

ANSTRUTHER WESTER PARISH

Session Records.- The earliest entry in the session records, as possessed by the present schoolmaster, is in 1651. One or two, short extracts from them may be interesting. It would appear from some items mentioned at this time (1651,) that the town had had a rather unceremonious visit from the " Inglis." Under the date of 16th September 1651, it is said, " paid for ane to hold ye sand-glass ye ould being plundered by ye ' Inglis.' " And again, on the 7th October following, it is said, " paid to Matt Thomson for drying ye ould bybell, which was cast in ye sea be ye ' Inglis,' yn ye towne was plundered."

" 5th September 1689.-The whilk day Mr Thomas Auchinleck, minister of Anstruther Wester, was discharged by the Lords of yr Majesty's Privy-Council from exercising the office of the ministry in this congregation, for not reading the proclamation, and for not praying for King William and Queen Mary; and the church was declared vacant by ane sent from the presbytery of Saint Andrews and Cupar to that effect.

" 5th September 1689.-Mr John Law, a Presbyterian minister, preached in the kirk, and intimated the proclamation.

" 15th April 1691.-Mr Hardie preached, finding no objections against seventeen elders, admitted them.

" May 1, 1700.-" The session appoints aney three elders to clear accounts with the schoolmaster, and pay what is due to him by the session against Witsunday next; and likeways informe him, that they have no design to keep any schoolmaster nor precentor, both upon account of the indisposition of the minister and the poverty of the place." And on the 29th of the same month it is said,-" This day Mr David Ballingall, schoolmaster, precentor, and session-clerk, did dimit." The schoolmaster's salary at this time stated at L. 16, 13s. 0d. Scots money.

" February 1, 1701.-Mr William Hardie, minister of Crail, preached. Collected for Andrew Simson, skipper in Dysert, and his company, who are slaves in Algiers, L. 16, 00, 00.

POPULATION.

The number of the inhabitants of the parish does not seem to be so great as it was in ancient times. Like most of the other towns on the east coast of Fife, the burgh, since the Union, has fallen greatly into decay, and the population appears also to have decreased, in consequence of the losses sustained in the civil wars during the reign of Charles I. The people, in general, were zealous Covenanters; and many of them fell in the battle of Kilsyth. Besides the disaster in the temporary failures of their fishing, Anstruther shared the fate of its neighbours about the year 1670, by an inundation of the sea, which destroyed or choked up the harbour, washed away the

bulwarks, and rendered many of the houses unsafe to dwell in. An inundation of a similar kind happened about the end of the seventeenth century, when nearly a third of the town seems to have been swept away. A long street called the Fore Street, was totally destroyed. Scarce a vestige of it remains. The rock on which the town-house once stood is covered by the sea every spring tide, when it also washes the street where the principal houses of the burgh were situated. By these means the town has been greatly reduced, and the baptisms, which about 200 years ago, as appears from the session records, were from twenty to thirty a year, are at present very few in number. Now, however, the scale seems to have turned; and not from any outward circumstances, but from the natural tendency of the population to increase, a slow but gradual advance in numbers is taking place.

The population in time of first Statistical Account	370
1811	405
1831	430
Males	191
Females	239
Number of Families	105
Of these employed in Agriculture	21
In Trade and Manufactures	28
Other Families	56
Males above Twenty years	97
Of these there are land occupiers having servants	3
Ditto, having no servants	2
Labourers	20
Tradesmen(All Weavers)	8
Retail and Handicrafts	34
Clergy, clerks, professional educated men and capitalists	5
Labourers not Agricultural	7
All other males of twenty years	18
Female Servants	18
Average of births, about	5 or 6
Marriages	4

No register of deaths is kept.

Occupations of the Traders and Handicraftsmen.-Blacksmith, 1; slater, 1; masons, 6; carpenters, 8; sawyers, 4; linen-draper 1; fish-dealer, 1; millers, 2; inn-keeper, 1; shoemakers, 6; shop-keepers, 3; weavers, 8. Inhabited houses, 62; building, 1; houses uninhabited, 3.

Lord William K. Douglas, brother of the present Marquis of Queensberry, is the only person of noble rank residing in the parish; but almost all the other heritors have land to the yearly value of L. 50 and upwards.

The number of families being 105, we have, making allowance for those who have no children or are unmarried, about four as the average number of children in each family.

