

The Braw New Coat

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*New Brig was buskit in a braw new coat,
That he, at Lon'on, frae ane Adams got.*

In 1743 was born the man whose public spirit and personal ambition combined to open a new way into the town of Ayr from the north and to enclose most of the remaining common land in the south. John Ballantine was no ordinary man, though his activities were purely local and he had little artistic sense, even architectural. What he had was drive, together with imagination, for he certainly saw the shape of Ayr as it is to-day, the railway and internal combustion engine being left out of account, and that at a time when the town retained much of its medieval isolation and its almost tribal distribution of houses round the two successive medicine-lodges or town-halls, known as the old and new tolbooths.

He was born in Ayr and educated in the schools of Ayr. His father, William Ballantine, was a merchant in Ayr, importing wood and owning along with his brother Patrick and John Hunter and Company a large brick warehouse near the base of the south stob, or pier.¹ William and Patrick Ballantine were both in the Town Council in the 1750's, both had been Baillies, and Patrick was Dean of Guild for several years.

Between the Seven Years' War and the American War of Independence, Patrick Ballantine entered the tobacco trade. The firm of Galloway and Cuthbert were already importing tobacco into Ayr² which was not, however, a free port like Glasgow.

1 Ayr Town Council Minutes, 18/4/1749. "It was observed that William and Patrick Ballantine and John Hunter and Company had built a shade (shed) to their brick warehouse fronting the big key without acquainting the Magistrates and Council thereof."

Minutes, 26/9/1750. "William and Patrick Ballantine, merchants in Ayr, of £151 15s 8d Scots for square timber for posts to the key, cuttings for the pyles, tree nails and tarr . . ."

There are many other references to the Ballantines in the Minutes.

2 Minutes, 5/9/1750. "David Galloway and Samuel Cuthbert, merchants in Ayr, proposed to sell and carle on a tobacco trade in Ayr, for which purpose they must provide themselves in cellars or storehouses near the shore, 120 ft. by 26 ft."

Minutes, 9/2/1785. "By the law as it presents stands, certain ports only named in the Act are allowed to import tobacco, without depositing the old subsidy of 4 pounds per hogshead at the custom house where it lies dead till the exportation of the tobacco . . . some of us are proprietors of extensive warehouses built for the express purpose of storing tobacco. Glasgow and Whitehaven are exempt from this troublesome piece of obstruction. Lancaster was lately excepted by an order from the King in Council . . ."

Tobacco could be imported at Ayr only for re-export and four pounds per hogshead had to be deposited at the custom-house in the Sandgate. Patrick determined to avoid these adverse conditions by trading from Glasgow. His sons, William and John, entered his business there and he himself went out to Virginia, where he died.

Meantime the stay-at-home William Ballantine put his son John into a bank, and sent his son Patrick to the West Indies. In which bank John served his apprenticeship is not certain, but eventually he was a partner in Hunter's Bank, which replaced the notorious Douglas and Heron Bank in the Sandgate. In the Douglas and Heron Bank it will be remembered the Directors were all merchants who took an optimistic view of their chances and granted each other unlimited credit on reasonable terms. When the bubble burst in 1772, many Ayrshire families were ruined, including the Whitefoords of Ballochmyle.

"Fareweel, fareweel, the braes o' Ballochmyle."

Hunter's Bank was run on different lines and along with the Bank of Scotland helped to finance the building of the new bridge.

John Ballantine first appears in the Minute Book of the Town Council on May 17, 1780, when he is named as one of the Trustees for the harbour. In September he was admitted and received Burgess and Gild Brother in the right of William Ballantine, merchant in Ayr, his father, and at Michaelmas became a new Councillor. His father had died in 1777 and on January 10, 1781, John asked permission to put up a headstone over his grave "in the Churchyard, there near the west wall of the Church," where it can still be seen.

The following September John Ballantine was one of the Committee appointed to peruse and examine the Treasurer's "eque" or annual balance. In October, one year after he had joined the Council, he was elected Dean of Gild, a position which he held until 1787 when he became Provost.

One of his first acts was to obtain a reliable report on the state of the Auld Brig, and this he presented to the Council in April, 1782. It was not to the effect that the Auld Brig would bide an unco bang.

Ayr, April 4, 1782.

Mr. John Ballantine.

