

PARISH OF MUIRAVONSIDE.

PRESBYTERY OF LINLITHGOW, SYNOD OF LOTHIAN AND TWEEDDALE.

THE REV. JAMES McFARLAN, MINISTER.

I - TOPOGRAPHY AND NATURAL HISTORY

Name - The name is commonly pronounced and generally written in ancient records, *Moranside*, and is derived, doubtless, from the position of the parish on the river Avon, and its uncultivated aspect in former times. Our silver communion cups, however, probably presented to the parish by the Earl of Callendar, and Lord of Almond, are said, in 1676, to belong to the Church of Almond: this, together with a tradition, that the minister once lived at Almond Castle, which is not far from the church, makes it probable that the chaplain of the castle, having assumed the spiritual superintendence of the district, got it erected into a separate parish, as it is repeatedly mentioned among the patronages of the Earls of Callendar and Linlithgow, as anciently forming part of the parish of Falkirk.

Extent and Boundaries - The length of the parish is about seven miles: its irregular breadth may average two. The river Avon descending towards the north-east, till it turns to the north and west, not far from Linlithgow bridge, bounds its extreme length on the south-east, and forms the border of its breadth on the north-east, separating it from the parishes of Slamannan, Torphichen, Linlithgow, and Borrowstounness, till it meets with the rivulets which form its less apparent division from Polmont and Slamannan on the north-west and west.

Topographical Appearances - Part of that dreary table-land which stretches across the island between the Clyde and the Forth is found on its extreme west, -while it occupies five miles of its length in descending eastward through ever-varying ridges towards the rich fields of Lothian and the luxuriant Carse of the Forth. These heights are, for the most part, crested with plantations, and embosom well-dressed fields.

Although none of them exceed the elevation of 400 feet above the sea, or of 150 from their own base, yet the remotest Grampians are seen from many points, - the towers of Stirling, Clackmannan, and Linlithgow, the shores of the Forth and the glens of the Devon. On the whole, its ever-varying surface, its widespread view of frith and plain, of mountain, wood, and tower, render its aspect unusually interesting and cheerful.

Hydrography - In the clay soil, which occupies two-thirds of this parish, springs are deficient, and the inhabitants are dependent on water of an inferior description, taken from ponds or hollows on the surface. Many springs in the mosses are so strongly impregnated with iron, that they speedily choke their outlets with red ochre. In the gravel soils, perennial springs are plentiful and strong, sometimes impregnated with minerals, rendering them less useful for household purposes, -an inconvenience rather increased than diminished by boiling. As the parish forms an irregular ridge between the river Avon and the Carse of the Forth, its proper streams are necessarily small, such as the Hollock, the Mannel, and the Sandyford burns.

The river Avon forms the most remarkable natural feature of the parish, which it bounds for nine miles, finding the flood-mark of the Forth about two miles below it. This stream is dull, sluggish, and swampy near the source, reserving its rapids and its foam for the sport of that maturer strength in which he visits us. The first symptom of this disposition is shown on its meeting with a mass of white sandstone at Hillend. The course then becomes more gentle, till it enters among rocks mouldering under the greyness of age, presenting an ever-changing outline, crested with heather and overhanging birch, - a scene befitting rather the remotest Highlands than the border of the Lothians. Still lower, where the flank of the Bathgate hills is cut off by the river between the castle of Carrubber and Muiravonside House, the banks, precipitous and wooded, are reared nearly 200 feet above the stream,

till they gradually expand with that valley crossed by the towering aqueduct which leads the waters of the Union Canal towards their destination.

Scenes still more precipitous and inaccessible are to be found on the Avon, as it bursts through the high-ground of Kinneil into the alluvial flatness of the Carse.

All the rock exposed on its course is sandstone, sometimes coarse, sometimes fine-grained, at others, in thin seams, much stained with the oxide of iron, - excepting that about Muiravonside House, which seems a large detachment of the same greenstone rock that forms the crest of Cockle Rue, about a mile to the south, and three veins of trap rock, one at Redford, the others on either side of Linlithgow bridge. Away from the banks of the Avon, there are only four detached spots where rock is apparent, and its character will be better understood when we consider the minerals of the parish.

The alluvial deposits to the north-east of the canal are, sand, gravel, peat, and marl. The contortions in the sand strata are endless; and such as are fond of theories might have a new one at every fathom, or oftener, if need be, and leave much unaccounted for, after all. The variety of surface in the gravel district is quite remarkable: it appears in mounds and hillocks of every shape and direction; sometimes inclosing extensive hollows; then a considerable thickness of marl, and over that, moss. In the midst of these deposits, was found a fine specimen of the ancient elk, a horn of which is now deposited in the College Museum of Edinburgh.

