

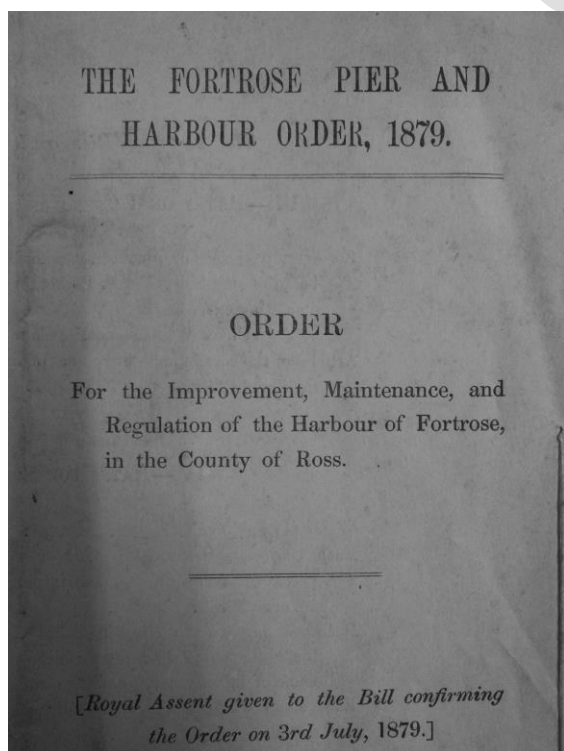
# HARBOURING HERITAGE – A HISTORY OF FORTROSE HARBOUR

## PART 3



### THE PIER AND FERRIES

While the harbour was considered to be 'safe and convenient', steamers could only enter the harbour near high water. This was acceptable for cargo ships used to waiting for the tide (as they still do today if docking at Inverness) but hopeless for **passengers requiring a regular service**. Consequently, in 1878, the Fortrose Town Clerk, John Henderson, put up a provisional order to build a wooden landing stage or pier at a cost of £3500 (around £317260 in today's money<sup>1</sup>). The provisional order map was drawn in 1878 by James Fraser CE engineer of Inverness and it would seem that it was amended to include an intermediate landing stage which held-up Board of Trade approval until 26 August 1881<sup>2</sup>. In the meantime, the Fortrose Pier & Harbour Order 1879 was raised by John Henderson and granted in the 42 & 43 Victoria Session (of Parliament) for a **230 yard pier** with a principal landing stage of 22 by 10 yards and an intermediate landing stage of 22 by 8 yards, 103 yards from seaward<sup>3</sup>.

