

THE ROYAL BURGH
OF
AYR



Seven Hundred and Fifty Years of History

Edited by

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CHAPTER 10

WITCHCRAFT

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TOWARDS the close of the sixteenth century Ayr began the most gruesome and ghastly period in its history, the period of witch-burning. The shadowy figure of Maggie Osborne, Ayr's best known witch, no longer rouses fear of her as an evil-doer, but pity as a victim, and, indeed, to-day Maggie and her death at the Cross are becoming almost as unreal as the people and events of a fairy-tale.

But to our forefathers witches were very real. As far as the people, high and low, rich and poor, cleric and lay, were concerned, witches there were—the Bible said so and the Bible did not err. So sorcerers, charmers, necromancers, and all of Satan's invisible kingdom had to be vigorously searched out, and mercilessly exterminated. For, though Burns and his contemporaries could laugh at the cantrips of Cutty Sark, and jest at the very devil himself as chief bagpipe-player to the wizened beldames at Kirk Alloway, their great-grandfathers had taken all such unchancy creatures as personal menaces, and for their own individual safety and for the safety of the realm, had fought the witches' devilries with blazing bonfires, and the witches' incantations with the silencing tortures of the 'spurr', the branks and the stake.

There had always been witches in Scotland, at least since the days when the thwarted emissaries of Satan hurled Dumbarton Rock at the fleeing St. Patrick. After that many witches had been punished at the stake, usually for getting their witchcraft mixed up with politics. However, it was witchcraft mixed up with religion that brought persecution to a climax in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries.

In 1563 the Scottish Parliament formally constituted witchcraft a capital offence, enacting that, 'all who used witchcraft, sorcery, necromancy, or pretended skill therein, and all con-

sulters of witches and sorcerers should be punished capitally'.¹ Henceforth the appellation 'witch' had many meanings, from old poverty-stricken widows unwanted by the bailies, to shadowless, cloven-footed Episcopalians unwanted by the Presbyterians. But among all such cross-currents of opinion, the basic idea of a witch was that of a person in league with the devil, baptised by the devil, and holding frequent appointments with the devil. Satan himself was conceived as completely real, a physical presence, appearing under many guises, sometimes as a black cloud, or a black horse, or even as a wee black hen. Satanic courts were held in graveyards, especially those with a ruined kirk therein, where the foul fiend could say a black mass, and preach a black sermon from a black pulpit, darkly lit by black candles. When a new witch-aspirant was introduced to the devil, he lay with her carnally, he drew off some blood from her, and he baptised her with this blood. From that day on the witch bore the devil's mark, the spot from which the blood had been drawn. This mark was insensible of pain, and could always be found by prodding methodically with a 'prin' all over the suspect's body. Expert mark-finders existed, and although the profession was frowned upon by the General Assembly after 1643, we find Ayr Presbytery tempted to employ a professional witchfinder from Gallo-way in 1644.²

King James the Saxt had been much troubled by witches and, for the guidance of his subjects, had compiled a comprehensive classification of them in a royal volume on Demonology, and from this book sprang most of the witch trials in Scotland.³ Surely if the witches danced against King James in the kirk-yaird at North Berwick, they could dance against the bailies of Ayr at Alloway Kirk. And so legal machinery for 'justifying' such undesirables was set up, connecting the justices in Ayr with the royal justiciars in Edinburgh. The procedure was this. If a woman was suspected of being a witch, she was reported to the Presbytery and examined by the ministers, who, if they found evidences of guilt, haled her before the burgh magistrates. If the provost and bailies also found grounds for suspicion, an application was made by the kirk-session to the

¹ Erskine's *Institutes*, p. 706

² D. M. Lyon, *Ayr in Olden Times*, p. 91

³ G. F. Black, *A Calendar of Cases of Witchcraft in Scotland*, 1938, p. 12

Lords of Council in Edinburgh for a commission to try the suspect as a witch. Many such applications are recorded in Ayr's local records. Two are sufficient to demonstrate the process. The first, of 1643, reads: 'in respect of sundry depositions given before the Presbytery against Susanna Shang, wherein were found great presumptions of the sin of witchcraft; therefore the Presbytery ordained a letter to be directed to the Lords of Council for purchasing ane warrant to try the said Susanna.'¹

The second letter seeks wider powers, for it shows, in 1650, Mr. Hugh Eccles, Moderator of Ayr, writing to the Estates for a general commission against witches, and also exhorting the Carrick ministers to make a similar application.² With such general commissions mass executions of witches could be carried out, but there is no evidence of this in Ayr although many single executions are recorded.

Writing in *Ayr in Olden Times*, Murray Lyon makes an unusual error when he states the only authentic record of witchcraft in our burgh took place at a time when the parish was served by the Episcopalian minister, Mr. William Annand.³ This is just not true; there are at least half a dozen records of witch-burnings, and in many of the applications for commissions appear the names of Mr. Eccles and Mr. Adair, both Presbyterian clergymen.

All over Scotland bailies and magistrates expended great energy in seeking evidence against suspects, and in using torture to obtain evidence. There is no trace in Ayr of 'capsicaws' to crush the victim's legs, or of other instruments of torture common to the period, but a Gestapo-like technique of sleep-prevention is suggested in a minute of 11th June 1650, wherein the kirk-session ordained that elders and deacons were to 'oversee the said persons in turn, and exhort them to confession . . . and to take all pains for the furtherance of so good a work'.⁴

Many of these offenders were not major criminals, so the punishments were not capital. In 1623 Michael, a spaeman, was sentenced to a period of excommunication; in 1651 the session banished John Muir, a palmister and reader of fortunes; and in 1684 a dumb man, who pretended to tell fortunes and

¹ D. M. Lyon, *Ayr in Olden Times*, p. 90 ² *ib.* ³ *ib.*
⁴ *Kirk-Session Records*, 11th June 1650

find things lost, was in trouble with the magistrates in our town.¹

But Ayr's records do not spare us the details of the horrors inflicted upon greater trespassers. In 1595 Agnes Hucheon escaped a charge of witchcraft and was adjudged simply an abuser of the people. Yet she was scourged mercilessly in a punitive procession to all the most public places in the burgh, set up in the cruel, mouth-tearing 'branks' during two full market days, and made to do countless satisfactions, before the Presbytery would accept her repentance.²

Another suspect, Margaret Reid, was held for six weeks in jail on bread and water, then banished the shire.³

But some there were who paid the penalty in full. It seems impossible to find the total of burnings in Ayr, but judged by the number of references to applications for 'commissions', it must have been high. In grim little cash payments some executions are recorded in the burgh *Book of Accounts*:

1586—In expenses sustained in burning the witch of Barnweill, to candles, to meat and drink, to pitch barrels, to coals, roset, hedir, treis and 'uther necessaris', £7 3s. 8d.⁴

1595—For coals, cords, tar-barrels, and other graith that burnt Marion Grief, witch, £4 4s. od.⁵

1599—For coal to burn Jonet Young, witch—for rope, 7s. 8d.; for a tar-barrel, £1; to Barquhill the hangman, for executing her, £4.⁶

1613—To Barquhill for doing his office upon Bessie Bell and others, £4 11s. 4d.⁷

1618—To James Gilmour, lokman, for executing Maly Wilson, £6 13s. 4d.⁸

Probably the list is not complete, for elsewhere are to be found references to witchcraft in Ayr during the period of the *Burgh Accounts*. In 1582 a William Gilmour of Polquhairn, appearing in Edinburgh before the Lords of Council on a charge of witchcraft and sorcery, was forwarded for trial to the Justice-ayre of Ayr, but there is no account locally.⁹ In 1618 Janet McAllister was executed for witchcraft, but no details appear in the *Accounts*.¹⁰ About 1650, during the peak period of persecution,

¹ J. H. Pagan, *Annals of Ayr*, p. 106 ² *ib.*, p. 107
³ D. M. Lyon, *Ayr in Olden Times*, p. 9 ⁴ *Ayr Burgh Accounts*, p. 156
⁵ *ib.*, p. 183 ⁶ *ib.*, p. 200 ⁷ *ib.*, p. 58 ⁸ *ib.*, p. 267
⁹ Pitcairn's *Criminal Trials*, vol. i, p. 101 ¹⁰ J. H. Pagan, *Annals of Ayr*, p. 108

many persons must have been punished by death, but further study of the burgh records for this period is necessary.

In Cromwell's time the English soldiers stationed in Ayr record, with disgust, a late witch-burning in the burgh. A colonel writing from Ayr tells of a certain Janet Saers who was strangled at the stake in 1658 and her whole body burnt to ashes, in spite of her valiant protestations of complete innocence. The English soldier's letter is full of sympathy for the victim,¹ and reflects the changing outlook on witchcraft which was to spread northwards so rapidly that by 1736 an act of Parliament dared to make it incompetent to institute any suit for witchcraft,² and thus penal statutes against witches came to an end, 'contrary to the express wish of God', as the diehards grimly protested.

Ayr had one ne'er-do-weel virago, who at the time appeared the quintessence of witchcraft. Her name was not Maggie Osborne but Jonet Smellie. This infamous creature first appears in 1613 making filthy, slanderous speeches against her neighbours, thereby meriting the 'spurr' to gag her mouth at the Fish Cross. In 1621 she is set up on the penitents' pillar for further unchristian railings, followed by attempted suicide by poison. In 1628 she is confined in the Black House for women, under the Tolbooth stair, to be sustained upon bread and water, and kept stringently away from stark drink. In 1629 the inevitable happens and a charge of witchcraft is preferred against the incorrigible offender, who, barely escaping execution, is banished out of the sheriffdom.³ Thirty-seven years after her first conviction, this old reprobate is back in Ayr, and in jail. In Ayr's Tolbooth she dies, and the much-tormented magistrates take a terrible revenge. 'The council with the advice of Mr. William Adair, minister, ordains that Jonet Smellie who was incarcerated within the Tolbooth, being now dead, and her corpse lying there, her corpse shall be drawn upon a "slaid" to the Gallows' foot and burnt in ashes.'⁴

Why then is this Jonet Smellie not the witch that Ayr remembers? Her deeds are known and recorded in grimy detail, but tradition ignores her, and concentrates on Maggie

¹ Firth, *Scotland Under the Protectorate*, p. 382

² *Domestic Annals of Scotland*, vol. ii, p. 597

³ D. M. Lyon, *Ayr in Olden Times*, p. 91

⁴ J. H. Pagan, *Annals of Ayr*, p. 109

Osborne of whom so very little is known, except in local legend.

There are two traditions of Maggie Osborne.

The first story affirms that Margaret was a daughter of the laird of Fail, a famous warlock, who instructed her in the magic arts. Coming to Ayr, Maggie set up in business as an inn-keeper. As a witch she made many excursions into Gallo-way practising her evil arts on wives, maidens and cattle. Witnesses gave testimony that she had been seen in the form of a beetle crawling along tracks through the Carrick hills; others offered evidence that they had looked upon the sterile patches left among the grass at the places where she had rested from her broomstick flight. Her two major exploits were the burial beneath a snowslide of a family who had given her offence, and the raising of a disastrous storm in the Bay of Ayr with the consequent wrecking of a vessel on the St. Nicholas rocks near the harbour. Betrayed by a servant girl, who had watched the storm being generated in a bucket, Maggie made a pact with the devil that she should make a spectacular last-minute escape from the stake. By affixing two thoroughly dry pewter plates to her shoulders she was to fly up from the blazing bonfire at the Cross, to the confusion and consternation of her baffled enemies. Alas! one of the pewter plates got wet and the flying farewell ended in the crippled Maggie being hooked down from her flight by an officer's halberd thrust indelicately into her petticoats. So Ayr's best remembered witch perished in the flames crying, 'Oh, ye false loon, instead o' a black gown, ye ha'e gi'en me a red ane; ha'e I deserved this for serving ye sae lang?'

