

Hexham Bridge; transcripts of newspaper reports 1777-78

Note; the *Newcastle Chronicle* for 1777 is missing from the online British Newspaper Archive, and so the two reports for October 1777 have been transcribed by Sue Ward from the files in Local Studies Section, Newcastle City Library.

Newcastle Chronicle 4 Oct 1777, p 4

Alnwick, Sept. 13, 1777

At a Meeting of the Grand Jury of last Michaelmas Sessions, and several other Gentlemen, held here this Day, in Pursuance of an Advertisement for the Purpose of considering of proper Measures to be taken in Consequence of a Memorial presented to the Chairman and Bench of Justices, at the said Sessions held at Alnwick, the Opinions of Mr Dunning and Mr Kitching upon the whole of the Matter were read, as also an Account of a Subscription for supporting the necessary Steps to be taken therein; and after fully considering the Business, it was unanimously resolved, that the Questions submitted to Mr Dunning and Mr Kitching, with their Opinions, should be published in the Newcastle Journal and Chronicle; and that the Opinion of Council be pursued ; and that further Opinions be had ; and that Council be retained for the Purpose of prosecuting the necessary Enquiry herein ; and that another Meeting be had relative thereto, at the White-Swan Inn, Alnwick, on Tuesday the 7th Day of October next, at Ten O'Clock in the Forenoon ; when the Grand Jury again request the Favour of the Company of the Gentlemen of the County.

The following are the Questions submitted to Council, with their several Answers.

Q, What by Law is a properly a County Bridge? And whether the Justices at any of the Sessions in and for a County have any, and what Right to levy Money under the Colour of the common general County Rates, viz. such Bridge and Vagrant Rates or Assessments or otherwise, and to apply the whole, or any Part of the Money raised, for the Purpose of building any new Bridge, where a Bridge hath not within the Memory of Man been built before?

Mr Dunning's Answer, Wherever a Bridge of public Utility is in Want of Repair, and it cannot be shewn that any Person is bound to repair it, it is a County Bridge, i.e. the Inhabitants of the County at large are, by the 22 H. 8. c. 5. To repair it, unless it lies within a City or Town corporate : *But neither the COUNTY at large, nor any individual, can be compelled to make Bridges where none have been before.* The Justices in Session

have, by the 12 G. 2. c. 29. the Power of making *the general County Rate*, and of directing the Applicatoin of it to its *proper Objects*, as also of examining the Treasurer's Accounts, and their Order is a sufficient Discharge to him : *But I conceive, if they direct any Part of it to be laid out in building any new Bridges, it will be a Mis-application.*

Mr Kitching's Answer.----- Justices of the Peace for a County, have not any Right or Authority at any of the Sessions, to levy Money, under any Colour or Pre- tence whatsoever, for building any new or additional public Bridge : the levying of Money for that Purpose cannot be compelled, but by Act of Parliament, for the Power of the Justices with Respect to public bridges, under the several Acts of Parliament, extends no further than the repairing, rebuilding, enlarging, and amending of such Bridges within the Limits of their Commissions, as have been usually, or of Right ought to be, repaired and maintained, by or at the Expence of the County, and that only upon the Presentment or Complaint of the Grand Jury at the General or Quarter Sessions : And I think that such Bridges are properly County Bridges, as being distinguishable from other Bridges within the County, which particular Persons, Places or Districts, ought to repair by Tenure, Prescription, or otherwise : but with this Difference, that the County at large may be liable to repair a public Bridge, built within the Memory of Man by the voluntary Contributions of some particular Persons : yet the Justices, as I apprehend, have not any Right to burthen the County with the Expence of rebuilding such a Bridge, it destroyed by Floods or any other Means, as the County was not under any Obligation at Law, originally to build the same.

Q. If the Justices have not any such Power as in the preceding Query, Have the Grand Jury at any of the Quarter Sessions for the County, or any other Person or Persons interested, any ? And what Right or Means to enforce the Production of the Treasurer's Accounts, as public Records, for ascertaining any Abuses of the Justices in the Instance complained of ? And can the Jury take Cognizance thereof, or of any other Abuses committed by the Justices, for the Purpose of redressing the same ? And what Redress can be had in this Respect, and by whom, and particularly for recovering the Money misapplied ?