To the south-west of the Canal, the whole subsoil is clay, of the stiffest texture. It has lately been trenched along five miles of its length by the Slamannan Railway, in some places, to the depth of forty feet, and exhibits very little variety, - the boulder-stones and dispersed gravel being, with few exceptions, ordinary greenstone. Rock is scarcely ever found; if at all, it is of freestone.

Soil.- The soil of the eastern district is light and gravelly, encumbered with many stones, but well inclosed and cultivated; of the west, cold and wet, excepting by the river side. Much of it is still undrained, unsheltered, uninclosed, though generally under the plough.

Quarries - Quarries of fine-grained blue whinstone, presenting occasionally a vertical columnar fracture, are frequent; and there are two quarries of excellent freestone; that of Manuelrig, extensively wrought, having vertical fissures filled with the finest blue clay, and occasional specimens of petrified equisetum; and that of Haining having a fracture resembling marble; perhaps the finest grained and most compact specimen of sandstone that can possibly be found, retaining its angles and chisel-marks unchanged by the vicissitudes of centuries.*

(* A seam of limestone, nine feet thick, has been lately found by Mr Stirling of Muiravonside, at the foot of the bank below the canal aqueduct, promising abundant supply.)

Coal is now wrought only at Stanrig and Craigend; but the following strata, excepting only the uppermost coal, have been lately ascertained to prevail over the western half of the parish:-

1st, from 5 fathoms to 10 of surface, consisting of stiff clay or rock; 2d, from 4 feet to 5, fine coal; 3d, 33 fathoms of rock strata and thin seams of coal; 4th, from 2 feet 8 inches to 3 feet of fine hard coal; 5th 14 fathoms of rock strata and one small seam of coal intervening; 6th, from 2 feet 6 inches to 3 feet, very fine soft coal; 7th, 23 fathoms of rock strata and various thin seams of coal; 8th, 1 foot 6 inches blaise or bituminous shale, containing three or four bands of ironstone, from 1 to 3 inches thick - and, 4 feet inferior coal, with frequent balls of iron; 9th, 5½ fathoms white rock; 10th, from 3 feet to 4, inferior coal; 11th, 9 fathoms rock strata and various thin seams of coal, and a good band of ironstone, 10 feet above the next coal; 12th, from 1½ foot to 3, Middlerig coal; 13th, 5 fathoms white rock; 14th, 2½ feet of fine coal bored, but not yet seen; 15th, 17 fathoms white freestone, with great quantities of water, some of the stone exceedingly hard and difficult to bore. Of these, the lower strata are the widest spread, some of them having been found six miles to the southward. The dip declines gently towards east-north-east, in which direction the upper seams fall off, in consequence of the dip of the surface and a great up-dike to the north-east; and no good coal has yet been found in that direction. The uppermost coal is of partial extent, even in the richest mineral district, being found to extend only about 30 yards round the upper pit at Stanrig, when it suddenly fails; it has been found, by boring, in another part of the parish, but not to any great extent. The next seam was the only coal anciently wrought in the lands of Parkhall and Craigend, with pits about 30 feet apart, to which it was conveyed from hand to hand beneath. Some of the under seams of coal have been wrought in the

lands of Muiravonside, and these workings have lately been renewed to a considerable extent. But the troubles or whinstone-dikes in this coal-field deserve attention. The northern or universal dike passes out of the parish at Rumford, from the south-east towards Shieldhill on the north-west, cutting off the whole upper seams of coal from the lower country, between Avon and Carron Rivers, - the toils of the borers being spent in vain on a mass of unfathomable sandstone. The second is parallel, nearly a mile to the south, affording good whinstone quarries at Craigend and Craigmad. The third occurs about a mile still further south, being very apparent at the Greencraig of Drumbroider; and still further south, there are appearances of a fourth, whose bearings are not yet known. All these dikes send off lateral spurs, throwing the perplexed strata sometimes up, sometimes down, to the extent of 15 or 20 fathoms, and throwing out the upper seams of coal in many places.

The iron wrought by the Carron Company near Maudiston is of the finest, but dispersed over a considerable bulk of ore. Considerable quantities of iron have been wrought in the lands adjoining to Maudiston; and there can be no doubt that a very great breadth of valuable ironstone remains to be wrought in the parish; but unfortunately the coal under the ironstone is so very inferior in quality, that it is quite unsaleable at present.

The only foul air known in the coal-pits is choke-damp or carbonic acid gas. It rises most when the barometer falls. On the night of the 27th November 1838, when the Tiviot and other streams disappeared from their channels, the rush of this air into the coal-pits was greater than the oldest miners ever knew of in this district.*

(* I beg to express my obligation to William Johnstone, Esq. of Meadowbank for his obliging communication, regarding the coal strata of the parish.)