The second tradition upholds Margaret Osborne as a pretty, young lady of good family, of pious aspect, and of Dorcas-like charity, who falls ill and in her fever becomes a subject of suspicion to the session. Mr. Adair, always on the look-out for witchcraft, charges her with sorcery, which she denies in vain. Incarcerated, tortured, and finally burnt at the Cross, her body lay in St. John's churchyard, where a tombstone marked her resting-place until time and vicissitude crumbled it away.¹

As yet no searcher has been able to discover any details of

¹ W. Robertson, *Historical Tales and Legends of Ayrshire*, pp. 93-111; *Old Ayrshire Days*, pp. 58-60, 79-89

the trial and execution. As far as is known the death of Margaret Osborne is not recorded in any burghal document, nor in criminal trial records in Edinburgh. Dr. Murray sums it up thus: 'There is no record of the case but it has been an unvarying tradition from the end of the seventeenth century.'¹ Part of the modern tradition would have it that Maggie Osborne was the last witch executed in Scotland. This can hardly be true, for witchcraft had long ceased to be treated as a capital offence in lowland Scotland, before the witch of Dornoch was executed in 1727,² just a few years in advance of the new law of 1736 abolishing the death penalty for witchcraft.³ But the fact that this detail of the tradition has been proved wrong does not mean that the whole story can be dismissed as mere phantasy. Some day evidence may be forthcoming, and until then may seekers through the records of Ayr keep a vigilant eye for clues towards a solution of the mystery.

ADDENDA

It is not hard to find ladies bearing the name of Margaret Osborne. On the thirty-first of October 1582, there is mention of the late Margaret Osborne, relict of Thomas Dalrymple.⁴ Between 1613 and 1622—and probably longer—a Margaret Osborne flourished as a wineseller in Ayr.⁵ In November of 1648 a Margaret Osborne had permission from the town council to intromit with the goods of Isobel Pyper who had been stricken by the plague.⁶ Another kirk-session record speaks of Margaret Osborne having to appear to do penance in 1630. But there is not a direct reference to the lady as a witch.

For those who have the inclination to pursue the subject into the realms of conjecture, a few remarks may be helpful. If the witch was a daughter of the laird of Fail, then her name should have been Margaret Wallace. To support this assumption another part of the tradition is valuable, namely that Margaret had a tavern in Ayr. If so, it is possible that she

¹ Murray, *Early Burgh Organisation*, vol. ii

² Walter Scott, *Letters on Demonology and Witchcraft*, p. 328

³ R. Chambers, *Domestic Annals of Scotland*, p. 597

⁴ *Protocol Book of John Mason*, no. 86

⁵ *Ayr Burgh Accounts*, pp. 262, 275, 279

⁶ *Reminiscences of 'Auld Ayr'* (1864), p. 7

conducted the business under her maiden name, for this was a common practice at the time, as can be seen in the *Burgh Accounts*, where items occur such as:

To Janet Crauford, wife of James Fergushill, for wine.¹

To Margaret Cunningham, spouse of George Cochren, for wine.²

So, as tavern-keeper, Margaret could be referred to as Osborne or Wallace. Happily for this theory, payments for wine are recorded from 1613 to 1623 at least, to Margaret Osborne and to Margaret Wallace, who could be the same individual.

If you care to accept the identification of Margaret Osborne with Margaret Wallace, then it is possible to suggest a date for her death, for, in 1629, there was burned in Ayr one Margaret Wallace and this execution is referred to in the burgh records.³

Such a solution raises another problem—if the witch was burned as Margaret Wallace, why did tradition remember her as Maggie Osborne?

A partial answer may be afforded by an Edinburgh event of the period. In 1622 a witch by the name of Margaret Wallace was burned at the Castlehill of Edinburgh, after a sensational witchcraft trial.⁴ Tongues in Ayr would be wagging with the name of this Maggie Wallace, so what more natural than that the people of Ayr seven years later should differentiate between the two Margarets by using the alternative name of their notorious witch, and thus hand on to posterity the tradition not of Margaret Wallace, but of Margaret Osborne? However, this is not history but speculation caused by the utter lack of factual details, and as such is best treated as a basis for further research.

¹ *Ayr Burgh Accounts*, p. 262 ² *ib.*, p. 241

³ *Ayr Kirk-Session Records*, 12th October 1629

⁴ *Pitcairn's Criminal Trials*, vol. iii, pp. 508-563

CHAPTER II

SOME ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENTS

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IT is only possible in this article to touch on certain economic developments in Ayr, but some aspects, *e.g.* the harbour, fairs and markets, and newspapers, are dealt with elsewhere in this volume and in the *Third Statistical Account*; and these notes refer mainly to developments since the seventeenth century. In 1692 the Convention of Royal Burghs compiled *A Register of the State and Condition of every Burgh* which gives a somewhat gloomy picture of trade at that time. In addition to dealing with shipping, the harbour and foreign trade, the Ayr Report to the Commissioners goes on to state:

There are about one hundred and fourty waste houses, besides severall ruinous houses, and particularly two great tenements on each side of the marcat cross bouth ruinous, one whereof are on each side of the Street.¹

The burgh also admitted to some small trade from Borrowstounness to Holland.

Foreign trade was the prerogative of the members of the Merchant Guild which had been established by charter of Robert the Bruce, 1323-4.² Owing to shortage of capital no one merchant was able to purchase a large quantity of goods and a whole cargo would require the combined efforts of the merchants of the burgh. As late as 1687 the merchants of Ayr had four-fifths of the cargo of a small vessel of 70 tons from Virginia.³

The Merchant Company, originally called the Merchant Booth Keepers of Ayr, was formed about 1655 and was a benevolent society.⁴ The Incorporated Trades, *viz.*, hammermen (including clockmakers, watchmakers, blacksmiths, copper-

smiths and tinsmiths), weavers, dyers, tailors, squaremen (including masons, wrights, slaters and glaziers), shoemakers, skinners, coopers and fleshers had the exclusive right of carrying on their trade in the burgh, and with the exception of the coopers and dyers, who had only a seal of cause from the magistrates, they had charters which date back to the sixteenth century.¹ Other craftsmen set up in Newton and Wallacetown in opposition to the freemen of the burgh and all over Scotland the privileges of the Incorporated Trades were gradually encroached upon until their right of exclusive trading was abolished in 1846. In 1791 there were in Ayr, including masters, journeymen and apprentices, 64 hammermen, 186 weavers, 12 dyers, 57 tailors, 135 squaremen, 62 shoemakers, 4 skinners, 22 coopers and 34 fleshers, a total of 576. It is believed that about a century before this the dyers and skinners were among the most numerous of the trades, and that the coopers were also more numerous owing to the wine trade with France.²

Ayr, in common with the rest of Scotland, supported the Darien Scheme and on 2nd April 1696 a subscription list for capital was opened in the town. In addition to what had already been subscribed through the Convention of Royal Burghs, the magistrates subscribed for £200 stock and the provost and twenty-three other inhabitants each subscribed for £100 Scots.³ The failure of the Scheme tied up capital which the country could ill afford and trade was very depressed.

Shortly after the passing of an Act in 1665 for the encouragement of the production of fine cloth in Scotland a woollen manufactory was established in Ayr along with two others at Bonnington and Newmills.⁴ A company was in existence in 1670 when cloth made by 'the manufactorie at Air' was distributed by lot to the shareholders as a dividend.⁵ This may have been a new partnership in the Citadel or Montgomerieston established after the Restoration by the Earl of Eglinton, who had obtained an Act to arrest vagrants and the unemployed in Ayrshire, Renfrewshire and Galloway, and to compel them

¹ *Miscellany of the Scottish Burghs Record Society*, 1881, p. 75.

² *Archaeological and Historical Collections of Ayr and Wigtown, Charters of the Royal Burgh of Ayr*, p. 22.

³ Murray, *Early Burgh Organisation in Scotland*, ii, p. 557.

⁴ *New Statistical Account*, v, p. 60.

¹ Paterson, *History of Ayrshire and its Families*, i, p. 185.

² *Statistical Account*, ii, p. 578.

³ *The Darien Papers*, p. 415 (Bannatyne Club, 1849).

⁴ *Records of a Scottish Cloth Manufactory at New Mills*, p. xxxiv.

⁵ *Northern Notes and Queries*, i, p. 22.

to work in his wool manufactory in return for meat and clothing only.¹ There is no mention in *The Register* of 1692 of the woollen manufactory, but this may be because it was claimed that the Citadel was not in the burgh; English competition after the Union of the Parliaments, however, destroyed the Scottish fine cloth industry. In 1749 there was an application for ground at the road leading to the Milns of Ayr for a large linen manufactory, but it is unknown whether it was ever built.²

The manufacture of woollen cloth was extensively carried on in Ayr and district but the linen trade was mainly for domestic use. The number of looms in Ayr and district in 1776 for woollen cloth and linens was about 200, with about 60 for silk and 15 stocking frames; but those in the town were chiefly employed in weaving plaidings and other coarse woollen goods for the weekly and annual markets.³ By 1828 the number of looms had increased to 900 and by 1838 Ayr and suburbs had 1087 looms weaving cotton and wool, as compared with 1,800 in both Girvan and Kilmarnock, 1,580 in Irvine, and 1,360 in Maybole and Crosshill. Most of the work was supplied by agents of Glasgow and Paisley firms who often compelled the weavers to purchase their goods from them.⁴

Dr. McGill states in the *Statistical Account* that in 1789 there were many female children happily engaged in the tambouring business which they have from the cotton manufactories; fifty years later *Lockhart's Directory* reported that Ayrshire needlework employed perhaps not less than 1,000 females earning 1s. to 2s. a day and that 'point' work had been first introduced about twenty-eight years before.⁵

About the beginning of the nineteenth century a small cotton mill was taken over by Dr. Charles, one of the magistrates, who turned it into a woollen spinning mill to offer employment to destitute children in the town. Mr. James Templeton acquired the business in 1827 and extended the premises in Fort Street. He commenced the manufacture of carpets in 1832, about which time he built a dye-house in Mill Street.

¹ Paterson, i, p. 184

² *ib.*, p. 185

³ Loch, *Essays on the Trade, Commerce, Manufactures and Fisheries of Scotland*, ii, p. 76

⁴ *Reports from Assistant Hand Loom Commissioners* (1838) p. 3

⁵ *Statistical Account*, xxii, p. 45; *Lockhart, Ayr, Newton, Wallacetown and Troon Directory* 1841/2, p. 83

For many years James Templeton & Son was the only works of any size in the town and was one of the largest of its kind in Scotland. The mill in Fort Street was burned out in 1876 and the present mill, which is for worsted spinning only, was built two years later. The manufacture of carpets was stopped, and the business, which now consists of the spinning of worsted yarns for hand knitting and hosiery manufacturing purposes, is under the direction of the fifth generation of the family.

In 1876 William C. Gray founded the carpet firm which bore his name and which in 1947 was incorporated in Gray's Carpets and Textiles Ltd. The firm, which was responsible for a number of innovations in the carpet industry, now manufactures Wilton, spool Axminster and chenille Axminster carpets up to 21 feet in width. Before the war approximately 1,500 people were employed, but now, due to reorganisation, production is about 25 % greater with only 1,200 employees.

There have been and still are a number of other firms engaged in the textile industry in the burgh, but of much smaller size.