Mr Dunning's Answer. --- I do not know that any of the Acts of Parliament respecting this Subject give any Power to the Grand Jury, to enforce the producing of the Treasurer's Accounts, further than by directing them with the Vouchers, to be kept among the Records of

the Sessions. (12 G. 2. c. 29, f. 8) *where they are, of Course public, and any Person may have Access to them. A wilful Misapplication of the Money is, I think, an Abuse of the Discretion trusted to the Justices, and punishable by Information, or Indictment.*

Mr Kitching's Answer.--- I think that the Grand Jury have a Right to enquire into any Misapplication of the County Stock, as being a Matter in which the Inhabitants and others contributing to it are so greatly interested, and consequently to see and examine the Treasurer's Accounts and Vouchers ; for it is scarce conceivable that the Justices should be entrusted with the Raising and Application of the County Stock, without being accountable for their Conduct. The Directions in the Act of the 12th Geo. II for the Treasurer's Acts and Vouchers to be deposited with the Clerk of the Peace, to be kept amongst the Records of the County, subject them to the like Inspection of the Public, as the Records with which they are kept, as to all, except the Justices, who are at Liberty to inspect them, without Fee or Reward. I think, therefore, that it will be adviseable for the Grand Jury to call upon the Treasurer to produce his Accounts and Vouchers, or to deposit them, after the Accounts are passed with the Clerk of the Peace : In Pursuance of the said Act, and upon his Refusal to do either, to present his Conduct to the Justices, at their General or Quarter Sessions, as an Offence in an Officer under their Appointment, and subject to their Orders : and if they should refuse to interfere in the Matter, the Court of King's Bench, upon a proper Application, would, as I apprehend, be induced to grant a Mandamus to compel a Production of the Accounts and Vouchers, and perhaps to punish the Treasurer and Justices, upon an Information, as having offended against the said Act : And if it should appear, upon the Inspection of the Accounts and Vouchers, that the Justices have misapplied considerable Sums out of the County Stock, in building new Bridges out of the Line of their Authority, I think every Individual injured by it may recover against the Treasurer, his Proportion of the Sums so misapplied, if the same can be ascertained ; or the Treasurer, as having a special Property in the Money taken out of his Hands, may maintain an Action against the Justices for the same, as for so much Money had and received for his Use, as a Trustee for the Parties injured, and the Justices will be liable to be punished by Information.

Q. The late Conduct of the Justices in Northumberland being very alarming, the Grand Jury are desirous of keeping them, if possible, within the Bounds of the

Law, by a due Exercise of their own Powers , and therefore desire to know, whether they in any, and what Respects, differ from a Grand Jury at the Assizes, and what Controul the Justices are subject to?

Mr Dunning's Answer. --- I do not know of any Difference as to this Subject, between a Grand Jury at the Assizes, and at the Sessions. The 12 G. 2. c. 29, f. 13 directs, that no Money shall be applied *to the Repair of Bridges*, until a Presentment, made by the Grand Jury, at the Assizes, or *Sessions*, of their Insufficiency, Inconveniency, or Want of Repair.

Mr Kitching's Answer. ---- I think that a Grand Jury, at the General Quarter Sessions, have the like Powers as a Grand Jury at the Assizes for a County, as far as the Powers of the Justices keep Pace with those of a Judge of Assize.

Newcastle Chronicle, 11 Oct 1777,

P 1

Alnwick, Oct. 7, 1777

AT a GENERAL MEETING of the Gentlemen, Freeholders, and Farmers of the County of Northumberland, in Pursuance of published Advertisement. Daniel Craster, Esq in the Chair.

It was resolved, nem.con, that the nine following Gentlemen be a Committee for the Purpose of taking the necessary Steps, and conducting the Prosecution on Behalf of the Freeholders and Farmers of the County.

John Collingwood, of Lillburn, Esq;
Daniel Craster, of Craster, Esq;
Samuel Cook, of Newton, Esq;
George Greive, of Swansfield, Esq;
Edward Wilson, of Hepscot, Esq;
Robert Ogle, of Eglingham, Esq;
Robert Forster, of Rotchwood, Esq;
John Archbold, of Acton, Esq;

That a Subscription be entered into for that Purpose, and that the Money collected be lodged in the Bank of [unreadable] Surtees and Burdon at Newcastle.

That three of the above Gentlemen be a Quorum and empowered to direct the Proceedings.

That no Part of the Money be withdrawn from the Bank, without an Order signed by five or more of the above Committee.

