

The Great Invention | Inventors | John Loudon McAdam (1756 - 1836)

John Loudon McAdam was the son of James McAdam and Susanna Cochrane, the niece of the 7th Earl of Dundonald. John Loudon was the youngest of 10 children, but the only surviving male from the main line of the Waterhead family. His older brother, James was a Capt. in the military and died in the South Seas when John was about 7 or 8 years old.

John Loudon McAdam was born in Ayr, Scotland in Lady Cathcart's house in the Sandgate, on September 21, 1756. The McAdam of Waterhead's residence at that time was Lord Carthcart's house in Ayr until 1760 when the family built a new residence and moved to Lagwyne. The Lagwyne Castle, now in ruins, is located on the outskirts of Carspairn, Scotland and was part of the property on the Waterhead estate. James McAdam had moved the family residence from Waterhead to Lagwyne because it was more accessible.

Shortly after the family moved into the new residence at Lagwyne it burnt to the ground. James and Susanna were away on business in Edinburgh when the Castle burnt down. A fire from the fireplace is said to have started the fire. John Loudon narrowly escaped the fire only to be rescued by the family nurse.

James McAdam did not rebuild the Lagwyne Castle and moved the family to Blairquhan or sometimes called the Whitefoord Castle, near Straiton. He leased the Castle from Sir John Whiteford. Whitefoord Castle since has been demolished and replaced by the present Blairquhan Castle.

James' life style and the mismanagement of his business dealing set him back with many financial losses. His financial empire collapsed with the Bank of Ayr, which he had co-founded. These financial setbacks forced James to sell the

ancient family Waterhead estate. Title to the estate is not clear, but Waterhead ended up being owned by John McAdam of Grimmit who purchased it 21 January 1778.

John Loudon attended Mr. Doick's school at Maybole. When John was 14 years of age, in 1770, his father, James died and was buried in the old kirkyard of Straiton. John Loudon was packed off to New York in the care of his uncle, William MacAdam, a New York merchant and his wife, Ann, daughter of Dirch Dey of New York who had no children. He owned McAdam & Co. who was granted 30,000 acres of land in Middlesex known as the Kilby Grant. John also became a merchant and his business prospered from Boston to Charleston. John was co-owner with Robert Gilmore of Northfork, Virginia of the ship, "General Matthew". This Privateer ship was engaged at the battle of Savannah Harbor, Ft. Sullivan, and at Charleston, South Carolina where it was heavily damaged by the American Forces. John and his uncle, William helped found the New York Chamber of Commerce in New York. John married Gloriana Nicoll. She was the daughter of William Nicoll of Suffolk, New York, descended from Colonel Nicoll. John and Gloriana inherited 1/3 of West Neck on Shelter Island and Blue Point Islip.

When the Revolutionary War came, John along with the other McAdames in New York City adhered to the loyalist side in the Revolution. His uncle, Gilbert was "aide to Camp" to Richard Maitland, Adjutant General of the British forces in America. Richard later married Mary McAdam, an aunt. John's uncle, William was a member of the "Committee of Correspondence of 51". Membership included Samuel Adams and Paul Revere. John Loudon served in the British reserves and was a government contractor engaged in the sale of war prizes arising out of the War. After the war, John and his family were not welcome in America and he returned to Scotland in 1783 with his wife and two children. His property and most of his other assets were confiscated by the new American government. However, he managed to keep enough money to

purchase an estate, Sauchrie near Maybole.

John's association with Admiral Lord Cochrane and the 9th Earl of Dundonald acquired him controlling interest in the iron works and mills that manufactured coal products such as tar for sealing sailing ships. His major business associate was Admiral Keith Stewart. The adoption of copper for sheathing vessels led to a diminution in the use of tar for marine purposes and consequently the industry established by Lord Dundonald, which John Loudon had a major investment in, began to decline and eventually ceased to function.

During this period, John's first known efforts in road building took place when he carried out some experiments with road stone. He constructed a road leading from the Alloway-Maybole highway to his estate. The road eventually became the highway and was still in use in 1936. Here he experimented with various road making techniques, but for 15 years he was Deputy-Lieutenant for Ayrshire. It was not until 1787 that he became a Road Trustee.

In 1794, John was a major in a corps of artillery. He was proud of his commission that was one of the last actually signed by King George III. In 1798, he received a Government appointment at the beginning of the Napoleonic War as agent for the revictualling of the Navy at the western ports. This appointment took him to Falmouth, England. In 1801 his acceptance of the post of surveyor to the Bristol turnpike trustees launched on the great work of his life. He was then 45 years of age. In 1818, he was acting as consulting surveyor to no fewer than 34 Road Trusts.

His 3 sons, one by one gave up their own careers in Scotland, in each case at some financial sacrifice and moved to England to help their father. John's work was held in such high regard that a Parliamentary Committee, reporting in 1819, was unstilted in their praise of him and the efficiency and economy of his method of road maintenance. By the year 1823, the number of Road Trusts

consulting McAdam had risen to nearly seventy. Thirty-four of which were actually managed by the McAdam family. Quinton McAdam of Craigengillan, Quinton McAdam of Waterside, and Alexander McAdam of Grimmet, all John Loudon's cousins are found on the Trustee's list.

John held valid patents on his method of road building that he had developed, undertaken, and built at his own expense. His methods proved so important that his patents were not protected and enforced by the governments, even in England. The term "Macadamized Road" long since has died out. Only the term "Tar-Mac", short for Tar-Macadam used to describe airport runways remains.

Parliament eventually awarded John some payment, but he was never completely compensated for his work or received royalties. Towards the end of his life John was offered knighthood for his work. He turned down the honor due to his age, but passed on the honor to his son. John, against the wishes of his family, had a second marriage to Charlotte, sister of Bishop de Lancy. He died on Nov. 26, 1836 at Moffat and was buried there next to his grandmother's grave.

John's grandfather was James McAdam who married Margaret Reid late in life. When James died, his widow went to live at Dumcrieff, a beautiful place just outside Moffat, Scotland. There she married again a Dr. Johnstone who died in 1766. Georgina, a great granddaughter, wrote she was a very stately woman and never gave up her title of "Lady Waterhead".