



Helensburgh Heritage Trust Newsletter

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Contributions and suggestions are urgently required and welcome!

THE FAILED STREETS OF HELENSBURGH

The idea of naming one Helensburgh street after the capital of Scotland, and another after the young Queen Victoria can only be regarded as a noble conception, but unfortunately, these are among several streets in the Town that, although planned, were never actually brought into being. The pertinent questions must then be: where were those streets, and why did they fail to materialise?

A town plan of c.1838 depicts much that is familiar, for example, the regular grid system of streets for which Helensburgh is famous. That the plan was, however, a vision rather than what was actually shown on the ground, is indicated by a number of features, including an extensive harbour (never built), and a N-S grid system which continued east of Hanover Street, right to Craigendoran, (again, never constructed).

While a few features are identified by printed captions, most of the streets had their names pencilled in, seemingly the work of a hurried, yet confident hand. To the east of Hanover Street, a further succession of parallel streets has thus been identified:- McDonald Street; Edinburgh Street; Victoria Street, and finally, Roxburgh Street.

That these names must have had a certain currency is shown by the fact that Edinburgh Street is referred to independently in a title deed of 1858, where it is described as "never opened." This again prompts the question: why was the grid system arrested east of Hanover Street?

A clue may lie in the 1838 map. Two, more or less parallel lines, have been pencilled in, coming from the vicinity of Craigendoran seafront, continuing diagonally across the failed streets, proceeding approximately along the line of East King Street, and terminating in one case at the bottom of Sinclair Street, and in the other at Helensburgh "Harbour." The former has the date "1846" written alongside, the latter "1847." It is suggested that these lines may depict the route of a projected railway line, which would undoubtedly have compromised the integrity of the failed streets, and gives a very good reason for their non-appearance.

It may also be that all the pencilled entries, including both the railway line, and the street names, were effectively annotations to the 1838 map, perhaps being added at the same time, i.e. 1847 (or later). There looks to be some similarity of style in the various pencilled entries.

A. McI.

Argyll Museum and Heritage

We were represented at the recent annual meeting of the Argyll and Bute Museums and Heritage Forum held at Kilmartin House. Of the 30 or so eligible organisations about ten were able to give an account of their activities in the last year. Mull Museum in Tobormory has 50 volunteers keeping the show on the road, working half days, 18,000 visitors was down but income was up! Dunoon were down in numbers also, partially because of a Hotel closure, but are negotiating with others and coach firms. They have 26 half day volunteers doing duty. Oban War and Peace Museum have been going for 16 years and have had 4 homes. It is the principal attraction in the town and benefits from visiting cruise ships and coaches. Full Museum accreditation was granted last year. Dunollie Castle hopes to open a small exhibition next year, but has a national and international archive - including 1,000 costumes still to be catalogued! Luig have a planning application in and hope to mount displays comparing 1900 - 1910 and 2000 - 2010. Auchendrain has done re-branding and marketing resulting in a 36% increase in visitors. Hopes for a Tea Room by Easter. Kilmartin is linked with Campbeltown which was flooded in January. Friends are keeping it open at weekends. Neil Oliver was recording for a pre-history series to be shown in January or February. Helensburgh read its Annual Report and added the possibility of opening a Heritage Centre in the former Reference Library and our initiative on the 'Comet' bicentenary. We received a round of applause!

K.N.C.

Christmas and New Year Greetings

Echoes of Old Clyde Paddle Wheels

by Andrew McQueen, was published in 1924, although a more recent edition has been seen.

One chapter deals with the early history of steam ships, and here is what Andrew McQueen has to say: "All European steamships trace their descent from Henry Bell's Comet as their common ancestor. Nevertheless it is a mistake, though a common one, to describe Bell as the inventor of the Steamboat. Steamboats were in existence long before the Comet appeared, and all that can be claimed for her is that she was the first steamer in Europe to ply regularly with passengers and to sail in open waters. It is not possible to say with exactitude who the inventor was, for the Steamboat was rather a growth than an invention; the process was a very gradual one, but even so long ago as the 16th century men were exercising their ingenuity over the question of propelling vessels by steam."

McQueen then goes on to claim that a Frenchman, Denis Papin, was probably constructor of the first actual steamboat which sailed in 1707 on the River Fulda from Cassel to Munden. However the boatmen on the river attacked him viciously because they were frightened of the effect that the steamship might have on their trade.

He then states that the first commercial steamship was undoubtedly that of John Fitch which was placed on the Delaware in 1790. It was called quite simply "The Steamboat" because there was no other in the world! It was propelled by three or four broad-bladed oars at the stern, worked by an engine. However it was found to be unreliable, and lenders were wary of giving Fitch further money.

At the same time as Fitch made his introduction in the United States, Patrick Miller and William Symington here in Scotland were experimenting firstly on Dalswinton Loch, and then later on the Forth and Clyde Canal in 1802 with the "Charlotte Dundas." She was abandoned because the Canal owners were worried that its wake might damage the Canal banks.

While the Charlotte Dundas was running, Symington received a visit from an American called Robert Fulton who showed great interest in the vessel. In 1807 Fulton put a steamboat called the "Catherine" (but better known as the "Clermont") on the Hudson between New York and Albany. Initially the results were not encouraging, but he persevered and made her a commercial success. Steamboats proliferated on American rivers thereafter. *H.S.N.*

Heritage Centre Displays

Within a day of publishing the last Newsletter I heard from our Founder, Betty Humphrey, now staying in Tewkesbury. Full of ideas for display subjects, she listed several thoughts from the early days of the trust. Amongst them was an original idea I have never seen implemented anywhere else! A cabinet dedicated to individual local family stories. Rotated on a regular basis each family given the opportunity to supply and show 'their' pictures, memorabilia and history for display for a set time. *What do Members think?* *K.N.C.*

The next meeting is on the 26th January 2011 at 7.30 p.m. The speaker is David Harvie and subject –
Diamonds in the Deli – J.B.Hannay.

A Restless Night at the Vale of Leven Hospital inspired this ditty!

Lomond Ward is full of noises
All through the night.
Bangs and creaks and human voices
All through the night.
If you're deaf and cannot hear it,
You are lucky, please believe it;
Those with normal hearing fear it
All through the night.

What's the cause of all this motion
All through the night?
Staff are working with devotion
All through the night.
Patients often add their portion,
Snoring when they take the notion;
It is really some commotion
All through the night.

A Member

New Destination

An Exhibition at Kelvingrove is open until February, marking the 50th anniversary of the electrification of the Airdrie to Helensburgh rail line and the introduction of the 'Blue Trains.' It also marks the new Bathgate line extension which enables the introduction next month of a through train service from Helensburgh to Edinburgh.

And Exhibition

"The Glasgow Girls" is on show at Glasgow School of Art until 20th Dec.

And Auction

Last week there was a flutter in the national and local press about a 1926 book "Television" by A Dinsdale which had turned up at the Oxfam shop in Morningside. The Manager found the signature 'John L. Baird' inside and sent it for auction. Bonhams sale in New Bond Street on 23/11 suggested that it had been his personal copy. Your Directors decided against bidding, despite a member offering us a substantial donation. We are not a Library or Museum with safe storage. With Buyers' Premium it sold for **£1,440.!**

And Speaker

Dr Martin MacGregor has had to withdraw his advertised talk on The Battle of Glen Fruin due to additional administrative commitments. We will announce a new speaker for the 30th March Public Meeting in due course.