Zoology - In no quarter are the blackbird and the thrush more numerous, or the chorus of birds of song more full than, in the woods of Almond; neither are the daw, the magpie, and the jay awanting. Foxes, also, are supposed to live in numbers near us.

Botany - The whin, the broom, the wild-rose, and the honeysuckle were the great possessors of our eastern soil, about half a century ago, when they yielded to the improving skill of the late Mr Forbes of Callendar, in whose ample farm roads they still abound. Such a thicket was the country then, that, when cattle were once turned out, it was no easy matter to trace them in their wanderings; but the example of that landlord, and access to Edinburgh manure by the Canal, have entirely changed the botanical aspect of the parish.

II - CIVIL HISTORY

In several returns of the earldom of Linlithgow, which were made in the seventeenth century, this parish is reckoned among its patronages, and it is declared in ancient times to have been annexed to the parish of Falkirk. The date of disjunction is unknown; but the names of Bruce, Urie, Campbell, Bennet, Boyd, Bertram, and Macall, ministers, predecessors in the church of Moranside, from 1660 till 1834, attest its independent existence throughout the greater part of Protestant times. It is named a separate parish in 1606, the date of the oldest presbytery record.

The origin of the most ancient remains in the parish is involved in deep obscurity. They consist of a series of fortified eminences, extending from Harlelaw, near Easter Manuel, by Castlehill, to Sight Hill. The last two present a steep face of about 150 feet in height to the valley of the Avon, upon which a triple trench had been formed, presenting now the appearance of three parallel roads towards the north-east, as if the attack were expected from that quarter. Whether they were raised by the original Celtic inhabitants against Danish invaders from the Lothians, (* Chalmer's Caledonia) or to retard the advance of the Romans or the Scots towards Camelon, long defended against both, (~ Holinshed) it is impossible now to determine with any certainty. The quantity of stone-coffins found at Linlithgow Bridge, Castle Hill, Sight Hill, and Brakes, on the flanks and in the rear of these defences, leave no doubt that the place was one of carnage. It is not believed that any remains decidedly Roman have been found nearer than Justing Haugh, half a mile to the eastward of Avon.

At Ballenbriech, on the Avon, three miles to the westward of the parish church, there are ruins, as tradition says, of a Popish chapel. Those of Manuel are sufficiently known to have belonged to a convent of Cistercian nuns, founded by Malcolm IV in 1156, consecrated to the Virgin; yet the name seems to indicate a prior settlement by the Culdees, to whom the name Emanuel was dear. Its revenues were increased by succeeding sovereigns, and in 1292, the prioress, Christiana, and in 1296, her successor, Alice, swore fealty to Edward I at Linlithgow.

The history of the Castle of Almond is more obscure. It was anciently known by the name of Haining, or more rarely Manuel, and seems to have owed its origin to the Crawfurds of Haining, a family of note in the reign of James III, one of whom was Abbot of Holyrood, and Treasurer of Scotland, under that sovereign. The stag's head and antlers, which formed the crest of their armorial bearings, show their descent from that Crawford who rescued King David from the deer, on the spot where Holyrood now stands. This much is certain, from the retour of Agnes Crawford, whose marriage in 1540 transferred the castle to the family of Livingstone, that it was then a manorial residence of note. In that family it continued till, in 1633, the name of Almond was given to it, and Sir James Livingstone, second son of the first Earl of Linlithgow, was created a baron by that title. However, although it became the ground of this title, and appears very frequently as held for the Crown by the Earls of Linlithgow, the Castle of Almond was possessed, for about two centuries, by the descendants of Thomas Livingstone of Haining, a cadet of that noble family, with which the Learmonths of Parkhall and Craigend, in the neighbourhood, are doubly connected by marriage. About the middle of last century, it ceased to be inhabited; and still remains a fine specimen of the strength and durability of the materials and masonry of ancient times.

Of more recent date is Linlithgow Bridge, built by Alexander Earl of Linlithgow, about the year 1650, as appears by a grant of its customs to Earl George, by Charles II, in 1677. Contrasting with these, are two of the finest bridges reared in modern times, one bearing the Union Canal, and the other the Edinburgh and Glasgow Railway, over the river and valley of the Avon. The first is of twelve arches, some of which look down one hundred feet upon the stream, and so covered are the banks with foliage, that the mighty fairy-like work seems resting on green leaves. The second, for the railway, consists of more than twenty arches, all of fair proportion, and substantial masonry.