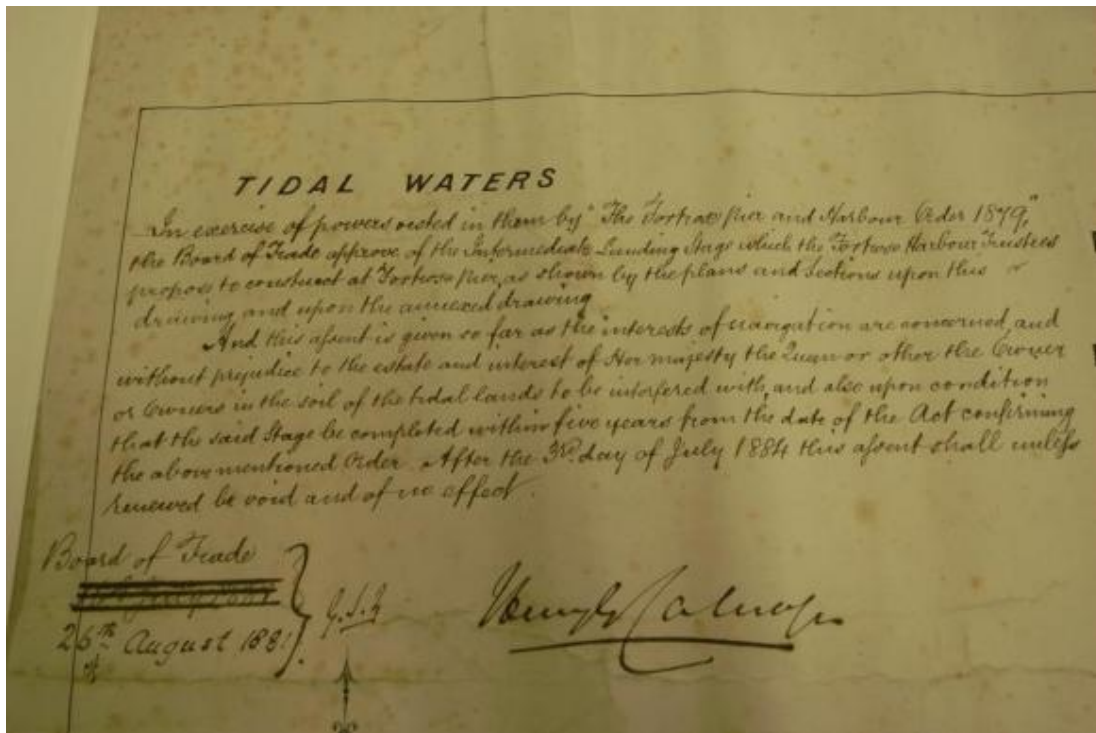


<sup>1</sup> In 2009 from the Bank of England's Inflation Calculator for Goods & Services

<sup>2</sup> Groam House Museum Collection

<sup>3</sup> Groam House Museum Collection

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This is the Board of Trade note on the **1878 provisional order** chart. It reads:

### 'TIDAL WATERS

In exercise of powers vested in them by "The Fortrose Pier and Harbour Order 1879", the Board of Trade approve of the Intermediate Landing Stage which the Fortrose Harbour Trustees propose to construct at Fortrose Pier, as shown by the plans and Sections upon this drawing and upon the annexed drawing.

And this assent is given so far as the interests of navigation are concerned, and without prejudice to the estate and interest of Her Majesty the Queen or other the Owner or Owners in the soil of the tidal lands to be interfered with, and also upon condition that the said Stage be completed within five years from the date of the Act confirming the above mentioned Order. After the 3<sup>rd</sup> day of July 1884 this assent shall unless renewed be void and of no effect.'

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The above shows the detail of the 1878 pier plan with **X** against the Intermediate Landing Stage.<sup>4</sup>

By **1882**, the wooden pier was built and the harbour was also thoroughly repaired. You can still see where the pier joined the stone structure in the gap in the original wall filled by the present sailing club's starter's box.

<sup>4</sup> Groam House Museum Collection  
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The pier gave steamers access at any state of tide allowing passenger timetables to be established and in 1882 the **Black Isle Steam-Ship Company** was formed with Mr James Douglas Fletcher of Rosehaugh as chairman. John Henderson had become JD Fletcher's Factor in 1878 and was clearly his 'right hand man' in the local area. J Henderson is also listed as a Manager & Director of the Black Isle Steam-Ship Company; he must have been a very busy man as in addition to his Town Clerk post he was at one time or another, the Depute Clerk to the Justices of the Peace, Clerk & Treasurer to the School Board, Clerk & Treasurer to the Academy, Vice-President of the Mechanics Institution and Secretary, Treasurer to the Fortrose Golf Club, Secretary to the Rosehaugh Rubber Company and Secretary and Treasurer of the Fortrose Gaslight Company. John Henderson lived in Canonbury off the main road above the harbour and the Estate Offices were built next door in what is now Kindeace Lodge. John Henderson became the longest serving Town clerk in Scotland having served as such for 75 years dying while still appointed during WW2 at the age of 96<sup>5</sup>. He was listed as a 'writer' (a solicitor).

The first action of the Black Isle Steam-Ship Company was to try to buy the *Speedwell* but Captain Mackenzie (see Part 4) refused to sell. The new company then bought a second-hand steamer, the *Rosehaugh* which was commanded by Captain Grieve (also listed as the Harbour & Shore-master in 1885). By 1885 the Black Isle Steam-Ship Company's steamer ran between **Inverness and Fortrose twice a day on Mondays, Wednesdays, and Thursdays, and once on Tuesdays, Fridays, and Saturdays, during summer, and once a day in winter**; other steamers afforded communication with Inverness 2 or 3 times a week. The service would not have supported regular commuting to Inverness but Fortrose and Rosemarkie were holiday destinations so the steamers would have carried day trippers and holiday makers to the seaside from Inverness. As MJB Baddeley's Thorough Guide of 1884 says '*A good steamer has been put on to this route and those who enjoy a pleasant sail in calm water and amid softly beautiful scenery will not repent of devoting a few hours to the excursion. Passengers are allowed about three hours at Fortrose, during which they may visit the charming scenery of St Helena<sup>6</sup>, or enjoy a capital bathe on the sands of Rosemarkie, one mile distant.*'

On the 31<sup>st</sup> December 1886, Hector MacKenzie was found at 9 o'clock in the morning to have died in a cabin of the *Rosehaugh* berthed in the harbour. He was eight-three and a former colonel in the East India Colonial Service. His nephew, Major-General Donald Macintyre VC, inherited his

