

## *David McAdam - Shipping Agent, Gatehouse*

### **Family Details**

David McAdam was baptised in Girthon on 4th December 1784. His parents were William McAdam and Elizabeth Thomson. He had 2 older brothers - James born in Loudon, Ayrshire in 1772 and George born in Girthon in 1776.

In a letter written by David in 1876, not long before his death, he says that his father William died at Palnackie in Buittle parish, and that the family also had connections with McAdams in Wigtown and Whithorn. The letter was written in connection with the line of inheritance for the Craigengillan Estate near Dalmellington, to which his father William had been named as a possible heir. This confirms that the Gatehouse McAdam's were part of the large McAdam family who owned several estates on the south Ayrshire / north Kirkcudbrightshire border for hundreds of years. This extended family included John Loudon McAdam, the inventor of tarmacadam.

David was educated at Girthon Parish School which was probably by then located in Castramont Road, in the building which was once the Drill Hall, and is now called Carney's Corner. John Armstrong was the headmaster and he seems to have put much emphasis on bible teaching.

Little is known of David's early life but in about 1805 he seems to have married Isabella McNae (sometimes just called Nae) who was from Penninghame Parish, Minnigaff. The couple are known to have had at least 5 children; Annabella (1806 - 1890), James (1808 - 1880), William (b.1812), Hugh (b.1819) and Eliza (1826 - 1881). They must have lived near Dumfries in the early part of their marriage as Annabella, James and William were recorded in various census returns as having been born in Caerlaverock.

David continued to study the bible and was often critical of leaders of the established Church of Scotland. He was a keen supporter of the Bible Society which formed in Gatehouse in 1813 and which was run by a Burgher minister. (The Burgher movement had broken away from the Church of Scotland 1747 -1799).

In 1822 he had an argument with Rev. Robert Jeffrey, minister of Girthon, who refused to baptise one of his children on the grounds that David had not attended communion at Gatehouse Parish Church, but had attended services at one of the non-Conformist churches in the town. Many letters passed between the two men but family tradition says that McAdam won the argument and the baby was christened. However there is no christening marked in the Girthon OPR although these records are incomplete.

In about **1832** David's daughter Annabella married James McLaughlin, a labourer who was born in Ireland.

In the first census in **1841**

- David (aged 50) and Isabella (aged 50) lived at Boatgreen - a terrace of houses facing the landing area for sailing boats coming up the River Fleet. David and Isabella were both born in Kirkcudbrightshire and David was a "ship agent". Sons James and William were aged 30 and 28, both being born in Scotland but outside Kirkcudbrightshire. James was a stocking maker and William a gardener. Daughter Eliza aged 15 was born in Kirkcudbrightshire.
- Annabella and James McLaughlin lived in Back Fleet Street (now Garden Street) with 3 daughters aged between 2 and 8)

Son William was married in **1842** to Euphemia Douglas (born c. 1811, Wigtownshire).

In **1851**

- The family were still at Boatgreen. We know from this census that David was born in Girthon and Isabella in Kirkcudbright. There are only 2 children at home - stocking maker James who was born in Dumfries and Eliza, a dressmaker born in Girthon.
- Son William and his wife Euphemia lived in Cross Street (now Digby St) from where William worked as a gardener.

#### In 1861

- David and Isabella still lived at Boatgreen occupying 4 rooms. David was a shipping agent. Son James (aged 52) is also at home and is now a harbour master. Eliza aged 36 is also single and at home.
- Son William and his wife Euphemia had moved to High Street - possibly number 59. There were 15 other people sharing the house with them.

In **1863** David McAdam bought 11 Fleet Street. His children James (harbour master), Eliza and William (gardener) are mentioned on the deed.

#### In 1871

- David and Isabella were living in Fleet Street. David was now 87 but still a shipping agent. Isabella was 84. James and Eliza still lived with them.
- Son William (aged 58, a labourer) was still with wife Euphemia but now lived in Victoria Street - (possibly 12/14) with 4 other families in the same building.
- Daughter Annabella now lived in Fleet Street. Her husband was not at home but she had 4 granddaughters living with her (aged 3 to 9)

David McAdam died in **1876** and Isabella died 5 years later, in **1881**, both deaths were registered in Anwoth. 11 Fleet Street passed to James McAdam (1878/9 Anwoth Valuation Roll). James also owned a weighing machine at Boatgreen.

