

ABERCROMBIE or ST.MONANS PARISH

PAROCHIAL REGISTERS:-The earliest entry in our parochial registers is 16th April 1597. It is very brief, and not very legible. It appears to record the settling of an account. Matters of discipline are often before the session, and the discipline extends to all manner of delinquencies. The first volume, commencing as just stated, ends in 1638; the second begins 1641, and ends 1660; the third begins 1664, and goes on to 1681. There is then a blank till 2d November 1689, when volume fourth begins with the ordination of Mr Walter Wilson. From that time to the present day, the minutes of session have been kept regularly, and the cash-book carried on along with them occasionally. This has been the case, indeed, from August 1689, to August 27th 1789. From that date the minutes have been kept distinct from cash concerns, there being a current book for each. The first trace that I can perceive of a marriage register is in 1684. There are only three entries of births and baptisms before 1707. From that period there is a more regular register of marriages and baptisms, and also of burials. There is an heritors' book besides those strictly sessional, and all of them during the late and present incumbency of session-clerk have been kept with commendable accuracy.

POPULATION.

Population in 1775, by return to Dr Webster, 780

in 1790, - 832

in 1821, - 912

in 1831, - 1110

The increase within the last ten years is partly to be accounted for by the working of the coal ; since the coal ceased to be wrought, there has been a marked diminution of the population.

There are about 130 of the population in the country, and 884 in St Monan's.

Births.-The average of births cannot be given with so much certainty, as were desirable, from the neglect of many parents in giving in their children's names for registration. But the whole number from 1828 till 1833 inclusive, is 59, which gives an average of $9 \frac{5}{7}$ for each year.

The average of deaths in six years, appears from a register which was for some time kept by the minister, to be $191/6$

Families.-The number of families in the parish by the minister's last visiting list is 248.

I do not know more than one bachelor above fifty years old in the parish, but there are at least 12 widowers of that age, and there are 19 unmarried females above forty-five.

In 1828, there died in the parish, in his ninety-second year, in full vigour both of body and mind, a respectable farmer, whose ancestors and himself had occupied the same farm on the Abercrombie estate, for nearly 300 years. His name was John Cowper, and his son (Robert) still keeps possession.

There are two male parishioners of ours, at present boarded in the Dundee Lunatic Asylum. The board of one of these unfortunate persons is defrayed out of his own funds, that of the other by the kirk-session and heritors. We have three fatuous persons at home, not strictly under coercion, and all of them maintained by their respective families without parochial assistance. These last mentioned were born without apparent defect either of body or mind. Their present unhappy state is to be ascribed to very severe sickness in early life. There are no blind, deaf, or dumb in the parish.

CHARACTER AND HABITS OF THE PEOPLE.-The people on the whole are most industrious, and enjoy in a reasonable degree the comforts, of society. In most of the fishermen's families, there is at times a striking air of comfort. For the wet, hungry, and weary fisherman (at sea since two or three o'clock in the morning) there is a blazing fire, and a clean substantial breakfast set out, to which he sits down with much relish and enjoyment. The ordinary food of the peasantry at their meals is oatmeal, potatoes, fish, and in most families, in the country part of the parish, a little pork of their own rearing.

During the last three years there have been 4 illegitimate births in the parish.

FISHERY :-This is one of the principal fishing stations on the east coast of Scotland, and, including men, women and children, it may afford their chief occupation to about 300 individuals. The children, before they are able for harder work, go in great numbers, and to a distance of some miles, to gather bait. The women bait the lines. The men, including boys from fourteen to eighteen, go a-fishing. The herring-fishery is the great concern with our people. There is a partial herring-fishery, comparatively near to our own shores, in the winter and spring months. But it is the Caithness or north country fishing which forms the great object of attention to our people. From the latter part of June, and to the middle of July, they are in a bustle of preparation. The number of the boats fitted out is twenty-six, at fifteen tons each. The complement of men for each boat is five, in all 130 for twenty-six boats. St Monan's does not furnish that number. There may be two men to each boat, strangers, finding employment in our boats. These are led half-deal men, from the limited proportion they receive of the profits, which is reasonably so limited, because, while they furnish their own nets, they have no property in the boats. The following may be taken as a tolerably accurate statement of the cost of fitting out one of our principal boats for sea. Boat with all her tackling and appurtenances, L 85; 20 nets at L. 4 each, L. 80; provisions, L 30. Every net is about 50 yards long, and fifteen score meshes wide, 32

meshes in the yard, the mesh 1 1/4 of an inch. The engagement which our people enter into with the fish-dealers is for six weeks ; but the bargain is understood to have been implemented by the fishers of any one boat when they have caught 250 barrels, in howsoever short a time.

