

Old Statistical Account - Bothkennar

PARISH OF BOTHKENNAR

(COUNTY AND PRESBYTERY OF STIRLING, SYNOD OF PERTH AND STIRLING)

Rev David Dickson, minister

Situation, Extent, &c. – The writer of this account has not been able to discover the origin of the name Bothkennar. This parish is situated in that track of country commonly called the Carse of Falkirk; is about a mile and a half in length, and nearly of equal breadth. It is bounded on the north by the parish of Airth; on the west, by the parish of Larbert; on the south, by the parishes of Falkirk and Polmont; and on the east, by the river Forth. It seems anciently to have been bounded on the south by the river Carron, but that river having changed its course, now intersects both the parishes of Bothkennar and Falkirk, leaving part of the former on the south, and a small part of the latter upon the north side of it. The parish contains 96 oxgangs of land, which, at the computation of 13 acres each, amounts in whole to 1248; the yearly valuation of which, including cess, feu-duty payable to the family of Marr, and minister's stipend, is 359 L. 12s 6d Scotch. The real rent of the parish cannot be so exactly ascertained, as it may vary according to the value of the ground, or the date of the leases; at a medium, it may be reckoned at least at 2 L. 5s. per acre, which would amount to 2808 L. Sterling; and when the price of grain is high, it may be considerably more.

Soil, Produce, &c. - The soil is mostly of a deep clay, and the land, which is believed to have been anciently covered by the waters of the neighbouring Frith, is, in general very rich, and produces plentiful crops of oats, pease, and beans, barley, wheat, grass, and potatoes. Mr Nimmo, in his history of Stirlingshire, informs us, that as early as the 14th century, (when, in comparison, little improvement had been made in agriculture), the yearly feu duty paid to the Crown, out of the parish of Bothkennar alone, was no less than 26 chalders of victual, besides 6 chalders paid to the Abbey of Cambuskenneth. About that time, or probably at a later period, the price of grain was so very low, that the proprietors of land in the parishes of Airth and Bothkennar, had it in their option, when paying the feu-duty, to pay either a merk Scotch or a boll of wheat. The former wisely chose to pay in money, which they still do; and the latter in grain, which, instead of a merk Scotch, has, for many years past, been equal in value to 20s, 25s, or sometimes even 30s, Sterling. This parish is almost a continued flat; there is scarcely the least rising ground to be observed through the whole of it, and not a stone to be seen, unless brought from other places. Excepting the roads, there is not a spot of ground uncultivated. The method of cultivation, the time of sowing and reaping, the wages of servants, tradesmen, and day-labourers, the prices of coal, grain, and provisions, are in general nearly the same as in the parishes of Airth and Polmont, to the statistical accounts of which the reader is here referred. There are 12 orchards in this parish, the largest of which is about 3 acres in extent. They produce cherries, apples and pears, and, in good fruit seasons, bring the proprietors a plentiful return.

Population, &c. – According to a list of the inhabitants, taken by the present minister in 1783, the number of souls was than about 730; but since that time it has considerably decreased, owing among other causes, to the shipping having been, in a great measure, removed from Carron shore to Grangemouth, on which account, several houses in this parish have been taken down, and others are left without inhabitants. In the year 1793, another list was taken, from which it appears, that there are now only 144 families, and in all about 600 inhabitants, of whom 303 are males, and 297 females; 164 married, and 436 unmarried; among which last, 45 are widowers and widows, and 133 children below 10 years of age. The number of marriages, baptisms, and burials, for the last 10 years, according to the parish register, which, during that time, has been very regularly kept, is as follows:

year	marriages	baptisms	burials
1783	5	21	15
1784	2	23	9

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1785	8	12	7
1786	2	20	9
1787	6	23	10
1788	7	17	16
1789	8	23	10
1790	12	10	9
1791	5	23	7
1792	5	11	15
	60	183 of which 101 males, and 82 females.	107 of which 57 males, and 50 females.

There are 38 farmers, and about 86 servants, 2 masons, 3 wrights, 2 journeymen and apprentices ditto, 3 coopers, 3 weavers, a journeyman ditto, 3 shoemakers, and 1 cobbler, 2 tailors, 6 smiths, 3 innkeepers, 1 baker, and 1 apprentice ditto, 1 barber, 1 excise officer, 8 shipmasters, 6 sailors, 3 carpenters, and 10 day labourers; 1 clergyman, 2 students, and 1 schoolmaster. The people, in general, attend the Established Church; of those who do not, there are about 9 Burghers, an equal number who are connected with the Relief congregation in Falkirk, 8 Antiburghers, 2 Cameronians, and 2 Episcopalians. The inhabitants are, for the most part, sober, industrious, and kindly affectioned one to another, maintaining a decent and becoming respect to the ordinances of religion; whilst, among the few dissenters from the Established Church, there is very little of that narrow bigotted spirit, for which the sectaries in other corners have been too frequently blamed.

