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The Rise And Progress Of Coatbridge And Surrounding Neighbourhood.

Andrew Miller, Dundyvan Iron Works, Glasgow 1864

CHAPTER I.

It has been said of England, that it is peculiarly the land of iron manufactures; and the same may, with equal justice, be applied to Scotland, where upwards of 120 blast furnaces continually belch forth their flames, producing a daily supply of pig-iron amounting to nearly three thousand tons; in addition to which there are also a large number of forges and mills, with their furnaces and powerful machinery, converting the crude iron into the malleable state, and rolling it out into every conceivable shape and form, according to the purposes for which it may be required. It is assumed that nearly one-half of all the iron so manufactured in Scotland, is produced in the district of Coatbridge and county of Lanark, which has earned for it the title of the Staffordshire of Scotland. These iron works have flourished and prospered in the district for upwards of thirty years - nay, some of them for the last sixty years; and this important branch of the nation's wealth and industry, in this district, has been the nursery or handmaid for the extension of iron manufacture to many other parts of Scotland. The district of Coatbridge is situated in the middle ward of the shire, and is famed for its mineral resources and productions, which for nearly half a century have held a very prominent position in the mining world. Many changes have taken place during that brief period, which it will be our duty in the present little work to record.

For many years prior to the close of last century, coal mining was carried on to a very limited extent; the means of transit to a market were, however, a great drawback to the development. Evidences of these mines still exist in many places, and may be traced by the small mounds of debris or shale that are seen lying in many parts of the district, and from the old waste workings from which the coal had been excavated and brought to the surface by the primitive method of windlass or gin, long before the steam engine was applied in the winding of coal from the mines. The windlass, as a motive power, we may remark, is still applied in many parts of the country where the coal and ironstone are easily attained. About the close of last century sulphur was manufactured in this district on a very extensive scale. The chemical works were erected on the Summerlee estate, and were carried on by the proprietor, the late Mr Neil M'Brayne, and were a source of employment to many workmen for a number of years. Portions of the old buildings still stand, and a large range of workmen's houses, together with a malleable work, are now built upon the site of these works, and are locally known as Maryston Square and the Maryston Iron Works. These chemical works, together with the weaving trade, formed the chief source of employment to the scattered population; for the Parish of Old Monkland at that period, viz., the middle of the eighteenth century, could only boast of some 2000 inhabitants, which, in the year 1790, was nearly double that number. In the course of that year the old Parish Church was taken down, and the present one built on the same site, while the manse was built and inhabited in 1791; the minister was the Rev. Mr Bower, who was succeeded by the Rev. Mr Thomson, the next successor being the present minister in charge, Rev. John Johnstone.

The first great undertaking to open up the country was the formation of the Monkland Canal, which was surveyed in 1769 by the famous engineer of the west, James Watt of Glasgow, and shortly afterwards an Act of Parliament was obtained for its construction. The work of excavation began in 1771, but want of capital among the shareholders prevented its completion till 1790. At first the canal went only as far west as Blackhill, and was so shallow that only boats with 20 tons could be carried on it. This was found to be a great mistake, and it was therefore widened and deepened, and afterwards extended from Blackhill to Glasgow, and, when finished for traffic, was said to have cost upwards of £30,000. This canal opened up a cheap means of communication to the Glasgow market, of which capitalists soon took advantage by developing the mineral resources of the district, so that, in 1793, four collieries were established along the banks of the canal—one at Faskine by the Messrs Stirling of Drumpeller, one at Barrachnie by Mr Hamilton, one at Fullarton by Mr Dunlop, and one at Coats and Dundyvan by Captain Christie. In 1796 a sad calamity occurred at the Coats pit, by the canal bursting its banks. The water gushed into the workings, where five men were employed, two of whom escaped, but the other three perished. The pit was filled to the mouth, and the bodies were never recovered; and the father of one of the victims planted a slip of hawthorn at the side of the pit, and the tree still stands to mark the spot. In these four collieries upwards of 400 men were employed, who, by their labour, produced, at a rough estimate, upwards of 200,000 carts of coal annually, or about 130,000 tons. The abundance of coal, and the ready transit for manufactured goods to the west market, brought another branch of industry into existence. With abundance of excellent fire clay at command, a pottery and tile work - the first in Scotland - was erected on the Coats estate, at a place now called The Pottery, by Mr James Creelman. It was situated on the banks of the canal, and gave employment to a considerable number of the inhabitants. The pottery ware produced from these works was of a superior quality, and the greater portion of it was exported to America and the West Indies. The Pottery, Brick, and Tile Work, as carried on at present so extensively by Mr Robert Brand, is built near the

