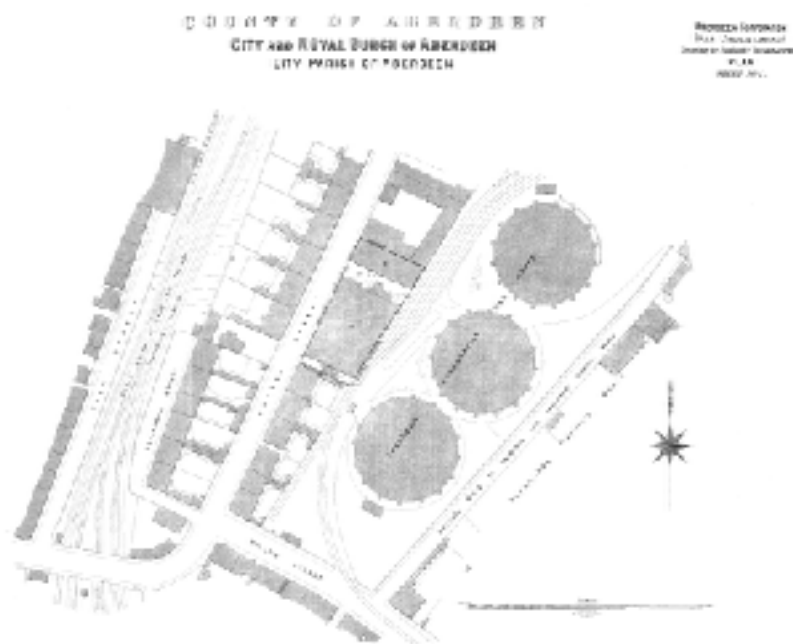


# The Aberdeen Gas Works and its Railway

The first mention of a railway to service the Sandilands Works was in the "Aberdeen Extension and Improvement Act" of 1883 which made provision for a railway to be worked by locomotives and wagons, or wagons drawn by horses from Waterloo to the Corporation Gas Works in Cotton Street. In 1884, the Council set up a committee to consider the construction of the railway. The first estimate was £12,700 based on a direct access to the Great North of Scotland Railway Company's Waterloo Station. However true to Aberdeen's reputation for thrift, an amended plan, based on a line up Church Street and Miller Street (formerly Summer Lane) which was to cost £6,800, was proposed and recommended for construction. It was estimated that the railway would give a saving of £450 per year in cartage and increased efficiency.

The proposed railway was not without opposition. The ratepayers, the Church and others in the Footdee area lodged a petition against its construction. Considerable controversy arose and the final motion that construction should proceed was only passed by a one vote majority. In December 1885, the contract to build the railway was awarded to R. Gair, Contractor, Aberdeen at a cost of £1,713. The work took 1 year to complete and in December 1886 the railway was ready for testing.



When the railway was first proposed, the Town Council came to an agreement with the Great North of Scotland Railway (G.N.S.R.) under which the G.N.S.R. agreed to carry out the all the haulage of coal, stores and products between the Gas Works and Guild Street, Deeside and Waterloo stations, and to the harbour, for 6d (old) per ton on all materials so carried. However, when the railway was completed, the G.N.S.R. approached the harbour commissioners for permission to use a locomotive on the harbour rails from Guild street to Waterloo, permission was declined. The harbour commissioners did however indicated that they would be more favourably disposed to any proposal from the G.N.S.R. to run locomotives over the whole harbour railway system provide the G.N.S.R. would bear the entire cost of strengthening the rails.

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Following the withdrawal of the G.N.S.R., the Council decided to work the railway themselves and in 1887 letters were sent out requesting tenders for supplying a locomotive engine which had to meet the following requirements;

"The locomotive engine must be capable of drawing 5 loaded wagons weighing 75 tons, and be able to exert great power for starting and stopping easily on the incline in Church Street (gradient 1 in 40). It must be constructed to consume gas coke, condense exhaust steam and emit no visible smoke or steam. No noise from blast or machinery and all working parts to be concealed as far as possible so as to avoid frightening horses or annoying the public

The tender from Messrs Black, Hawthorn and Company for the supply of a 0-4-0 saddle tank locomotive at £875 was recommended for acceptance as "being simple in construction, having 30% excess power over that required, and a coke consumption of 14lbs per mile". In October 1887, the engine aptly named "City of Aberdeen" duly arrived at Aberdeen. Permission to run the locomotive over the harbour rails to and



from Guild Street was obtained from the Harbour commissioners albeit only between the hours of 6-7AM and 2-3PM, and the Gas Works Railway became an operational entity. In addition to the engine, the Council also purchased 8 No. 8 Ton wagons from the Ashbury railway Carriage and Iron Co. Ltd Manchester at a cost of £352.