Climate, &c. – Notwithstanding the low situation, the climate is uncommonly healthy. It is observed to be even more so than the higher ground in the adjacent parishes. As a proof of its salubrity, among those who have died within the last 10 years, 11 were above 60; 14 above 70; 5, 80 and upwards; and 1 above 90. At present there are living in the parish 23 between 60 and 70; 9, 70 and upwards; and 4 above 80. The most prevalent diseases are rheumatism and hysteric complaints. The former may be owing to many of the houses having only earthen floors; the causes of the latter, we leave to men of medical knowledge to determine. The ague, which about 30 years ago was very frequent, is now scarcely known, which may be attributed partly to the ditches being kept more open, and partly to the different manner of living. The frequent breezes from the Frith may contribute not a little to the health of the inhabitants; and some have supposed, that even the smoke from Carron Work, though in other respects disagreeable, may serve to dispel those noxious vapours, which, in other places, particularly in low countries, are often so prejudicial. Inoculation for the small-pox is still far from being general; but, when practiced, has almost universally been attended with success.

Church, Manse, &c. – The church was rebuilt in a modern form, in the year 1789, and is now a very neat place of worship, sufficient to accommodate 5 or 600 people easily. The manse and office houses are at present repairing at a very considerable expence. The glebe is about 4 acres of very good land. The stipend, partly in money, and partly in victual, is generally about 100L.: Sterling. There have been only 4 presbyterian ministers in this parish since Episcopacy was abolished. The first, viz. Mr Lindsay, afterwards translated to Perth, was settled here in 1721-2; was succeeded by Mr Penman, in 1744; after him, Mr Nimmo, author of the History of Stirlingshire, was ordained in 1765. The present minister was admitted in July 1783. The heritors are 22 in number, of whom only 10 reside within the bounds of the parish. The principal are, Lord Dundas of Aske, Mr Ogilvie of Gairdoch, and the heirs of the late much respected General Thomas Dundas of Carronhall, all of whom are non-resident. The patronage belongs to the family of Airth, who have always exercised that right in a manner that does them the highest honour. The late Mr Graham, who had a particular pleasure in promoting the happiness of those around him, (although not a member of the Established Presbyterian Church), was accustomed to indulge the people with the choice of pastors; by doing so, he obtained just and universal esteem while he lived, and on this account his memory will long be highly respected. If other patrons were of the same disposition, the law of patronage, so long complained of, would cease from being a grievance; and

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instead of that frequent discord and animosity, which are so destructive to the civil and religious interests of our country, peace and harmony would everywhere prevail.

School & Poor – There is only one school in this parish, at which 50 or 60 children are yearly taught English, writing, arithmetic, Latin, Greek, & c. The schoolmaster has a house and small garden. His salary is only 100 merks Scotch, which, together with voluntary contributions from some of the heritors, his school wages, and perquisites as session-clerk, scarcely exceed 20 L. Sterling per annum. It is much to be wished, that, in this age of liberality and improvement, something were done for the encouragement of schoolmasters, many of whom, having families to support, must often be straitened to obtain even the necessities of life. The poor in the parish are not allowed to beg from door to door. The number upon the Session roll is at present 7, who receive a weekly allowance, besides a few who get occasional supply. They are supported by the weekly collections, with the interest of 130 L. Sterling, which together amount to an average, for 10 years past, to 34 l. 10s. yearly. A few poor scholars also have their school wages and books paid from the same fund.

Roads and Improvements – The roads in this parish, which old people remember to have been once scarcely passable, are now in general good, unless a short time during the winter, when the ground is very wet, or when covered with water, owing to the tides and land floods meeting together. Within these few years, a considerable extent of ground has been gained in this parish and neighbourhood from the Frith, which, though defended at a great expence, will soon become a valuable acquisition to its possessors. There is a bridge soon to be built over the river Carron, a little above Grangemouth, and a new road to be carried from thence across this parish, towards Alloa and Stirling, which are likely to be of great advantage to the inhabitants, and will open a nearer and more agreeable communication both to the north and south.