Housing 1918
Truck Report (1871)
Mining District Reports
Trades' Unions &
Sankey 1919
Health & Disease
Ayrshire
Clackmannanshire
Fife
Lanarkshire
Lothians
Renfrewshire
Stirlingshire
Misc. Areas
Westwoods

same site where this famous pottery once stood. The produce of these collieries, and the pottery goods, together with manure from the city for the farmers, formed the principal source of traffic on the canal; and, for many years, the revenue derived was so trifling, compared with the great outlay of capital, that the shareholders almost despaired of its ever proving a profitable investment. It is said that in 1805, when the annual meeting of shareholders took place, presided over by the late Mr Colt of Gartsherrie, at the conclusion, murmurs of dissatisfaction prevailed among the members at the very cheerless report. Many propositions were made, and, after discussion, abandoned. At last, a question was put to the chairman as to what he thought should be done; he replied, "Conscience, lads, the best thing we can dae, is for ilka ane o' us toffill up the sheuch on his ain lands, and let it staun'." This advice restored good humour, and the meeting dispersed, after resolving to wait for better times.

Prior to this, the highway between Edinburgh and Glasgow was formed upon the good old principle of a height and hollow alternately, like some of the old parish roads still extant. It was a difficult matter in those days to get a man who understood the navigation of all the turns and twists over heights and through hollows of the roads in question; and it was wisely resolved to construct a new road on more approved principles, which was accordingly done upwards of seventy years ago. The present road, which passes through Coatbridge, was therefore a great improvement, and diverged from the original track in some places, more especially to the west, about a mile, and from that downwards in a north-easterly direction.. On some of the farms on the Drumpeller estate, to the south-west of the present road, the farmers can still trace the old highway by the stony places through which the plough passes.

There is a spring of water near Drumpark House which still bears the name of the "Cadger's well," where it is said those travelling merchants in olden times rested on their journey to refresh both man and beast; the water it contains is cool and clear, and it is never dry even in the hottest weather. The pit workings have not yet dried up its source, and long may its limpid waters run as one small link of the past with the present. About the beginning of the present century, about half-a-dozen "Coal lords" represented the trade; and these usually met at sundry times, during the course of each month, to transact business, in the Black Bull Hotel, of the city of St Mungo. At those meetings the drinking custom was then fashionable; and each had his glass, a peculiarly constructed one, manufactured for the special purpose, bearing on its side, cut in the crystal, the motto of "The black face o't," a very appropriate term for those who used them. During the last few years, a gentleman, intimately connected with mines and mining, has endeavoured, by every inquiry, to get one of those glasses into his possession, to keep as a memento of the past, but as yet has failed in his efforts. The "Coal lords" of those days, among whom were Mr Ferrie of Farm, Mr Grey of Camtyne, Mr Merry of Nettleholes, Mr Young of Cuihill, and a few others, formed themselves into a joint stock company, and leased the greater portion of the coal fields on the banks of the canal. They succeeded for some years in monopolising the trade, but competition came, and the co-partnership was dissolved, each getting his share of the concern; and their heirs, in several instances, are still working the fields thus acquired. The principal part of these fields lie between Coatbridge and Blackhill locks. The erection of iron works at Calder, about the close of the last century, was a small source of revenue to the Canal Company. The supplies, at least part of them, for the furnaces, were taken by water, and the carriage of iron to the market, together with an increased traffic in coal, from the collieries, gradually augmented the funds of the company, year by year, until, in 1807, the shareholders were paid their first dividend, the revenue for that year amounting to nearly £5000. This prosperity increased by degrees, more and more, until 1815, when, from that period up until 1828, the revenue remained almost stationary; its success since then, or what may be termed the dawn of the iron era, has scarcely a precedent in the annals of speculation, as the traffic returns now show the handsome sum of about £35,000 per annum.

CHAPTER II.