Sir,

Having at your desire this day and formerly examined the situation of the Bridge of Ayr which for some time past has been supposed to be insufficient we are of opinion that the pillar on which the second and third arches from the town rests is in a very dangerous situation, being rent in several places and the stones from the land flood mark as far down as we had an opportunity of observing much decayed and fallen out in many places. The third arch is fully worse than the pillar above described, being not only sunk and consequently partly separated from the pillars it rests on but rent in many places and the stones so much decayed that we are seriously of opinion it may give way in a very short time and without the least warning . . . a very precarious situation . . . the smallness of the stones and their perishable nature . . . Hitherto we have not had an opportunity of examining the foundations but will as soon as the river is sufficiently low and report accordingly.

We are, Sir, your most Humble Servs,

HUGH CAIRNCROSS.

JOHN HOUSTON.

This was too serious to be ignored and David Fergusson, the Provost, was recommended to write to Alexander Montgomerie, Esquire, of Coilsfield, Convener of the Commissioners of Supply for the County. He was to enclose a copy of the report, to be laid before the general meeting on April 30. The object was to get a committee named to co-operate with one named by the Town Council "in following forth joint and proper measures to remedy such a momentous evil both to the County and Town." Nothing whatever came of this approach and only temporary repairs were carried out (with gravel) in the summer of 1783.

That Michaelmas a new Provost was elected, William Campbell, of Fairfield, a small estate near Monkton.

Old David Fergusson had been on the Council, much of the time as Provost, for a quarter of a century. He was married to John Ballantine's sister and lived at Castlehill, formerly the

property of the Bannatynes, from whom the Ballantines claimed descent. He was one of the "auld warld squad", inclined to be forgetful; had to apologise for failing to write to people and once for forgetting to warn the Councillors of a meeting. The Council loved him and gave him a silver cup, but clearly a more forceful personality was required at this time.

Campbell was a much younger man and not so much an Ayr man as either Ballantine or Fergusson. Boswell met him in Edinburgh in 1776, when he alludes to him as "young Fairfield who lived in the same stair." Boswell was "a little heated with my share of two bottles," and Campbell appears as willing to make up a four at whist but dodging the serious drinking.

He first appears in the Minutes at Michaelmas, 1781, when he became one of the new Councillors. The son of William Campbell, P.C., Admiralty Court, he was the grandson of a former Provost of Ayr. He qualified as an Advocate in 1772 and after two years as Provost of Ayr returned to Edinburgh to live. In 1795 he was Sheriff Clerk of Ayr.³

In March 1784 determined measures were agreed upon by the Town Council. The Magistrates, the Dean of Gild and John Murdoch or any three of them were to attend the meeting of the Commissioners at the end of April, and meantime to "make out an advertisement for the different newspapers intimating what is proposed to the said meeting." The Commission had no choice but appoint members to the Joint Committee which met on May 4, 1784, when there were present of the County:— Sir William Cunningham of Robertland, Baronet; John Hamilton of Sundrum; Col. J. W. Crawford of Crawfordland; Alexander Fairlie of Fairlie; Mungo Smith of Drongan; and William Crawford of Doonside. Of Ayr, William Campbell of Fairfield, Provost; David Limond, eldest Baillie; John Ballantine, Dean of Gild; and John Murdoch, one of the Council. The Provost of Ayr was Preses.

This Committee was of opinion that the Bridge of Ayr could not be rebuilt in any other manner than by an application to Parliament for an Act imposing a pontage upon all carriages, horses and passengers, to be levied till the expense of rebuilding the said bridge was fully paid up. It was proposed that the bridge should consist of four arches and that its width should not

³ *The Faculty of Advocates in Scotland, 1532 to 1943*, Scottish Record Society, Part cxlv, page 31.

exceed twenty feet clear of the parapet with a footpath on one side of four feet. The Magistrates of Ayr should advertise in the newspapers for plans and estimates, and also obtain another plan for a bridge of four arches, not to exceed sixteen feet in width and with no footpath.

In the upshot the County slid out of the financial responsibility, perhaps thinking they had done enough in advising the town how to proceed. On January 26, 1785, this position was recognised in words of some acerbity. "As the County are not to give the town any assistance in procuring money for the building the bridge, the Magistrates and Council resolve and agree to undertake the carrying on of that business themselves without giving the gentlemen of the County any trouble thereanent."

Accordingly the heads of a bill were drawn up and sent to Mr. John Spottiswoode, Solicitor at Law in London, who appears in Boswell's *Life of Johnson* in company with the Doctor and Sir Joshua Reynolds.

"The celebrated Mrs. Rudd being mentioned.