Cod-fishing for export is carried on to a considerable extent here. The packing furnishes employment and maintenance to many females. This fishing, however, is of very limited duration. When the herring disappear in the end of winter, it ceases of course, as it is with herring.-bait that the cod are taken.

The cod, when cured, are sent to the London and Liverpool markets. Haddocks, turbot, cod, etc. are, in their several seasons, sent in great quantities to the Edinburgh market, and also supply our own adjacent country by means of cadgers and fish-women.

Besides 26 boats of about 15 tons, there are perhaps 14 yawls of 7 1/2 tons.

MANUFACTURES:-We have only four weavers in the parish, and these have sometimes other occupations.

The working of nets is a very general occupation among the young. They will make at the rate of 9d a day. Kelp has long ago ceased to be a profitable concern, nor has there been any made these many years. We have in St Monan's a very extensive malting and brewing concern.

PAROCHIAL ECONOMY.

St Monan's can hardly be called a market-town, in the proper sense of the word. It is a burgh of barony holding of Newark. It has three bailies, a treasurer, and fifteen councillors. The feuars choose the bailies, and the bailies the councillors. There are twelve constables annually chosen.

MARKET TOWN.-The nearest market-town is Pittenweem, about, a mile and a half distant; it is also the nearest post-town.

VILLAGE.-The only vestige of a village in the parish, exclusive of St Monan's, is Abercrombie. It contains the manse and offices, two farm-houses with their extensive offices, a wright and a smith's respective shops, with the dwelling-houses of these tradesmen, two houses for married farm-servants, (others being lodged in a bothie) and two houses besides, occupied by persons connected with the place.

There is no post-office in the parish, but the London and Edinburgh mail arrives at Pittenweem every morning about half-past six, and leaves the same place at seven in the evening. There are nearly two miles of excellent turnpike road along the north east boundary of the parish, and about the same extent along the shore from east to west.

MEANS OF COMMUNICATION:-The Balcarres coach starts from Anstruther for Pettycur at eight in the morning, Monday, Wednesday, and Friday, throughout the year; and from 2, Princes Street, at ten a.m. for Anstruther, every Tuesday, Thursday and Saturday. There is a daily coach for a great part of the year from Anstruther to Largo, where there arrives twice a-day a steamer from Newhaven. There are many steamers coasting along, every lawful day in summer, and affording great facilities for intercourse with the metropolis.

A carrier from Crail to Edinburgh passes and repasses every week, and generally one from Pittenweem to Cupar, the county town.

ECCLESIASTICAL STATE:- The parish church is conveniently situated for the great bulk of the population, viz. the inhabitants of St Monan's, but very much the reverse for the minister and his family. The original parish church, abandoned to ruin these 190 years, was about five minutes walk from the manse. But when the chapel in the barony of St Monan's came to be used as the parish church, the manse and offices remained where they had ever been, and hence their inconvenient distance of a full mile from the place of worship, since 1646. The manse was rebuilt from the foundation, 1795-6, and in 1818-19, an addition made to it, and a complete set of offices erected. Upon either of these occasions, it might have seemed obvious to remove the manse and offices to the vicinity of the church. But in 1796, the aged incumbent, attached to the localities of Abercrombie, does not appear to have wished for a change, and when the enlargement of the manse and new offices were thought necessary, in 1819, there were, from the minority of the two great heritors, legal difficulties in the way of a change of site, which prevented the removal, however desirable, from being carried into effect. Partly surrounding the manse, enlarged as above, there is an excellent garden, most substantially inclosed, and a good set of offices.