About the year 1805 or 1806, the great discovery of that rich and valuable mineral, Blackband Ironstone, was made by the manager of Calder Iron Works, Mr David Mushet, whose name has been immortalised by this mineral, now so widely known as the "Mushet Blackband." At first Mr Mushet made his experiments from a seam called the "Palacecraig Ironstone," taken from the side of a small burn on the west side of Coatdyke, where the metals cropped out. After several experiments made on this in a small furnace, Mr Mushet next proceeded to analyse a piece of black stone which he had discovered some 20 fathoms below the splint coal. The richness of the stone, above all others, was at once so apparent, that farther researches were made for the mineral by those deeply interested, and it was found in its true position in many parts of the district, and received the name of the "Black-band" from its colour, and as Mr Mushet was the first to discover its position and value, it was called the "Mushet Blackband." Mr William Moore, M.E, Glasgow, who lately published a small pamphlet on this subject, remarks, "That the Blackband Ironstone in its raw state contains about 35 per cent, of iron, when calcined, about 70 per cent; and that after its discovery it was but partially worked, and used at both the Calder and Clyde Iron Works for a number of years; ultimately it became the principal source of supply." The field of this mineral extended from Langloan on the west, to Arden, three miles east of Airdrie, very irregular in breadth, but lying principally on the north side of Calder water. The depth at the eastern extremity is about 30 fathoms; on the west, at the deepest point, 140 fathoms; on the east, west, and south sides the Ironstone is replaced by coal, and on the north it crops out. It is generally observed, that where the Ironstone comes into conjunction with whin it is invariably very much impregnated with pyrites, and in that state has been worked principally for chemical purposes. There is also another seam of Ironstone of more recent discovery, termed the "Slaty Band" the position of which is said to be about 100 fathoms under the "Blackband" and from the evidence of bores put down, and its being found about the outcrops of the "Blackband" there is reason to believe that it extends all under the Blackband. The supplies of mineral have hitherto been abundant from many sources, and there has not yet been any great necessity to sink to such a depth, the "Slaty" has, however, been frequently bored for north of Coatbridge, but as yet without success.

From 1810, to 1816, the coal trade of the district continued gradually to increase. Pits were sunk at Blaiklands, Gunny and Kipps, by James Merry; at the Wilderness and Kipps, by the Messrs Frew; at Maryston, by Robert Simpson, and several other small workings were started in the immediate vicinity of the village. At Rochsolloch, a day level and a gin pit were started by the founder of Gartsherrie Iron Works, William Baird, who, with the assistance of his brothers, laid the

foundation of their fortunes in this successful little colliery. They afterwards extended their operations to Maryston and Gartsherrie, and the result of their united exertions was made visible on the 4th of May, 1830, when the first furnace was put on blast at Gartsherrie. In these speculations in coal fields, all were not successful, and many failures, after years of struggling, was the result. The cause of such cannot now be easily ascertained, but certain it is, that those who attended to their duties succeeded far beyond their most sanguine expectations, and often were able to lease the coal, and succeed where others had failed. The increasing prosperity of the coal trade after 1820, suggested to capitalists the idea of giving additional accommodation to the district by a railway. It was admitted by traders that a railway would be beneficial in developing those fields of minerals lying inland, and which, on account of their distance from the canal could not be wrought so as to compete with the collieries on its banks. A railway was projected, a company formed, and an Act of Parliament obtained for its construction, and the Monkland and Kirkintilloch Railway was commenced in 1824, and opened for traffic in 1826. As the importance of this means of transit soon became apparent, other branches were formed by other companies both to the east and the north, and these companies some years afterwards amalgamated, and the railway considerably extended, the cost of the whole exceeding £86,000. In 1845 or 1846, the railway was extended to the east to Bo'ness and Kinniel Iron Works, and in 1861 another new branch line to Bathgate, &c., was formed and opened for traffic, which is fast developing the resources of rich and abundant supplies of coal and ironstone, with which that track of country is so well provided. All these branches belong to the Monklands Railway Company, and it is strange that although this company were the first on the field, they are completely hemmed in, as far as their own railways are concerned, by other companies, and have no communication either with Glasgow or Edinburgh. The Monklands Railway Co., have, however, paid a fair percentage all along for the capital invested, and these new feeders or branch lines must add considerably to their revenue, as the minerals are being rapidly developed. The Glasgow and Garnkirk Railway, which joins the Monklands at Gartsherrie Junction, was opened for traffic in 1831, and proved an important acquisition to the district in conveying not only the coal and iron produce to the Glasgow market, but was also a great boon to the inhabitants, who, by the passenger trains, got easy access to Glasgow. With Kirkintilloch on the north, and Bo'ness on the east, all these were now outlets for the manufactures and produce of the locality, while the superior quality of the bricks manufactured at Garnkirk, Glenboig, Heathfield, and other works of the same description, adjoining both the Kirkintilloch and Garnkirk Railways, found a ready market in this district in the construction of the respective Iron Works. The Wishaw and Coltness Railway on the south, which comes into junction with the Monkland at Whiffat was begun in 1838, and completed for traffic in 1841; the railways, east, north, west, and south, all converge to Coatbridge, and form a complete net-work, in and around it, thus affording every facility for transit that the most enterprising could desire.