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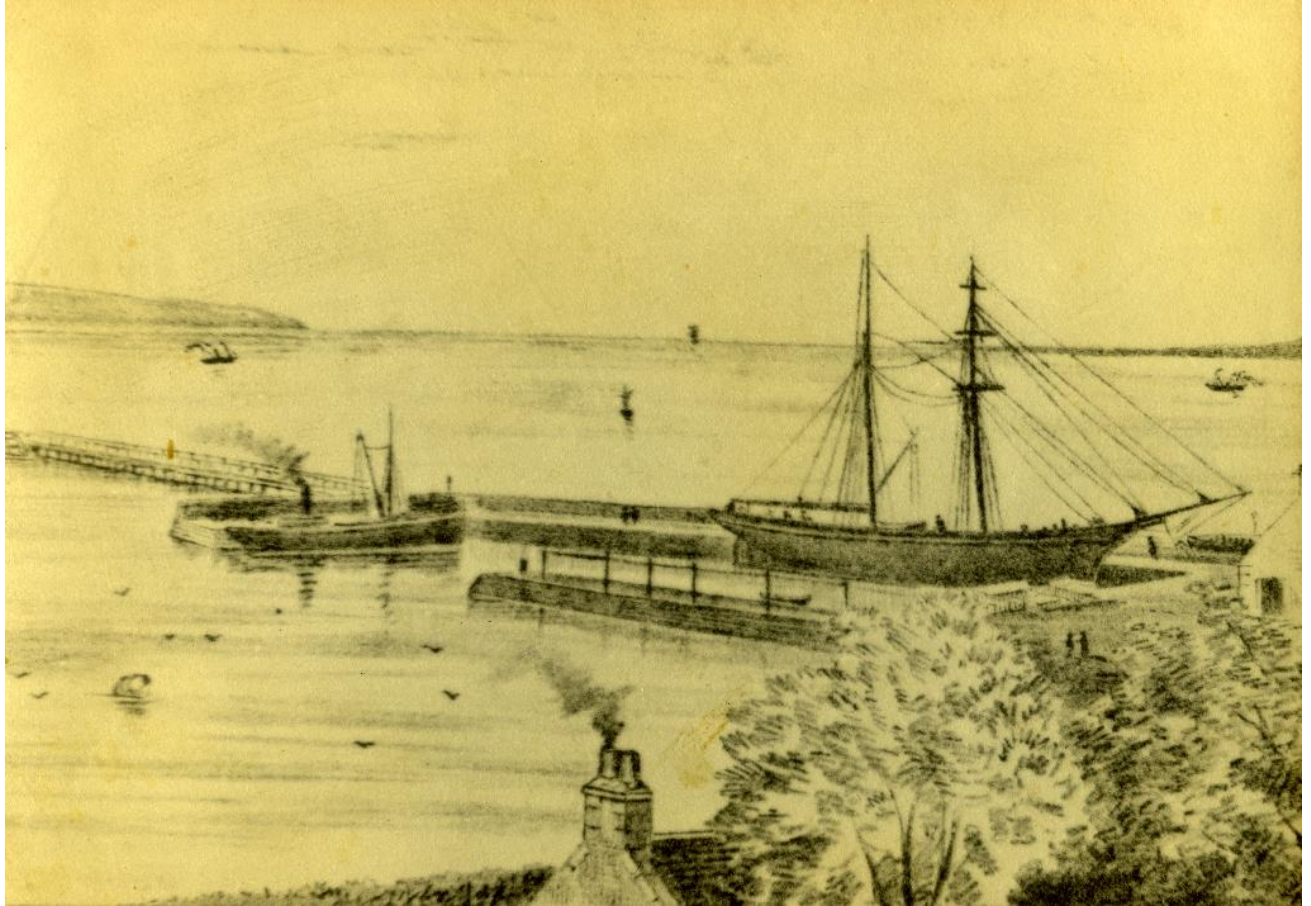
<sup>5</sup> Rosehaugh – A House of its Times published by the Avoch Heritage Society

<sup>6</sup> St Helena refers to a small house and grounds south of the Rosemarkie Burn built in 1815. In 1877 George Dunlop bought land along the burn and erected the villa 'Fairy Glen'. Dunlop was a shareholder in the Black Isle Steam-Ship Company and the owner of the Royal Hotel in Fortrose (now the Anderson) – Historic Scotland



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house on the corner of Academy Street and St Andrew's Walk which became known as MacKenzie Lodge (burnt down during WW2) and overlooked the harbour.<sup>7</sup>



This illustration of Fortrose harbour and pier is taken from Angus J Beaton's 'Illustrated Guide to Fortrose and Vicinity, with an appendix on the **Antiquities of the Black Isle**', published in Inverness in 1885. It shows the pier and a small steamer moored inside the southern wall. The schooner is very probably the *Annie* (see Part 4).