#### In 1881

- Eliza McAdam now lived alone at 11 Fleet Street and is referred to as harbour mistress. Her brother James died in 1880 and Eliza died in 1883.
- William and Euphemia were still living in Victoria Street and had 2 rooms (possibly 12/14). In this census William says that he was born at Caerlaverock, Dumfriesshire.

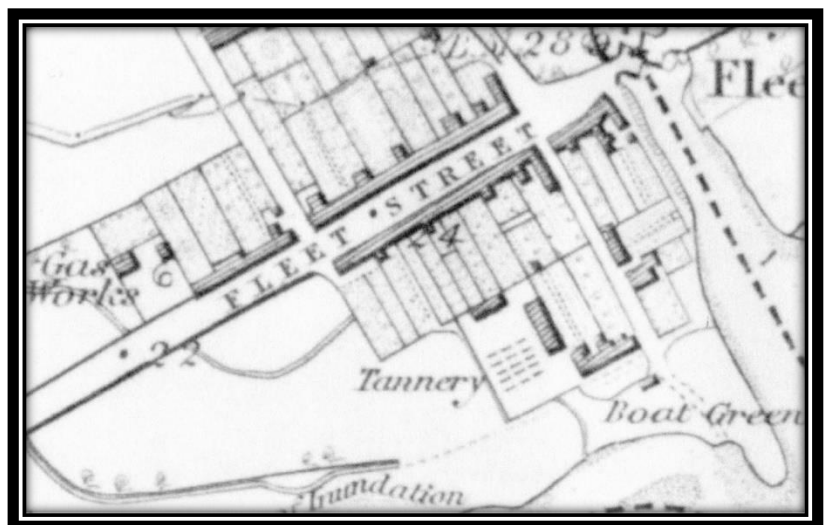
The house in Fleet Street seems to have been sold between 1881 and 1884. The sale is not recorded in the deeds.

## Transport Routes

In the late 18<sup>th</sup> century Gatehouse was a bustling town with cotton mills, tanneries and other small industries. At that time communications between Gatehouse and the outside world were poor. There were roads but they were often in bad condition. The easiest way to reach Gatehouse was by boat.

### Boatgreen

The first harbour for the town was at Boatgreen, just off Fleet Street at a bend in the River Fleet where ships could turn round. Ships could only reach this part of the river at high tide and even then had to follow a tortuous route across the flood plain around several meanders. Only small ships could use the harbour and larger ships are known to have unloaded to smaller vessels further out in the Fleet Bay e.g. at Skyreburn.