And that every Subscriber be entitled to attend and vote at any Meeting of the Committee.

It was likewise unanimously resolved that the Thanks of this Meeting be given to Samuel Cook, Esq; the Foreman, and the other Gentlemen who composed the Grand Jury at the last Michaelmas Sessions, for

having asserted, with Judgment and Spirit, their Power with which they were invested by the Constitution and for their generous Endeavours to relieve, from the Burthen of unnecessary Taxes, the Freeholders and Farmers of this County.

And that the above Resolutions be inserted in the Newcastle Journal and Chronicle, signed by the Chairman, as an inducement for other Grand Juries to do their Duty in supporting the Rights of the People.

DANIEL CRASTER, Chairman.

p 4

Northumberland

Alnwick Grand Jury Room, Oct. 9, 1777

We, the Foreman and Grand Inquest for the Body of this County, beg Leave to represent to your Worships, that we have read and unanimously approved of a Memorial presented to the Bench by the Grand Jury at the last Michaelmas Sessions, stating the great Expence attending the building of Hexham Bridge, and the heavy Taxes laid upon the County for that Purpose, which we agree with them in thinking illegal and unwarranted : That the Opinion of Mr Denning and Mr Kitching, taken by order of that Grand Jury, having been laid before us, conform us in thinking that the Justices have in that and other Instances exceeded the legal Limits on their Authority : That such a Conduct has been pursued relative to Bridges for some years past, as to become matter of general Complaint to the County.

With every Disposition on our Part to believe, that there has been no wilful misapplication of the public Money, we lament the Necessity which compels us to entertain a doubt of, or in any Respect to call in Question the Conduct of the Magistrates, whose Characters we respect, and whose Office it is our Inclination as well as Resolution to support. In our public Capacity, we have only one clear Line of Duty to pursue : to [unreadable] and, if possible, to remedy public Abuses. which fall within the Cognizance of our Office ; and to assert with Decency but firmness those Rights and Powers, with which we apprehend ourselves invested as a Grand Jury representing the Body of the County.

For these Reasons we find ourselves under the painful Necessity of putting in our Claim to have the Accounts of the County Treasurer laid before us, as hath been always practised heretofore at the Assizes and Quarter Sessions, and never neglected until this Day : A Claim which be cannot but esteem consonant with Reason and that Principle of Check and Controul,

which pervades every Part of our excellent Constitution.

Wanting that Information respecting the Accounts of the last Year, from which alone we can derive any specific Knowledge of the Expenditure of the Public Money, we must content ourselves with representing to your Worships, that notwithstanding the Memorial of a very respectable Grand Jury at the last Michaelmas Sessions, expressing their Doubts, and requesting the Opinion of the Bench on the very important Matter respecting the Propriety and Legality of their Conduct, the building of Hexham Bridge is still carried on, and other Measures, in our Apprehension equally illegal are pursued : to which we request your serious Attention, in a full Confidence that our present Memorial and Application will be maturely weighed; and such Satisfaction given to the County by your Worships, as will obviate all Doubts, and remove every future Cause of Difference.

Thus far we have thought it our indispensable Duty to deliver and *record* our Sentiments of the past and present Proceedings of the Magistracy, again disclaiming every Imputation of unworthy Motives on the Bench, either generally or individually considered.

It is our next Duty to lay before your Worships the Result of our Consultation, representing the Conference held with your Worships in an adjourned Meeting at the White Swan this Morning. – At the same Time that we observe with Satisfaction, that Disposition to put every Matter of Difference between the County and the Bench in a Train of Conciliation, a Disposition so strongly and repeatedly expressed by your Chairman. We lament, that for Want of an earlier Communication, which was sought in vain, manifesting that Desire of an amicable settlement, the Dispute should unfortunately have extended itself beyond the Limits of our Authority.

In our Situation as a Grand Jury, whose Existence is but temporary, your Worships will clearly perceive our Incompetency to fix any Mode of bringing it to a Conclusion. Our good Offices are confined to our individual Capacity. The principal Matter of Contest is now before the County : We submit it, however, to your Worships, whether, as the Causes of Difference are various, and the Claims of the Grand Jury blended with the Doubts of the County at large, there be any Method so Satisfactory as an amicable Appeal to the Court of King's Bench : a Mode of Proceeding which, on our Part, shall readily be adopted ; and which we will chearfully recommend as *Jurors*, or as *Freeholders*, as the surest, and perhaps the only effectual

Termination of the Business.

