficial competition for the Glasgow and Edinburgh public, on fresh water, that has already been experienced by the two great British Capitals by sea, though the projectors of the salt water conveyance were never forced or expected to court the smiles, or deprecate the wrath of the right honourable heads of the two cities in question, before their schemes were brought to maturity; and they have not fared the worse for thus possessing that independent spirit and manly courage, which must be congenial with the feelings of every British merchant, in all his efforts to improve the dearest interests of his country, by its two best pillars, agriculture and commerce.

parting in the usual way would be much preferable. Besides, it is well known, that after a vessel *does* arrive at Leith with a general cargo, the goods must be carted from it to the different trading vessels and warehouses; a process of loading and unloading, which alone forms the worst part of land-carriage.

From what has been said it is evident, that the connexion between the proposed Canal and Leith will be carried on at a much cheaper rate, and in a more eligible manner, by means of a rail-road, which may be made either for waggons or for common carts, and can be laid along the south edge of Prince's Street, and down the edge of Leith Walk, at little cost, without requiring an Act of Parliament, and without the expense of purchasing land. This would, besides, be of infinite advantage to Leith and Edinburgh, from the opportunity which it would afford, of conveying every description of land-carriage and goods; occasioning also a considerable saving in the expense of maintaining the present road; while coals and goods would be shipped as cheaply and expeditiously at Leith, from the proposed basin at Main-Point, as if the Canal were carried down to Leith by Locks. If, however, from any unforeseen occurrence, it should ever be thought expedient to extend the Union Canal to Leith, nothing is now proposed to be done which can prevent an Act of Parliament from being obtained for carrying a *five feet* Canal there; one of *eight feet*, or any intermediate size, being, from the insuperable objections before stated, entirely out of the question.*

No impartial man who has attended to the origin, progress, and impending results of the existing contest between the whole population of Edinburgh, with its territorial dependencies, and the Mid-Lothian coal-masters, but must make every allowance for the irritable feelings of the Subscribers to the Union Canal, as individuals or an associated body. The coal-

* Should the Magistrates be induced to sanction the Bill now before Parliament, instead of opposing it there, a prospective clause might still be introduced to facilitate the extension of the Union Canal to the port of Leith, on fair and liberal principles for all parties concerned in such a measure, whenever it shall be found expedient and practicable so to do, for the general good.

masters' Advocate, and his worthy accomplice MENTOR, have not hesitated, along with their menaced rail-roads, to rail and rave against the projected useful Canal as a mere bubble or Air-bank; and, instead of being a practicable North land undertaking, it has been most scandalously denounced as a nefarious South Sea scheme to cheat the public, or ruin its supporters. In short, they have been *branded* with the epithets of vile lottery puffers, zealots, madmen, drivellers, impostors, credulous fools, headstrong, impatient extortioners, sturdy beggars, imprudent incendiaries, demagogues; and last, not least, as a pack of graceless plebeians, with hardly one honourable or right honourable man among them. The engineer has come in for his full share of the abuse, as a mere coal-tacksman, whose name never had extended beyond the sphere of his own coal-works: he has been stigmatized as an empiric or quack in his profession, and as a juggler in his calculations; nothing in fact has been left undone, to sink Mr Baird as low as possible in public estimation, and to raise on his devoted ruins a lofty monument to the defunct plans of Mr Rennie, from which a phoenix is conjured up again to amuse the good people of Edinburgh for some years longer, at the expense of the city funds, Mr Baird, and all his employers.

The persecuted Union Canal itself has been denounced as an execrable object, visionary, and worse than useless, utterly ruinous in its effects on the country in general, and the Subscribers in particular; in a word, as a huge hydra-headed serpent, or dangerous, mad water-dog, let loose by a few maniacs, to bite or burn the fingers of every loyal reflecting subject in this deluded land, who has helped most preposterously to raise already the enormous sum of £. 200,000 in its favour.

Now, good reader, can any one wonder, that such a pelting shower of abuse on the head of the proposed Canal, and its friends, should terminate with reverberated peals of thunder, and a volley of warm bolts, pointed at the seat of honour in their opponents, pending the paper-war which they first declared by a firebrand from the press, and seem still determined to wage with redoubled fury to the contested issue in the imperial Parliament.