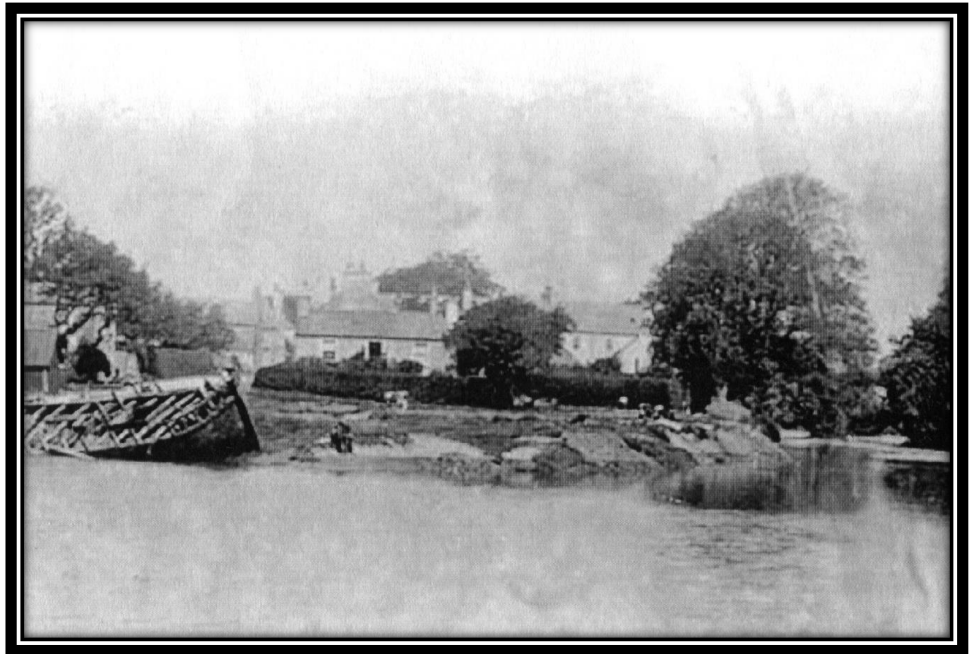
## Boatgreen

Boatgreen may have been used since the late 1600's but during the time when James Murray was the Feudal Superior (1760 - 1800), it was developed to include a landing place, sheds and boat building facilities. No.5 was one of the first houses at Boatgreen to be feued in 1795.

The 1794 Statistical Account listed some of the products handled at Boatgreen.

- The main imports were raw cotton and wool for use in the mills, hides for processing in the tanneries, tallow for candles and some food such as grain and potatoes as well as ale, porter & wine and coal.
- The main exports were cotton manufactured products from the mills, tanned leather, soap, grain and potatoes.

An attempt to improve access to Gatehouse by straightening part of the river must have taken place before 1813, as a Commissioners of Customs and Excise report that year mentions 'The Fleet from the north end of Boatgreen to the south end of *the canal*'. The route of the old meander is shown here in blue. The line of the canal is shown on the 1854 O.S. map as the 'Old Fleet Canal' between Port McAdam and the Alder Pool and can be seen coloured red in the foreground of this photo. Still today, at very high tides the old meanders on the merse (flood plain) can be seen as they fill with water.



A schooner named 'The Lady Ann Murray' is known to have been built at Boatgreen about 1840. Thomas Newbigging recalled seeing the launching in his book 'A Nook in Galloway'.

## Transport Improvements

By 1790 a new westward turnpike road led from the bridge over the Fleet out to Cardoness Castle and then to Skyreburn. This replaced the old road which followed a route to Anwoth Clachan and over the hills via the Corse of Slakes road to Creetown.

In 1823 The Cut formed a new road entrance into Gatehouse from the east.

In 1824 the lower stretch of the River Fleet was straightened forming a short canal making access to Fleet Bay much easier.

About 1831 a drawbridge was built over the Fleet near Cardoness Castle. A roadway connected Cally Mains farm to the westward turnpike by using this drawbridge.

In 1836 David McAdam was given permission to build a new harbour at Port McAdam.

## Port McAdam

David McAdam was a ship agent based at Boatgreen. He realized that further improvements to transport links could be made and he drew up plans for a new harbour closer to the sea.

He knew that Gatehouse was in an ideal position to trade with ports in the north of England (such as Liverpool and Whitehaven), the Isle of Man, Belfast and Larne in Northern Ireland and also ports on the Firth of Clyde (such as Ayr and Glasgow).

He presented his ideas to Alexander Murray of Cally, the land owner, who, in 1836 gave David McAdam permission "to erect a wharf or quay at or near the Minniebut Rocks for loading or discharge of vessels". This was signed by Mr Murray's factor John Brown.

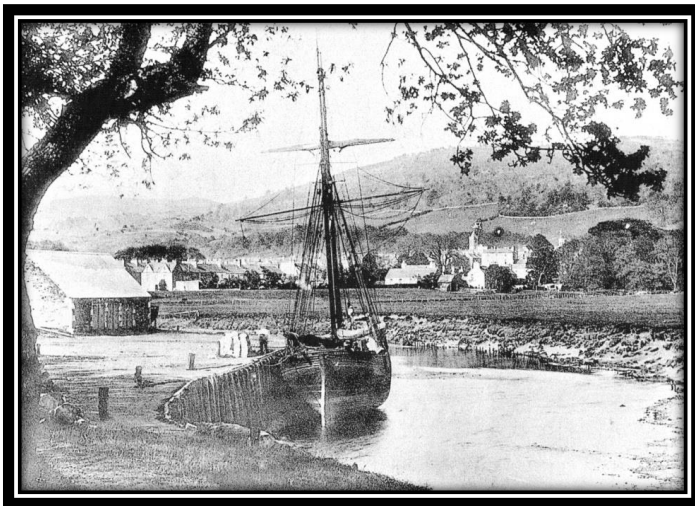
The position chosen by David McAdam was at the head of the new Fleet Canal just before the river turned towards the town. He was given permission to use stone from a nearby quarry (now in the Boreland Wood housing development) and timber from Cally Woods.