In Answer to the *unanimous* Proposal of the Justices In their Adjournment of the Sessions this Day, *to give up the point, and relinquish their Pretensions in future to the Power of building new Bridges*, we should rejoice at an Opportunity of closing with that Proposal, were it possible to give any Seecurity to perpetuate the Engagement ; at present, your Worships must be aware of your own Incompetence to insure its Certainty, and of the consequent Futility of such a Promise. --- With the fullest Confidence, therefore, in your Honour, we can by no means stand justified in acceding to a Compact, which may be voided by your Successors, or even by any future Bench of Justices.

To Gawen Ainsley, Esq: Chairman
and the rest of his Majesty's Justices of the Peace in Quarter Session assembled.

Signed ---- George Greive, Foreman

John Collingwood,	Thomas James,
Samuel Cook,	Henry Taylor,
Daniel Craster,	John Story,
Edward Gallon,	William Taylor,
Edward Grey,	Edward Cook,
Robert Ogle,	William Smith,
John Craster,	Robert Forster,
John Archbold,	Edward Anderson,
Robert Carr,	Thomas Ilderton,
Thomas Cook,	

Alnwick, Oct. 10, 1777

At a general adjourned Meeting of the Gentlemen, Freeholders and Farmers of the County of Northumberland.

The late Foreman of the Grand Jury, at the present Michaelmas Sessions, having acquainted this Meeting, that the Grand Jury had *unanimously* approved of, and adopted the Opinion of the Jury at the Michaelmas Sessions, 1776, and had, in Consequence, presented a Memorial on the same Subject to the Justices in Quarter Sessions assembled ; in Answer to which, the Chairman, in the Name of the Bench, had informed the Grand Jury, that on considering the Matter of the Memorial, the Justices present were unanimously of Opinion, that they could not, with Propriety, take upon them to give an Answer to the Jury in a Matter of such Moment, without consulting all the Justices of the County, which should be done at the next General Quarter Sessions of the Peace ; and that in the mean Time, a Copy of the Memorial should be sent to each Magistrate.

This Meeting, therefore, taking into Consideration the said Report,

Resolve unanimously,

That The Committee appointed at the last Meeting take every necessary Step to obtain Information on the several Matters in Question, and to procure subscriptions ; but that no Application is made to the Court of King's Bench, until the Result of each Consultation be known and communicated to a General Meeting.

Resolved,

That the Thanks of this Meeting be given to the Gentlemen, Freeholders and Farmers In GLENDALE, for the spirit and liberality with which they have *voluntarily*, by a large Contribution, supported the Resolutions of the Grand Jury and General Meetings.

Resolved,

That the Gentlemen of the Grand Jury be requested to publish their late Memorial in the Newcastle Journal and Chronicle ONLY, *the printer of the Courant having refused to insert the advertisement of the General Meetings, on Business of the highest Importance to the whole County.*

That the above Resolutions be published in the said two papers ONLY, signed by the Chairman.

DANIEL CRASTER, Chairman

10 January 1778

To the Gentlemen, Freeholders and Farmers of the County of Northumberland

THE Committee for conducting the Contest between the Magistracy and yourselves, relative to their Power of building new Bridges, and other assumed Powers, beg Leave, to remind you, that the Christmas Sessions approach, when the important Matters in Dispute are, agreeable to their Promise, to be taken into Consideration by the bench of Justices. The Committee think it their Duty, therefore, to acquaint you, that they have employed Mr John Wright of Newcastle, as their Solicitor ; and have retained Mr Dunning, Mr Wallace, Mr Lee and Mr Wilson, the Recorder of Berwick, to give Advice, and plead their Cause, should Matters unhappily be not accommodated to the general Satisfaction of the County, at the ensuing Quarter Sessions.

They trust it is unnecessary to observe, that these Measures undertaken for the benefit of the Farmers in particular, are attended with a considerable Expence, and have been carried into Execution on their Behalf, by a few private Gentlemen, at their own Risque, de-

pending upon the general Support of the Country. They have now the peculiar Satisfaction to inform you, that wherever the Subscription has been properly urged, the success has been as general as the Wishes of the People : in Consequence of which, considerable Sums have been paid into the Bank of Messrs Surtees and Burdon.