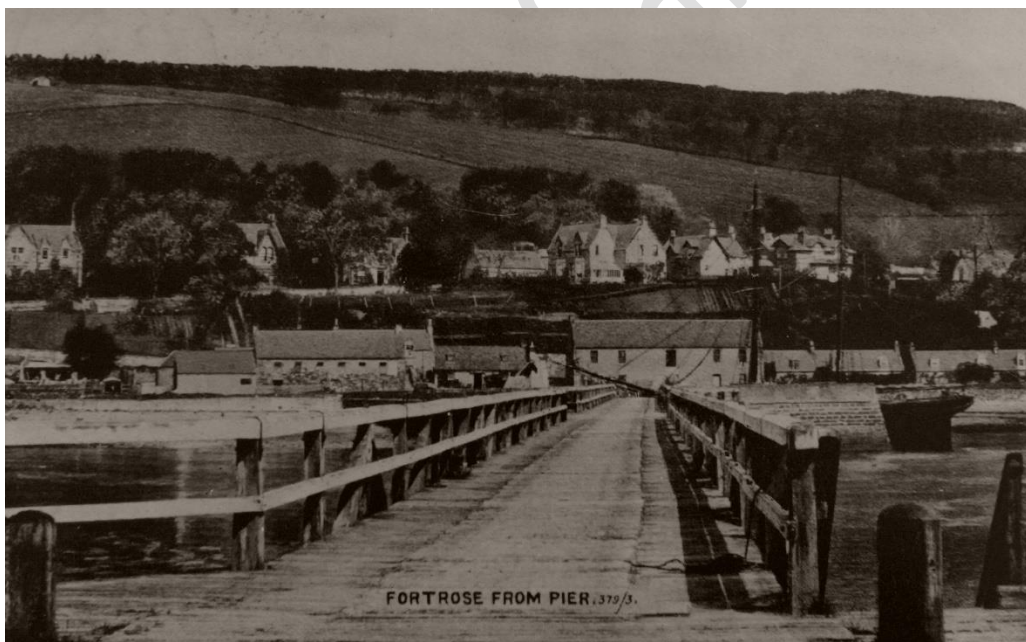
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<sup>7</sup> Rosemarkie Connections by Freda Bassindale.  
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This 'tinted' picture<sup>8</sup> taken some time before the First World War gives a good impression of the length of the pier looking back to the harbour from the outer landing stage. It also shows the various harbour buildings starting with the back of the West End stores on the left. The lad on the bicycle was thought to be Jack Stewart who was a grocer on the High Street<sup>9</sup>.



This picture is from a slightly different viewpoint to the tinted picture but may have been taken around the same time.

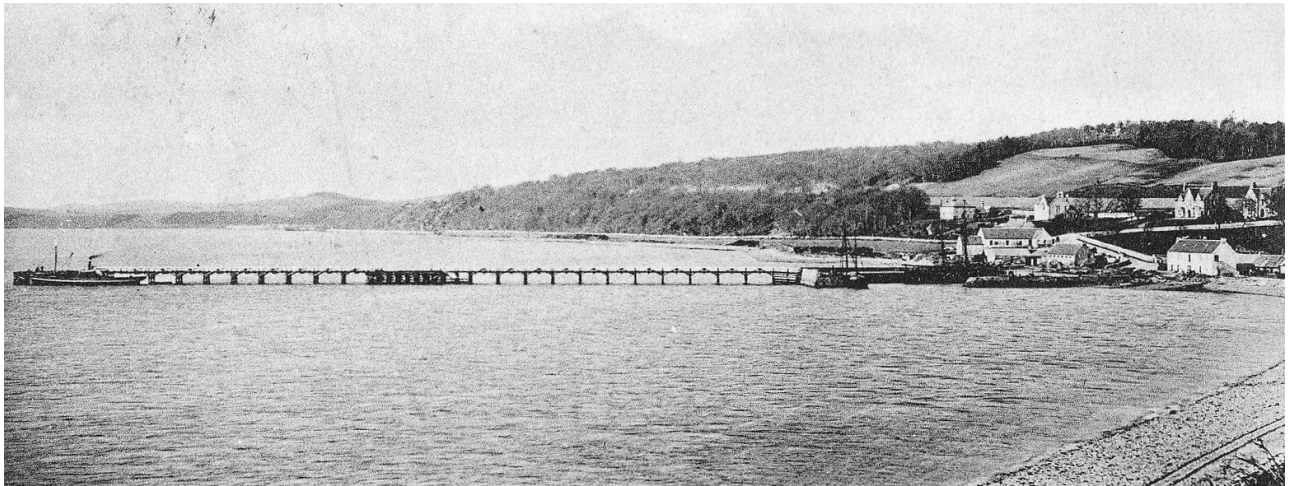
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<sup>8</sup> Pocock collection

