

## PARISH OF SLAMANNAN, OR ST. LAURENCE (COUNTY OF STIRLING, SYNOD OF LOTHIAN AND TWEEDALE, PRESBYTERY OF LINLITHGOW)

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In the year 1470, and reign of James II., it is said, that Lord Livingstone obtained a charter, under the great seal, of the lands of Slamannan. His Lordship's successors, the Earls of Linlithgow, and last of Callander, feued out these lands to different persons, the superiority of which continued in that noble family till the year 1715, when they were forfeited, together with the patronage of the church, and became the property of the crown. But whether the foresaid charter contained a grant of all the lands, or only a part, may be uncertain, as the papers of many of the proprietors bear, that they were feued from Lord Torphichen. And as these lands are all sucken to one mill, and the rest of the lands to another mill, though they are interspersed together, it is probable, that Lord Torphichen once had a right to one half of the lands of Slamannan, and the Earl of Callander to the other.

**Name** — Though this parish bears both the names of Slamannan and St. Laurence, yet the first of these is now universally used. I find the last only used in the old records of session, and in the presentation issued forth by his majesty, who is patron of the church, where the words are, “the church and parish of Slamannan, otherwise St. Laurence;” from which I am apt to think, that St. Laurence was not the name of the parish, but only of the church. It was originally a prebend; and as a great many old places of worship were called by the names of particular saints, this might be called by the name of this saint. There is an excellent spring of water a little to the south-east of the church, which still goes by the name of Laurence Well; but what the origin of the word Slamannan is, like most other proper names, is very uncertain, and merely conjectural. Some say, it derives its origin from the following circumstance. When the Earl of Callander and Linlithgow, to whom it belonged, first sent up his servant to plough part of it, (it being formerly a barren moor), he asked his servant, how it would work; to which he answered, it would *slay man and mare*. Others again suppose, that from its vicinity to the Caledonian Wood, it had often been the scene of battle, where many had been slain. And to strengthen this opinion, there is, upon the south-side of the church, at a little distance, a small hill, which is called Castle Hill, where, they say, anciently stood a castle. There are no remains of it now, only the farm-house upon the west side of it, goes by the same name. And a little to the eastward of this hill, there is another rising ground, where is the vestige of a trench, and which goes by the name of Killhills, because of the number, it is supposed, that were killed there. Besides, there were anciently here, 2 cones of earth, about 50 yards distant from one another, which are supposed to have been raised as monuments of peace, like the 2 at Dunipace; the one of them still stands, and is evidently artificial; the other was levelled, and the church of St. Laurence built upon it. These circumstances, and the names of these places, together with others at no great distance, such as Balcastle, Balquhatstom, &c., give some foundation for the supposition, that there must have been many slain here; and hence, probably the name Slamannan. Others say, that the name is Gaelic, and signifies the Blind Man's Valley, there being a valley upon the north side of the church from E. to W., where the river Avon runs. But as in all the old writings, the word is universally spelt Slamanna, without the last *n*, there appears a great similarity in the two last syllables to the word Dalmeny; and I think it very probable, they may be of the same original. Now, Dr. Robertson, in his account of the parish of Dalmeny, says, that the word Dalmeny signifies black heath; from which I am apt to think, that Slamanna must signify some kind of heath, perhaps brown or grey, or long heath, for the parish hath all originally been covered with heath.

**Situation and Extent** — This parish lies in the shire of Stirling, and is the most southerly parish in it. Nigh the N.W. end of the parish, there is a point where the three shires of Stirling, Dunbarton and Lanark meet; and at the S.W. end, the shires of Stirling and Lanark meet with the shire of Linlithgow.

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It consists of the old parish of Slamannan, and a part annexed from the parish of Falkirk. The original parish of Slamannan is from 4 to 5 miles in length, and from 2 to 3 in breadth, and lies upon the south side of the water of Avon, which anciently separated it from the extensive parish of Falkirk, which lay upon the north of the Avon; but about the year 1730, there was a division made of the parish of Falkirk, when the whole parish of Polmont was taken off it, and also a part of it annexed to the parish of Slamannan. The part annexed to this parish lies immediately upon the north side of the river, and is neatly of the same length with the old parish, and about one mile broad; so that the present parish of Slamannan, including the annexation, will be from 4 to 5 miles in length, and from 3 to 4 in breadth.