The Committee acknowledge with Pleasure, the Zeal and Activity of those Gentlemen who have interested themselves in collecting subscriptions : but are astonished to learn, that several very worthy Individuals, who approve highly of the Measures, have been illiberally *deterred* from promoting that Spirit of Enquiry, and the Fair, legal Discussion, which are the only Objects of the Gentlemen who espouse the Cause of the Farmers.

To remove every Difficulty, which may have been thrown in their Way, by Persons who dread nothing so much as a Scrutiny into their Conduct, the Committee desire all those who approve of their Proceedings, but have been *intimidated by false Pretences* from subscribing, to pay in what Sums they may think proper, either in their own Names, or anonymously, to any of their Neighbours appointed to receive subscriptions, or to the Bank of Surtees and Burdon, which will answer every Purpose of bringing the Question to a legal Issue.

The Committee further request all Persons who have undertaken to receive Subscriptions, to lose no Time in collecting and paying them in to the Bank of Surtees and Burdon, that they may know, as soon as possible, what Money is in Hand, and be enabled to proceed with Spirit in this important Undertaking ; and at the same Time, they beg that Gentlemen who have *not* received the CIRCULAR LETTERS from the Committee must not be offended at any supposed Neglect, as it was utterly impossible for them, in this extensive County, to recollect every proper Person, or know who were willing to give their Assistance ; besides that, the Affair was publicly advertised, and understood to be the general Sense of the Country, whose *Interest* it clearly is, to support those Gentlemen, who we, at some Expence, and much Trouble, endeavouring to render them a most essential Service.

The Farmers are particularly desired to recollect, that for three or four Years successively, the Book of Rates was collected no less than SEVEN or EIGHT Times ; and to consider, that in Consequence of the present Opposition, they have very *probably* saved already, in one Year, much more than the Amount of what they may subscribe ; but should the present En-

quiry drop for Want of their Assistance, it may never be again revived, - our Complaints in future become Matter of Triumph, and the former Abuses, and heavy burthens, be renewed and established with redoubled Rigour.

By Order of the Committee,
JOHN COLLINGWOOD, Chairman,
Rothbury, Dec. 18, 1777.

N. B. The Advertisements of the General Meetings and Committee are published in the Newcastle Journal and Chronicle only : the Printer of the Courant having refused to insert the Advertisements of the General Meetings, on business of the highest Importance to the whole County.

Newcastle Chronicle 28 February 1778, transcript

To the GENTLEMEN, FREEHOLDERS and
FARMERS of Northumberland
February 18, 1778

THE COMMITTEE appointed by the GENTLEMEN, FREEHOLDERS and FARMERS of the County, to conduct the late Contest between the Magistracy and them, relative to the Power of building new bridges, where none had been before, and of repairing Bridges, without the Presentment of the Grand Jury, have at Length the Satisfaction of laying before the County the present happy state and Termination of this Transaction.

They have hitherto delayed this Information, to which ever Subscriber is intitled, until the Treaty and Agreement were matured and advanced beyond the Probability of any Dispute or Misunderstanding. At the last Quarter Sessions at Morpeth, several of the Committee, with other respectable Subscribers, attended, to receive the final Determination of the Bench in Answer to the Claims of the County, agreeable to the Promise of the Justices at the Michaelmas Sessions at Alnwick.

The Committee, that their Proceedings might be strictly conformable to Law, and to avoid, if possible, every illiberal and unworthy Reflection, were accompanied in their several Conferences with the Magistrates by Mr Wilson, Recorder of Berwick, whose Abilities, Firmness and Moderation, contributed in the most eminent Degree to bring this painful and unwished-for Contest to a happy Conclusion. — It is but Justice to the Bench to declare that, excepting Mr

William Lowes, who was uncommonly factitious, irritating and peremptory, there appeared the strongest Disposition for Peace, and Desire for the Restoration of Harmony in the County, in every Magistrate present.