In 1825, four or five years previous to the iron era, a mining engineer from the west, a gentleman of great practical experience in mining, was employed by the firm of Campbell & Barlas, solicitors, Glasgow, to make a survey of the district, and report thereon, for a West Indian capitalist, with the prospective intention of erecting iron works; but the foreigner abandoned the idea on seeing two bores, that had been put down to some depth, discharging water at a rate of supply he had never witnessed from such a small hole while in the western tropics, so that the erection of furnaces was left to be carried out, as it has been, by local enterprise and perseverance alone. Shortly after, the Monkland Railway was opened, and before the steam engine was brought into action for locomotive purposes, a few gentlemen, interested in the trade of the district, tried the experiment of propelling waggons by means of the wind, using umbrellas as a substitute for sails. The first trial was successful; the wind was strong in their favour, and the waggon on which they were seated rattled along at rapid speed for some distance. They wished to return by the same method, but the wind being contrary to their desires, and tacking scarcely practicable on a railway, they were forced to dismount, and apply their shoulders to the machine, to get it back to the place whence they started. The one trial was sufficient to show the impracticability of such a propeller. In 1826 the coal trade was greatly increased by Mr Buchanan, of Mount Vernon, commencing operations on the Drumpeller estate. This was quite a new field, which in a few years was developed so rapidly that it gave employment to upwards of 300 colliers. At one period six pits were in active working order. The great thickness of the coal enabled large quantities to be sent forth annually, and its superior quality commanded a ready market in the city of the west, to which it was boated on the Monkland Canal. Like the other collieries the pits were sunk close to the side of the water; the coal being emptied from the hutches as they came out of the pits down the screens into the boats, thus combining economy with despatch. As the collieries increased, other branches of industry were called into requisition; such as iron castings for machinery, for rails, &c., and, to meet the demand, local enterprise again entered the field. In 1829 Mr William Gray, founder, erected premises for this purpose on the side of the Monkland Railway, quite convenient and central for the district. For many months the castings produced daily at this foundry averaged from 15 to 20 cwt., whereas the same work now will produce as many tons, in the following year another foundry was erected contiguous to the Monkland Canal, by Mr John Munro, opposite the village, an appropriate site for such a work. In a very few years both these foundries carried on a most extensive business, and they are still prominent in the trade.

The iron era maybe dated from 1830, after the discovery and introduction of the hot blast, by Mr J. B. Neilson. This invention produced a radical change in the system of smelting the ores; for, in the old process, with cold blast, a furnace only produced from three to four tons every twelve hours, while by the new process the quantity was more than doubled. Many improvements were afterwards effected on the air-heating apparatus and its application, the result being still greater increase in the produce of iron; and the fruits of this important discovery soon evinced themselves in the district, by the extension of the existing works at Calder and Gartsherrie, and in the erection, of new works at Dundyvan, Calderbank, Summerlee, Cambroë, and Langloan.