In 1700 the magistrates resolved 'to sett down and shank a coal heugh on the town lands'. Boring took place between the Mill Vennel and the Town's Mill and coal was discovered at the head of the Vennel. The contractor was imprisoned for breach of contract and the magistrates took the work into their own hands, but it became a very expensive undertaking owing to the difficulty of the strata. Another pit sunk at Broomberry proved a failure through lack of coal, and the inhabitants had to be stented to carry on the pit at Townhead.¹ Coal had been worked in the burgh from at least 1528 when Adam Wallace of Craigie obtained a seven years' lease to work coal in the Barony of Alloway. Scarcity of coal was known even in those days, as shipments had caused such a dearth that the magistrates in 1593 prohibited the export of coal. Municipal enterprise was evident in a scheme promoted by the town council in 1611 whereby subscriptions were received to sink a pit at the waterside on the basis that the subscribers received back double the amount advanced if coal was found but lost their money in the event of failure.² In 1765 the town subscribed £50 to assist the burgh of Newton to shank for coal;

¹ Paterson, i, p. 185

² Lyon, *Ayr in the Olden Times*, p. 48

two pits were sunk but were almost abandoned owing to water, and Ayr subscribed another £50 to help.¹ The pits ultimately became successful, and the burgh of Newton drew rent and royalties of about £250 or £300 per annum when the price of coal was 5s. 6d. per ton of 24 cwt. Considerable trouble was caused by the inflow of water and an early steam engine, pumping 360 gallons a minute, was installed to deal with this.² At one time there were several coal pits, albeit small, one near the swing bridge at the harbour, a second close to the battery and a third within the Citadel; while on the north side of the river there was a pit where the lighthouse stands, a second along the shore at the salt pans, a third at Newtonhead and a fourth near the Old Bridge end.³ Just over a hundred years ago the Ayr Colliery, owned by John Gordon Taylor and comprising the Auchencruive, Blackhouse, Newton and Sanquhar pits, had an output of 100,000 tons per annum and employed about 700 men at wages of 1s. 6d. to 4s. a day, while boys earned 6d. to 1s. 8d. a day.⁴ Now no coal is worked in the burgh but since the nationalisation of the mines the Ayr and Dumfries headquarters of the National Coal Board has been set up in the town.

The allied engineering trades have been carried on for a long time. Several foundries were established about the beginning of the nineteenth century⁵ and the two present foundries in the burgh can trace their ancestry back to the middle of last century. Agricultural machinery made in Ayr was well known last century and Wallace Bros. devoted attention to the improvement of their reaping machine, while J. & T. Young had a large export trade with Ireland and the Colonies for their horse and steam threshing machines.⁶

The largest engineering firm in the town is The Scottish Stamping and Engineering Co. Ltd., the successor to the original business formed in 1900 when the first drop hammers were installed. In the early days the company also did structural work and up to 1914 the forgings were mainly used by shipyards, but after the 1914-18 war an increasing proportion of the output went to the motor industry. The forge is now the

¹ Paterson, i, p. 185 ² *Statistical Account*, vii, p. 1

³ Robertson, *Old Ayrshire Days*, p. 242

⁴ Lockhart's *Directory*, p. 42

⁵ *ib.*, p. 42

⁶ *Principal Manufactures of the West of Scotland*, p. 113 (British Association, 1876)

second largest in the United Kingdom, employing about 750 people and has one of the heaviest steam drop hammers in Britain. James Dickie & Co. (Drop Forgings) Ltd., was established more recently in the same industry.

Among old established industries are tanning and shoemaking. About 1790 the average number of hides tanned was 3,000 and from 500 to 600 dozens of calf skins,¹ while in 1837 about 20 men were employed by three firms engaged in tanning and currying.² Shoemaking was very active during the Napoleonic Wars as an army contract gave employment to fully 1,000 hands.³ By 1837, although there was a small export trade, chiefly to the Colonies, the number of shoemakers had been reduced to about two hundred,⁴ but shoemaking has remained an industry in the burgh to this day.

Another industry catering for the local market was that of brewing and malting which had been carried on in the Citadel to a small extent prior to 1727, and in 1734 the Countess of Eglinton erected premises for the distillation of whisky, cinnamon and various waters from herbs. The buildings were let to tenants who began to brew ale in 1754 and the first consignment brought into Ayr was seized and sold for the payment of the 'intown multure'.⁵ In 1787 the Citadel was again a brewery and the magistrates, reverting to the claim made in 1754, proceeded against the occupants, McConnell & McCracken, for thirlage. The case went to the Court of Session and the magistrates lost, thus establishing the independence of the burgh of barony of Montgomerieston (comprising the Citadel) granted by Charles II to the Eglinton family in 1663.⁶ There was another brewery in Mill Street in the early part of the nineteenth century, and Turner's Newton Brewery is also of considerable antiquity.

An attempt to start a sugar refinery about 1770 was not successful and the building within a few years was derelict. The manufacture of soap is also mentioned by the writer of the article in the *Statistical Account*, and this trade was carried on for many years.⁷ While the present fertiliser and chemical industry dates back to 1860 when A. Weir & Co. (absorbed by

¹ *Statistical Account*, xxi, p. 45

² *New Statistical Account*, v, p. 54

³ Gray, *The Auld Town o' Ayr*, p. 23

⁴ *New Statistical Account*, v, p. 54

⁵ Paterson, i, p. 184

⁶ *ib.*, p. 185

⁷ *Statistical Account*, xxi, p. 45

Daniel Wyllie & Co. in 1880) started making superphosphate and other fertilisers, there was a small chemical industry before this. Barilla, black ashes and soda were made in the early part of the nineteenth century,¹ while magnesia, epsom and glauber salts, vitriol and marine acid were manufactured by Taylor's in 1830²; and in 1838 a mill for crushing bones for agricultural purposes was erected.³ The firm of Daniel Wyllie & Co. was itself absorbed by Scottish Agricultural Industries in 1928. In 1947 a granulation plant, one of the largest in Scotland, was installed and further large extensions are on hand.

In any notes on economic developments in Ayr some reference must be made to the old local banking companies. In the latter part of the eighteenth century money was exceedingly scarce in Scotland and there was great difficulty in financing trade or obtaining credit to improve estates, as the branch banking system had not yet been developed. The first bank established in Ayr was John Macadam & Co. in 1763,⁴ and on 6th November 1769 the notorious firm of Douglas, Heron & Co., well named 'Bankers in Air', was started. About that time a number of enterprising companies, engaged in different kinds of foreign and domestic trade, were also formed in Ayr.⁵ Douglas, Heron & Co. was founded chiefly by landed interests and had a capital of £150,000; the shareholders included two dukes, a duchess, two earls and many men of rank and fortune, but no bankers and few residents of the burgh.⁶ A rapid policy of expansion was started: the firm of John Macadam & Co. was bought for £18,000; the banking business of Johnson, Lawson & Co. at Dumfries was taken over; a branch was established at Edinburgh and agencies at Glasgow, Inveraray, Inverness, Kelso, Montrose and Campbeltown.⁷ Following the failure of a banking house in London, Douglas, Heron & Co. stopped payment in June 1772 with liabilities of almost a million and a quarter, including deposits of £300,000, note circulation of £220,000 and bills in London of £600,000.⁸

¹ Aiton, *General View of the Agriculture of the County of Ayr*, p. 617

² McCarter, *Directory for Ayr*, 1832, p. 148

³ Lockhart's *Directory*, p. 43

⁴ McCarter's *Directory*, p. 153

⁵ *The Precipitation and Fall of Mess. Douglas, Heron and Co., late Bankers in Air*, p. 21

⁶ Alphabetical List of the Partners of Douglas, Heron & Co.

⁷ *The Precipitation and Fall of Mess. Douglas, Heron and Co., late Bankers in Air*, p. 85

⁸ Somers, *The Scotch Banks and System of Issue*, p. 103; Munro, *The History of the Royal Bank of Scotland*, p. 134 et. seq.

The bank was reopened by means of selling annuities at exorbitant rates but finally closed its doors in August 1773 leaving a loss to the shareholders of £663,396 18s. 6d.¹ This failure left an amount of destruction such as had not been experienced since the wreck of the Darien Expedition. A large proportion of the land in Ayrshire changed hands in consequence and it is said that some families did not get their accounts satisfactorily closed for upwards of sixty years.² Whatever the cost may have been to the shareholders, Douglas, Heron & Co. was not entirely a failure as it had enabled many landlords to improve their estates and had encouraged trade in the south-west of Scotland.

After the collapse of Douglas, Heron & Co., James Hunter who had been cashier not only to them but also to the Air Banking Company (John Macadam & Co.) started the banking firm of Hunter & Co. with a capital of £10,000. The new bank was managed on prudent lines and did not at first discount bills exceeding £300.³

In 1775 the Bank of Scotland opened an office in Ayr and it was over 55 years before a branch of another bank (the Glasgow Union Banking Co.) was opened in the town.

Meantime Hunter & Co. continued to expand and absorbed the Kilmarnock Banking Co. in 1821⁴; and when it itself was absorbed by the Union Bank of Scotland in 1843 there were branches in Girvan, Galston, Irvine, Kilmarnock, Maybole, Stewarton and Troon.⁵

In 1830 Quintin Kennedy, a partner in Hunter & Co., left to found the Ayrshire Banking Company which had nine branches and was bought for a premium of £60,000 in 1845 by the Western Bank.⁶

A Savings Bank for Ayr, Newton and Wallacetown was formed in 1815⁷ but this was dissolved later. A new Savings Bank was started in 1909 and amalgamated with the Savings Bank of Glasgow in 1933, at which date deposits were less than £100,000 as compared with deposits of more than £2,810,000 in November 1951.

¹ Somers, p. 103

² Forbes, *Memoirs of a Banking House*, p. 42

³ Rait, *History of the Union Bank of Scotland*, p. 172

⁴ *ib.*, p. 180

⁵ *ib.*, p. 185

⁶ Kerr, *History of Banking in Scotland*, 3rd edn., p. 214

⁷ McCarter's *Directory*, p. 153

CHAPTER 12

FAIRS AND MARKETS

WILLIAM J. DILLON, M.A.

FROM the earliest days of Ayr's recorded history the royal burgh possessed the jealously-guarded privileges of a market and a fair. The burgesses fought legal battle after legal battle against all who disputed these rights. Sometimes their adversaries were the merchants of Irvine, sometimes the sheriff and his deputies, sometimes the unfreemen of Maybole, but in all cases the freemen of Ayr were resolute in defence of their rights. The underlying reason was not petty civic pride or inter-burghal rivalry, but desire for revenue, dependent upon monopoly of trade.

In the medieval economy Ayr was a royal burgh with a king-given market and fair. By the erection charter of 1203¹ Ayr had sole rights of trade within certain fixed toll-points, which to-day are on the extreme limits of the shire. Inside this area—called the liberty of the burgh—no other market could be held, which meant that buying and selling of goods could take place nowhere in Ayrshire except at the market or fair of the county town. Irvine disputed this right and seems to have gained a monopoly of trading in Cuninghame, nevertheless no other place in Ayrshire could legally engage in trade.

On a market day no person could sell unless he was a freeman of the town, but on a fair day this restriction was removed and traders from all the 'airts' were welcomed by the burgh. On such days, to Ayr came Italians with silks and velvets, Spaniards with cargoes of iron, Norwegians with tar and pitch, and Gascons and Greeks with wines. Thousands of country folk flocked into Ayr to buy such overseas commodities, and to enjoy the entertainments which always accompanied such marketings. This influx of business-men and pleasure-seekers brought to the burgh owning the fair substantial increases of

¹ *Muniments of the Burgh of Ayr*, no. 1

revenue. Money poured into the town coffers from tolls on all goods brought into the burgh, from levies on all goods sold, from charges for permission to set up booths and stalls, and from fines exacted for breach of the peace of the fair. Such profits lasted well into the middle of the nineteenth century, and in 1822 we find Ayr rousing the 'fair custom' to the highest bidder, mainly to avoid the difficulty of collecting the dues.

