

PARISH OF AIRTH
PRESBYTERY OF STIRLING, SYNOD OF PERTH AND STIRLING
THE REV. JOHN MACGACHEN, MINISTER.

I -TOPOGRAPHY AND NATURAL HISTORY.

Name - It is generally supposed that the word Airth is derived from the Gaelic *ard* or *ardhe*; signifying a hill; and if this supposition be correct, it furnishes strong grounds for the opinion, that the parish, which for the most part presents a complete level, owes its name to what is well known by the appellation of the Hill of Airth.

Extent, &c - The extent of the parish, from north to south, may be estimated at fully 6½ miles in length; and in breadth, from east to west, at about 3½ miles; the whole comprehending a surface of 30 square miles. It is bounded on the north by the Forth; on the east, by the same river and the parish of Bothkennar; on the south, by the parishes of Bothkennar and Larbert; and on the west, by the parish of St Ninians. Its figure is somewhat irregular, and may be considered as approximating nearer to a parallelogram than to any other. With the exception of the Hill of Airth, and the rising grounds of Dunmore Park, the parish, as has been already hinted, forms an entire plain. And, although there are no records for enabling us to fix the precise period, yet, from the strata of shells to be found at no great depth throughout the whole of the low grounds, it may be reasonably inferred that these once formed part of the bed of the river, and that vessels were to be seen spreading their white sails to the wind, where the husbandman now pursues his peaceful occupations. The Hill of Airth is of a circular form, and may be computed in height at about 100 feet above low water-mark at spring tides. On its south-east extremity, stands Airth Castle, the seat of William Graham Stirling, Esq.; nor is it too much to say, that, from every part of it, the admirer of nature may luxuriate on scenes exquisitely picturesque and beautiful. The grounds of Dunmore Park, the seat of the Earl of Dunmore, may be reckoned at about 70 or 75 feet above low water-mark. They are richly wooded; and, together with the mansion-house, present an enchanting prospect to the steam-boat traveller between Newhaven and Alloa. The sea coast, forming the boundary of the parish to the north and east, may be said to extend in length 8½ miles; and though there are in a manner three harbours, Newmiln, Airth, and Dunmore, yet there are none of them sufficiently important to require particular notice.

Hydrography - There are several springs said to be medicinal; one of which is known by the name of the Lady Well; a name which it is generally supposed to have received in times of Popery, from being used to furnish holy water for the abbacy, which is said to have then existed at Airth, in connection with Holyrood. The only river in the parish is one of no note, called the Pow. It takes its rise in the adjacent parish of St Ninians, and empties itself into the Forth, a little above Kincardine Ferry. It is crossed by several small bridges, one of which is still known by the name of the Abbey Town Bridge.

Geology - All the rocks in the parish are of the coal formation, and form a part of the great coal-field of Scotland. The line of dip varies. Next to the Forth, it is southerly; but in the south part of the parish, it is towards the north-east, which is the general dip of the surrounding coal-fields. Veins and fissures cut across the strata, and have the effect of dislocating them; throwing the corresponding strata either up or down, according to the angle which the vein makes with the strata. The declination which the line of dip makes with the horizon, is generally about one foot in six. The rocks are sandstones, of various shades of yellow, grey, and approaching to white; some of them of excessive hardness. Some of the beds are several fathoms thick. Argillaceous rock varies in thickness from an inch to two feet. This rock is generally the bed on which the coals rest, and is suitable for making fire-brick for furnaces. Sand and clay are variously mixed in these beds. Argillaceous ironstone is found in the argillaceous schistus in thin beds or bands of a few inches thick; also in detached balls. This ironstone yields about 30 per cent. of iron. The greater proportion of the parish is composed of alluvial deposits from the Forth; the lower part of which is dark-coloured soft clay or sludge, in which

New Statistical Account - Airth

are found varieties of sea-shells, corresponding with those which are found at Leith. All the soils lie on rocks of the coal formation. The only mines are those of coal; but at present, there is no colliery establishment in the parish. There was an extensive one near the village of Dunmore, from which coals were exported, both coastwise and over seas; but, being nearly exhausted, it was given up in the year 1811. It is said, and there is every reason to believe it to have been the case, that, at a very remote period, coals were wrought at no great distance from Airth Castle; and it is supposed, that there is still a considerable quantity of coal to be found, both in the south and north-east parts of the parish.

Zoology - Badgers, not many years ago, were common in Dunmore Wood; but they have now entirely disappeared. This fact is ascribed to an assault which certain mischievous individuals made upon them one night with dogs, whereby either the whole of them were destroyed, or such dreadful havoc made amongst them, that those which escaped the general carnage consulted their safety by flight. Certain it is, that the badger, once so common, is now never to be seen.