The Committee deeming it in the present State of the Business, no less invidious, than ill-judged, to revive former Differences of Opinion, when the important Question is substantially terminated, to the Honour of the County, forbear entering into a minute Discussion of what passed at the long and repeated Conference at Morpeth; - suffice it to say, that the following ORDER *proposed by Mr Wilson*, was agreed to by the Bench, and made an ORDER OF COURT, and is enshrined by an Act now carrying through Parliament by Algernon Percy and Sir William Middleton, the Substance of Which may be seen in the Votes of the House of Commons, Page 187, of the present Sessions :

ORDER

“WHEREAS at the last General Quarter Sessions of the Peace for the County, holden at Alnwick the 8th Day of October last, a Complaint was made to the Court by the Grand Jury, on behalf of themselves, and of several of the principal Gentlemen, Freeholders, and Farmers of this County, that Several considerable Sums of Money had been expended in building new Bridges, where no County Bridges were ever before, and in repairing several bridges within the County, without having been presented by the Grand Jury as the Law directs: and the Court then assembled agree to take such complaint into Consideration ; and whereas a like Complaint hath been again made to the Court, and the time having been fully considered it is ordered that an alphabetical list of all the bridges within this County, repaired at the Expence of the County, be printed : and that for the future, at every General Quarter Sessions of the Peace to be held for this County, one of such Lists be delivered to the Foreman of the Grand Jury, to enable them to know the Number of the County Bridges, and where they are situated ; in order that such Presentments, as the Law requires, may be made respecting the same : And it is also further ordered, that for the future no Part of the Money already raised, and in the Treasurer’s Hands, or that shall be raised or collected pursuant to the Statute of the 12th Geo II. Cap. 29, shall be applied to the erecting any new Bridge, as a County Bridge, within this County, without an express Act of Parliament for that Purpose ; nor that any Bridge or Bridges within this County be rebuilt or repaired until Presentment be made by the Grand Jury at the Assizes or Sessions, of the Insuf-

ficiency, Inconvenience, or Want of Reparation of
 such Bridge or Bridges, save, and except such Bridges,
 the Repairs wherof now are, or hereafter shall be,
 contracted for, pursuant to the said Statute of 12th
 Geo. II, and save, and except such Sum or Sums of Mo-
 ney shall become payable for completing a new
 Bridge now building across the River Tyne at Hex-
 ham : *And in order that the [??] for building the Bridge*
now be proceeded in, and the Legality thereof never [??]
Question, IT IS FURTHER ORDERED, that Appli-
 cation be immediately made to Parliament for an Act
 to enable the Justices of the Peace for this County to
 carry into Execution, and fulfil an Agreement
 entered into by them with Henry Errington Esq being Date
 the Day of 1777 for building a
 Bridge across the River Tyne at Hexham, aforesaid, and
 for making and compleating the necessary Avenues or
 Highways to and from such Bridge.”

The above Order speaks so fully for itself, that the
 Committee will content themselves with adding [??]
 short, but what appears to them, necessary explana-
 tions. The Order of Court, and the subsequent *Act*
of Parliament, without which the former was meer
 waste Paper, justify in the most explicit terms, the Pro-
 priety of the public Complaints, by admitting the Ille-
 gality of those Acts, which have been questioned with
 such Spirit and Perseverance by the County, and esta-
 blish on the broadest and most secure Foundation, the
 Rights of the Inhabitants at large, and the constitu-
 tional Controul of the Grand Jury, not only with Re-
 spect to the enormous and unreasonable Power of
 building *new Bridges*, but the important Right of *repair-*
ing Bridges, the Exercise of which, in a smaller Degree
 indeed, is liable to very great Abuse.

The Committee are aware of an Objection, that
 “ the ALPHABETICAL LIST of the Bridges repaired
 at the Expence of the County “ as mentioned in the
 above Order, leaves an Opening for much Evasion : To
 this they give the following (they trust) satisfactory
 Answer

The alphabetical List is only mentioned in the Or-
 der of Court, and not in the Act of Parliament ; be-
 sides, that the meer Insertion of any Bridge in the
 printed List, by the Clerk of the Peace, can by no
 Means ensure its Reception by the Grand Jury as a
 Bridge which the County is bound to repair ; the Con-
 troul and Power is with them : if the Grand Inquest
 for the County, Men of Character chosen from our-
 selves, and *upon Oath*, can be supposed deliberately to
 injure you and themselves, as well as burthen their
 Posterity with superfluous and unnecessary Expences,

it is impossible for human Ingenuity to provide any remedy against Abuse and Oppression.

The Committee have obtained what they think reasonable and honourable Conditions ; they have guarded as much as possible against a Repetition of past Abuses ; it lies with yourselves to watch with a jealous Eye every future Encroachment, and with the Grand Juries of different Parts of the County to do their Duty and *Refuse* their Sanction to the Repair of any Bridges which appear unnecessary, or may have originally been, within the Memory of Man, contrary to Law, that is, without a *special Act of Parliament* ; - against such Attempts the County should be particularly guarded, as there is too much Reason to fear they will be repeated.