For such lucrative privileges royal burghs had to make themselves answerable for a large part of the revenue needed by the king. For centuries, the burghs' share was fixed at one-sixth of the total for the whole country, and each individual burgh was rated at so much per every hundred pounds of the sum required. Ayr's contribution in 1535 was £2 7s. 3d. out of every hundred pounds. Payment of such taxes was Ayr's moral justification for suppressing all trade elsewhere in Ayrshire.¹

It was all important that merchants trading in the burgh should be free from disturbance, so accordingly the fair was put under the king's peace. None dared trouble the tranquillity of the market. Thus the fair opened with a display of magisterial pomp and circumstance. On the evening preceding the great day the burgh officer mounted the Tolbooth steps, chanted a fixed formula for opening the fair, and gave solemn warning that no one came to the fair to 'do any hurt or trouble one to another, for old debt or new debt, old feud or new feud, but live peaceably and use their merchandise and exchange, under God's peace and Our Sovereign Lord's protection'. Once this order had been promulgated no one, except a traitor, could be arrested unless he broke the peace of the fair. But peace does not spring from proclamations, and the bailies of Ayr, holding the 'Dusty-feet Court' where all merchants were tried, added many fines to the burgh's revenue.

The town had complete control of the fair. Its magistrates drew up the regulations, adjudged the appropriate charges, verified the weight and quality of the vendibles, and took strict precautions that no sheriff should intrude to hold court or search for fugitive outlaws. It was indeed the fair of Ayr.

To derive maximum benefit from a fair a burgh had to

¹ *Records of Convention of Royal Burghs*, vol. i, pp. 514-26

ensure that its fair day fell in a season when people were free to attend. To be avoided were harvest periods and fair times of adjacent burghs. Thus Ayr's principal fair was held in the midsummer month, thereby preceding the harvest, and avoiding the Marymass Fair at Irvine. Moreover, when Irvine changed the date of its festival, Ayr burgh protested vigorously, claiming that damage was being inflicted upon its own midsummer event.¹

This July fair had been granted in 1261 by King Alexander who gave to Ayr a fair each year at the Feast of the Nativity of St. John the Baptist, to last for the fifteen days following.² This was Ayr's greatest event of the year and in succeeding centuries it flourished under the various titles of St. John's Fair, the Midsummer Fair, and the July Fair.

In 1458 the town obtained the privilege of a second yearly fair at the Feast of St. Michael the Archangel and for four days after.³ The sheriff took strong exception to this additional grant, and for many years Ayr was involved in a series of legal proceedings to defend the new privilege of a Michaelmas Fair.⁴

The above two great medieval events were dated by reference to religious festivals. After 1560 the reformers frowned upon such holy-days and strove to stifle celebration of all feasts such as 'the superstitious day called Yuill'. A more prosaic way of dating fairs came into being, and fair days were settled on fixed calendar dates. Thus it came about that Ayr's third fair, granted by act of Parliament in 1701, was allocated to the first Tuesday of January and the four days following.⁵ It bore the title of the January Fair but local people referred to it as the Horse Fair.

By the beginning of the eighteenth century, Ayr fixed its three fairs thus:

The Midsummer Fair on the last Tuesday of June;
The Michaelmas Fair on the last Tuesday of October;
Horse Fair on the first Tuesday of January.⁶

In the succeeding century changes and subdivisions appear in the lists of fairs, and in the methods of dating, so that the *Directory* for 1858 contains a longer catalogue, e.g.:

¹ *Muniments of the Burgh of Ayr; Acts of the Parliaments of Scotland*, vol. v, p. 578

² *Muniments of the Burgh of Ayr*, no. 11 ³ *ib.*, no. 19

⁴ *ib.*, nos. 20-26, 48, 49 ⁵ *ib.*, no. 40

⁶ Kyle, *History of Ayr*, p. 113

New Year's Day Fair	Thursday and Friday before the second Wednesday of January.
Palm Fair	First Tuesday of April.
Cattle Fair	Last Friday of April.
Midsummer Fair	Thursday and Friday before the second Monday of July.
Wool Fair	Third Tuesday of July.
Michaelmas Fair	Second Thursday and Friday of October.

Further subdivisions and changes appear by 1876:

New Year's Day Fair	as above.
Hiring Fair	Third Tuesday in April.
Palm Fair	First Tuesday in April.
Cattle Fair	as above.
Midsummer Fair	as above, omitting Friday.
Wool Fair	Second Thursday in October.
Hiring Fair	Third Tuesday in October.

By this time the fairs were moribund, and were decaying into cattle fairs and feeing fairs, one of which was locally known as the 'Duds Day Fair'.

For centuries Ayr's July Fair was a compelling attraction. People came from long distances to buy and sell such goods as plaiding, cattle, and horses. Over from Arran came fleets of herring-boats to vend displayed cargoes of potatoes and carefully hidden jars of smuggled whisky.¹ From the rural areas the country people flocked into town to sample the fun of the fair and to suffer temptation from the proffered bargains of tinsmiths, jewellers, shoemakers, coopers, brasiers, turners, haberdashers, china-merchants and French soap-sellers. An atmosphere of chaotic gaiety mellowed the hard bargainings. Dram-booths offered whisky galore; taverns tempted with foaming tankards and unending penny reels; sideshows, shooting galleries, swings, roundabouts, coconut shies, boxing booths and a motley of freaks, mountebanks and pickpockets, lured the pennies from the visiting lads and lasses who toured the stalls gaudy with balloons, cheap toys, and tawdry fairings. Little wonder that Fergusson was moved to verse² and Aiton to condemnation.³

Space does not permit a detailed analysis of the causes which put an end to these old gatherings. One potent factor was the

¹ *Reminiscences of Auld Ayr*, 1864, p. 70-1, Edinburgh

² 'Hallow Fair'; depicting a market just outside Edinburgh

³ Aiton, *General View of Agriculture of County of Ayr*

growth of competition in buying and selling. In early times Ayr and Irvine had no trade rivals because the king had granted them the sole right of fairs and market in all the shire. About the time of the Reformation other Ayrshire burghs were striving to break this monopoly, and were becoming increasingly successful in their challenge. As each new centre achieved the privilege of trading, so too did it institute a fair. For example, in 1509, Cumnock's baron obtained a fair on St. Matthew's Day, and by 1691 this village had four fairs lasting one day each.¹ In 1516 Maybole received a charter giving power to have a market cross, to conduct a market on Thursdays, and to hold a fair yearly at the Bondage of St. Peter.² Ayr's magistrates valiantly opposed these intruders but progress could not be halted and the great fairs of the county town lost much to the younger competitors.

The changes, which transformed Scotland in the early days of the industrial revolution, heralded the demise of all fairs. Improved transport, and the opening of shops in every town and village removed the necessity of coming to Ayr to buy household goods. In 1848 all exclusive trading privileges were abolished by act of Parliament, and fairs soon were obsolescent. Gradually, but inevitably, the gatherings lessened, the markets crumbled, and the traders ceased to go their rounds of the burghs. Many fairs died away unnoticed while others, such as Ayr, developing into cattle auctions and servant-feeing occasions, had an 'Indian summer' before fading into oblivion.

In later days one aspect of the fair had begun to predominate, that of entertainment. The fair offered the simple pleasures of the poor and the young; grandfathers bestowed an annual fairing and scholars were released from bondage to revel in the lusty pleasures of 'the shows'. Even when the fair was no longer of economic import, it was attended for the carnival it offered. The festivities of earlier days were preserved in parades, horse-races, and annual incursions of merry-go-rounds and swings. In 1840 Irvine had a 'procession of tailors and weavers, an equestrian parade of coal carters, and a race run by their lumpish, scarecrow horses',³ and still to-day the Marymass

¹ J. Warrick, *History of Old Cumnock*, 1899, pp. 304-7

² Rev. R. Lawson, *The Capital of Carrick*, p. 16

³ Walker, *Life of a Manse Household in 1780*, quoted in *Social Life of Scotland*, vol. ii, p. 335

Races are a vigorous survival of the old Ladyday Fair. In Ayr the Whipmen's Society, founded in 1765, paraded the streets 'in their uniforms on the Friday of Midsummer Fair and thereafter proceeded to the sands where they started for a race'.¹ North of the river the Newton and Wallace-ton Whipmen's Society—begun in 1838—assembled each year on the second Friday in August, paraded on horseback through Newton and Wallace-ton, and finally proceeded to the sands for racing.² This famous Kipper Fair of Newton had a bacchanalian lustiness—ably described by William Robertson³—which augured well for its survival, but alas! it is many years gone from amongst us. To-day the fairs of Ayr are gone, never to return. Our modern way of life owes to them the 'shows' that periodically frequent the Newton, the races that are the best all Scotland can offer, and the Cattle Market where farmers still transact the traditional business of the old Fauldbacks.

AYR'S MARKETS

The same medieval conception of a trading monopoly for taxation purposes lay behind both markets and fairs. To-day, with shops in every town and village, we find it difficult to visualise the gigantic monopoly of trade possessed by Ayr and Irvine in former times. Nothing could be bought or sold outside these two royal burghs except from the packs of travelling chapmen who carried their wares from door to door. All marketing of goods had to take place in Ayr or Irvine, and not on any day except that granted by charter to these burghs.

So to Ayr on a Saturday came privileged strangers bringing their goods by wain or packhorse, to sell them to the freemen of the town and to dispose of surpluses to any others wishing to buy. The right to conduct trade in Ayr market belonged solely to the merchants of Ayr. In 1450 the burgh of Irvine claimed freedom in the town of Ayr 'to stand in the market to tap braid cloth and narrow cloth, wax, wine, iron, tar, lint, cloth, and all other small goods'. But a decret of council forbade any merchant to do so except on a fair day.⁴ Nor could ambitious traders deal in the larger commodities because

¹ *Directory* for 1832, p. 183

² *ib.*, 1845, p. 17

³ W. Robertson, *Auld Ayr*, pp. 66-7

⁴ *Muniments of Burgh of Ayr*, no. 18

the buying of wool, hides, skins and such like belonged to the guilds of Ayr.¹

Other communities in Ayrshire fought against such privileged monopoly. There was a long contest between the royal burghs and the unfree places. One irrepressible upstart intruder was Maybole. In 1516 this Carrick centre was erected into a burgh of barony with the right to possess a market cross and to hold a market on each Thursday.² The royal burgh protested promptly that Maybole was within the trading liberties of Ayr, and for a time was able to impede the progress of the newcomer.³

Further inland a centre of trade developed at Cumnock. Here in 1509 the kirklands were erected into a barony burgh under Sir James Dunbar, and from then on the inhabitants had 'full power and absolute right to buy and sell in the burgh, wine, wax, pitch, bitumen, woollen cloth, linen cloth, wool, skins, ox hides, salt, butter, cheese and all other merchandise'.⁴ Moreover, the charter granted 'power and liberty to possess and keep in the burgh, bakers, braziers, tanners, butchers, sellers of flesh and fish, and all other tradesmen'. Prior to this, Ayr alone had such rights.

Another menace to the monopoly held by the royal burghs was the Sunday market. Travelling chapmen found ready-made markets among the congregations assembled for church. Ayr and Irvine vainly employed every legal device to destroy the illegal markets held at the kirks of Beith, Dalry, Largs, Kilmarnock and other places.⁵ In 1538 the sheriff of Ayr and the bailie of Cuninghame were ordered to prohibit all merchants from using merchandise at any kirks and to order them to bring their goods to the free burghs only, because, since Flodden, merchants and chapmen had markets on Sundays at the parish kirks of Kilmarnock, Largs and similar places.⁶

But growth could not be stifled, and gradually trade threw off the shackles of medieval monopoly.

With the ending of market supremacy Ayr suffered a

¹ *Muniments of Ayr*, no. 18

² Rev. R. Lawson, *The Capital of Carrick*, p. 16

³ See *Ayr Burgh Accounts*; see Index, under Maybole

⁴ J. Warrick, *History of Old Cumnock*, 1899, pp. 51-2

⁵ *Records of Convention of Royal Burghs* (1677/1711), p. 614

⁶ *Muniments of the Royal Burgh of Irvine*, vol. i, pp. 41-2

grievous reduction of income, for fewer traders came and consequently fewer market dues flowed into the burghal coffer. All stranger merchants paid duties for the privilege of erecting stalls, while imposts were levied on goods as they were borne to and from the market. Each sale also paid its mite to the town treasury. From 1588 Ayr had had permission to tax all merchandise crossing the town bridge, and on fair and market days the volume of traffic must have been great. This bridge levy is known in detail and the charges were listed as follows:

a horse or mare	12d.	a sheep	2d.
an ox or cow	6d.	a lamb	1d.
a pack of wool	24d.	a dacre of hides	12d. ¹
a horsepack of skins, etc.	24d.		