"Johnson: Fifteen years ago I should have gone to see her.

"Spottiswoode: Because she was fifteen years younger?

"Johnson: No, Sir, but now they have a trick of putting everything into the newspapers."

From this gentleman who had acted for the town on several occasions a reply came by March 15, 1785, when the Dean of Gild asked the Provost to call an extraordinary Meeting of the Council. The Officers went round, the Councillors assembled and the following letter was produced by the Dean of Gild:—

London, 8th March, 1785.

Gentlemen,

I received the letter which the Committee of the Magistrates of Ayr did me the honour to write me inclosing the heads of a bill for rebuilding the bridge across the River of Ayr. It was unfortunate, however, that you did not send a petition to the House of Commons along with the heads of the bill, signed by the Magistrates and the Corporation Seal affixed to it, for the House would not receive one signed by me in name of the Magistrates.

I was therefore under the necessity of getting one signed by Lord Eglinton, Lord Cassillis, Major Montgomerie, Sir Adam Fergusson and Sir Archibald Edmonson (*sic*),⁴ praying for leave to bring in a Bill for the purposes mentioned in your heaps of a Bill. It was this day presented and referred to a Committee which will meet in a few days and upon the report being made, the Bill will be ordered in and printed, of which I shall immediately send you a copy.

In the meantime please remitt me £100 to account of the fees thereof. I beg you will mention to whom I shall address my letters in this business.

I have the Honour to be, Gentlemen,

Your most obedt. and Devoted Servant,

JOHN SPOTTISWOODE.

This made it absolutely necessary to raise funds. The treasurer was empowered to borrow £100 on the town's credit to pay Mr. Spottiswoode, and this was to be remitted by the next day's post. Actually it took a little longer and along with it went the following letter from the treasurer, dated March 23, 1785 :—

John Spottiswoode, Esqr., Solicitor at Law.

Sir,

Your letter to the Magistrates of Ayr came dully (*sic*) to hand. In compliance therewith I am directed to remitt you one hundred pounds sterling to account of expenses in procuring an Act of Parliament for building a new bridge over the River of Ayr. I therefore inclose you Hunters and Coy.'s dft. on Sir Robert Herries and Coy. at 10 days sight for said sum.

The Magistrates are sorry that their ignorance of the mode of presenting Petitions to Parliament should have occasioned you so much trouble and are much obliged to you for your activity in removing the difficulties that thereby stood in the way of bringing in the Bill this Session.

⁴ This is Spottiswoode's spelling. The Minutes usually spell his name Edmonston, while he himself spells it Edmonstone.

Minutes, 31/3/84. "Gentlemen, as there is a possibility of an immediate dissolution permit me again to offer myself as your representative in Parliament, an honour if I am so happy to obtain I shall endeavour to deserve and make the best return in my power for, by a faithful discharge of my public duty and a particular attention upon all occasions to the interests of my constituents, being with great truth, Gentlemen, Your most obliged and obedt. Servt., A. Edmonstone, Argyle Street, March 22d, 1784."

Minutes, 10/4/1784. "William Campbell was appointed to repair to Campbelltown on 21st April, when, there being no other candidate, the five electors duly elected Sir A. Edmonstone."

When you have occasion to write on this subject of the Bill, please address your letters to John Ballantine, Esquire (Dean of Gild), which I hope you will have no difficulty in getting franked.

(Signed) DAVID SCOTT.

All seemed to be going well. However, a serious obstacle soon presented itself, as can be seen from another of Mr. Spottiswoode's London letters, addressed to John Ballantine, Dean of Gild, Ayr :—

London, 28 April, 1785.

Sir,

I wrote you last week and informed you of the two objections that had been stated to the Ayr Bridge Bill, viz., the taking of stones without payment and carrying the materials for the Bridge through the road tolls without paying anything. The Committee of the House of Commons was to have satt upon the Bill this day. But, yesterday, Sir Adam Fergusson called on me and stated a number of objections and enquiries relative to the state of the Old Bridge—whether any and what tolls have been in use to have been collected upon it, in whom the property of the Old Bridge is vested, whether it was meant to establish the temporary ferry immediately and to take the same tolls that are granted by the Act for the New Bridge. If so, that he would not agree to it, and upon the whole he said that untill these matters were cleared up to his satisfaction he would oppose the Bill both in the Committee and in the House.