The church itself, it is said, I believe on good traditional authority, to have been built about the fortieth year of David 11's reign. (1369.) His father Robert 1. had died 1329. Tradition says, that David and his Queen, narrowly escaping shipwreck on the " stormy frith," had found a landing on the shore, hard by St Monan's, and that, as an expression of gratitude for their deliverance, they had caused to be erected a chapel to St Monan, the tutelary Saint of the Place. By David's charter, dated Edinburgh, he grants to this chapel the lands of Easter Birney in Fife, and some lands in the sheriffdom of Edinburgh. James 111. gave it to the Black-friars. It had afterwards a convent at Cupar annexed to it, and both it and the convent were annexed by James V. to a convent at St Andrews.

The condition which this well known fabric exhibited ten years ago had been its condition for ages.

Situated at the west end of St Monan's, and separated from it by a small brook, and within fifty yards of what is shown as St Monan's Cell, it exhibited a beautiful specimen of Gothic architecture, in the form of a cross, with a steeple of hewn stone in the centre, square so far, and terminating in a spire of eight sides. There remained no vestige of building from the steeple westward; but to the north and the south of it, were to be seen the unroofed remains of a transept, or wings, at right angles to the body of the fabric. The main part of the building, extending eastward from the spire, with vaulted roof, as well described by my predecessor, and in Sibbald, was used, as above mentioned, as the parish church. However interesting to the antiquarian, it was most uncomfortable as a place of worship; damp, cold, its walls covered with green mould, and presenting altogether an aspect of chilling desolation. In 1772, the late incumbent, in respect of its uncomfortable and ruinous condition, raised a process for repairs before the Presbytery, and obtained a decret against the heritors for repairs, extensive and substantial.

The heritors conceived that this was not an expense with which they ought to be burdened, for as much as the feuars of St Monan's by their charter as above quoted, were bound to uphold the fabric. The heritors accordingly had recourse upon the feuars the latter resisted, and the matter came before the Court of Session. The feuars were found liable to uphold the building in terms of their charter. They did therefore apply a repair, but very partial, and by no means amounting to what had been decreed by the Presbytery, "and nothing more," says my predecessor in 1790, "has yet been done." Down to 1825, it continued the uncomfortable decaying fabric above described.

But a great deal has now been done. Early in February 1826, the present incumbent brought the state of the church before the Presbytery. A visitation in the usual form took place, the heritors being competently represented, and tradesmen attending, according to citation. Upon thorough inspection, the tradesmen formally condemned the church. The heritors' representatives craving delay, the Presbytery did not immediately discern. Another meeting was appointed, against which the heritors engaged to have the opinion of Mr Burn, architect. This gentleman being applied to, visited the church, and with strong professional enthusiasm, deprecated the idea of its being abandoned to ruin, and gave his decided opinion as to its capability of being repaired into a beautiful specimen of ecclesiastical architecture, and a place of worship singularly well adapted for seeing and hearing. This report coinciding with the previous views of the heritors, and approved by the Presbytery, was immediately acted upon; and after all the tedious forms connected with so great a work, we were, in June 1828, put into occupation of one of the most beautiful places of worship of which the country can boast. There was a lofty communication opened under a splendid arch betwixt the main building and the area of the steeple. The side-wings to the north and south, forming the transepts were raised to the height of the principal building, and finished in the same style with the original roof. The pulpit was removed to the west end, immediately in front of a magnificent Gothic window. There were opened four similar windows in the south Walls and two in the north, and we were provided with a commodious vestry behind the church.

The heritors abandoned the claim they had upon the feuars for upholding the fabric; but thought it reasonable that, as an indemnification for the great sum laid out by them, (not less than L. 1730,) they should receive a moderate seat rent from the feuars. This arrangement (consented to by the feuars) still subsists, one of the most reasonable instances that can be conceived of seat rents drawn by heritors. It appears the more reasonable in the following views; that the rents have been twice reduced ; that they are now only 1s. a sitting; and that, besides the original sum of L. 1730, the heritors, upon two different occasions, 1829-1836, have come forward, and at an expense, 1st, of L. 40, and 2d, of L. 17, have ordered a strengthening of the roof by additional couples, for the removal of apprehensions, in regard to the safety of the building.