<sup>9</sup> From George Taylor



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This picture also illustrates the length (230 yards) of the pier and the long walk passengers would have experienced to the small steamer tied-up at the outer landing stage.



This very atmospheric photo shows the **pier looking rather worn**. It was taken during an Easterly and shows at the lower level the harbour buildings from left to right as the Scaffie's hut, the gas works chimney, the Harbour Store, Marine Cottage, the Shore Inn, Quay House and the 4 cottages still standing on St Andrew's Walk. It probably dates from around 1910.

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This picture (a crop) from 1912 is interesting in that it shows the pier from the west.

The opening of the **Black Isle Railway** (more properly the Fortrose Branch of the Highland Railway) in **1894** brought an end to the **Black Isle Steam-Ship Company** which went into **voluntary liquidation** on 5 April 1898 (John Henderson was elected Liquidator<sup>10</sup>).

Companies Acts, 1862 to 1890

### THE BLACK ISLE STEAM SHIPPING COMPANY LIMITED.

**A**T an Extraordinary General Meeting of the Members of the said Company, duly convened and held at the Office of Messrs. Innes & Mackay, Solicitors, Queensgate Chambers, Inverness, on the 15th day of March 1898, the following Special Resolution was duly passed, and at a subsequent Extraordinary General Meeting of

THE EDINBURGH GAZETTE, APRIL 12, 1898.

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hereby given that the Right  
LGERNON HAWKINS THOMOND  
EARL OF KINTORE, LORD  
LKERTON, &c., G.C.M.G., Heir  
sion of the Entailed Estate of  
Parishes of Kintore, Kemnay,  
th Hall, and County of Aber-  
d a Petition to the Lords of  
n (First Division, Junior Lord  
tonio, Clerk), in terms of the  
relative Acts of Sederunt for

the Members of the said Company, also duly convened and held at the same place on the 5th day of April 1898, the following Special Resolution was duly confirmed:—

“That the Company be wound up voluntarily under the provisions in that behalf of the Companies Acts, 1862 to 1893.”

At the last-mentioned Meeting, Mr. John Henderson, Town-Clerk, Fortrose, was appointed Liquidator.