Upon stating these several matters to Sir Archibald Edmondson he has adjourned the Committee and desires that you will immediately send up some gentlemen of your place conversant in all these matters, relative to the Town and the Bridge. If so, you will either send up the original book kept for these articles or extracts of the accompts, which extracts the gentleman who comes must compare with the originals so that he may be able to swear to them and in short he must be able to give evidence to every particular arising out of this Bill.

I must likewise request that he may be here as quickly as possible, for the Parliament will adjourn in June and Sir Archd. Edmondson proposes to leave this city in the month of May.

I am, etc.,

JOHN SPOTTISWOODE.

It was decided to send the Provost and Dean of Gild to London at the town's expense in order to remove Sir Adam Fergusson's objections. The Bridge Committee met to consider the various points on May 4, and two days later reported to the Council. So far as tolls were concerned the town had been "immemorially in the use of collecting a Bridge Custom agreeable to a table made up many years ago," and collected after public roup, "agreeable to the rates ascertained under the hands of the Town Clerk, taken from the town records." As to ownership, the Council very well knew that the burthen of supporting the said old bridge had been always upon the town's funds. There was not the smallest evidence nor had it ever been alleged that the County had been at any expense in either building or maintaining it.

"To obviate the third difficulty the Magistrates and Council never meant to erect a temporary ferry except in the event of their taking down the old bridge and building the new one where it now stands." They had merely wished to reserve an alternative in case of the old bridge falling or if it were found more expedient to build the new bridge nearer to the harbour, "to collect an immediate toll on the old bridge, if it stands, or upon the ferry or temporary bridge during the building of the new one, till the same is completed."

In case the old rate of pontage should be insufficient they thought a clause should be inserted in the Bill allowing them to charge more so that the expense might be ultimately liquidated and the bridge made free. Their man of business in Edinburgh should be instructed to transmit to Mr. Spottiswoode an attested copy of the Interloquitor by the Court of Session in favour of the Town against the Wine Coy. of Ayr, relative to the Bridge Custom.

Extracts of the Minutes were ordered to be given to Messrs. Campbell and Ballantine and the treasurer authorised to pay their expenses.

It seems likely that Campbell and Ballantine left for London about May 7. They would go, as Boswell did, by Dumfries and Carlisle, after which a variety of roads, all bad, was available to them. Boswell generally took a week or more to reach London from Auchinleck, but he usually broke his journey at Lichfield or elsewhere. He once reached Auchinleck from London in sixty-four and a quarter hours; three or four days was the normal travelling time. Ballantine and Campbell were certainly in

London by May 12, and Campbell cannot have stayed more than ten days, for he was back in Ayr on May 25. Ballantine remained for about another month, reporting to the Council on June 22.

As it happened, the progress of the Ayr Bridge Bill through Parliament coincided with one of Boswell's frequent visits to the capital and in addition to writing part of his *Hebrides*, calling on George III, watching Lunardi ascend in his balloon, and other less respectable activities, he found time to give evidence before the Committee, probably on 12th April, when he noted in his Journal, "House of Commons a little." On that day Sir Archibald Edmonstone reported back to the House, first reading his report in his place and afterwards depositing it at the Clerk's Table.

"To prove the Allegations of the said Petition, James Boswell, Esquire, being examined, said That the Bridge across the River Ayr is a great public Convenience; but from the Length of Time . . . and so on almost word for word in the terms of the Preamble."⁵

Sir Adam Ferguson was added to the Committee on 14th April and the following day the Bill received its second reading. The objections raised by Sir Adam, to which Spottiswoode's letter of 28th April refers, resulted in a number of amendments, which were read to the House on 19th May, when the Bill, with Amendments, was ordered to be engrossed. To these amendments the two men from Ayr must have contributed.

Boswell completely fails to mention the Ayr Bridge Bill or the visitors from Ayr, but throughout the whole period he was hovering about Spottiswoode, Lord Eglinton and the House of Commons. On 17th May, for example, he was at Lord Eglinton's—"chiefly an Ayrshire party"—and got away, for once, "not drunk." As that was two days before the amendments were read in Parliament, it is reasonable to suppose that Ballantine and Campbell were there and that they were all celebrating the final removal of the difficulties.⁶

Campbell was back in Ayr on 25th May, bringing with him a copy of the Bill which was ordered to be ingrossed on 19th May. On 22nd June the Dean of Gild himself reported that he had remained in London after the Provost left the city "and after much trouble and considerable delay had got the Bridge Bill passed into a law."

⁵ For an abstract of the Act see Appendix to this article.