The Black Hawthorn drawings of "The City" do show both the steam condensing system and motion side skirts as per the tender specification but subsequent photographs would suggest the steam condensing system was either not fitted or removed early in the engine's life.

By 1888, permission for use of the engine was extended to cover the rails and sidings at Waterloo Quay including the rails joining to the G.N.S.R's Waterloo Station. By 1896, "City of Aberdeen" was in need of a major overhaul, and although new wheels, axles, axle boxes and eccentrics were fitted at a cost of £95, the council declined to make repairs to the boiler, which were estimated by the insurance company at £300.



Instead the Council decided to purchase another locomotive and issued tenders to the exactly same specification as issued in 1887. The tender was awarded to Andrew

Barclay & Sons, Kilmarnock for their 12" 0-4-0 ST engine at a cost of £795.

The engine, Barclay's works Number 807, was delivered in the spring of 1897, and named "Bon-Accord".

Subsequent to the purchase of Bon-Accord, the necessary boiler repairs to City of Aberdeen were carried out and the engine returned to service. By 1908, the wear on the sunken rails in the entire Miller-Church Street section was such as to be a hazard to other wheeled vehicles and replacement of the street section was undertaken. With the ever-increasing demand for gas by 1914, railway handling had doubled since starting operation in 1887 and it proved necessary to purchase a 3rd locomotive. The tender was again awarded to Andrew Barclay for the supply of a 14inch 0-4-0 saddle tank engine at a cost of £1140. This engine was named "Aberdeen Gas Works No. 3"

The life of "No3" at Aberdeen Gas Works proved short-lived, as in 1918, the Director of Railway materials approached the Council as to the availability of a locomotive for the construction of aerodromes and shipyards. The Council agreed to the sale of the recently purchased "No3" for £1800. This locomotive was subsequently sold to the ironworks at Dalmellington and at some later date found its way into the ownership of the National Coal Board where it was used in the Dalmellington area.



1919 saw a major reconstruction of the railway network within the Gas Works site. Much of the track was bought 2nd hand from the Caledonian Railway. By 1925, again the railway activity was such that a 3rd engine was required and the tender was awarded to Andrew Barclay for a 12inch 0-4-0 saddle-tank engine, which took the same name as its predecessor "Aberdeen Corporation Gas Works No3" The same activity lead to the purchase of a new boiler and saddle-tank for "City of Aberdeen", these being supplied by William

Arnott & Co, Coatbridge for a cost of £460.

The Town Council took over the old buildings ground between Miller Street and Canal Terrace in 1940 for use as coal storage, but it is not believes any changes took place until the end of the 2nd World War. This saw the demolition of the housing on the south side of Miller Street, Gavocks Wynd. The siding immediately to the west of the railway entrance to the Works was extended across Miller Street to form a line into the open coal storage area. At the same time a spur line was built in Miller Street to give rail access to the Sandilands Chemical Works.





In 1946, the increased activity was such that the withdrawal of any of the 3 engines for maintenance caused problems and a 4th engine was purchased. The tender was again awarded to Andrew Barclay for a 12inch 0-4-0 Saddle Tank locomotive at a cost of £3225. At this time, nationalisation of the Gas industry was in progress and when the 4th engine was subsequently delivered, it was named "Mr Therm". On nationalisation in 1948, all the locomotives were converted from their distinctive lined out Aberdeen Corporation Green livery to blue with white lining incorporating the "flaming torch" symbol of the



Scottish Gas Board. No.3 was subsequently renamed from "Aberdeen Corporation Gas Works No3" to "Aberdeen Gas Works No. 3"

The last major changes in the railway network were carried out in the period 1947-1950 with the building of the No. 5 retort house and the coke screening plant, both of which required additional sidings. In 1961, again the track in the Miller Street-Church Street sections was in need of renewal at an estimated cost of £12,000.

An alternative plan to build the new track through the coal storage area on the south side of Millar Street to join the existing track at the foot of Church Street was estimated at £11,600, which included the provision of additional sidings. However, the saving was not considered sufficient and renewal of the existing street rails was carried out in 1963.



1964 saw the end of steam hauled railway traffic. The arrival of a Simplex 0-4-0 diesel engine (known as No.1 Diesel) transferred from the Greenock Gas Works saw "Bon-Accord" withdrawn from service. Shortly afterward, the arrival of a Rushton 0-4-0 diesel from Dundee Gas Works saw



"No3" and "Mr Therm" also withdrawn from service. At this time, use of the railway was in decline with an ever-increasing amount of coal being delivered from the docks by lorry. However the railway was still used for the transport of coal tar by rail tanker to Scottish Tar Distillers at Falkirk, coke, and ammonia tanks to and from the Sandilands Chemical Works.