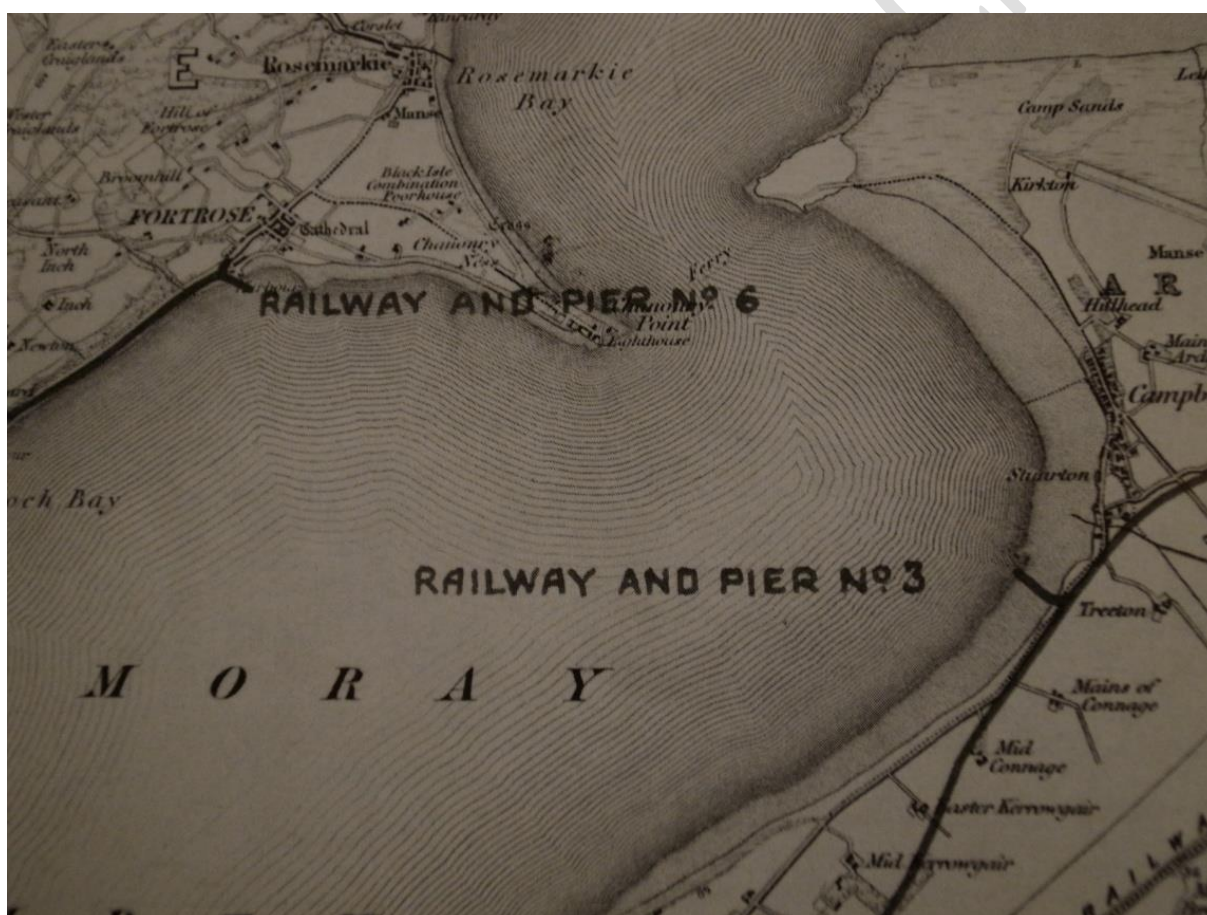
JOHN HENDERSON, Liquidator.

<sup>10</sup> Edinburgh Gazette 12 April 1898  
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The story could have been quite different though. Two railway companies had vied with each other to provide the Black Isle Railway. The **Great North of Scotland Railway Company** had made their intentions known in late 1889 to construct a railway in the district. This came as a surprise to the directors of the Highland Railway who responded by initiating a survey from Muir of Ord to Fortrose. Great community interest was stirred-up in the project and the intentions of both companies became clear when they provided details for a **Bill for the 1890 Parliamentary Session**. Of note, the **Great North proposed a line** from the existing Highland line at Muir of Ord **to Fortrose where they planned to acquire the pier, extend it and run the railway along it (!)** to their own steamer which would then cross to a new pier near Campbelltown (Ardersier) and link via a spur to a new line they were planning from Elgin to Inverness. The proposed route is shown below.



There was much popular support for the Great North route but for various reasons explained in great detail in 'The Black Isle Railway' <sup>11</sup>it was **the Highland Railway that prevailed leading to the end of the existing ferry service and consequentially the decline of the pier.**

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<sup>11</sup> The Black Isle Railway by Jack Kernahan ISBN: 978 0 9545485 99  
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The book **Fortrose – a Garden City by the Sea**<sup>12</sup> published in 1912 records the fine pier in a 'ruinous condition' and the author goes on to suggest that it should be repaired to allow steamers to call again and to provide an alternative to the '*long, round-about, slow and tedious railway journey*' to Inverness although he did acknowledge that in 1912 an excellent service of motor cars now runs between Cromarty, Fortrose and the Kessock ferry which enables the journey to Inverness to be made in about an hour.

The suggestion to repair the pier was clearly taken seriously – the pictures below<sup>13</sup> show details from a **1912 plan to repair the pier** (new timbers in red) – sadly it was not to happen.



<sup>12</sup> 'St Duthac'