A mile above Manuel, is a place named Fechtin Foord, traditionally reported as the scene of a feud between the shepherds of the opposite banks; and to the northward two circular eminences, rounded by art for purposes unknown.

Land-owners - William Forbes, Esq. of Callendar, late Member for the county, is principal land-owner; and, although not resident himself, does all to remedy that disadvantage, by his liberality to the poor and parochial institutions of the parish. There are thirty-six proprietors of estates, or parcels of land, in the parish. Several of the last inherit the perpetual feus granted by the last Earl of Linlithgow, in order to raise money for carrying on the Rebellion of 1715. Twenty-one are resident; seven of independent fortune.

III – POPULATION

Amount of population in

1801	1070
1811	1330
1821	1678
1831	1540

The actual population cannot be short of 1700, including from 200 to 300 strangers at work on the Slamannan Railway. Indeed, the immense fields of coal now proved to lie within the parish, and the increasing facilities of export, make it unlikely that it should ever fall below that number. If we except twenty-five families of colliers lately settled, and an unusually large proportion of masons, the population is entirely agricultural, interspersed with the necessary tradesmen.

The number of families settled is 300.

There is one insane person under restraint; three too weak in mind to be employed in labour.

The people are industrious, sober, and kind, especially to others in distress.

IV – INDUSTRY

Agriculture - The whole parish is arable, excepting plantations and mosses, not probably amounting to a twentieth part. The average rent per acre about L.1, 12s.

Sheep is a rare stock, the fences not containing them; for the same reason, cattle are uniformly herded in the day, and house at night, in the west. In the eastern division, the quality of stock is excellent; and they are turnip fed through the winter to a considerable extent, and have fences sufficient for their pastures. There also, the system of husbandry is good; and furrow-drainings extend to the westward, where it is much needed. Police dung from Edinburgh is employed to a great extent. Lime also from the neighbouring parish of Linlithgow, is largely used. The farm-buildings are much improved, being adapted in the east to farms of 300 or 400 acres; in the west, to 40 or 50. In the small farms, the want of shelter and inclosure and capital is great.

The farms in the eastern district are generally allotted into five parts, - two in grass, one in green crop, one in wheat or barley, one in oats. The grass, including hay, may be reckoned at L.5; green crop L.16; the grain at L.6 per acre; and though the system of farming to the westward is various, and the soil inferior, the extent of surface may render its produce double.

The gross annual produce may be stated thus: Grain, L.20,000; green crop, L.10,400; hay and grass, L.7850; in all, L.38,250.

V - PAROCHIAL ECONOMY

Market-Town - Falkirk, though five miles distant, is the market-town for the parish, rather than Linlithgow, which is distant but three. Maudiston, hanging in picturesque confusion on the slope of its hill, and by the sides of its bridge, is the principal village. Our means of communication are ample. The Stirling and Edinburgh road, the Union Canal, a railway nearly finished by Slamannan to Glasgow, another commenced between Glasgow and Edinburgh, all intersect the parish.

Ecclesiastical State - The church and manse were built within these thirty years, and are sufficient and in good repair; but the former, being within two miles of the east end, and six of the west, is, especially in bad weather, inaccessible to many. It may accommodate 600. The glebe is worth L.12 a year. The stipend, chiefly money, from L.240 to L.260. The attendance at the parish church is good; in that of the United Secession, small; one-sixth of the population only dissenting. Our communicants are 280 in number. Church collections, L.50.

Education - There are two schools. The parish school has the maximum salary, a glebe of 6 acres, and 100 well taught scholars, several in Latin, and the greater part learning reading, writing, arithmetic, grammar, and geography. The second school, with an excellent free house at Avonbridge, is under the control of the parents of the children attending; it is at present flourishing.

Library - There is a parochial library of 120 volumes.

Poor - There are 14 paupers, receiving from 4s. to 12s. a month. Occasional relief is given to others. Amount of income, L. 80 a year. Several consider the occasional relief degrading. The average yearly amount of assessment for the years 1835, 1836, and 1837, was L. 37, 14s. 8d.

Inns - There are 6 public-houses.

Fuel - Peats are sent to the neighbouring distilleries in considerable quantity; but coals are generally used in the parish.

MISCELLANEOUS OBSERVATIONS.

The progress of cultivation has entirely changed the appearance of the parish, since the date of the last Account. At that time, it would seem every one sought to grind his own meal. There were 17 mills within the parish: now, there is but one corn and flourmill, one saw and two flax-mills. The feudal oppression which bound the vassal to the superior's mill is now not heard of. The access to markets and superior mills is much increased; and no district has improved more rapidly under the superior means of communication which the age affords.

April 1841.