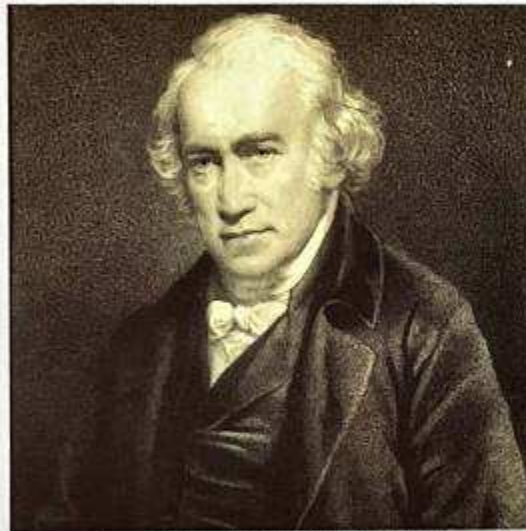
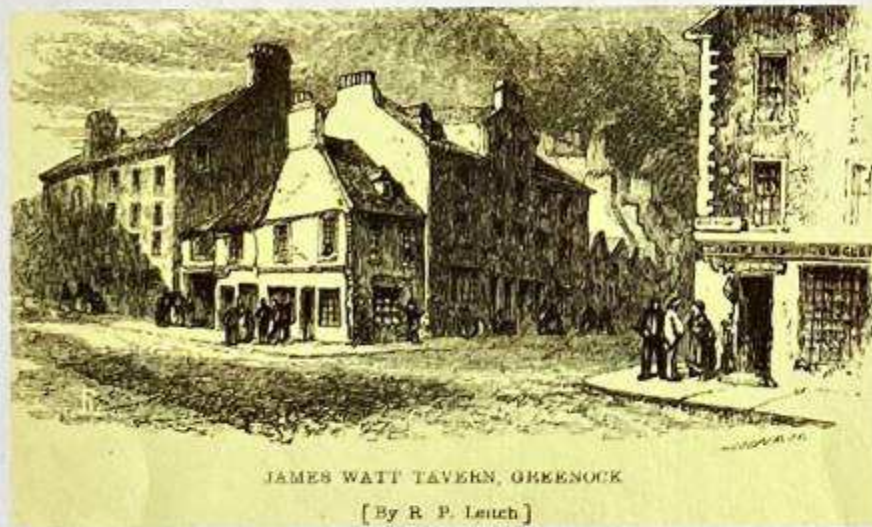


**A commemorative tribute on James Watt's 274<sup>th</sup> birthday anniversary  
to Watt Club diners at the Café Royal, Edinburgh, 19<sup>th</sup> January 2010**

by Professor Roland Paxton MBE, FICE, FRSE  
*Engineering Historian, Member of Heriot-Watt University Watt Club [founded 1854]*



Engraving of Watt after Partridge.  
[G. Williamson's *Memorials* . . . Watt Club, 1856]



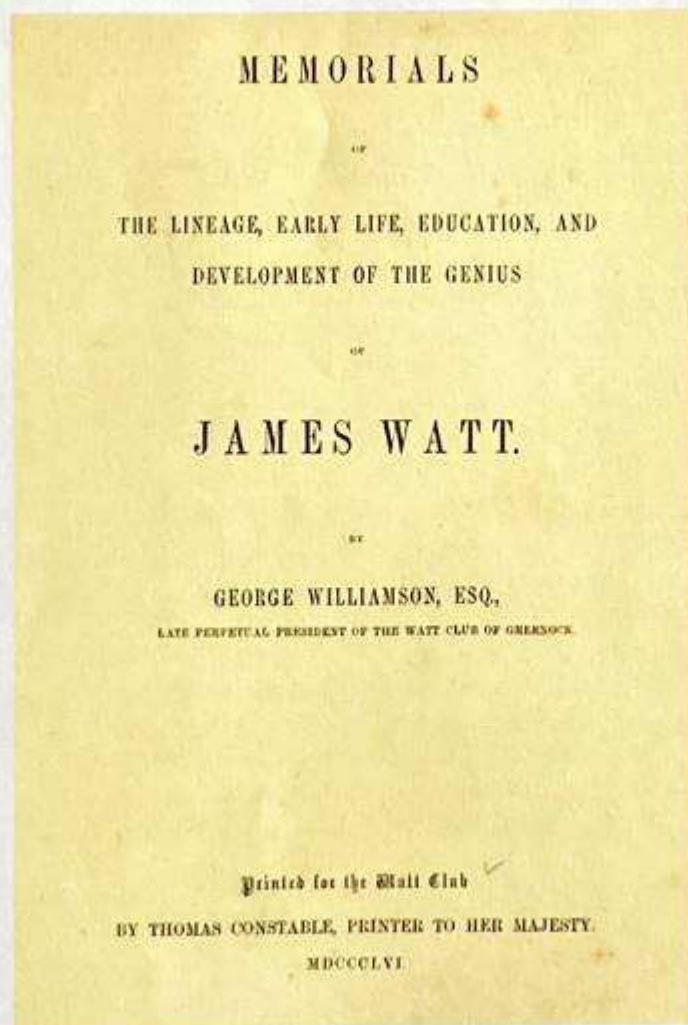
JAMES WATT TAVERN, GREENOCK

[By R. P. Leuch]