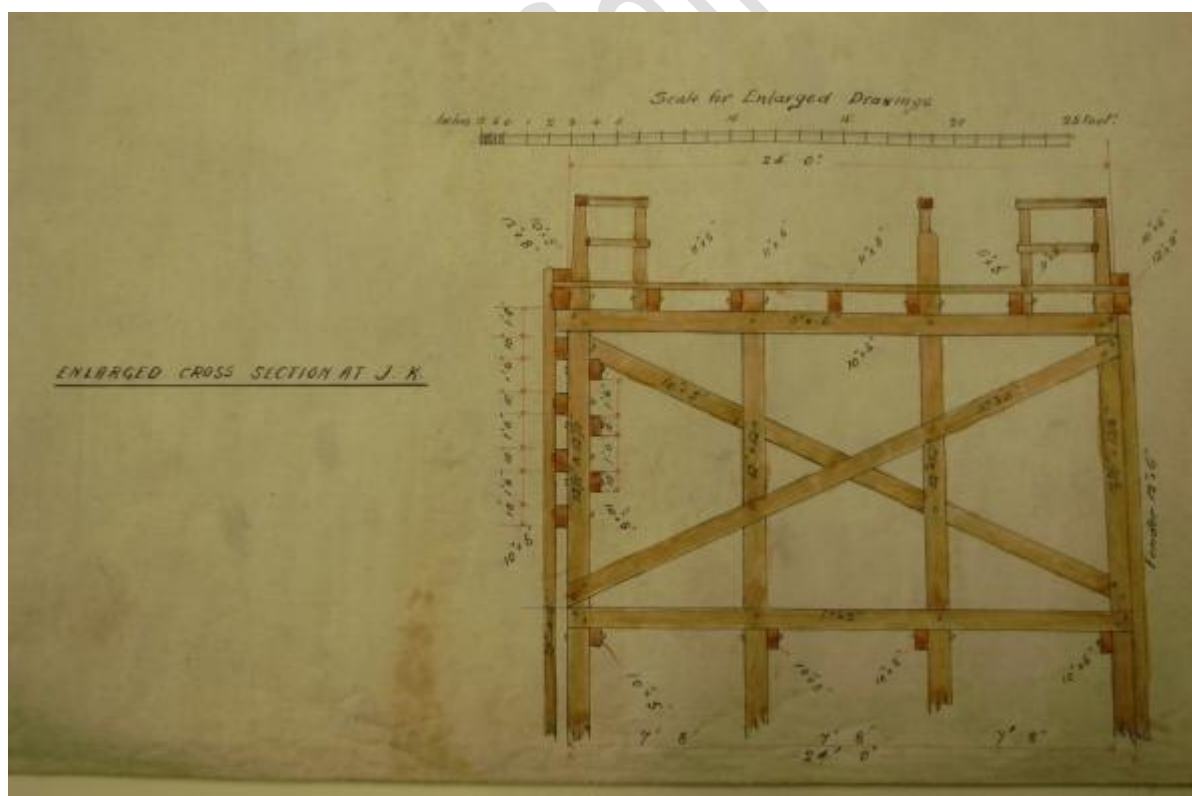
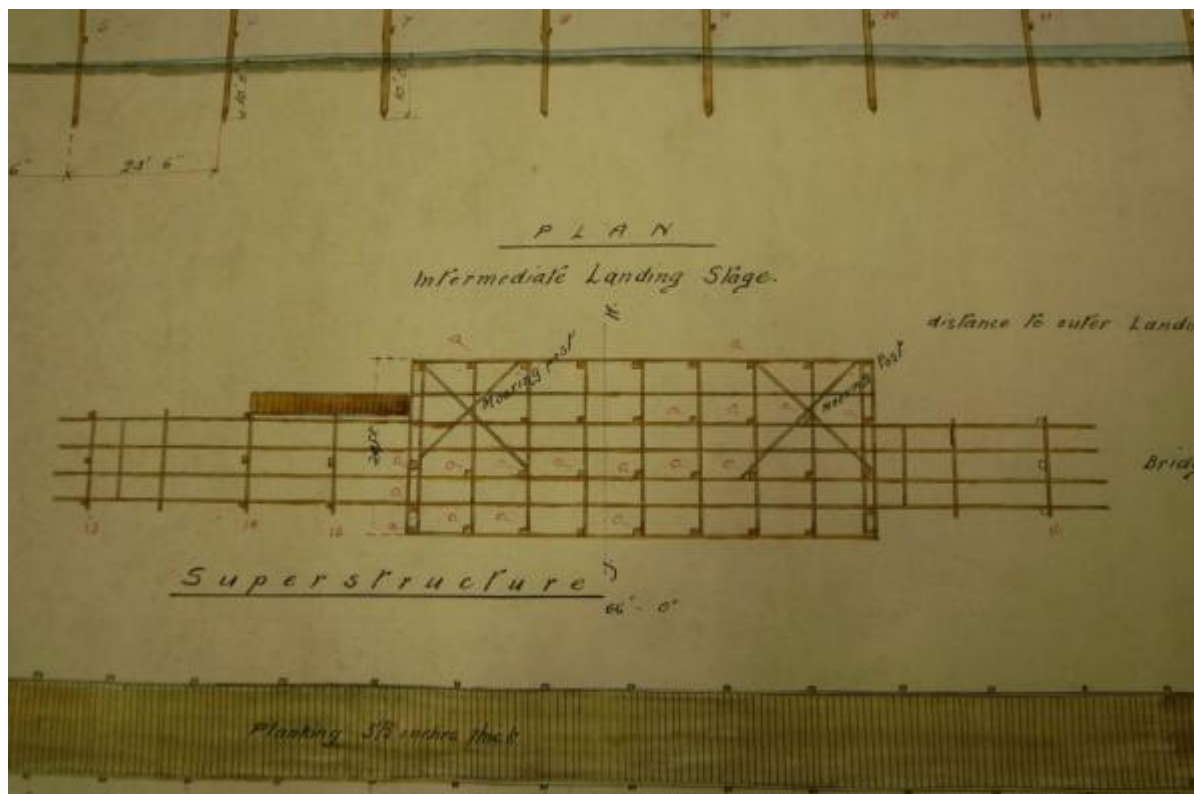
<sup>13</sup> Groam House Museum collection