In the *Ayr Council Book* (1722/1731) a very long list of the dues leviable for the brig custom and the causeway custom contains nearly every type of article sold in Ayr in 1731. The catalogue is a lengthy one, and the profits must have been great. Yearly the burgh auctioned these customs to the highest bidder, and the prices obtained were recorded in the town's books.

In 1730 the revenue from the roup was:

Meal Market Custom	£210 Scots	Wool and Iron Trone	£112 Scots
Bridge Custom	£151 "	Nolt Custom	£75 "
Calsay Custom	£67 "	Sheep Custom	£83 "
Fair Custom	£40 "	Total	£738. ²

The roup for 1842 reveals a total of £894,³ which means the burgh still profited from the old way of buying and selling. Even in Howie's day shops were very few, for the multiplication of places of business to meet a daily customer was not yet come. Trade still depended upon marketing, not upon retail. Ayr provided a fixed day, a series of stances, and a supervised standard of quality, and charged for such amenities. To-day, government control of food, and the rationing of meat, butter, cheese and like groceries, have obscured the old market practices. The Cattle Market, besides bringing in a goodly rent for the site, provides the town chamberlain with revenue from cattle-market dues levied on all animals sold. The power of the burgh to exact such dues has been redefined by the act

¹ *Muniments of Ayr*, no. 32

² *Ayr Council Book* (1722/1731), 27th April 1730

³ *Ayr Directory* for 1842, p. 99

of 1922, and a scale of maximum charges laid down. The burgh contents itself with the following rates, which are not maxima:

cattle	1s. 6d.	sheep	3d.	lambs	2d.	calves	6d.
pigs	6d.	horses	1s. 6d.	poultry	1d.		

The Butter Market also brings in a profit which will be discussed later, but no other market has stood the test of time.

Ayr's market-day was not always Tuesday. Originally, by the erection charter of 1203, the burgh was granted a Saturday market. After the Reformation, markets on Saturday and Monday were discouraged because the travelling involved often caused a profanation of the Sabbath. By 1690, Ayr's market-day had moved forward to Friday.¹ Later still, the expansion of trade demanded a subdivision of marketing because one single day would not suffice for dealing in all the commodities involved. In 1822 the Butter Market was held every Tuesday and Friday, the Web Market on the Thursday of each fair, and the Cattle and Grain Markets on Tuesdays. In general, however, most of the business was transacted on a Tuesday, as it still is.

Just as the market days changed with the passing of the years, so also did the marketing place. From remote times markets were held at crosses set up at the point of intersection of the principal streets. Ayr had two such points and two crosses, the Fish Cross and the Malt Cross, each claiming to be the market cross, with the evidence definitely in favour of the former.

The marketing area of Ayr stretched from the Malt Cross at the Sandgate, along the High Street to the Tolbooth, and from there to the Cattle Market at the Fauldbacks; that is, it extended from to-day's New Bridge to Burns' Statue Square. At different points in this district were sited the Malt Market, the Fish Market, the Meal Market, the Wool Market, the Butter Market, the Cattle Market, the Sheep Market and the Horse Market. The busy part of this market area was around the Fish Cross which stood opposite the south end of the Auld Brig, where a cross of stones set into the roadway marks its former position. The old cross with its base and weighing pans 'stood in an angular corner formed by the houses, between Isle Lane and High Street'.² Here, in Howie's time, came the

¹ *History of Ayrshire (Kyle)*, p. 113

² James Howie, *Historical Account of the Town of Ayr*, 1861, pp. 11-13

fishwives with baskets full of their caller wares, and here, too, came street-vendors to proffer fruit, vegetables, and potatoes. But the original purpose of this cross was to indicate a site for the sale of fish, in days when such 'stuff' could be sold nowhere else. Foreign merchants had to come here to buy fish because they were prohibited by royal precept from buying elsewhere than in free burghs, such as Ayr, Irvine, Dumbarton and Glasgow.¹

The illustration facing p. 192 shows the activities of the 'auld toon o' Ayr' centred at the Fish Cross, where much of the business of the town took place. Here, from its pedestal, burghal proclamations were given forth, and kirk-session disciplines publicly carried out. It was the town cross of Ayr in all but name.

Its rival, the Malt Cross, see plate V, stood at the other great traffic centre, where the Sandgate met the High Street. When the New Bridge was being built in 1778 a narrow passage led from the bridge to the end of the Sandgate. It was imperative that this narrow vennel be widened into a street broad enough to meet the new traffic requirements. The burgesses, who had chosen the site for the new cross, had desired a situation that would not interfere with the transport of goods along the High Street or the Sandgate, but which would readily be accessible from both routes. So the Malt Cross had been erected at the end of the small vennel, right in the middle of the causeway. There, then, it stood until 1778, presenting a tantalising barrier to traffic. It had to be removed, but the desire for its removal was not unanimous. It had the appealing assets of age and dignity; it had been built in the reign of Charles II²; it was a replica of the imposing Market Cross of Edinburgh.³ But in the name of progress it had to go, to make way for the coaches of the new era. It is a mystery why it was not rebuilt on a more convenient site. It was dismantled and its component parts allowed to find separate resting places. One side of it is still in existence, in the basement of the Carnegie Library. A sketch of this fine old erection is given on page 000 as a guide to those who may happen upon some of the missing portions.

¹ Precept of James IV, 1490

² J. Pagan, *Annals of Ayr*, p. 53

³ *Reminiscences of Auld Ayr*, p. 431

Near the Fish Cross, where an island of buildings to-day marks the area, next to the Flesh Market and the Hayweighs, stood the Meal Market. To this stance came the burgesses to deal in meal, corn, barley, other grains, and malt. In early times such business was conducted on the open street but by 1662 the burgh planned to build a covered market and accordingly was given authority to levy a custom on meal and victual.¹ Perhaps the proposed new building was intended to replace a ruinous market, as was the case in Irvine about the same period.² J. H. Pagan states that the Meal Market was built in 1586, replaced in 1662, and removed in 1843³; Paterson makes a similar statement.⁴ But the meal market existed long before this, though perhaps not as a building.⁵

In the nineteenth century the Meal Market was a huge, strong, square building, open on Tuesdays and Fridays, for the retail of meal, barley, pease and all other cereal produce. Neighbouring farmers brought in meal and other such grains regularly to the market and sold them to the inhabitants. The price fixed on a Friday remained in operation until the following Friday.⁶ Many reorganisations and adjustments took place in the early nineteenth century. Ayr reconstituted its grain market in 1821. Newton abandoned a similar market in 1812, but by 1832 it had been revived and was open every Saturday.⁷

For centuries the sale of meal brought a profit to the burgh. In 1662 the charge was fourpence sterling on each sack of meal brought into the market.⁸ In the nineteenth century the impost was a penny per boll, later relaxed to a penny a load. The *Air Advertiser* of 8th November 1821 gives statistics for the three years during which the reorganised grain market had been in existence and shows an average yearly sale of over five thousand bolls of wheat. Oats, barley, bear, beans, pease and oatmeal are also listed, but do not sell so well as wheat. By this time wheat from America and oats from Ireland were being stored in a granary rented by the magistrates, and the market day had been changed to Friday, although a minority of dealers voted for the traditional Tuesday. The practice of rousing

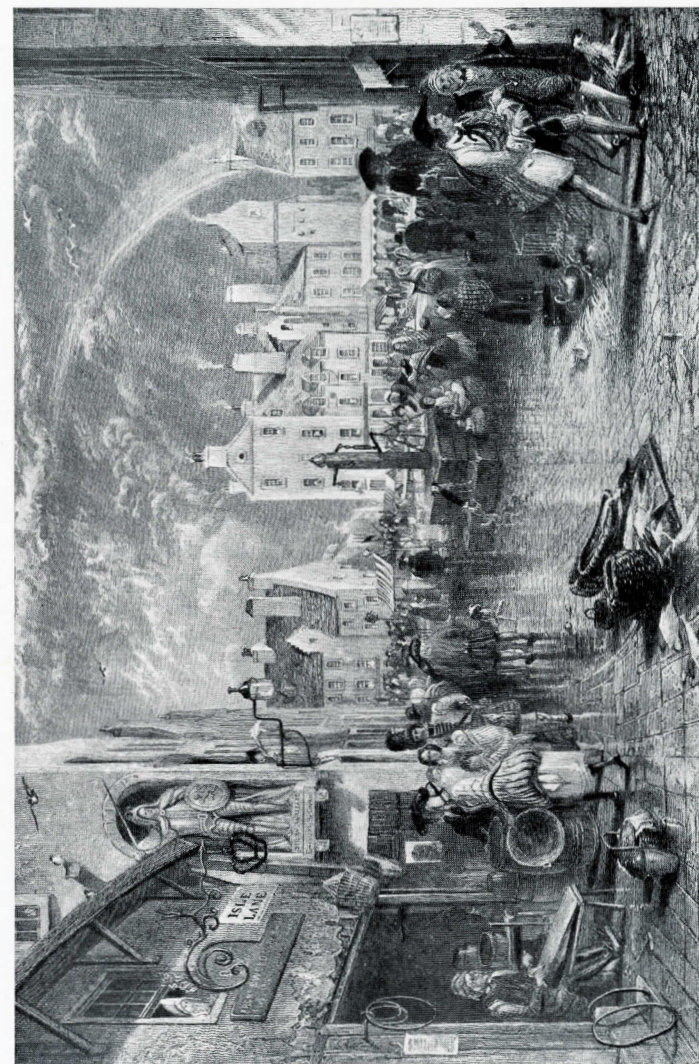
¹ *Acts of Parliament of Scotland*, 1662, vii, p. 375

² *Muniments of Irvine*, vol. ii, 1693, no. 71 ³ Pagan, *Annals of Ayr*, p. 55

⁴ *History of Ayrshire (Kyle)*, p. 14 ⁵ *Ayr Burgh Accounts*, pp. 32, 134

⁶ Howie, *Historical Account of the Town of Ayr*, p. 11

⁷ *Directory of Ayr*, 1832, p. 192 ⁸ *Acts of the Parliaments of Scotland*, vii, p. 375



THE FISH CROSS

after D. O. Hill

the customs still continued, and in 1841 the dues for the Meal Market were auctioned at £48.¹ To-day the town makes no profit from the sale of meal.

It is worthy of note that the Meal Market was also used for the sale of malt. It is difficult to know why this was so since the town had a Malt Cross, but the problem cannot be avoided for there are constant references to malt sold in the Meal Market, and recurring complaints from local brewers as to its poor quality. On 12th October 1730 the council received a petition concerning this 'insufficient malt'. On 3rd November of the same year it was decided that all malt ground in the town's mills be visited. 'All malt so visited shall have the seal of the visitor in wax upon a piece of pack thread tied by him about the mouth of the sack.' All malt brewed within the burgh shall be visited within the 'meallmercat' and exposed to sale upon every Tuesday, and pay two shillings Scots of customs for each boll. In the Meal Market the burgh maintained 'two firloths, one peck, and one fourth part dishes with iron girds for the use of the meal market for measuring malt'. Such town vessels ensured that buyers were free from the dangers of short weight. Correspondingly, to ensure quality, the burgh each year appointed two visitors and supplied each with a seal bearing the word 'Ayr' on it. A payment of one shilling Scots was expected for visiting and sealing, and fines were exacted for selling unsealed malt.²

Why then was the Malt Cross not at the Meal Market? Like the Malt Cross the Meal Market fell victim to civic improvements for it, too, 'was a great deformity on the part of the street'.³

Textiles were sold in the Wool Market and the Web Market. The former was for the sale of unmanufactured wool and cloth made from wool.⁴ Trade in cloth dates back to pre-Reformation times,⁵ but details of the market are not available until fairly recent days. By the nineteenth century the business of both these markets was being done in the Plaiding Fair, held in the Winton Buildings next the Hayweighs. Every six weeks people from Dalmellington and other sheep-shearing districts brought

¹ *Directory of Ayr*, 1841, p. 99

² *Town Council Book* (1722-1731) M.S., 3rd November 1730

³ *Old Statistical Account*

⁴ *Air Advertiser*, 22nd June 1820

⁵ *Ayr Burgh Accounts*, p. 31

in their homespun plaiding made from the wool of their own sheep. Wholesalers came from Glasgow and Kilmarnock and other centres to buy.¹ The development of rural industries caused changes which affected all burghs, and Ayr had to organise to hold the decaying market. Thus in 1820 a meeting was held in the King's Arms Inn to publicise the Wool Market and to find methods of attracting customers.²

The Web Market dealt mainly in flannels, manufactured in the outlying country districts. A sale took place every Thursday of the four fairs, and also on certain specified Tuesdays.³ Of this market little information is available.