It is claimed that 2,000 cart loads of stone, rubbish and gravel was poured onto the land as a foundation. The harbour side was 200 feet in length mainly built of timber, but 50 feet was faced with stone to a depth of 6 or 7 feet. It was capable of taking 5 sloops at a time. There was enough width in the river for the boats to turn on an ebb tide. The quay was still tidal so some larger ships still had to unload further downstream.

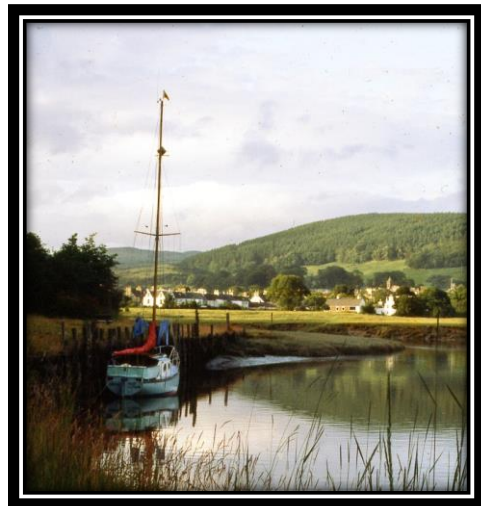
He also erected a stone store beside the quay.

The new harbour was given the name Port McAdam.

The 1841 Statistical Accounts states that 100 ships a year used Boatgreen and Port McAdam.



*An old schooner unloading c.1900*



*a modern yacht visiting Port McAdam.*

At the new quay the main imports included coal (used increasingly in the mill buildings but was later required for the gas works which opened in 1845), lime and guano used by various farms to improve the soil, and building materials such as bricks and slate. e.g. sandstone from Dumfries was transported when the Free Church manse in 1840's, slates for the new Laggan School in 1845 and pipework for the gas works the same year all arrived by boat..

The main exports were forestry products - bark for the tanning industry, timber such as larch and oak props and charcoal.

The Town Council took an interest in this activity and placed a levy of one penny per ton of cargo and charged McAdam 25/- per annum for use of the facility. This may also have included any cargoes at Boatgreen or any discharged further out in the bay.

In 1838 they increased the levy to 2d per ton.

David McAdam kept precise diaries and logs of his business dealings. From this we know that in 1837 there were 75 boats landed at Port McAdam and 31 made outward journeys.



*Port McAdam c.1850*

Gradually the main industries in Gatehouse began to close down. Scott's cotton mill had already closed in 1810. After years of problems the Birtwhistle cotton mills finally closed in 1850. They were converted to manufacture bobbins and to process bark. In 1864 the railway station was opened at Dromore, 6 miles to the north of Gatehouse and gradually the need for a harbour disappeared.

David McAdam held strong opinions on several subjects and was not above criticising people in authority. In 1849 he became embroiled in an argument with the Burgh Council who claimed that he had not paid the full amount of his levies. McAdam stood his ground, did not accept the charge and eventually legal advice was taken from Alexander Murray's lawyers in Edinburgh. McAdam claimed that he had built the harbour as a private speculation under a charter from Alexander Murray. The lawyers agreed with him and said that the burgh had no authority to charge him fees. (The case for the burgh was not helped by the fact that they had lost both their ledger and the minutes book!). David was greatly upset by these proceedings and also by unkind remarks made to him and his family.

He had always been a great supporter of activities in the town and was particularly supportive of one of the brass bands. He wrote notes in his diaries about various events that took place around the town and wrote poems about life in Gatehouse.