Every candid observer must be struck with the comparative insignificance of the commerce of the metropolis of Scotland, contrasted with its twin sister's more rapid progress in all mercantile and manufacturing concerns, by the means of Canals, machinery, steam engines, and every species of grand

operative works, which abound in the town and adjoining districts of Glasgow. The traveller there will perhaps have to learn with admiration and surprise, that the Magistrates of that city have often little other merit in the creation of so many sources of national prosperity and individual wealth, than prudently letting the various projectors, speculators and managers, in their several pursuits, entirely alone. This fact was lately published to the world, in a string of the many negative acts of the Glasgow Magistracy, by all the papers in that place; but here unfortunately, it is said, that only one solitary office was found bold enough to risk the publication of so harmless a truth.

That it bears strongly on the question under discussion no reasonable man can deny, and he will not be displeased to see it submitted for his perusal among these sheets.

To the Editor of the Glasgow Courier.

SIR,

I have observed lately in the Edinburgh and Glasgow Newspapers, several discussions on the subject of the proposed Edinburgh and Glasgow Union Canal, and on the conduct of the Right Honourable the Lord Provost and Magistrates of Edinburgh, in that business.

I have no intention of troubling your readers with any observations on the arguments or objections which have been urged for or against the Union Canal, nor with any panegyric on the promoters, nor invectives against the opposers of that undertaking; but I cannot refrain from congratulating the inhabitants of Glasgow on the line of conduct which has uniformly, and on all occasions, been followed by their Magistrates, relative to all similar undertakings in the neighbourhood of Glasgow.

I shall say nothing of what the Magistrates of Edinburgh have done, nor of what they are using all their influence, both open and secret, to prevent from being done: But I beg leave very shortly to call the attention of the public, to *what the Magistrates of Glasgow have not done.*

After copies of the surveys and reports of engineers, relative to any of the Canals near Glasgow, had been laid before the Magistrates of Glasgow, for their consideration, for more than ten weeks, they never declared that they had not looked at, read, nor considered these surveys and reports; and, at the

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same time, accused the promoters of these undertakings of disrespect to the Magistrates, by not giving them timely notice of their proceedings.

After the plan of any Canal had been for the space of seventeen years before the public, and had been uniformly neglected and rejected as unprofitable and unadvisable, and not one shilling ever subscribed for its execution; and after a new and practicable Canal had been planned and surveyed, and the funds for its execution had been provided, the Magistrates of Glasgow never had recourse to the old neglected and rejected plan, for the purpose of counteracting and opposing the establishment of the new and practicable line, for the execution of which sufficient funds had been provided.

The Magistrates of Glasgow never set themselves in opposition to any scheme for bringing into Glasgow an increased and cheaper supply of coals :—

They never used their magisterial, personal, or parliamentary influence, in opposition to any such scheme :—

They were never even suspected of such conduct, nor of abetting the combination of coal-masters against any such scheme, nor of making secret application to the great landed proprietors in the neighbourhood, to oppose the carrying of any Canal into Glasgow.

In short, the Magistrates of Glasgow never opposed, either directly or indirectly, nor ever attempted, under the pretence of delay, and of seeking time for deliberation, to prevent the bringing to Glasgow of any navigable Canal whatever.

When the Forth and Clyde Navigation, or, as it is commonly termed, the Great Canal, was proposed to be brought near Glasgow, the Magistrates of Glasgow did not insist that the design should be given up, unless the Canal were to be locked down to their port at the Broomielaw, in order to prevent the diminution of their port-dues :—

They never considered their port-dues as a private fund, for the increase of which the public advantage should be sacrificed :—

They looked upon their port-dues in their true light, as a means of serving and accommodating the public; and if that accommodation could be procured, and the public could be served, and benefited by a new navigation, they did not, like monopolists, oppose the establishment of the new navigation.

Of consequence, they never dreamed of opposing the establishment of the Great Canal, although it is not locked down

to the Clyde at Glasgow, but ten miles farther down the river. On the contrary, they became Subscribers to the undertaking, and supported it at the expense of the public fund.

When the scheme of the Monkland Canal was proposed for bringing to Glasgow an additional supply of coals, the Magistrates of Glasgow gave no aid, either open or secret, either direct or indirect, to the machinations and exertions of the neighbouring coal-masters, in opposition to this scheme, although several of these coal-masters were men highly respected, and possessed a great interest and influence in the city of Glasgow and the Town Council.

The Magistrates raised no clamour against the Monkland Canal, although it was never proposed to lock it down to the Broomielaw. The opposition made in Parliament by the coal-masters, against the completion of the Monkland Canal, never received the smallest encouragement or countenance from the Magistrates of Glasgow.