Woods - Various plantations, consisting of all kinds of hardwood, larch, Scotch fir, birch, &c. have been made, chiefly on the grounds of Airth and Dunmore Park, all of which are in a thriving condition. On the former of these grounds, the castle is surrounded by trees of every description, very majestic, and of very ancient date; but the willow trees, which are scattered in all directions, deserve to be peculiarly noticed, as surpassing, both in nature and beauty, most of the same species to be found either in Scotland or England. Many more trees of the same sort have been planted by the present active proprietor, chiefly in hedgerows; by the rapid growth of which, in the course of a few years, the estate has been greatly beautified, and its value will be greatly increased. The trees of Dunmore Park are very numerous and valuable. The oak and beech trees especially are most magnificent, and, being profusely scattered throughout the park, impart to it an air of singular grandeur and beauty. There is likewise a wood of considerable extent, through which the principal approach to the mansion-house is made, abounding with all kinds of forest trees, many of them of stately dimensions; amongst which, however, the beech and Scotch fir occupy a conspicuous place. Of the latter kind is one, close to the approach, so remarkable as to have attracted the attention of an eminent London artist, who has given it a place in a set of engravings of the most striking trees to be found in Scotland, lately published. On measurement, it was found to contain, excluding all limbs not six inches in the side, 290 cubic feet.

II - CIVIL HISTORY

As an historical incident of some importance, it may be mentioned, that, in 1817, when cutting the present line of road which leads from Airth to Stirling, the workmen came on the skeleton of a whale. The skeleton was found to the north of the mansion house of Dunmore Park, and upwards of a quarter of a mile from the bank of the river. It was traced to the extent of 75 feet.

Land-owners - The chief land-owners of the parish are, The Earl of Dunmore; William Graham Stirling, Esq. of Airth; Sir A. Maitland Gibson of Kersie; James Bruce, Esq. of Powfoulis; John Burn Murdoch, Esq. of Newck, &c.

Parochial Registers - There is a register of births, deaths, and marriages from 16th September 1660, to 9th November 1669. From this date there is none till 15th February 1670, when it again commences, and is carried on to 4th September 1720, when there is another blank down to 4th July 1732; from which period, it is continued, with tolerable accuracy, down to the present.

Modern Buildings - The principal modern buildings in the parish are, an elegant front addition to Airth Castle, the mansion-house of Dunmore Park, beautifully finished, and of Gothic architecture; the houses of Newck and Powfoulis; the church, a very handsome little structure, containing accommodation for 800 sitters; and the manse, seated on a rising ground at a little distance from the

village. All of these tend not a little to adorn the scenery on the south banks of the Forth, between Kincardine and Alloa.

III - POPULATION

The population of the parish has decreased considerably, within the last thirty years, from two causes, viz. from the common practice of throwing two or three small farms into one; but chiefly, from the Dunmore colliery having been given up. There are two villages, Airth and Dunmore. The population of the former is 850; and of the latter, 246. Population in the country, 754.

Average of births for the last seven years	30
Deaths	29
Marriages	12
Number of unmarried men, bachelors, and widowers upwards of 50 years of age	75
women upwards of 45 years of age	185
Average number of children in each family	4

One nobleman is resident in the parish, viz. the Earl of Dunmore, and three or four families of independent fortune. By far the greater proportion of heritors are non-resident. Proprietors of land in the parish, of the yearly average of L.50 and upwards, are thirteen in number.

IV - INDUSTRY

Agriculture - The number of acres, standard imperial measure, in the parish is 16,400, almost constantly in tillage. Saving the Dunmore parks, extending to about 200 acres, and the lawn surrounding Airth Castle, consisting of 70 acres, there is little or no pasture. There are between 300 and 400 acres of moss, some of it to the depth of 16 feet, covering ground of most excellent quality. Part of the moss is covered with a thriving plantation, whilst by far the greater part of it is in the hands of tenants, or, as they are called, Moss Lairds, who, by dint of hard labour, are gradually removing it. They are paid for the land when cleared at the rate of L.24 per imperial acre; whilst the land so cleared, is measured off once every four years, and a rent exacted for it, amounting to about L.2 per acre. The number of acres under wood in the parish may be estimated at about 160. All kinds of hard-wood are planted, and every attention is paid to thinning, felling, pruning, &c.

Rent of Land - The average rent of arable land, per imperial acre, is about L.3.

Wages, &c - Farm-servants receive from L.7 to L.10 in the half year, with board; women employed in several departments of farm labour, from L.2, 10s. to L.3, with board; labourers, 10s. per week, summer and winter. A cart thoroughly finished costs L.10, a plough, L.3, 3s.; a pair of harrows, L.1. Mason's wages per day are 2s. 6d.; a carpenter's the same; a smith's, 3s.

Husbandry - The general character of the husbandry has been very much improved; and now, it may, without exaggeration, be said to equal that of any other part of Scotland. No less than 150 imperial acres have been added to the Dunmore estate, by land taken from the sea, within the last fifty years; and to the Airth estate no fewer than 185, within little more than the same period. The land is of the very first quality. The embankments by which it is defended from the water, are composed of mud and turf, some of them with stone facings. Draining, particularly wedge-draining, has been carried on to a very great extent, more than one-half of the parish having been so drained, within the last ten years. This, in Carse land, may be considered the very basis of agricultural improvement. The expense is considerable, but the tenant is assisted by the proprietor.