A Butter and Cheese Market seems to have varied its situation without ever moving very far from the east corner of Newmarket Street. At first this market was held on the causeway in High Street, and about 1767 the town council agreed to reconstruct an old vennel which led from the Sandgate to the markets for meal and flesh.⁴ This new road was called the New Yard, and later the New Market Street. At one time butter and dairy produce was sold in the High Street between the old *Advertiser* Office and the carriers' quarters opposite the King's Arms Inn.⁵ The *Directory* for 1832 states that the Butter and Cheese Market was held in Newmarket Street every Tuesday and Friday, for retail of butter, eggs, cheese and fowls.⁶ The public street yielded place to an open market, with a wall and an iron railing in front, and a slated shed inside, which open market was later displaced by the Macneille Buildings. To-day the Butter Market is up the Butter Market Close in the High Street. Here, in recent years, every Tuesday, Ayrshire farmers did direct trading with local grocers and townspeople. In 1900 the town made a profit of £48 on this market and by 1911 the sum had risen to £75. When rationing was introduced it put an end to the activities of this marketing, but the town retains the power—restated in an act of 1873—to charge dues on every pound of butter sold.

Butcher meat was sold in the Flesh Market which was next the Meal Market in the High Street. The notorious Maggie Osborne lived in a tenement adjoining this market.⁷ In 1764

¹ *Statistical Account*, 1799, vol. xxi, p. 46

² *Air Advertiser*, 13th July 1820

³ *Ayr Directory*, 1832, p. 186

⁴ *History of Ayrshire*, vol. i, p. 58

⁵ Howie, *Historical Account of the Town of Ayr*, p. 14

⁶ *Ayr Directory*, 1832, p. 186

⁷ *Lyon, Ayr in Olden Times*, p. 10

the burgh, at the request of the merchants, had a market built at a cost of £93 19s. 7d.¹ This new building was a continuation of the improvements which had caused the erection of a slaughter-house in Mill Street in 1747, after thirteen years of argument as to its desirability.²

Ayr's most lasting mart was the Cattle Market. All livestock was sold at the Townhead in market-places outside the Kyle Port and next the Cow Vennel. The site was called the Fauldbacks, and contained the selling places for cattle, sheep and horses. It was, of necessity, a large area and to-day much of it is covered by Burns' Statue Square and adjoining properties.

When the town was developing away from the High Street district and moving towards the Sandgate, where stood the new Tolbooth and the Malt Cross, an attempt was made to remove the Cattle Market to a fauld in the Sandgate. A successful petition managed to get the market re-established on its old site, from which neighbourhood it has never since stirred.³

The Fauldbacks has a long history. In 1539 the nolt (or cattle) custom was worth £2 13s. 4d.,⁴ in 1729 it had risen in value to £75, and to-day the contribution to burgh revenue is considerable. This increase in monetary value reflects a corresponding rise in the number of markets. In 1820 there was an annual cattle sale at the end of April, and a weekly market during the summer months. Moreover, the magistrates, acting on a petition from respectable farmers and cattle-dealers, consented to institute a new Midsummer Cattle Market to be held on the Friday of Midsummer Fair.⁵ It was to take place in the Noltfaulds adjoining the Horse Market, and was directed especially towards the sale of 'Black Cattle' and sheep. In order to tempt dealers to attend, no custom was to be levied on Highland cattle and only twenty pence a score on all other kinds of lean cattle.

Adjoining the Fauldbacks were sale-places for horses and sheep. Little is known of either.

On the map of 1832 the Horse Market appears as a small triangular enclosure attached to the Cattle Market, and there

¹ *History of Ayrshire*, vol. i, p. 111

² *Lyon, Ayr in Olden Times*, p. 33

³ *History of Ayrshire (Kyle)*, p. 113

⁴ *Ayr Burgh Accounts*, p. 81

⁵ *Air Advertiser*, 22nd June 1820

was a toll gate that took its name from the Horse Market nearby.¹

In later days sheep were sold in the cattle market, but there may have been a separate establishment earlier, for in 1592 there is reference to a tenement in the Sheep Market.² Sheep dues are usually a separate item in the treasurer's balance sheet, as in 1595 when this official used the sheep custom to reward the bellman for looking after the town's 'knock'.³

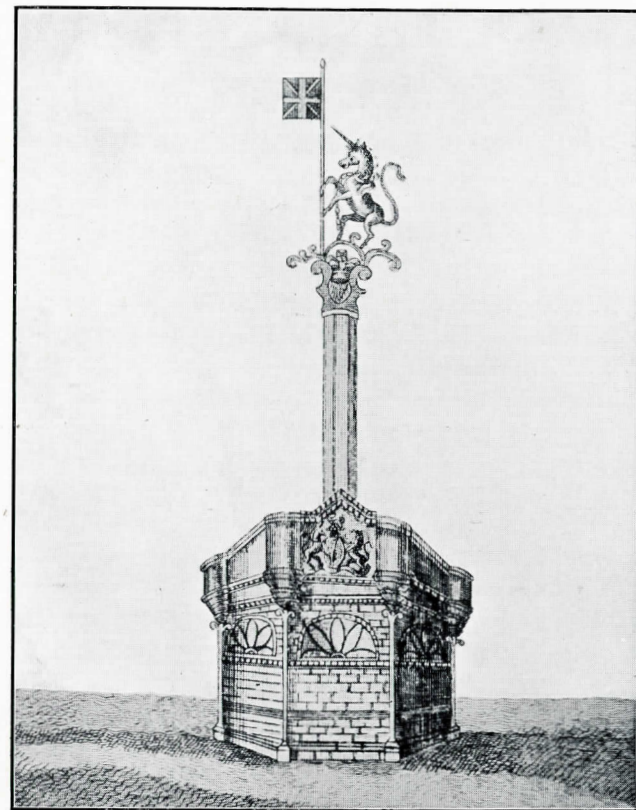
By 1832, the Cattle Market was held every Tuesday at the Fauldbacks.⁴ But, in reality, it is difficult to distinguish between the various livestock markets, and this may perhaps be possible only when the burgh's records have been fully transcribed.

¹ *Air Advertiser*, Roup of tolls, 7th March 1822

² *Protocol Book of John Mason*, no. 139

³ *Ayr Burgh Accounts*, p. 188

⁴ *Directory*, 1832, p. 186



THE MALT CROSS

from Ferguson's *Auld Ayr*

CHAPTER 13

THE HARBOUR

HUGH MCGHEE, M.A.

See the Society's 'Collections 1947-1949' for *The Old Harbour of Ayr from the earliest times to the Union of the Crowns*.

'... and for number of goode schippis and skilfull and able marinaris it is the best in this your maiesties kingdome, Leyth and Dundie onlie except.'

SUCH was the position of Ayr at the beginning of the seventeenth century. It possessed a small fleet of merchantmen exporting the surplus wool, hides, skins, plaiding, salted herring and salmon, panned salt and coal from Ayrshire, Arran and Kintyre to many parts of Britain and Europe. To the ports of Normandy, Bordeaux, La Rochelle in France sailed the merchants of Ayr, bringing back wine and rock salt; to Rotterdam and Campveere in the Low Countries, returning with cloth, spices, silk, wax and fruit; to Norway for timber and iron, to Danzig for iron, canvas, rope and tar; to Ireland for timber, cattle and grain; and to Campbeltown and the Western Isles, in these days far more closely linked with Ayr than with Glasgow. Foreign traders from many countries came to buy and sell in the markets of Ayr in the 'adventure' or 'venter' trade, paying petty custom to the town for their privileges. John Mason, clerk, was granted the lease of this custom in 1616 on all vessels 'arryvand within this harbery and seyport with wyne, salt, victuall, oranges, tymber, coles, hydes and other gudes importit and inbrot furth of forrane countries be strangeris or unfriendis, or yet-transported be them furth of this burgh and harbery'. It was a thriving port.

Yet many obstacles lay in the path of development. After the Union of the Crowns, it was hoped that through the efforts of James VI there would be free trade with England and her colonies. This did happen for a few years, but by 1611 all the old duties were re-imposed. Nevertheless during this time Ayr

merchants were establishing a trade with the West Indies in tobacco. The will of William Kelso, merchant burghess of Ayr, states that 'the defunct had the saxteen pairt of the stock of tobacco in the *James* of Ayr newly come fra the Isle of Barbados', and 'certain tobacco in the hands of certain persones in Barbados worth £124'. In 1646 the 'latterwill' of another merchant burghess of Ayr, Robert Rolland, states that 'the defunct, departing this life on the Isle of St. Christopher, without this kingdom, had with him his haill merchant wair and stock, quhilk efter his deceis being returned in the guid schip called the *Bonaventure* of Irving to the port of Ayr, according to the account maid to his wife, by the partners and companie of the schip, thair was returned the number of eleven thousand weight of tobacco.'

This period also witnessed the decline of the monopolies of the royal burghs, and the creation of many burghs of barony infringing the trading rights of the former. The issue is summed up in a complaint of the merchants to the Convention of Royal Burghs in 1657 that 'the whole tread only competent to merchandes of free burghs, bearers of the burdens thair of, wes inhanced be unfreemen, indwellers in burghs of baronie, clachans, and villages throughout the whole natione, to the utter ruine of the whole free burghs within this natione if some effective course be not taken for speedie remeid thair of'. There were many instances of action taken by royal burghs against neighbouring burghs of barony, but the government tended to approve of the extension of trade and industry, and the law courts would not give any definite ruling, so the royal burghs fought a losing battle. The unfree burghs argued that the extension of trade was bound to make the country richer, and in many cases the royal burghs were too far apart to provide the necessary marketing service to the country. In 1672 Parliament passed an act giving leave to anyone to export corn, cattle, sheep, horses, coal, salt, wool and all other native commodities, and to import timber, iron, tar, soap, hemp, and other necessities. The retail trade was open to all, the only trade reserved for the royal burghs being the wholesale trade in wine, wax, silk and spices. For Ayr all this meant a steady loss of trade to the landward burghs of barony and the rival ports of Troon and Ardrossan.

Ayr was very favourably placed for trade with Northern Ireland 'within twelff houris sailing thair off,' and a brisk trade had existed in the sixteenth century, but as a result of the revolts, the government regulated this trade very closely in the seventeenth century, banning at various times the import of grain and the export of coal.

The Civil War was a further reason for the decline of the port of Ayr in the seventeenth century, for the attacks of the Royalist privateers, the absence of many townsmen, and finally the invasion of Cromwell, interrupted the flow of trade. Though in 1638 Ayr had still twenty 'guid ships', she had only six by 1645, and by 1656 when a representative of the Commonwealth was sent to Scotland to arrange the standardisation of customs and excise in Scottish ports, he found that Ayr had only three ships, one of one hundred tons, one of four tons and one of three tons.