In 1967, the "City of Aberdeen", which had for many years only been kept as a standby engine, was restored and made its first public appearance since the 1950's on a Great North of Scotland

Railway Preservation Society trip to the Gas Works in 1968.

The engine was subsequently used operationally for a few weeks in 1970 when both diesels were out of action, and on a number of enthusiast trips round the harbour railway system.

Its last excursion was in 1972 when it hauled the last train to use the harbour rails in Market Street to Jamieson Quay.

With the closure of the Coal Gas Plant, 3 of the locomotives (Bon-Accord, Mr. Therm and No. 3) were transferred to Aberdeen Council for preservation and relocated to Ferryhill. Bon-Accord and No. 3 were loaned to the Preservation Society set up at the time and Mr. Therm was placed in Aberdeen's Seaton Park as part of a children's play area.



However ongoing problems with lack of covered storage and vandalism saw No. 3 transferred to the Ayrshire Railway Preservation Group at Dalmellington in 1979, and Bon-Accord to the Brechin Railway Society in 1980.

The 'City of Aberdeen' was gifted by The Scottish Gas Board to The Scottish Railway Preservation Society in 1975 and is currently in static storage at the Tanfield Railway. 'No.3' has been restored as a static exhibit at Grampian Transport Museum in Alford, Aberdeenshire. Bon-Accord, of course, has now returned to Aberdeen and restoration to full working order is complete. No. 1 and No. 2 Diesels were gifted to the Strathspey Railway. No. 1 Diesel is non-operational, but still in the care of the Strathspey Railway, however No. 2 Diesel has since been scrapped.

Whilst the track within the Gas Works was lifted in 1975, the section from Waterloo Goods Yard to



the Sandilands Chemical Works was retained and operated by a Rushton diesel owned by Scottish Agricultural Industries (SAI). However despite the track being renewed, it finally fell out of use with the closure of the chemical works in 1985.

Major quay

renovation work in late 1980's saw the end of the entire harbour railway network on the north side of the harbour, and the loss of the track access to the Waterloo Goods yard.





# Bon Accords Restoration

Many years ago Bon-Accord, one of the diminutive Barclay Saddle Tanks that operated at the Aberdeen Gas Work, was resident at Brechin Station. The locomotive eventually left Brechin for restoration in Aberdeen.

The summer of 2016 was momentous for Bon-Accord and the members of the Bon-Accord Locomotive Society, who had been working on the locomotive. The reason was that, Bon-Accord returned to steam at the Royal Deeside Railway, and hauled passenger trains on several occasions.

The restoration of the locomotive that is owned by the Grampian Transport Museum had been beset by a series of challenges, however over the past two years, the members of the Bon-Accord Locomotive Society have undertaken further works on the locomotive that saw new axleboxes, new bearings, new underkeeps, new springs, new buffer springs fitted and extensive repairs to the water pump, the braking system, the motion bearings, and the eccentric straps.

While all of the above was taking place, the boiler was stripped for its annual inspection, and following the satisfactory completion, the boiler was reassembled and steam tested.

And so it was, that over the weekend of the 11<sup>th</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup> June that Bon-Accord hauled brake van rides at the Milton of Crathes Station. The weekend was significant, as it was the first time that two steam locomotives operated together at the Royal Deeside Railway in the preservation era.

Over the following months further work was undertaken on the locomotive culminating in the locomotive operating the passenger services at the end of August. Two weeks later Bon-Accord headed off on the back of a low loader to Locomotion, the National Railway Museum at Shildon to represent the Royal Deeside Railway and the Bon Accord Locomotive Society. The locomotive operated at Locomotion's Gala, and then moved again to Beamish Museum, where the locomotive has operated until it returned to the Royal Deeside Railway this past week.





The decision making behind Bon-Accord visiting these railways, was driven by the fact that the Bon Accord Locomotive Society and the Deeside Railway Company, who operate the locomotive on behalf of the society, need to ensure that sufficient funds are available to continue to operate the locomotive. With the end of the ten year boiler certificate on the horizon, limited opportunities to steam the locomotive at the Royal Deeside Railway, the opportunity to see the locomotive operating at alternate locations, where it would be on public display, and generate income, it was a very easy decision to make, which was supported by the

locomotives owners.

If you would like to join the Bon-Accord Locomotive Society then please contact the Secretary James West by e-mail to [jameswestabz@aol.com](mailto:jameswestabz@aol.com) for more information, or by post to 14A Great Western Place, Aberdeen AB10 6QL.