In 1830 Coatbridge was represented by very few one-story houses, built in the primitive style, thatched with straw, or covered with tiles. These houses chiefly belonged to the residents, and consisted of a but and a ben, one of these being set apart for a four or six-loom weaving-shop, where the sound of the shuttles was heard to clatter from morning till night, and plied with advantage, too, in regard to wages. In those days, the four posts of poverty could not be applied to the trade, and starvation-prices for work done was little dreamt of. What a contrast from the past to the present! The village of Langloan, a little to the west, was somewhat similar to Coatbridge, containing a few more houses, and it could boast of an "inn," which was the only two-storied building it contained. It was thatched with heather, and was a "warm, cozy bield," long known as "Dunlop's Inn." It was extensively patronized by travellers in the palmy days of stage coaches, where comforts for both man and beast were dispensed by "mine host" and his "guidwife" with no niggardly hand. These days are past,

and the "inn" now stands a roofless ruin, linking the past with the present. The "Comet Inn," a more modern erection, was built a short distance to the east of its more humble neighbour, the "Heather Inn." The architecture of the new building was after the Swiss fashion, according to the instructions of the late Laird of Drumpeller, Mr Buchanan; it was, but a few years ago, converted into dwelling houses, the east wing of it taken down altogether to make room for other buildings. Previous to these alterations, a portion of it was let for offices, and it was there that the Western Bank of Scotland first started their Coatbridge Branch, which was followed, on the former being removed farther east, to what is now termed the Bank Buildings, by the Union Bank taking it as their Branch office. At the time of the failure of the Western Bank, a commodious and handsome building was nearly finished in Academy Street, as the offices for this branch, the whole of which was purchased shortly afterwards by the directors of the Royal Bank, where they have carried on a safe business ever since. In 1855 the new building of the Union Bank was occupied. It is a plain, substantial building; and both banks are ornaments to the town. The Clydesdale Bank have opened a branch office during the present year in Church Street. The names of the respective bank agents are - for the Royal, Thomas Torrance, Esq.; for the Union, Robert Henderson, Esq.; and for the Clydesdale, James Watson, Esq.

CHAPTER III.

"A stage coach carries animation always with it, and puts the world in motion as it whirls along. The horn, sounded at the entrance, of a village, produces a general bustle; some hasten forth to meet friends, some with bundles and bandboxes to secure places, and in the hurry of the moment can hardly take leave of the group that accompanies them; in the meantime the coachman has a world of small commissions to execute. ... As the coach rattles through the village every one runs to the window, and you have glances on every side of fresh country faces, and blooming, laughing girls." The days of stage coaches are now among those of the past. Coatbridge and Langloan were both stations at which the horses were changed when plying between the eastern and western metropolis, viz., Edinburgh and Glasgow. There were men of enterprise in those days as well as in the present, and the father of the late Mr Jackson, of Coats, was one of them. In 1816 (of course coaches were run long before that time), Mr Jackson, who was a shareholder in these stage coach speculations, erected a station, consisting of a large square of buildings, known by every traveller as "Jackson's stables." The coaches did their duty, the "Tally ho!" not excepted; employment was thus given by them to many of the inhabitants for upwards of thirty years. The contests between the rival coaches were often exciting, while rattling at their utmost speed, striving who would be the victor. But coachy's occupation in this line is now gone—the advent of the iron trade, and the introduction of the iron roads, with the iron stallion of the nineteenth century, have connected every town or hamlet, and linked them in iron bonds with the two capitals of Scotland, and produced changes which many of the older inhabitants regret, and speak with garrulous fondness of the days when they were young, when they watched, and could tell the hour of the day by their time-keepers, the coaches, as they passed onwards on their journey. Instead of the musical sound of the guard's horn, we have the wild shrill whistle of the steam-engines, belching forth their fire and smoke, as they career along on the iron pathways on every side of us.

The iron trade began to flourish, and brought in its train a rising population; and with it came the march of improvement—old houses that had stood the storm of more than a century, were swept remorselessly away, to give place to buildings of a modern description. This renovation began in 1835, when the Messrs Baird of Gartsherrie built the Coatbridge Inn, and adjoining range of shops; and although the principal portion of the workmen in the respective iron works and collieries were accommodated with houses erected by their employers, still the demand for houses and shops in the town increased. The old houses and green fields disappeared, as building after building reared their heads, and street after street was formed, until the small town of former days became one of no mean proportion—surrounded by scenes of busy industry and prosperity; while here and there a solitary house of the olden time, with its blackened thatch, still remain, like a connecting link between the ancient and modern times.