On the 9th July 1652 'divers barkes came into Ayr with provisions for the troops, four frigates and several vessels for their assistance'. The troops were those of Cromwell occupying what they considered 'a strong town with a convenient harbour' to control the south-west of Scotland. They built the Citadel, the masonry for which was probably brought by sea from Ardrossan Castle.

A result of the complete union during the Commonwealth, and the opening of the English and colonial markets to Scottish trade was the temporary revival of trade in Ayr and the founding of two trading companies, the Merchant Booth Keepers and the Concord Company. But the Scottish merchants were opposed to the Navigation Acts of 1651 because so many ships had been lost during the previous twenty years that there were not enough to carry necessary imports. They had been using, and wished to continue to use, Dutch ships. Moreover the regulations debarred the export of wool, skins and hides, though they could not be used at home, because there were few manufactories, and no money coming in to establish industries. But if there was discontent over this Act during the Commonwealth, trading conditions deteriorated so rapidly during the Restoration period, that Scottish merchants began to look back on the Commonwealth as a time of relative prosperity. The Act of Union was repealed, and Scotland

immediately lost the benefits of free trade with England and the Plantations. The burghs appealed to the king to suspend the Navigation Acts as far as Scotland was concerned, and this was done, but for a short space only, owing to the objections of the English merchants. The Scots, they said, had ships built in Holland, and had privileges in France which let them undersell the English merchants in their own markets. Therefore the Plantation trade and the carrying trade with England were debarred, and heavy duties were imposed on Scottish goods imported to England.

In 1670 Dundee appealed to the Convention of Royal Burghs for financial assistance during a time of distress. Ayr had to refuse help because its plight was just as serious. A minute of the town council dated 26th July 1670 sums up the 'Reason for Decaying Trade' during this troubled era:

It is said we have our trade to Barbados and these Islands. It is trew. But it can be maid appear that this twelf years bygane we have had great losses be that traid. We have had severell ships lost in that Island, and by the way, and be fyre, and the last year ane new ship lost; men and guids, except the maister and boy that wer ashore. And except the first two or three years, we had never gane since.

And as to our French traid, we have not had ane hogset of wine in venter, these ten years bygan, and to some little salt imported, it is sold with great loss because of the great excyse.

And for our Norroway traid, it is well known we had no venter to Norroway upon our ain accompt this ten year.

The traid with Ireland was sometyme profitable to us quhilk is now altogether debarred.

Our harbour is totally ruined and decayed qyhilk we are not abill in the least to maintain. Our bridge daylie failing by great spaits, and yce coming down in the winter tyme on it.

Moreover the religious troubles of the time made things even worse, for in 1667, four hundred and fifty men belonging to General Dalzell, in free quarter for seven months, cost the town above forty thousand marks (Scots money).

In the last decade of the seventeenth century the great hope for the revival of Scottish trade was the Darien Scheme, and Ayr in common with every other Scottish town was enthusiastic in support. It subscribed £200 sterling from the burgh revenue, and gave its share of the £3,000 voted by the Convention of Royal Burghs. The failure of the project did not influence the merchants of Ayr to favour complete union with England, for

both the magistrates and the inhabitants petitioned against the Act of Union. Whatever their objections were, they seemed to be justified, for the plight of the town became worse. An early eighteenth century traveller, Captain J. Mackie, in *A Journey through Scotland*, writes: 'From Kilmarnock in eight miles I crossed the river of Air over a fair stone bridge, to the town of Air which looks like a fine beauty in decay. Here are the ruins of an ancient trading town; the market-place and two streets show what it hath been, but everything is now out of order.'

And in 1724 Ayr, like Dundee, had to appeal for help to the Convention of Royal Burghs, which appointed commissioners to enquire into the state of the town. Having viewed the town, harbour, Tolbooth and bridge, and enquired into the trade and accounts, they

find the trade of the said burgh very low and much decayed, and that there is only two barques, one of about thirty tons, and the other about twenty belonging thereto.

That many of the houses on the fore street of the said burgh are ruinous and waste, and more back houses fallen, become wasted or converted to yards. That the key and harbour of the said burgh of Ayr are very much out of order, and in an insufficient condition occasioned mostly by the great decay of their north and south dykes of their river.

Mention is also made of the imminent collapse of the Tolbooth, and the need to 'calsey the bridge' anew. The scrutiny of the town's accounts indicated that there was no adequate balance for the upkeep of harbour, bridge or other public works. Ayr was accordingly granted £40 sterling for the repair of the harbour.

This was surely the lowest ebb.

Despite the decline of trade during the seventeenth century the port of Ayr continued to hold its position as the chief herring curing station in the west of Scotland. During the season the fishing fleets of the west coast frequented the harbour, and foreign buyers entered the market. Many local laws controlled the fishing trade and the town benefited from the petty custom levied on boats and catches. At the beginning of the eighteenth century, however, some of the Newton fishermen began to land fish on the north side of the river to evade the tolls 'contrair to the town's rights and immemoriall customs'.

A lawsuit followed in which Sir Thomas Wallace of Craigie championed the Newton cause so successfully that in spite of the production of the charter of Alexander the Third and Robert the Third granting fishing rights and harbour customs to the burgh, a decision against the town was given. But a subsequent appeal confirmed the ancient privileges of Ayr.¹ The men of Newton monopolised the salmon fishing in the estuary, paying dues for each salmon coble to the burgh of Ayr. Before the days of stake nets or bag nets, the method they followed was to watch for the appearance of a fish in the mouth of the river, then ring a net speedily round it and haul again to the boat, usually with success. Salmon were much more plentiful in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, being a common article of diet and export. The traditional Kipper Fair in Newton was held in August when the main summer catch of salmon had been salted and kippered.

There was a considerable time lag between the Union of 1707 and the benefits expected to arise from it, during which the decline of the Scottish burghs continued. The west coast ports like Ayr, Glasgow and Dumbarton were the first to take advantage of the opening of the colonial trade. Ayr had traded in tobacco at a much earlier period and it was the revival of this trade which helped to bring back some degree of prosperity to the town. Though there is no evidence of 'tobacco lords' in Ayr, there grew up a brisk trade with Virginia, which was threatened by the prospect of war with the Colonies. On 8th January 1766 a letter from the merchants was read to the magistrates and council, setting forth their fears for their trade and stocks in the Colonies because of disturbances following the Stamp Act. It was decided to petition Parliament to do what it could to prevent disaster. Their fears were justified and war came. The town council supporting the British cause and their own trade, offered large bounties to any men of Ayr or Newton, who served in the king's ships. The war came much nearer than they expected for the privateers of the American rebels raided the west coast of Scotland, and in 1778 the council appointed a town guard of thirteen men to give the alarm in case of an attack on Ayr. The loss of the

¹ Near the end of the eighteenth century they were purchased by the Society of Writers in Ayr for £1,100 (*Old Statistical Account*, vol. ii, p. 273)

Colonies put an end to the tobacco trade, but at a later date Ayr merchants renewed their trade with America, importing timber from St. John and Quebec.

Though the American trade contributed to some extent to the returning prosperity of the port of Ayr in the eighteenth century, it was the coal trade which was mainly responsible. Coal had been mined within the bounds of Ayr and Alloway from the sixteenth, and on the north side of the river from the seventeenth century, but by the beginning of the eighteenth century there was an urgent need to develop the export trade. In February 1710, it was 'represented to the magistrates and council that several of the inhabitants doe incline to build a coal-ree or more at that pairt of the citadel next to the water, for preserving coalls in order to transport the same to Ireland or elsewhere, which will be encouraging to the trade of the place, now so much decayed'. A slow but steady increase in the trade continued throughout the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. In 1765 Ayr subscribed £50 'to assist the town of Newton in boring for coals as it would be a conveniency to the burgh, and perhaps lead to the exportation of coals'. Two pits were sunk, but flooding meant a further £50 subscription from Ayr. On the south side of the river there was a pit on the site of the slip dock, the shaft of which was found when the dock was being built; another where the gaswork is now situated, and another up nearer to the Fort wall, the clay excavated from which formed what was called the clay hill. Coals were run in baskets from these pits along a gangway to the waiting vessels in the harbour. James Montgomerie's Company in 1771 were allowed to erect a temporary wharf on the north side for exporting coals, having secured a coalfield in Newton Green. The bulk of the coal was on the Newton side in the immediate vicinity of the town, and as the nearer seams were worked out, new pits were opened up on the Auchencruive estate. In the forties of the nineteenth century the mines were owned by Messrs. George Taylor & Company; one existed not far from the Old Bridge, another, the Allison Pit, near Russell Street, Newton Head Pit near Tam's Brig, Saltfield Pit and Green Pit near Newton Lodge. About 1850 two pits were sunk in Craigie grounds from which coal was carted across the river to vessels lying on the south side. Most of the coal from the

Whitletts and Auchencruive pits was conveyed by horse-waggon in trains of four-, two- or three-ton waggons via Waggon Road and Newton Green to the North Quay. The rail ran straight down towards the Newton shore then swept round in the direction of the harbour to the jetties, and the wooden 'hurries'. The coal was tipped into the holds of a fleet of sailing colliers, the forerunners of Kelly's, two of which, the *Sister Anne* and the *Commerce*, belonged to the port of Ayr. This trade has been for two and a half centuries the most important at the harbour. The pits to-day are further afield, the locomotive has replaced the horse-drawn waggon train, and the old wooden 'hurries' have given way to coal conveyors and electric and steam coaling cranes.

COAL EXPORTS FROM AYR HARBOUR

1900	-	-	-	-	504,167 tons
1910	-	-	-	-	755,543 "
1920	-	-	-	-	968,113 "
1930	-	-	-	-	1,281,754 "
1940	-	-	-	-	1,541,397 "
1950	-	-	-	-	965,000 "

Coal tonnage (exported) increased steadily from 1900 onwards, till the peak in 1939 was reached at 1,740,000 tons.

The growth of the timber trade with America led to the renewal of ship-building at Ayr. In the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries the construction of wooden vessels was one of the main industries of the town. Several sawpits and ship-building yards were located on the north side of the river. Sloan and Gemmel's yard survived longest and their patent slip to haul up vessels for repair was sufficient for the shipping of the day. This firm was celebrated for the building of fast sailing clippers. Their *Tamerlane* held the record in the East India trade, and the barque *Oriental* had a great reputation for speed. The pride of the harbour was its timber fleet, built locally for trading to St. John and Quebec. Some of the vessels were the *Magog*, *Alexander Wise*, *Collingwood*, *Princess* and *Minerva*. In the early nineteenth century the depth at the bar was only 13 feet to 14 feet, so timber-laden vessels had often to be in the offing for two or three days till part of their cargo had been discharged. One launch from Sloan and Gemmel's at-

tracted special interest. It was that of the schooner *Felix*, in 1850, for the Arctic explorer Sir John Ross, to go in search of Sir John Franklin. The owner came to Ayr to supervise the building and the whale fishers who manned her were aboard at the launch.

Other schooners built by this firm were the *Eglinton*, *Gazelle* and *Katinka*, engaged in the coastal trade with Liverpool, bringing to Ayr, salt, animal feeding stuff and grain. The grain stores and mills along the south harbour were built to cope with this trade. The exports to Liverpool were pig-iron from Dalmellington, lead from Craigengillan, and quarystone. Down the cobbled Kyle Street 'used to come nightly the long cavalcade of carts with the pig-iron from Dalmellington iron-works for shipment at the harbour'. The *Euphemia Fullarton* continued the trade in hemp and tar with Archangel and the Baltic ports.¹ About 1832 according to the *Directory* of that year five pilots were licensed by provost and bailies, the pilotage rates being fixed at a penny three-farthings per ton of the tonnage of any ship handled. In addition to the Liverpool trade, regular services operated to Glasgow, Campbeltown and Arran.