This unfortunate state of matters, in regard to the church, makes it somewhat difficult to say, who are or are not members of the Established Church. We are in a transition state. Respectable parishioners are still absenting themselves. But we are not aware of many having joined Dissenting congregations. There is no Seceding or Dissenting place of worship in the parish nor are there now, we should think, above twenty-five grown up persons in the bounds who acknowledge any dissenting minister their adopted pastor. The church is seated for 528; deduct sittings for the poor 36 ; preserved for heritors, their families, and their servants, farmers, their children and servants, the elders and minister's, and schoolmaster's seats, 200 ; there remain for letting, 292; an ample supply for the parishioners, and considerably exceeding the number of applicants.

The number of persons of all ages attending the Church, we cannot, in present circumstances, state with accuracy. But, without reference to our late alarms, we might say, towards 300. There should be many more, and we lament that there are not. Clerical means are used to augment the attendance, but we are apt to have offered as excuses, the difficulty of hearing, the want of decent clothing, the coldness of the church, especially in winter- artificial heat, by means of stoves or otherwise, never having been introduced.

The average number of communicants may be given at 210. It is low compared with the population. Many are absent at sea when the sacrament is dispensed in summer, and when we have it in February, when the men are at home, it falls in with the throng of the winter herring-fishing.

There is in the parish an Abercrombie and St Monan's Bible and Missionary Society of some years standing. But, from want of unanimity among the members as to the disposal of the funds it has greatly declined from its original efficiency, and seems verging to total extinction.

EDUCATION:.-We have one parochial school. The average number attending was given in at last examination at 51 boys and 35 girls = 86. The schoolmaster has the legal accommodations, and the maximum salary. His fees are, reading per quarter, 2s. ; writing 2s. 6d. arithmetic, 3s. ; Latin, 5s. ; no additional charge has hitherto been made for English grammar or geography. The fees may amount to L. 25, or L. 30 a year. The parochial schoolmaster, altogether proprio motu, carries on efficiently and acceptably a Sabbath evening school. There is another school in St Monan's upon the teacher's own adventure. I do not understand his fees or the branches taught to

be different from those of the parochial school. He is of the Established Church, his numbers 67. There has been recently established in the parish by Lady Anstruther of Balcaskie, an infant school, which is also supported by her ladyship, and promises to be of great benefit to the place. None of the children at other schools in the parish, cost less than 2s per quarter, none more than 5s. There is no quarter of the parish so distant from school, as to be a bar to attendance. There are no additional schools required. But a sewing school might possibly be of advantage. From the irregular attendance of children at school the people here might be thought less alive to the benefits of education than they really are. But they are so dependent upon the services of the children in some of the fishing departments, that they are constrained to keep them from school when they would be glad that they could attend it. Many parents, however, are culpably remiss in enforcing attendance.

PRISONS:-There are two prisons in St Monan's, under one roof, one on the upper floor of the town-house, the other on the ground floor. They are equally well secured ; the lower, by much the more dismal of the two. Prisoners are committed to the one or the other according to their pre-eminence in delinquency. The magistrates imprison as sudden emergency calls for it; but they do not impose fines, except with the formalities of a regularly constituted court. So far as I have occasion to bear, imprisonment is a rare occurrence.

INNS etc..-As this place is no thoroughfare, there can hardly be said to be in it one traveller's inn, where there is regular stabling or posting. But there are too many ale-houses, and their effect upon the morals of the people is highly unfavourable.

MISCELLANEOUS OBSERVATIONS.

There is one variation of rather an unpleasant kind betwixt the present state of the parish and people, and that which subsisted at the time of the last Statistical Account. They are certainly less shy than formerly in applying for and receiving parochial aid. My predecessor says, " There are now upon the poor's list three persons and two orphans." At present there are nineteen. There are no indications of such an increase of poverty as can account for this difference. The truth is, that the spirit of independence, which shrunk from being troublesome in coming upon the fund, is now greatly broken down. It is natural to think that the fine edge of delicacy will be blunted as the number of receivers increase, to keep one another in countenance. Whatsoever is given, however, is received thankfully, and it is so far consoling that pauperism has not been upon the increase these some years. It is, at the same time, a compensating fact, that our collections, though still extremely moderate, are very far beyond what they were forty years ago. Within these last twenty years, there has been a marked improvement in the style of the farm-houses and farm offices in the parish. it seems to be no unwarranted assertion, that the people are improving in general intelligence, and in their acquaintance with the truths of religion.

January 1837 (Rev Robert Swan)