⁶ See *Private Papers of James Boswell from Malahide Castle, Journal of James Boswell*, 1783-86 (Isham Collection), Vol. 16, pp. 59, 80, 81, 82, 89, 94, 96, 98.

Yet the Journals of the House of Commons and House of Lords show no undue delay. The Third Reading in the Commons was on 23rd May, the three readings in the Lords on 24th May, 31st May and 6th June, while the Royal Assent came one week later, on 13th June.⁷

Perhaps Ballantine felt a certain awkwardness in presenting the Town Council with a bill for £138, a figure which should be multiplied by ten or twelve to give something like its present-day value. Travel was very expensive. Boswell paid twelve guineas for the journey to Auchinleck in September of that same year and probably Ballantine and Campbell cost the town £50 for the double journey between them. But that leaves a considerable sum to be accounted for in a total of six weeks' residence in London. This amount refers to purely personal expenditure, for Mr. Spottiswoode handled the various payments, open and clandestine, which had to be made in those days before an Act of Parliament was passed and his total bill came to £260, eighteenth century sterling.

The Provost and Dean were moving in high society. David, 10th Earl of Casillis, and Archibald, 11th Earl of Eglinton, were two of those who signed the petition for the bill. The others were Sir Adam Fergusson of Kilkerran, member for Edinburgh; Sir Archibald Edmonstone, their own member; and Col. Hugh Montgomerie of Coilsfield, member for the County and future 12th Earl of Eglinton. No doubt there was much entertaining in both directions.

The Committee was next instructed to wait upon Hugh Gemmill late mason, now merchant in Glasgow and presently in Ayr, and converse with him upon the subject of the bridge. On the same day Hugh Gemmill was admitted and received Burgess and Gild Brother. The following week it was reported that Hugh Gemmill thought the bridge might be repaired, but that "it would cost much more expensive than he at first thought." The whole of the piers except the one next the Newton must be taken down to their bases and also the three arches next the town. Upon the whole he thought it more advisable to let the old bridge stand and build a new one.

The Council thereupon decided to begin collecting half the pontage allowed by the Bill; to choose a person to collect it,

⁷ See *Journals of the House of Commons*, Vol. 40, pp. 609, 834, 848, 852, 866, 997, 1003, 1050, 1052, 1067 and *Journals of the House of Lords*, Vol. xxxvii, pp. 279, 290, 293, 297, 310.

and a site for a bar. The Dean of Gild found it impossible to erect one at the town end, but caused one to be erected at the Newton side. They paid off James Douglas, tacksman of the bridge custom, and appointed a new toll-gatherer; and on July 20, 1785, they recommended the Bridge Committee "to consider the different plans of the proposed bridge and the estimates given in for building the same."

One of these plans was by Robert Adam, the dominant partner in the greatest architectural firm of all time, builders of Shelburne House and Luton Hoo, the Admiralty Screen at Whitehall, the Adelphi Buildings. Adam would design anything from a palace to a watch-chain, but there is no doubt that he preferred designing palaces. He thought on the grand scale and invariably tried for the maximum order. He made a spirited attempt to re-model the town of Ayr, but he had no chance against Ayr Town Council.

Ballantine probably met him in London, and Burns's "The Brigs of Ayr" is evidence here—

"That he, at Lon'on, frae ane Adams got."

The likeliest person to introduce these very different Scots was the Earl of Cassillis, for whom Robert Adam was building Culzean Castle.

In 1785 Adam was particularly busy in Ayrshire, having just finished Dalquharra for another of the Kennedys. It was his practice to present his account in person and it would be very easy for him to visit Ayr, survey the ground and make sketches.

There is proof that he did visit the town in 1785, in two signed drawings now in the Carnegie Library, Ayr, but these are not of the bridge. They are of the Tolbooth, which stood in the middle of Sandgate, and would be the first object seen by anybody crossing the bridge from the north. One shows it as it was—a plain tower with nineteen steps leading up to a door in its side; a square clock, a belfry and weather-cock. The other shows it transmogrified, Adamised. He has given it a new door and windows and replaced the old top with a new one of quasi-classical design.

These proposals of his, and they can be nothing else, were ignored by the Council. However, Ballantine had decided in favour of the Adam Bridge and of the new site for it. On August 20,

1785, there was a show of opposition, when a Mr. Donald moved that a community meeting should be called to consult the opinion of the townspeople on the proper place to build the bridge. His motion being put to the vote, "it carried ten to three not to call said meeting."