He was a keen gardener. There was a report in the 1848 Dumfries & Galloway Standard about the very large vegetables that he had grown.

In 1845 when Alexander Murray of Cally and Broughton died, David lost a good friend and a staunch supporter of his projects. Despite the decline in trade, Port McAdam did continue to operate until the 1930s as coal continued to be an important cargo.

After David died in 1876 the running of the ports at Boatgreen and Port McAdam passed to his son James, who died in 1880 when David's daughter Eliza took over. Eliza died in 1883.

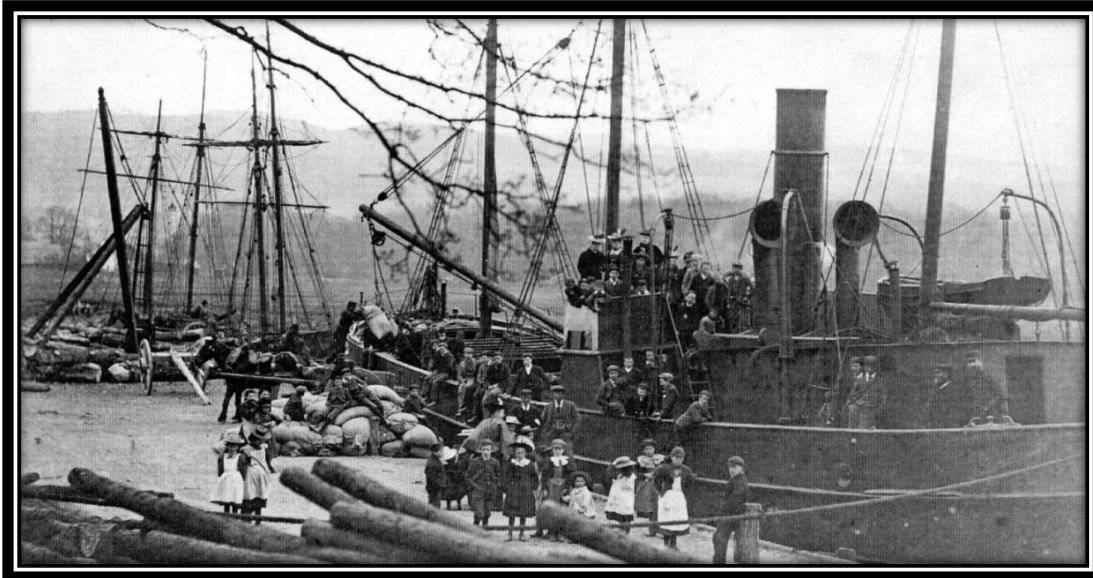
This seems to have been the end of the McAdam family's involvement in the harbours.

In 1894 a charter from Horatio Murray Stewart was granted to Robert Oliver, master mariner. He seems to have been the principal user for some time. He and his wife Agnes had a grocery shop in Catherine Street. Agnes' family were the Belfords who traded in coal and grains and other agricultural products using the quay. Robert Oliver held the charter until 1904. He died in 1913.

The Murray Baillie family took over the ownership between 1904 and 1933.

During this time it was rented to John Belford, coal merchant, who had a coal store at the quay.

Mrs Murray Usher sold the quay to the Forestry Commission in 1933 when it was leased to J. Faed Sproat from Boreland of Anwoth who used it for supply of various agricultural products.



The port was a highlight in the social life of Gatehouse. Large crowds were known to gather when a large sloop was expected and it was a favourite walk from the town.

*A visit to the quay by a Sunday School picnic in late 19th century. (ex Kirkcudbright Museum)*

The quay ceased to be used by the late 1930's. For many years it lay derelict and became very overgrown.

When plans for the A75 Gatehouse bypass were drawn up in early 1980's the new bypass bridge was designed in a way that prevented boats reaching the old port (a very rare occurrence anyway), and mooring posts were erected on the bay side of the new bridge. About the same time the harbour area was cleared and in 2005 a footpath made between the harbour, the old drawbridge and Cardoness Castle.



*Port McAdam at low tide - as it is today.*