With the development of the steam engine and the iron ships, the yards on the north side declined, though the ship-building tradition was continued when McKnight and Company began the building and repairing of steam ships. The original *Ayr* of Ayr, which came in 1822, was a fast sailing clipper intended to maintain a speedy service between Ayr and Glasgow. She could not compete against steam, and was succeeded by the steam packet of the same name. During a return journey from Glasgow this vessel collided with the *Comet II* off Gourock, holing her and causing the deaths of sixty persons. The skipper of the *Ayr* had misjudged the situation, thinking his own vessel was about to sink. Some time after the accident the *Ayr* was sold and the captain, although exonerated at the enquiry, emigrated. When the railway from Glasgow to Ayr opened in 1840, the steamer services to the former were greatly curtailed, but the services to Girvan, Stranraer, and Campbeltown con-

¹ '646 barrels of Tar, 11 tons hemp, 1,500 matts, being the cargo of the *Delight*, Capt. Gray, now landing from Archangel, are on sale by Quintin Macharg.'—Advertising notice in *Air Advertiser*, 7th September 1820

tinued with the *Queen of Scots*, *James Osborne*, *Scotia*, *Briton* and *Caledonia*. The first pleasure cruise took place in the *Queen of Scots* round Ailsa Craig, and subsequently every Saturday in summer for many years. Some of these old steamers ended their careers in blockade running during the American Civil War.

In recent times much of the nineteenth century trade of the port has passed away. The closing of the Lugar and Waterside ironworks meant the end, in 1928, of the importation to Ayr harbour of iron ore and limestone and the export of pig-iron. The coastal trade with Liverpool in grain and feeding stuffs did not survive the end of the century, though there is still a trade in general merchandise with the north of Ireland carried on by Burns-Laird, successor to the Ayr Steam Ship Co., who have a permanent berth and loading cranes on the north quay. Ship-repairing has replaced ship-building on the south side, where a slipway can accommodate vessels up to two thousand tons. Comparatively new imports associated with the agricultural fertilisers factory in Newton are phosphate and potash. It is expected that the harbour may be used to a greater extent for the importing of raw materials for this ever-expanding industry. Coal from the surrounding coalfields is still the main export.

TABLE OF EXPORTS AND IMPORTS

Year	Import	Export (excluding coal)
1900	153,493 tons	13,948 tons
1910	255,753 „	17,450 „
1920	117,675 „	11,408 „
1930	76,490 „	20,724 „
1940	72,254 „	2,692 „
	(coal, 52,352 tons)	
1950	39,000 tons	6,000 „

1900-1928 imports refer to iron ore and limestone, exports to pig-iron. The 1940 coal import is exceptional: it came from South Wales for use of Scottish railways, and was brought by sea to economise in use of railways during the war.

In the winter of 1951 a part of the roadway at South Harbour Street subsided during a period of prolonged heavy rainfall and spate, and the foundation of the south wall of the river from the New Bridge to a point beyond the subsidence was strengthened by sheet piling. This may be regarded as a twentieth

century illustration of the difficulty of maintaining a harbour formed by the mouth of a river. From earliest times the upkeep of the harbour was the responsibility of the town council and maintenance expenses were taken from the 'common good'. In times of economic stress the council could ask for a royal commission as in 1588, and get the right to impose special tolls for the upkeep of the harbour, or ask for assistance from the other burghs as in August 1724, or levy a special 'stent' or tax on the inhabitants as in 1668, or ask them to participate in person in the work of repair as in 1667 when the magistrates ordered the inhabitants 'to go out themselves, in proper person or ane sufficient man for them, to the haven work, and work ane tyde water, as they sall be warnit under fyve pounds penalty'. That year £1,090 Scots was spent upon the north and south dykes of the river—the first mention in any of the minutes of the north dyke. In the following year, 1678, a further £400 went to the continuation of the north dyke. Minutes of 1684, 1699 and 1764 refer to the removal of wrecks in the harbour, creating obstruction and endangering shipping. The *Margaret* of Queensferry had lain right across the harbour, the *Betty* near the Ratton Hole, and the *Unicorn*, *Hopeweel* and *Success* upstream, in danger of being carried down by every spate.¹ The first harbour light was put 'on the south stob, for directing the fishers in outgoing and returning during the fishing', in 1712. Part of the quay was rebuilt in 1713, in a firm manner with large stones, and between 1724 and 1730 determined efforts were made to strengthen both the north and south quays. The Slezer print of Ayr from the north (1693) shows a length of harbour wall on the south bank from the line of the present New Bridge to where the wall even to-day turns to the river at right angles. This was the Ratton Hole. Further downstream, where the fishing boats land their catches to-day, the sand dunes came down to the water's edge, but beyond that there is another quay wall. The print shows no sign of a dyke on the Newton side, though it may be a low one hidden by the foreground which shows Newton Green stretching down to the river side.

¹ There are numerous accounts of wrecks in the harbour in late times. In 1820 the sloop, *John and Mary*, carrying 40 tons of coal, sank and blocked the river. It was pulled clear by troops of the Royal Veteran Battalion from the barracks.—*Air Advertiser*, 7th June 1820

Systematic dredging began as early as 1730 when the council ordered a drag to be purchased like the one used in Dublin to keep the harbour free of banks. Four years later Lord Elphinstone addressed a letter to the provost with two model machines which he thought might be used in cleaning the harbour, with instruction on how to use them.

But the modern development of the port dated from the year 1772 when an act of Parliament was obtained granting power to improve the harbour, to deal with increasing trade and the accommodation of more shipping. The money difficulty was tackled by empowering the council to borrow money to the extent of £15,000. Further acts of 1794 and 1817 extended the terms of the 1772 act, the former adding regulations on the landing of fish and the latter giving additional borrowing powers. The 1817 act was to be operative for a period of twenty-one years, and the *Directory* of 1832 reports 'great improvements under harbour-master Telfer and his successor Blackwood'. Up to 1835 the management of the harbour was the responsibility of the town council, but in that year a harbour trust was formed in which the shipping interests were represented.¹ There were twenty-two members: the provost, two bailies, the master of works, the treasurer and five members of the council, and shipowners of the port; one member of the Sailors' Society, one member from the Merchant Company, the eldest bailie and two councillors of Newton (or three of the freemen of Newton, to be annually elected). An act of this year empowered the trustees to construct two docks, one on the south side between the quay and the barracks, and the other on the north side in the yard belonging to Mr. Oswald, formerly occupied as a ship-building yard, and gave them authority to purchase a dredger.² It began work in 1839, but was small and had to discharge the debris into flat-bottomed punts moored alongside. These were poled outside the breakwater, and the mud shovelled into the sea. An act of 1855 authorised the further deepening of the harbour, the extension and improving of the quays, borrowing powers up to £25,000,

¹ The *Air Advertiser* of 7th February 1822 states that 'the trustees of the harbour of Ayr have resolved to build 80 yards to the south wall'

² 'The drudge boat, built by Messrs. Connel and Co., to be employed in cleaning the harbour, was launched, and is named the *Enterprise*.'—*Air Advertiser*, 7th June 1821

the establishing of a sinking fund, and the purchase of a dredger and tugboat. (In the 1830's, harbour-master Telfer's 'big black horse "Dick"', a marvel of strength, had been employed to give a schooner a pull down the river when the wind was light'.) Under a section of this act the trustees are required to pay to the magistrates and town council of Ayr the sum of £130 per annum in respect of anchorage rates.

The new dredger was bought in 1855, but had soon to make way for the *Kyle*, which was very successful, giving twenty-two feet at the bar.

In the half-century 1840/1890, according to one authority every yard of the harbour walls had to be rebuilt; about 1855 the line of the wall of the Ratton Quay was altered to its present form. A further alteration was at the coal loading berths on the North Quay. The old walls were built mainly of loose stones, over which, at right angles, were carried the coal 'hurries'. When the quay wall was rebuilt, it was set back twenty to twenty-five feet, thus increasing the width of the river. The new wall was not founded deep enough, and when deep dredging was carried out, the foundation of the wall right along its length had to be strengthened by sheet-piling. About 1850 the breakwater, which had consisted simply of large boulder stones, was improved by the addition of masonry. It was shattered by gale some years later and reconstructed in 1869 at the same time as the south pierhead was rebuilt. The trustees in 1866 were given authority to build a wet dock, and to use a government loan provided they could guarantee a revenue of £10,000 a year. In that year the revenue was only £4,300, but the £165,000 required for the project was guaranteed by James Baird of Cambusdoon. It was opened on 18th July 1878 and a new era in the history of the harbour began. By 1889 the accounts of the trustees showed a revenue of over £24,000. The dock, designed by Thomas Meek, C.E., is eight acres in area with a depth of nineteen to twenty feet at high water. The masonry for the dock walls was quarried from the bed of the dock itself. The next important development was the construction of the slip dock on the Ayr side. An act of 1879 gave the trustees authority to go on with this work; to construct a draw bridge or swing bridge across the entrance to the wet dock, and a road access on the north side, the Darling-

ton Road having been widened from the New Bridge to Lottery Hall¹ as early as 1830. The work on the slip dock was responsible for the building of the Esplanade. The ground here had been occupied by the 'Pilot-house'—a little wooden erection open to the north, . . . '“howf” of the old salts' who brought the sailing ships in by taking bearings on familiar land-marks—by Paton's saw-pit, the lime kilns where limestone from Ireland was burned and retailed to purchasers,² and an open space of ground made up by the cartage of ballast. The last of the wooden shipyards disappeared in the eighties when the quay wall on the north side opposite Paton's saw-mills was built, the slips filled up, and a solid roadway replaced the swing bridge which had spanned them. The extension of the railway to the south side of the harbour by the building of a bridge and the laying down of railway sidings was carried out by the G. & S.W. Railway in 1900.

Indeed, from the end of the century the railway company began to have an ever-growing share in the control of the harbour. The heavy borrowing during the nineteenth century for the creation of a modern harbour, meant a severe drain on annual revenue for the payment of interest. By 1901 the trustees were finding that the revenue would not meet the expenses of management, maintenance and repair, plus payment of interest, and the railway company 'became bound for thirty years from 1901 to guarantee payment of the interest on the debenture stock'. In return 'any surplus revenue shall be divided equally between the harbour trustees and the company'. The same act altered the constitution of the trustees to the provost (chairman of the trust), three members of the town council, five ratepayers and six members appointed by the company. During the years 1901 to 1919 revenue failed to meet interest by £32,159 and the harbour undertaking was transferred to the railway by an act of 28th March 1919. This act states that the company 'shall as soon as possible after the termination of the present war put the existing harbour works into proper con-

¹ Lottery Hall was the original railway station. In 1907 it was wiped out and Newton Terrace merged with it into the goods station.—*Reminiscences of Auld Ayr*, p. 243.

² The public will be supplied with lime at any hour of the day at the kilns near the North Quay, Newton, at the low price of 11d. per boll credit and 10½d. boll cash. No toll is exigible at the New Bridge if the lime is used for manure.—*Air Advertiser*, 9th May 1822.

dition' and gave authority to extend and improve them by expending not less than £50,000 within the ten years following. The act also safeguarded the Royal Burgh of Ayr by granting the town council the right to complain in case of advantages being granted to neighbouring ports by reason of lower harbour rates, rebates or other facilities; and allowed it to retain the public bathing shelter and existing bathing privileges at the south pier and battery and the use of the south pier as a promenade. When the railway amalgamation took place in 1926 Ayr became an L.M.S. harbour; in 1948 it was nationalised under British Railways, and on 8th January 1950 it came under the Docks and Inland Waterways executive.

As in the past the export of coal will continue to be the most important item in the trade of the port. Before the war it was exported to Italy, Spain and the north of France as well as to Ireland. The extension of mining in Ayrshire may ultimately lead to the restoration of the 1939 export maximum. In addition there are three further trends which bode well for the future. These are the development of Agricultural Industries' plant adjoining the wet dock, with the potential imports of raw materials like phosphates and nitrates; the continuation of the landing of herring and white fish and the proposal to build a quick-freeze plant on the north side of the river, and finally the increasing activity of the ship repair yard on the south side.