Ballantine then gave it as his opinion that "the best place for building the bridge is from the Water Vennel to the street of the Old Newton." This was unanimously agreed but at the same time the Magistrates and Council resolved that the old bridge should be kept up and repaired for the benefit of foot passengers in all time coming.

Next, rather mysteriously, they ordered "the Committee upon the bridge" to consult with a Mr. Alexander Stevens "anent a plan and estimate for building the bridge as above settled," and on April 24, 1786, the contract was signed by various representatives of the town and "Alex. Stevens."⁸ In the Carnegie Library, Ayr, is an architect's drawing, comprising elevation, plan and section of the bridge actually built. It is not signed by Robert Adam, and Alex. Stevens signs as a party to the contract and not as having made the drawings.

On November 6, 1788, an entry in the Bridge Account reads—"To paid Robt. Adams, Architect, for Plan of a Bridge, £31 10/." It might appear, therefore, that the drawings referred to above were the plan thus paid for and that Stevens was merely the builder.

The situation, however, is much more complicated than that. Alexander Stevens is referred to in the Town Council Minutes as the architect as well as the builder of the bridge and the Rev. Stebbing Shaw, who arrived from England at a critical moment, was also under this impression. After describing his arrival in Ayr on August 20, 1787, he says:—

"One great instance of public spirit which we were fortunate enough to witness is that of erecting a most excellent bridge below

⁸ *The Gentleman's Magazine*, 1796, Vol. lxvi. (1), p. 196. "January 20th. At Lancaster, in an advanced period of life, Mr. Alexander Stevens, architect, who in the course of the last forty years erected more stone bridges and other buildings in water than any man in these kingdoms. Among the many excellent works of that kind may be mentioned the bridge over the Liffey at Dublin and the locks and docks on the grand canal of Ireland. The North of England and Scotland exhibits numberless works of his execution. The aquaduct over the river Lune at Lancaster is one of the greatest undertakings he was ever concerned in, and, had he lived for a few months longer, he would have had the satisfaction of seeing it completed. Society has sustained a great loss by the death of this valuable man, who not only possessed consummate knowledge in his profession but had the most pleasing and engaging manners which endeared him to all who knew him."

the old one, which is now too ancient long to endure the violence of tide and rapid streams. The keystone of the middle arch, on which the whole depends, was just made secure as we arrived, which occasioned an evening's jubilee of dancing, etc., among the artificers, as the undertaker was then relieved from the great anxiety occasioned the night before by the violence of rain and wind. The centre arch is fifty feet wide, the two next forty-five each and end ones forty, besides the intermediate pillars, four in number, of ten feet each. The whole length is two hundred and sixty feet, and width twenty-four and a half; so that when finished it will be completely handsome. The architect, Mr. Stevens, has contracted to finish it for the sum of four thousand pounds."⁹

On the other hand the drawings for the bridge are in exactly the same style as the two drawings of the Tolbooth signed by Robert Adam.

In the Soane Museum, in London, are the rough sketches made by Adam and a full-scale elevation, plan and section of the bridge which resemble some of these sketches, but not the bridge as built.¹⁰ Moreover, there are in Ayr many copies of a small engraving entitled "A Perspective View of the Bridge and Quays agreeable to Mr. Adam's Plan—D. Cowan delint., D. Lizars sculpt." Cowan is a local name and Lizars an Edinburgh firm. The strange thing is that this work of pure fantasy depicts not the bridge as built but that of the Soane Museum drawings. This certainly confirms the other evidence that Adam submitted a plan for the New Bridge, but it also proves that that plan was not used and another one substituted.

The bridge as Adam conceived it was to consist of a wide central span of seventy feet and two side spans of fifty-eight feet. Smaller arches were to carry the roadway across two new boulevards which he envisaged as running along the banks of the Ayr on both sides. The central arch was higher than the others and the parapet above it higher still to make room for a medallion bearing the Town Crest, festooned with stone flowers. Above the piers were floral medallions and on the balustrades above each of these twin dolphins, balancing upon their faces, wreathed their tails to support lamp standards. The sloping balustrades flattened out into platforms on which were recumbent lions and then curved down to pointed end pillars.

⁹ *Tour from London to the Western Highlands of Scotland*, 1787, by the Rev. Stebbing Shaw, Vicar of Hartshorn, p. 114.

¹⁰ See Appendix 2.