It may likewise be objected by some, that there exists a Variety of Bridges [top of page cut off] overlooked; to which it may be answered, that allowing the Fact the task of Reformation is slow, and at [??] : it is much easier to raise than to obviate Objections. – The Affair of Bridges was confessedly the leading Feature of our Complaints, and upon Examination, has appeared to be an Object of more real Importance and Magnitude than was at first imagined ; as Reason and Candour allowed the Enquiry into that Business has been attended with Success.- Other Matters proved difficult in scrutiny : and it is Justice to add, proved in some Instances to have been exaggerated, and in others, comparatively too trivial, to be blended with the great Question, and must, if introduced, have given a vexatious and illiberal Colour to the Proceedings of the Committee.

No Step or Resolution of the Committee, however, can, or is intended to preclude any future Enquiry into Abuses, which may be found hereafter really to exist in any public Department of the County.

The Committee have only further to add, that the Subscribers, who have, so much to their own Honour, contributed to produce the recent happy and honourable Decision, may rely upon a faithful and exact Detail of the Monies received and disbursed on their Account, as early as Circumstances will admit, and the Bill in Question be conclusively settled and carried into a Law.

The very sensible anonymous Letter from Newcastle containing Remarks on the above, came safe to Hand, where it was addressed, and shall be laid before the Committee at their Meeting this Day. (Saturday the 28th.) The Information and Facts are truly interesting, and the Writer will observe, on *re-perusing* the above Address, and the ORDER, that the Passage al-

luded to, only justifies the Proceedings *according to that Act*. – A letter addressed as before, under the real signature of the Writer, would give great satisfaction.- Without his Permission, the strictest Secrecy shall be Observed.

i Of Ridley Hall, died 1783. He got up the noses of people in Newcastle as well; with a poem being written about him in 1774 after he laid the foundation stone for the Assembly Rooms while the bridge was still unrepaired;

The pious sanction of W L_____s Esq
Engraved on brass, continues to show the profligacy of the age.'

[ii](#) Under the General Highways Act 1773

[iii](#) County Rates Act 1739; it limited the amount that could be collected as a Highway Rate, but not how much could be collected as Bridge Money

[iv](#) Passed as *An act for building a stone bridge across the River Tyne, opposite the town of Hexham, in the county of Northumberland, and for making proper roads and avenues to and from the same.* 1778. The Lit and Phil has 2 copies of the Act, and one of the Bill with emendations in manuscript, in Vol 21 of its Local Acts section, Local Folio N346/1. Lengthy and repetitious, but says exactly how the bridge is designed, and that any dispute about it is to be referred to a Grand Jury.

NORTHUMBERLAND

A Meeting of the Committee for the Purpose of taking the necessary Steps and conducting the Prosecution on Behalf of the Freeholders and Farmers of this County, relative to the Power of the Justices, &c. is to be held at Mr Shotton's, the Phoenix, in Morpeth, on Tuesday the 13th of January inst, at Eleven o'Clock in the Forenoon.

The Committee is open to every Subscriber : and as many of them as conveniently can, are requested to attend.

N. B. The Advertisements of the General Meetings and Committee are published in the Newcastle Journal and Chronicle only : the Printer of the Courant having refused to insert the Advertisements of the General Meetings, on business of the highest Importance to the whole County.

[i](#) The British Newspaper Archive is missing copies of the *Newcastle Chronicle* for 1777, and since the *Courant* was not covering this story, there's a gap in our knowledge. There might be something in the Quarter Sessions Records for Northumberland, at Woodhorn; I will go back there and look when I've done more research and know what I'm looking for.

[ii](#) Lawyer and MP, leader in the movement for 'economical reform' and in particular successfully introduced the motion, 'that the influence of the Crown has increased, is increasing, and ought to be diminished' in the Commons in March 1780

[iii](#) Lawyer and MP, born in Northumberland but now living in Cumberland, appointed Solicitor General in April 1778 and Attorney-General in 1780; in that role, gave advice to Henry Errington about his proposed Act of Parliament

[iv](#) Lawyer from Staindrop in County Durham, became MP in 1782, involved in petitioning movement of 1779 for Parliamentary and administrative reform.

Not yet tracked down; may be a relation of Admiral Lord Collingwood