When the Paisley and Ardrossan Canal was proposed to be carried to Glasgow, the Magistrates understood their duty to the public better than to oppose the establishment of such a Canal, although some illiberal and narrow-minded persons urged that it would raise the price of coals in the Glasgow market, by carrying coals to Paisley, and would lessen the port-dues of the Broomielaw, and the river-dues of the Clyde.

The three Canals before mentioned, viz. the Monkland Canal, the Paisley and Ardrossan Canal, and the Great Canal, having all met with encouragement and support, in place of open or secret opposition, from the Magistrates of Glasgow, have all been established, to the great benefit of the inhabitants, and of the trade and commerce of the city of Glasgow. By means of these Canals the city of Glasgow, in place of one port at the Broomielaw, has now the benefit of three other and additional ports, viz. the Monkland Bason on the Monkland Canal, Port Eglinton on the Paisley Canal, and Port Dundas on the Great Canal. By the first Glasgow is supplied with coals, and is connected with the coal-works and iron-works of Lanarkshire; by the second it is connected with Paisley and the interior of Renfrewshire; and by the last the trade of Glasgow communicates with the Frith of Forth, the German Ocean, the Baltic, and the Thames, on the east; and with the Frith of Clyde, the Irish Channel, and the Atlantic, on the west.

It is possible that the establishment of all these Canals may have been unfavourable to the port-dues of the Bromielaw, which are under the sole controul and management of the Magistrates of Glasgow. It is possible that the power and influence of the Magistrates, and the profits of their friends, the neighbouring coal-masters, may have thereby been kept within more narrow bounds; but the manufactures and commerce of Glasgow have been increased ten-fold, and its population has been trebled; and, from being, as it was prior to the establishment of these Canals, only the second city, it has now become the first city in Scotland, in point of the number of inhabitants. I am, Sir, your most obedient servant,

A. B.

Glasgow, February 17. 1814.

The attentive reader will by this time readily allow, that an impartial examination of all the arguments in various publications, for and against the Union Canal, clearly proves, that its promising execution alone has ever seriously alarmed those very sympathetic coal-masters, who never will hesitate to sound the joyful horn in a wild-goose chase after coals among the Highland moors, while, with their staunch hounds all at bay, they now pull up with instinctive horror and antipathy at candid truth's approach, like a majestic swan, in a similar pursuit on the Lowlands adjacent, which seems at last on the wing with glad tidings of hope to the shivering poor, but with sad forbodings of despair to their undermining oppressors.

It will also be evident, that the past and present conduct of such second-sighted sportsmen respecting their own immediate game on Canals, incontestably demonstrates, that every line, but Mr Baird's, presents to their keen eyes only the "two hopeless birds in a bush;" while the Union Canal, on the contrary, assumes the ominous posture of "one in hand," which, if not immediately suspended *in terrorem* by the bill, may lower on the prospect of their coal monopoly for ever.

Since neither the coal-masters nor their partisans appear to patronize the Union Canal's immediate commencement, the public may safely keep the field in its favour, without the hazard of *latet anguis in herba* from their hostility, whatever fears might naturally have been excited by their friendship on such grounds. Every reflecting mind will therefore

naturally deem Mr Baird's plan alone worthy of recommendation, countenance, and support, in preference to every other, on which coal monopolists, or their deluded friends, may confer the meed of approbation, as a mere *stalking-horse* for concealing the sinister blow thus aimed at the metropolis of Scotland; whence some trusty Trojan may now prophetically exclaim,—

“ Aut aliquis latet error, equo ne credite Teucri ;

“ Quidquid id est, timeo danaos et dona ferentes.”

The more that the comparative merits of the Union Canal are discussed, its immediate adoption will more evidently seem one of those grand national undertakings, which will speedily improve this part of the country, in arts, manufactures, agriculture, commerce, and all the comforts of social life, which the poor of the land have a right to enjoy in a proportionate degree with the wealthy and rich; because the wants of the former, and the higher enjoyments of the latter, are so essentially blended together, that they must have forcibly struck the poet's prospective eye to “ a warm fire-side,” in his autumnal exclamation :—

“ All is the gift of industry ;—whate'er

“ Exalts, embellishes, and renders life

“ Delightful. Pensive Winter, cheer'd by him,

“ Sits at the social fire, and, happy, hears

“ Th' excluded tempest idly rave along :

“ Without him—Summer were an arid waste :

“ —Nor could we thus call every friend around.”

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