The increase of population from the commencement of the iron era, compared with its progress before that period, is very significant of the great advances made, and are so striking, that the census returns from an early period of the parish of Old Monkland may here be recorded to bear out this fact. The population of the parish in 1781 was 2000; in 1791, 4000; in 1801, 4006; in 1811, 5469; in 1821, 8983; in 1831, 9580; in 1841, 19,709; in 1851, 27,332; and in 1861, 29,543. Thus from 1831, till 1861, the population was more than tripled; the parish being divided into three divisions, the population of 1861 were as follows:—western or Baillieston district, 6930; middle or Coatbridge district, 15,305; and the eastern district, Coatdyke, &c., 7308.

Prior to 1833, the nearest post town was Airdrie. Previous to this, a weaver, named William Stewart, residing in Langloan, was letter-carrier, and although a Government servant, Stewart was a radical in every sense of the term. A few nights previous to the Bonnymuir tragedy, the radicals in the Airdrie district had resolved to turn out. On the appointed evening, Willie started from home fully equipped for a campaign, with knapsack on back and three days' supply of provisions. The rain fell in torrents, so that on reaching Airdrie he was drenched into the skin. No way daunted, he approached the house of one of the leaders, and gave the preconcerted signal. On coming out and seeing the state of the weather, the captain declared he would not budge an inch were it to save the State from destruction, shut the door, leaving poor posty outside, ill satisfied with the weather, and disgusted with the treatment he had received. He returned home a sadder and a wiser man, meddled no more with the affairs of State, and retained his post as a Government servant.

In 1833, Alexander Morrison, another knight of the shuttle, was appointed post-master in Langloan. In 1836, a petition, signed by a number of influential gentlemen, was forwarded to the authorities at Edinburgh, to have the post-office removed to Coatbridge, which was granted, and Mr M. Fairlie, draper, was duly installed: he still fills the office with honour and credit.

The present site of the Caledonian Railway Station was, some twenty-five years ago, occupied by the Summerlee Mansion House and Gardens, one of the loveliest spots in the locality, surrounded by a green lawn and shrubberies, and intersected with flower plots tastefully laid out—the approach to the house skirted with trees and shrubs. No traces of

these are now to be seen, save a few blackened trees, stunted and withered, that stand on the bank of the Monkland Canal, which they once adorned, but are now only monuments of the past. In 1842, the Garnkirk Railway Company extended their line from Gartsherrie Junction to the present Station, and the Mansion House referred to was used for some time as the Ticket Office, and Waiting Rooms for passengers. It was, however, taken down, to give place to a range of goods sheds. A further extension of this line took place in 1844, for the purpose of connecting it with the Wishaw and Coltness Railway at Whiffat. The two Companies combined, in order to effect this, as the undertaking was very expensive, in consequence of the great mineral wealth of the land over which it had to pass. The whole was therefore acquired by purchase, and for one portion the price paid was £12,000, which included the cost of minerals underneath. In 1845 the connection was opened for traffic. The bridge over the Monkland canal, near the station, was at first constructed of wood, the span of the arch being 147 feet, resting at both sides on substantial stone buttresses.

The joiner and mason-work were contracted for by Mr William Waddell and the late James Haldane of Coatbridge. The whole cost about £3000. In 1854 the structure thus raised began to show signs of decay, the immense traffic both of passenger and mineral trains that passed over daily having shaken it much; and it was consequently condemned in 1855, at which time it was replaced by the present peculiarly built iron bridge. This structure was begun in November of the same year, and finished for traffic in February, 1856. The work of building and fitting was accomplished without interfering with the general trading arrangements, which was considered a work of great difficulty, and the bridge, when finished, a masterpiece of skill in engineering. The contractors were Messrs Joseph Butler & Co., Stanningly, near Leeds; and some idea of the strength of the bridge may be formed from the weight and measurement of material used, viz., wrought and cast iron, 167 tons; ashlar stone, 800 cubic feet; red pine wood, 2500 feet; span of girder, 147 feet; depth of girder, 16 1/2 feet; distance between girders, 14 feet; breadth of bridge, 34 1/2 feet: the whole forming a work of immense strength, and capable of bearing a weight of some 200 tons. In 1847 the Garnkirk, Glasgow, Wishaw, and Coltness Railways merged into the Caledonian Railway Company; and at present the revenue at the Coatbridge station on this railway is not less than £25,000 per annum.