The bridge as built survived into the age of photography, so there is no doubt about its appearance. It was a handsome structure of five spans, the widest being fifty-five feet. There is, at first sight, no resemblance to the Adam design, but on closer inspection a kind of relationship emerges. The reduction of the central span and the extension of the small side arches have led to a redistribution of the ornament. The lions have gone, but the dolphins remain (in the plan, that is; the town thought again about those dolphin lamp standards). The town crest has come down from the space above the central span, the arches having gained in height something of what they lost in width. There are now two medallions with the town crest, replacing the two floral medallions in the original design, while the two extra piers are decorated with statues in alcoves, a new feature. On the end pillar are flat, oval recesses.

The surviving known local works of Mr. Stevens do not suggest that he could have designed such a bridge. They are the odd-looking building with twin bays which faces the visitor on the left as he crosses the modern New Bridge; and the wall round the Old Racecourse. On October 11, 1788, James Wallace, tacksman of the Mills of Ayr, complained that the Mill Vennel (Mill Street) was in a very bad state, "owing to the great leading of stones from the town's quarry" and "the Magistrates and Dean of Gild were recommended to converse with Alexander Stevens, Architect, who alone had the use of the Town's Quarry."

This may be the solution to the problem. The Bridge Committee had evidently had to drop their request for permission to bring stone through the road-tolls without payment and for the sake of economy had fallen back upon the local freestone. Adam had probably been thinking in terms of granite and limestone; freestone might not be thought strong enough to support a span of seventy feet.

Weighing the evidence, I think the Bridge Committee sent back Adam's plan with the request that it be altered and he did alter it, but unwillingly and against his better judgment. The fact that the plans actually used are unsigned suggests that he had no wish to lay claim to them and only made the alterations to please Ballantine or perhaps to please his noble patron, the Earl of Cassillis.

Here we must bear in mind those dolphin lamp standards which link the Adam design, both original and modified, with Culzean.

In addition to the artificial, well-built ruins, or "follies," there is some sham heraldry at Culzean which the Kennedys, who had plenty of genuine heraldry in the family, used to expose gleefully to their visitors.

Above the ornamental arch near the castle there is a boy on a dolphin who has no justification in history."¹¹ The dolphin has, though, and is a kind of stone pun on "Dauphin" since a Kennedy commanded the French troops under Joan of Arc at the siege of Orleans. The place abounds in dolphins, dolphins in the fountain, dolphins on the upholstery, specially designed by Robert Adam, for some of the chairs.

It may be that Adam was obsessed by the idea of dolphins or it may be that he worked them into his bridge design as a compliment to the Earl, but the Town of Ayr took no chances. It had had considerable trouble with the Earl of Cassillis whose vast territories were threatening to spread to the north bank of the Doon.

Indeed the Earl had an uncomfortable interest in the town itself, having, as it were, a little private burgh there. This was the area of seventeen acres enclosed by Cromwell in his Citadel. At the Restoration Charles II made it over to the Earl of Eglinton, and he in turn had parted with it to the Earl of Cassillis, who had let it out and allowed a brewery to be built in it. This, the Old Brewery, of many engravings, was selling beer without paying "multure." The town took the Earl to the Court of Session about it, but lost the case, and they were having no dolphin lamps on their bridge.

It has been pointed out by the late James A. Morris in *The Brig of Ayr* that when Burns saw the New Brig at the end of September, 1786, four months after the contract to build it was signed, "very little even of the 'rising piers' could have been visible and the 'braw new coat' then existed only on the contract drawings or in the poet's imagination." So far as is known Burns was never in Ayr again.

What he was doing at Simpson's Inn that night is not entirely clear. He was uneasily poised between the West Indies and his Edinburgh edition, between Mary, waiting for him at Greenock,

¹¹ See Appendix 2.

and Jean, with her twins, in Mauchline. From Simpson's he sent a copy of the poem to John Ballantine at the Townhead. He had begun a covering letter but turned it into a verse dedication, incorporated in the poem. In a note he sent with the poem, thus enlarged, he said he would like a picture of the Mercat Cross to take with him when he sailed for the tropics.

There is no doubt that Ballantine was "hooked" by the verse dedication, and when fate decided in favour of the Edinburgh edition Ballantine's help was invaluable.

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APPENDIX 1.

Anno Vicesimo Quinto, Georgii III. Regis, Cap. XXXVII

An Act for rebuilding the Bridge across the River of Ayr at the Town of Ayr

1. Preamble. Whereas the Bridge across the River of Ayr, which is of great public utility; being the only communication for travellers going to Ireland by the great West Road through the County of Ayr, and for the march of His Majesty's Troops to Ireland by that road is not only very inconvenient, being steep at each end, and so narrow, that it is with difficulty that two carriages can pass each other . . .¹² May it therefore please Your Majesty . . .