[Smiles S. *Lives of Boulton and Watt*, John Murray, 1865]

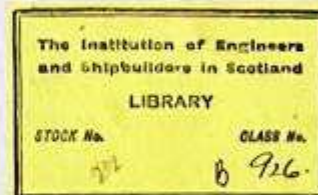
The Watt Club at Greenock formed in 1813 (first annual dinner 1820)\* met at what was formerly the 'Greenock Tavern', partly occupying the site of the tenement in which Watt was born in 1736. By 1823 it had been re-named after Watt and existed until the turn of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Interestingly, this Watt Club predated the foundation in 1821 of the Edinburgh School of Arts, by Leonard Horner and others, in which Heriot-Watt University has its roots. The School of Arts' success in educating working class mechanics, together with that of (John) Anderson's Institute in Glasgow, influenced the creation of the London Mechanics' Institution in 1823 and the subsequent spread of the genre nationally [Robert Chambers suggests to about 100,000 members by c.1850].

\*Greenock Advertiser 3/10/1824, 28/1/1835, 22/1/1861



[Private collection]

*Presented to the  
Institution of Engineers & Shipbuilders  
by Andrew  
Secretary to the  
Watt Club of Greenock.  
No. 10, Colquhoun St.,*



Inscription to Institution of Engineers and Shipbuilders in Scotland 16 April 1860 and its library stamp

In a covering letter of 16<sup>th</sup> April 1860 when presenting this copy of the book to the Institution of Engineers and Shipbuilders in Scotland (founded 1857), John Gray, Watt Club Secretary, concludes, “It occurred to me to send herewith for your Institution (rather than a plain one) a copy similar to that presented to Her Most Gracious Majesty.”. Tipped in is the following copy letter of royal acceptance:-

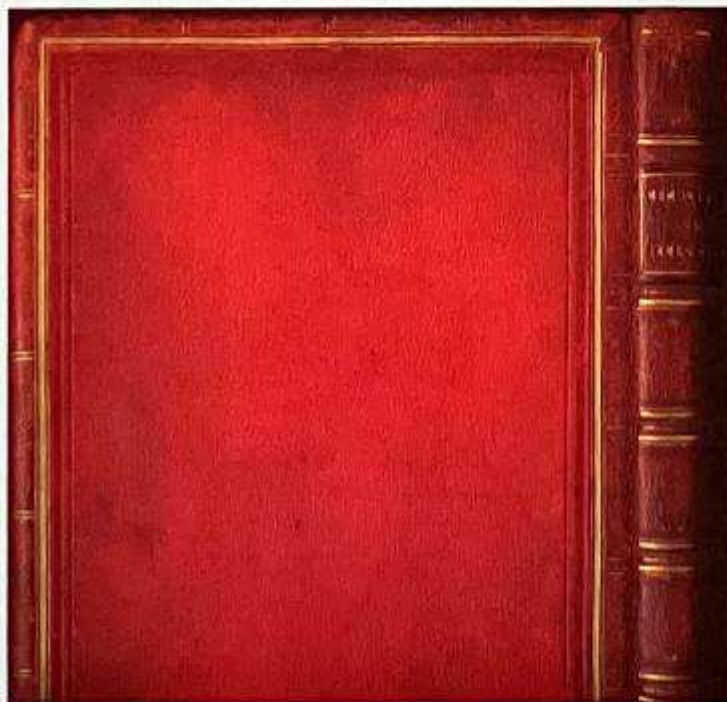
Balmoral Castle  
Oct. 7. 1856

Sir

I am commanded by  
His Royal Highness Prince  
Albert to acknowledge the  
receipt of your note of the  
4<sup>th</sup> inst. - with the accompa-  
nying very handsome copy  
of the Memorials of James  
Watt, which you have been

“good enough to send for presentation to Her Majesty. Her Majesty cannot but admire the manner in which this volume is got up, & I am commanded to express the pleasure with which she accepts it for the Royal Library.

I have the honour to be, Sir, Your very obdt Srvt. (signed) A(?). Grey”.



Part of red morocco, bevelled-edged, gilt extra, gilt-edged, Edinburgh binding (21.5x16.5 cm) signed inside front cover, in the form it was presented to Queen Victoria. [Private collection]

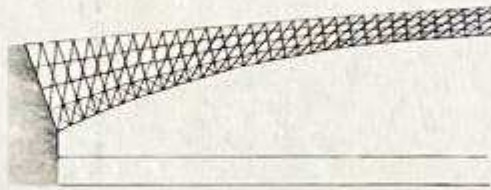
Watt's efforts in trying to improve communications and water supply in Scotland as the Industrial Revolution developed merit our appreciation. From 1766-74 he surveyed, planned and prepared estimates for Greenock harbour and water supply improvements - executed 1773-4, major bridges erected over the Clyde at Hamilton and Rutherglen, and navigation projects for parts of the Clyde and Forth and 12 canals, mostly unbuilt.\*

\*See Hills R.L. James Watt - His time in Scotland 1736-1774, Landmark, 2002.

Funding was often a problem, even on Watt's largest executed canal project the Monkland (water from which still supplies the Forth & Clyde). He was also resident engineer for its upper 7-mile reach. Three of the canals were made later by others, the Forth & Clyde, Crinan and Caledonian (for which Telford praised Watt's survey work).

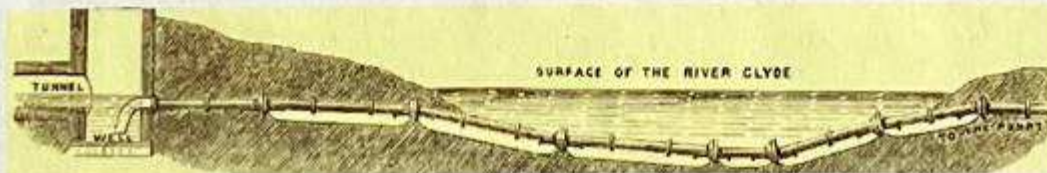


Rutherglen Bridge, Glasgow 1775 - c.1895\*



Telford's 600 ft span London Bridge proposal 1801

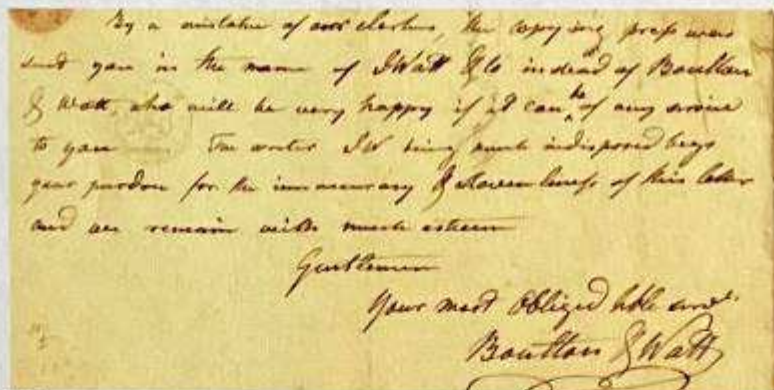
Other notable work in which Watt was associated with Telford was Glasgow water



Watt's water main with 'lobster's tail' flexible joints laid under water at Glasgow, 1810. [Smiles. Op.cit]

works, for which he invented this ingenious mode of crossing the Clyde.\* Further south he was associated with Telford on Liverpool water supply (1799) and in commenting on Telford's proposal for an iron arch replacement of old London Bridge with an unprecedented 600 ft span. Watt rightly considered it practicable 'if sufficiently stable and massive abutments' could be made. Telford also sought his support for poet Thomas Campbell perhaps unaware he was a friend of Watt's son Gregory. In 1824-25 Telford gave £50 to the Greenock Provost towards the cost of a Watt statue. A plaque recently erected at Heriot-Watt recognises Telford's and Watt's close connection.

I conclude with a few holograph words of Watt himself, evocative of his inventive genius, writing practice, all too frequent indispositions, and self-effacing perfectionism!



End of a Watt Cornish pumping engine business letter 1791. [Private collection]

**"By a mistake of our clerk's, the copying press [Watt's then increasingly popular document copying invention] was sent you in the name of J. Watt & Co. instead of Boulton & Watt, who will be very happy if it can be of any service to you. The writer JW being much indisposed begs your pardon for the in(n)accuracy & slovenliness of this letter and we remain with much esteem, Gentlemen . . ."**

\*See Paxton R. & Shipway J. *Civil Engineering Heritage Scotland Lowlands and Borders*. Telford, 2007. **SBE 18/1**