**River and Lochs** — The river Avon, which runs through this parish, from W. to E., takes its rise from a loch in the parish of Cumbernauld, called Fanny Side Loch. It immediately receives a considerable addition from a small rivulet which takes its rise from a moss in the East Monkland parish, about 2 miles distant, and which some think is more properly the head of the Avon. Certain it is, there is a farm-house very near that moss, where this rivulet comes from, which is called Avon-Head. There are also 3 lochs in this parish; one the north side of the annexation, called the Ellridge Loch, which supplies a corn mill with water, and falls into the water of Avon; the other two are upon the S.W. side of the old parish, called the little and the great Black Lochs; the one of which, namely the Little Black Loch, runs E., and the other, the great Black loch, which is about half a mile W. from the other, and lies upon the boundaries of this and the East Monkland parish, runs W. It hath lately been made a reservoir to the great canal between the Forth and Clyde, by the run of the water of Calder, by which it is carried into the Monkland canal, and from that, by a cut near Glasgow, conveyed into the large canal. There are some trouts in the water of Avon, and also in the 2 Black Lochs, and some perches and eels; but none, I believe, in the Ellridge Loch.

**Valuation and Rent** — The valuation of the old parish, in the cess-books, is 2349 L. 11s. 7d. Scots, and the annual rent in the year 1771, was estimated at 1040 L. 5s. Sterling. The valuation of the annexation is 1066 L. 13s. 1d. Scots, and the annual rent, in the year 1771 was estimated at 527 L. Sterling. There are, at present, in the parish, 28 residing and 25 non-residing heritors; and in the annexation, 6 residing and 13 non-residing; so that the whole number of heritors is 72. The most of the residing heritors farm their own lands, except a few, who have considerable property; in which case, they let part of it to tenants. And these lands have been in possession of the fame families for many generations, perhaps since first feued out.

**Soil** — The arable lands on each side of the Avon, for about half a mile, are of a light free soil; and, if properly prepared, would produce very good crops, almost of any grain. These are interspersed with haughs and meadows, which are of a rich loamy soil. The haughs produce good crops of oats, and the meadows very good natural grass, which is made into hay, and is excellent feeding for black cattle in winter. Some of these lands are let at 1 L. the acre, but the most of them at half of that. The soil lying farther off the water for about a mile, is of a strong hard clay, and does not produce so good crops as the lands above described. The rent of these kinds may be about 7s. 6d. the acre. The soil in the extremity of the parish is of a very black mossy bottom, and produces bad crops; as the lands lie interspersed amongst mosses, the crops seldom come to perfection. The farmers make most by raising young cattle and by milk, the grass not being fit for fattening them. The 2 first kinds of soil described, may be, and some of it is improved, but the last not capable of much.

The farms here are generally small, few of them being equal to a ploughgate; the most of them only the half, and some not so much. The highest rent of a ploughgate does not exceed 30 L. Sterling. They universally make use of the old Scotch plough, and generally have the one half of their ground tilled, and the other lying in natural grass. They let it lie commonly for 3 years, and then plough it for other 3 years. It is generally milch cows they feed upon their ground, with a few young ones to supply the

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place of the old ones; but there are few or no sheep, the soil being rather wet and mossy, and therefore not so favourable for them. Their wives and daughters, together with a servant, take care of the milk, of which they make a good deal of butter and cheese, and by which the tenants generally pay the most of their rent.

**Produce** — The soil produces pretty good flax, not very fine in quality, but strong and good of its kind, though they seldom raise more of it than is for their own use. There is also some bear raised, but the principal produce is oats. Sometimes they sow grass seeds with their bear; but little of the ground being enclosed, it is much destroyed by the cattle in the winter, when they are allowed to go at large. The want of proper enclosures, with plantations, is a great hindrance to the improvement of the country. Also they lie at a good distance from lime, but not indeed at so great a distance, as that the roads are very bad. They are about 6 or 7 miles from the lime-works of Torphichen or Bathgate, and about the same distance from those of Cumbernauld. Another great obstacle to the regular improvement of the parish is, that a great number of the proprietors occupy their own lands; and though they and their families live very comfortably and independently upon the produce, yet they cannot spare any money to lay out in improvements. However, there are some of them who are both planting and enclosing more of their ground, and making their roads a great deal better. They have, especially of late, made a road through a moss, called Moss Candle, more than a mile in length, between this and Falkirk, which makes the communication much more easy; and the proposed road between Edinburgh and Glasgow, by Bathgate and Airdrie, it is expected, will be of considerable service to this part of the country.

**Population, &c.** — According to Dr. Webster's report, the population in 1755 was 1209. The number of inhabitants in this parish at present is 1010; of whom there are 466 males, and 544 females; and of these there are 263 under 10 years of age; 255 between 10 and 20; 317 between 20 and 50; 126 between 50 and 70; 37 between 70 and 80; and 2 above 80. There are 233 families, including single persons who keep houses by themselves; 312 married persons; 6 bachelors, or unmarried men; and 20 unmarried women above 40 years of age; there are also 17 widowers and 42 widows. The inhabitants of the annexation were always considered to be nearly equal to one half of the old parish; at present, however, they are a great deal less, being only 272, and the old parish being 738. This is owing chiefly to some of the farms in the annexation being of late purchased by Mr. Forbes of Callander, which are lying in grass, and the houses uninhabited.— Since April 1788, there have been about 139 births, and 47 marriages. There has been no regular register of the deaths kept; but, by comparing the roll of the present year with the one taken up in 1788, I find there are about 70 who have died since that time. Upon an average, therefore, the births each year may be about 32; the marriages 10; and the burials 18.— There are no manufactures carried on in this parish, nor is there any village in it; the few houses which are near the church not deserving that name. The most of the inhabitants are farmers, except a few employed in the other necessary businesses of life; such as weavers, tailors, smiths, &c. But these are only employed in these branches by the inhabitants of the parish; and therefore there are only such a number of them as are sufficient for the parish. There are about 4 smiths, 10 masons and joiners, 12 weavers, 12 shoemakers, 3 tailors, 3 millers, and 1 lint-miller, 3 flax-dressers, 3 public-houses, and a few coal-hewers. These last are employed by the Carron Company, and are sometimes more numerous than at other times. There were more than 20 of them about 2 years ago, and at present there are not more than 5. There is 1 clergyman and 1 school-master; but no surgeon nor writer. There are about 15 heads of families connected with the Secession, making in all, with their families, about 78 persons, but many of their families attend upon the parish church.

(The wages of an ordinary ploughman are 8 L. in the year, and some of them 10 L. They have risen very considerably of late. A woman servant 3 L. in the year, and as much ground as sows half a peck of lintseed in the summer half year. A labouring man used to be hired at 6d a day, and his meat; but now they ask 8d. As there is no market-town in the parish, the prices of vivres is always regulated by Falkirk, which is the nearest market-town, and about 5 miles distant. There is plenty of fuel in the parish, both coal and peat; but peat is most generally used, as every person hath commonly a right to some moss connected with the land he possesses, or pays only 1s. for as many as he can cast in a day.

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The Carron Company, who work some pits in the parish, supply the country with all the coal they need, though most of the heritors have coal in their own lands.)

**Poor** - The average number of poor upon the session roll is about 12. They are supplied by the collections made on Sunday, together with the interest of a small fund of about 150 L., without any assessment. They generally get from 2s. to 4s. the month, and one 5s. Sometimes also families, when they are in distress, receive occasional supplies as they need. But none of those who receive from the session are allowed to beg.

**Diseases** — The most common disease I have observed since I came to this parish, appears to be the consumption, occasioned not so much by the constitution of the inhabitants, as by the coldness and dampness of the houses. The bad state of the houses often brings on colds upon those that are young and tender, which, if not speedily removed, ends in a consumption. It is not unfrequent also for old people, when confined much to their houses, and unable to take that exercise which is proper for the circulation of the blood, to be troubled with great swellings in their legs; and not a few have died of the dropsy, which, it is probable, also originates from the same cause. What strengthens this opinion, is, that these complaints are more frequent among the lower class of the inhabitants, the few families who are in a superior station, and have comfortable houses, not being subject to them. Otherwise the people are generally pretty healthy and I have observed fewer fevers here than in the neighbouring parishes.

**Church, Stipend, &c.** — The walls of the church were rebuilt about the year 1753; but the old seating was still continued, which indeed is very old; many seats being marked with the year 1632, and some of them even so far back as the year 1556. It stands, therefore, in much need of being renewed. When the annexation was joined to this parish, they were allowed to build an aisle, for their own accommodation, upon the N. side of the church, at their own expense, and to uphold it for 20 years; and the heritors of Slamannan were bound to uphold the old church for the same number of years; after which they were all to bear any expense upon the church and church-yard walls, in proportion to their valuations. But as they were otherwise annexed only *quoad sacra*, they pay no part of the minister's stipend. The King is patron. The stipend is 50 L. Sterling in money, 2 chalders of meal, and 1 chalders of bear, a manse and glebe of about 15 acres. There is also 3 L. 6s. 8d. for furnishing communion elements, together with the interest of 500 merks, which is in the hands of the session. The manse was built more than 30 years ago, since which time it hath not only been frequently repaired, but had a considerable addition made to it.