The Act is too long to print in full, but of great interest for the picture it gives of traffic into and out of the town. After fixing penalties for damaging the bridge, the Act goes on to fix pontage, as follows:—For every coach, chariot, Berlin, landau, calash, chaise, chair or hearse, drawn by six horses, mares, geldings or mules, 4/-; four, 2/-; three, 1/4; two, 1/-; one, 6d. For every waggon, wain, cart, sledge with wheels, or any other carriage drawn by six horses, oxen or other beasts of draught, 4/-; five, 3/4; four, 2/8; three, 1/-; two, 8d; one, 4d. For every sledge without wheels, and for every horse, mare, gelding, mule or ass, laden or unladen, and not drawing, the sum of 2d. For every drove of oxen, or neat cattle, 1/- per score. For every drove of horses or fillies unshod, 2/- per score. For every drove

¹² Cf. Burns: "Where twa wheel-barrows tremble when they meet."

of calves, sheep, lambs, hogs or goats, 6d per score. But vehicles carrying coals, peat or turf and drawn by only one horse are to pay only 2d, and animals carrying loads of fuel on their backs only 1d.

Toll is to be paid only once a day and there are penalties for evasion. Horses must not be taken off and led across the ford. There is exemption for horses or carriages carrying corn or victual from the Milns of Ayr, or carrying farm meal to the granaries of any heritor, dung or manure, ploughs, harness or other implements of husbandry, hay, corn in the straw, unless to be sold, coals for export, horses or cattle going to or coming from pasture, post-horses carrying the mail or packet, horses or carriages of soldiers on the march, carts, carriages or waggons with vagrants sent with legal passes. Except in the case of His Majesty's troops, which are to pass freely in all cases, this privilege only applies where vehicles have one draft animal. Traffic is to keep to the right.

Authority is granted to open stone quarries, dig, gather and carry away stones, gravel, sand, furze, heath or other materials, out of the river or from waste or common land, even from private property, but not where houses are built, nor from gardens, orchards, yards, planted walks, avenues to houses, or tree-nurseries. No houses are to be built on the bridge, but gates and toll-house may be erected on or near it. Pontage may be charged on the old bridge until the new one is ready and, if necessary, on a ferry, where foot-passengers may also be charged 1/2d.

The New Bridge is to be the property of the Magistrates and Council, who have power to borrow and to stop up the existing fords or deepen the river. The Old Bridge is not to be used by wheeled vehicles once the new one is open. Commissioners are appointed to supervise the collection of tolls, which must not in any one year exceed 7 1/2% of the total cost of the bridge. When the expense of building has been cleared, the bridge is to be free. It is a public Act.

APPENDIX 2.

The Adam drawings in the Sir John Soane Museum, 13 Lincoln's Inn Fields, London.

Drawings 1 (80-84) in ink and pencil are the preliminary sketches made by Adam while searching for ideas and inspiration. I (80) shows bits of bridges, one with a dolphin lamp, one with a

lion, 1 (81) the general plan of three arches with dry arches at either end. 1 (82 and 83) may not refer to the Ayr Bridge at all, but 1 (84) does, for it has the inscription "Sketch for the Bridge at Ayr," and a suggestion of the town crest on a medallion.

34 (101) on the other hand is a large and very beautiful architect's ink and wash drawing, elevation and plan, inscribed "Bridge of Air." It does not resemble the bridge of the engraving, but it has one highly significant feature : the boy on a dolphin appears on two medallions.

34 (102) is the one which most closely agrees with the engraving. It shows elevation, section and plan, in the same beautiful style, black and grey, with the water washed in green. The inscription is "Two other designs for the Bridge of Air," and there are slight differences of proportion between the elevation and section. The decoration tallies with that in the engraving except that the creatures on the parapet are sphinxes, not lions.

It appears that the drawing sent to Lizars for engraving was similar to, but not identical with 34 (102) and must represent a still later stage in the development of Adam's intentions. The proportions of the arches in the engraving, however, are certainly not attributable to Adam.

In my opinion, admittedly not that of an expert, the plans in the Carnegie Library, Ayr, were the product of the same hand and brain as those in the Sir John Soane Museum. They represent Adam's final compromise with circumstances beyond his control.