The general duration of leases is nineteen years. Farm-buildings are, upon the whole, indifferent.

Quarries - There is abundance of sandstone quarries; nothing peculiar in the mode of working them.

New Statistical Account - Airth

Fishery - No fishery in the parish of any importance. The salmon-fishing, however, such as it is, and which is carried on by means of staff-nets, commences in the month of July, and terminates at the period prescribed by the Act of Parliament, A small rent is exacted by the proprietors, and the produce is either sold to the neighbouring families, or conveyed by the steam-boats, to the Edinburgh market.

Produce - The average produce of grain of all kinds may be estimated at about 6 bolls per imperial acre. The culture of potatoes, turnips, cabbages, &c. in the fields, is exceedingly limited. The average crop of hay per imperial acre is 200 stone. Produce of gardens and orchards is, in general, very abundant. The thinning of the plantations rarely amounts to more than what is required for paling. Total yearly value of raw produce raised in the parish is about L.100,000.

Weaving is the only species of manufacture carried on, and that to a small extent.

There are only five registered vessels belonging to the parish.

V - PAROCHIAL ECONOMY

Market-Town, &c - Falkirk is the nearest market-town, distant six miles. There are two villages, Airth and Dunmore. The length of the turnpike roads in the parish, is about eight miles. Two public carriages pass through the parish to Glasgow, viz. the Alloa coach daily, and the Kirkcaldy coach, three times a week.

Ecclesiastical State - The situation of the parish church is centrical, being about three miles and a half distant from the northern extremity of the parish, and nearly as much from the southern. It was first opened for public worship on 20th February 1820, and consequently it is in excellent repair. It is built for the accommodation of 800 individuals. The sittings are all free, the tenants being accommodated by their respective landlords, and about 60 sittings set apart for the poor. The manse was finished in 1815. The glebe, including the site of the manse and garden, is upwards of 10 acres in extent. The stipend is 18 chalders of victual, half barley, half meal, payable by the highest fairs of the county; and L8, 6s. 8d. for communion elements.

There is a Burgher meeting-house in the parish. The minister is paid from the seat rents and collections. Stipend allowed, about L.100.

The number of families attending the Established Church may be estimated at 300; number of individuals, exclusive of children, 1350. Families attending meeting-house about 90; individuals above twelve years of age, 201. Average number of communicants in the Establishment, 400.

There are Societies in the parish for religious purposes, and the amount of their contributions may average L.20 per annum.

Education - There are the parish school, and two unendowed schools. The salary of the parochial schoolmaster is the maximum; the fees, 3s. for reading per quarter; 3s. 6d. for reading and writing; 4s. for arithmetic ; 6s. for Latin; and one guinea for a course of book-keeping. The schoolmaster has an excellent house, neatly built, and containing far more than the legal accommodation. The general expense of education may be stated to be from 10s. to 20s. per annum. There are few or none above fifteen years of age who cannot both read and write. The people in general feel the benefits of education. The parish school is conveniently situated for all.

Library - There is a circulating library.

Societies - Two friendly Societies have been established - the one, denominated the Weaver's Society, having been in existence upwards of fifty years, and chiefly designed to defray the expenses incurred, when a death takes place in any family connected with it; and the other, the Dead-fund Society, established for a similar purpose.

Savings Banks - A Savings Bank for the parish and vicinity was established in 1821. The sums invested yearly have amounted to L. 100 or L. 150; and the sums withdrawn, to about L. 50.

New Statistical Account - Airth

Poor and Parochial Funds - There are upwards of 30 persons who receive parochial aid, at the rate of about 1s. per week, and upwards of 40 who receive it occasionally. The annual amount of collections made for their relief at the church door, including an extraordinary collection made on the first Sabbath of the year, may amount to about L. 40; and to this sum is added, for the same purpose, the interest of L. 360, bequeathed by different individuals. There is, besides, an annual assessment laid upon the heritors, amounting to upwards of L. 50. Out of these funds, however, are paid precentor's salary, beadle's salary, salary of synod-clerk, presbytery-clerk, presbytery-officer, and session-clerk. It rarely happens that any indisposition to receive parochial aid is manifested.

Fairs - There is an annual fair on the last Tuesday of July, chiefly for the purpose of hiring shearers.

Alehouses - There are 10 or 11 alehouses in the parish, and there is every reason to suppose that they tend to injure the morals of the people.

MISCELLANEOUS OBSERVATIONS

The most striking variations betwixt the present state of the parish, and that which existed at the time of the last Statistical Account, are, - the decrease of the population, which was then reckoned at 2350, and now at 1850; the number of buildings which have been completed; the immense improvements which have been made in agriculture; and the improvements, scarcely inferior, which have been made on the state of the roads. The system of husbandry vies, in point of excellence, with what is carried on in any district of Scotland, so that, in this respect, the parish may be considered as not susceptible of improvement.

Revised April 1841.