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The interest in repairing the pier was stimulated by the Royal Navy destroyer flotillas that anchored in Fortrose bay in the years before WW1. The Town Council, sniffing an opportunity, entered into discussion with the

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Admiralty in the hope that the Admiralty would fund the work. Initially, the Admiralty were keen but changed their minds.

From the council minutes September 18<sup>th</sup>, 1913:

*The Clerk submitted letter from the Superintending Civil Engineer, H.M. Dockyard, Rosyth, dated 9<sup>th</sup> instant (No 6931) in which he intimates that subject to Treasury sanction the Admiralty are prepared to increase their contribution toward the proposed repairs to the Jetty to one half of the actual cost of the work or one half of £2009, whichever is the lesser amount.*

*The meeting, after carefully considering the matter, along with the letter written by the Town Clerk to Mr J. Annan Bryce, instructed the Clerk to write to the Superintending Civil Engineer at Rosyth, and ascertain if the Admiralty will agree to contribute two thirds of the cost of repairing the Jetty, and give their aid to the Town Council to procure a loan on easy terms for the balance. If this can be effected the Council think there is a probability of the matter being arranged, and the other proposals of the Admiralty agreed to.*

Just 2 months later (November 17<sup>th</sup>, 1913) it was all over:

*The Clerk submitted letter from Mr Cartwright Reid, the Inspecting Civil Engineer for the Admiralty at Rosyth, dated 1<sup>st</sup> instant and was instructed to write to him that the Town Council regret the Lords Commissioners of the Admiralty are not prepared to contribute two thirds of the cost of repairing and improving the pier. The Council, while desirous to have the pier repaired and put into proper order for the convenience of His Majesty's warships which come regularly to this firth are sorry that the position of the Burgh Funds does not warrant them to incur large liabilities for the repair and maintenance of the Pier as considerable sums have been already advanced and liabilities incurred in connection with it. They are still disposed to try and raise one third of the cost of the repair but they are afraid they cannot undertake to do more.*

Were the Town Council too greedy?

From the September 19<sup>th</sup>, 1917 meeting:

*The Clerk stated that the Harbourmaster had reported to him the dangerous condition of the wooden pier and that some repairs were absolutely necessary to prevent accidents. The Clerk brought the report under the notice of Bailie Murray and it was arranged to employ Mr Alexander Taylor to give the pier a temporary repair. It was also decided to have a **notice board** put up at each end of the pier stating that it is closed for traffic and that the Trustees will not be responsible for accidents to those using it. The Trustees unanimously approved of what had been done and resolved to have the entrance to the pier closed by a plank across it; also to have planks nailed across the steps at both landing stages.*

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This accords with the RN's view of the state of the pier. It was inspected in October 1917 by Captain Lockhart Leith to see if the pier could support the anticipated US Navy minelaying activities ('the Northern Barrage'). The conclusion was blunt:

*Fortrose: Cannot be used as a Depot or for embarking or disembarking Mines or Sinkers as the present pier is falling to pieces and a new pier cannot be built in under 8 or 9 Months.*

In 1927 most of the wooden pier was swept away in a storm and remnants went in a gale in 1935 or 36.



The 'short' pier sometime after the storm of 1927.

Sylvia Macdonald recalls new mains water pipes being laid in the High Street (1960s?) and the trenches were lined with timber from the old pier which was in particularly good condition. Seemingly, the timber had been salvaged and stored.

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There are still some signs of the old pier on the seabed as this photo shows taken at low water in March 2011:

