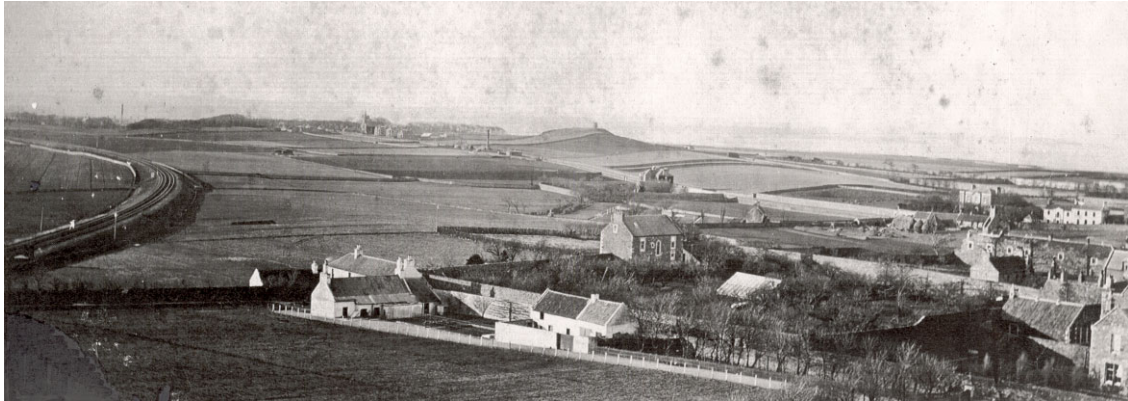




John Muir's Birthplace Fact Sheet

Number 3.11 – The railway comes to Dunbar

In February 1849 John Muir left Dunbar and set off on a journey to start his new life in America. John, his brother David and sister Sarah, went to the station and took the train to Glasgow with their father Daniel. They had just said a sad farewell to their grandfather Gilrye.



View of Dunbar showing the railway line, early 1880s, Courtesy of Dunbar and District History Society

At this time the east coast railway line was still very new. The North British Railway Company had opened the line from the City of Edinburgh to Berwick just 3 years earlier, in June 1846. John Learmonth, Chairman of the Edinburgh and Glasgow Railway and one time Lord Provost of Edinburgh, was the man who had been responsible for bringing the first line across the border to the east coast over the preferred west coast route.

The original plan had been to build a line from Edinburgh that would end at Dunbar's Cromwell Harbour. The Company however could not raise the funds. When John Learmonth met George Hudson (known as the Railway King) he gained his full support if the line continued down to Berwick. This would both connect the East Coast Companies and also gain English support.

A prospectus and shares were issued and advertising arranged. Local landowners lobbied Parliament. The North British Railway Companies Bill was passed and the



ANNO NONO & DECIMO

VICTORIÆ REGINÆ.

Cap. lxxiv.

An Act to authorize the Construction of several Branch Railways and other Works in connexion with the North British Railway.

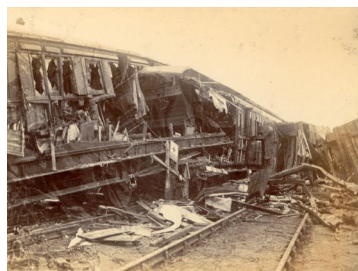
[26th June 1846.]

WHEREAS an Act was passed in the Seventh and Eighth Years of the Reign of Her present Majesty, intituled *An Act for making a Railway from the City of Edinburgh to the Town of Berwick-upon-Tweed, with a Branch to the Town of Haddington*: And whereas an Act was passed in the Eighth and Ninth Years of the Reign of Her present Majesty, intituled *An Act to empower the North British Railway Company to purchase the Edinburgh and Dalkeith Railway, and to alter Part of the Line of the said Railway, and of the North British Railway, and to connect certain Branch Railways in connexion therewith*: And whereas an Act was passed in the Seventh Year of the Reign of His late Majesty King George the Fourth, intituled *An Act for making and maintaining a Railway from Edinburgh to the South Side of the River North Esk, near Dalkeith and Newbattle, with Branches therefrom, all in the County of Edinburgh*: And whereas another Act was passed in the Tenth Year of the Reign of His said late Majesty King George the Fourth, intituled *An Act to enable the Edinburgh and Dalkeith Railway Company to raise a further Sum of Money to make a Branch from the said Railway to Leith; and for other Purposes relating thereto*: And whereas another Act was passed in the Fourth and Fifth Years of the Reign of His late Majesty King William the Fourth, intituled *An Act to enable the Edinburgh and Dalkeith Railway Company to make a Branch* [Local.]

Board instructed building work to begin immediately and ordered stock and supplies. Compensations for loss of land were paid to Dunbar Town Council, as well as the Presbytery and local landowners.

A pre-opening ceremony was arranged. Two trains with 50 carriages and 9 engines were used. No expense was spared. Dunbar was the venue for a grand feast when over 700 people enjoyed a meal in the station house! The first timetable ran on 22 June. By the end of the first week over 15000 passengers had travelled on the new trains which ran either to Berwick or locally between Edinburgh and Musselburgh.

Train crash at Dunbar, 1892,
Courtesy of P Smeed



The new line had its problems in the early years. Within months, flooding caused landslides particularly to the south, while several accidents, some fatal, occurred in the 1880s and 1890s.

In 1893 John Muir returned to Dunbar as part of his European tour. By this time the railway had opened up the area for visitors. Hundreds of passengers took advantage of low fares for daily excursions in the summer months. Families would arrive complete with servants and baggage and spend the summer season by the sea. Large villas were rented out and new hotels began to appear.



Courtesy of Dunbar &
District History Society



Courtesy of P Smeed

The advantages worked both ways. Local Sabbath Schools, Band of Hope or works outings now enjoyed trips further afield.

Further reading

- Muir, John. The Story of My Boyhood and Youth. Wisconsin; The University of Wisconsin Press, 1965.
- Miller, James. The History of Dunbar. Dunbar; James Downie, 1859.
- Anderson, David. Old Dunbar. Ochiltree; Stenlake Publishing, 2000.
- Pugh, Roy. Swords Loaves and Fishes. Mid Lothian, Balerno; Harlaw Heritage, 2002.

Websites

- John Muir's Birthplace
- Dunbar's John Muir Association
- Dunbar
- SCRAN – access to cultural resources

www.jmbt.org.uk
www.djma.org.uk
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