Character, etc. of the People.-The inhabitants of the town and Parish resemble very much in character those of the other villages on the east coast. Judging from the session records of former periods, there must be a great improvement in point of morals. We may not witness the same appearance of zeal which entitled their forefathers to the appellation of the " Whigs of Fife;" but it could be wrong not to admit that much attention is paid to outward propriety of conduct, and that a regular and becoming attendance is given to the ordinances of religion. Habits of cleanliness are on the increase. Altogether, the people enjoy, in a reasonable degree, the comforts and advantages of society; and are, or at least, before new notions were put into their heads, were, contented with their situation and circumstances.

PAROCHIAL ECONOMY

Burgh.-Anstruther Wester is a royal burgh, and, before the time of the Reform Bill, used to join with Pittenweem, Anstruther Easter, Kilrenny, and Crail, in sending a Member to Parliament. Originally it was erected into a burgh of barony in 1554, but holds its charter of incorporation, as a royal burgh, from James VI. in 1587. It is governed by a chief magistrate, two bailies, town-clerk, treasurer, and eleven councillors, and has a revenue of about L. 70 per annum, which arises chiefly from land. There are also five or six acres of town's common, which is occupied in summer as pasturage for horses and cows belonging to the inhabitants, at the rate of 1s. 8d. of grass-mail for each beast per night. Owing to the smallness of the population, it is one of those burghs which have not, as yet, been affected by the late Reform Bill. The municipal authorities still continue to be appointed according to the old system, under which, notwithstanding all its alleged corruption and abuse, the corporation lands have been preserved entire; not an acre having been alienated since the issuing of the royal grant in its favour, upwards of 250 years ago.

The population of the burgh is almost co-extensive with that of the parish. There cannot be above thirty or forty people in the country. At, one time, a considerable trade appears to have flourished in Anstruther Wester. But from the causes already alluded to, it, has entirely disappeared. No vessels or even fishing-boats belong to the place,-the only business of any kind carried on being

that which is necessary to supply the wants of the limited population. No regular police is required; there are, however, twelve constables who may be called out on any emergency. Fortunately, their services are seldom needed. In the former Statistical Account, it is stated, that since the battle of Kilsyth the people have a strong aversion to a military life,-that, in the course of twenty-one years, only one instance of a person enlisting had occurred-that there had not been a suspicion of murder for fifty years-that one instance of suicide had taken place about the year 1744-and that no person had been tried before a criminal court since 1732. The writer is unable to say whether the same state of things continues ; but he has reason to believe, that, notwithstanding the altered circumstances of the country, instances similar to the foregoing are still extremely rare.

Market Town.- The burgh itself is not a market-town, but a weekly market is held every Saturday in Anstruther Easter, which is united to it by a handsome bridge over the Dreel Burn.

Means of Communication.-The post-office is also placed in Anstruther Easter. Letters arrive and depart daily, though, from the frequent changes which have lately taken place, the hours are very uncertain. The length of the turnpike roads in the parish is only about half a mile, amongst which the Balcarres coach to Edinburgh runs thrice a week, returning on the alternate days. An omnibus also leaves every morning for Largo, and returns on the arrival of the steam-boat from Newhaven. Carriers travel regularly to Edinburgh, and to all the neighbouring towns of any consequence in Fife, such as Cupar, St Andrews. In summer there is much communication carried on by steam-boats. Those to and from Dundee, Aberdeen, and Montrose, pass and repass daily to Newhaven, so that a journey, which, less than thirty years ago, occupied a whole day, or sometimes two or three, and could only be accomplished at a great expense, is now performed in two hours and a half, and for a very trifling, sum.

The fences are commonly dry stone dikes, or, as they are called, Galloway dikes. In some places, we find hedges; but no great attention seems to be paid to either.

Ecclesiastical State.-The church is very conveniently situated for the greater part of the population, being built in the burgh, where the bulk of the people reside. It may be nearly two miles from the north-west corner of the parish, but there is no inhabited house so remote as that. There does not appear to be any record as to the period when it was built; but, from the style of its architecture, it must have existed a considerable time previous to the Reformation. It was new roofed in 1761, and has been frequently repaired at considerable expense by the heritors. At present, it is in tolerable order. From its situation almost on the sea shore, and on the bank of the Dreel, it is liable to be damp and cold in winter ; a stove, however, has just been erected in it, which will add much to its comfort. The number of seats is fully beyond that required by law, and they afford accommodation for all the parishioners who are able to attend public worship. Part of them belong to the kirk-session. These are let at sixpence a sitting, but even that small rent is very seldom demanded. The last time it was so, was during the prevalence of cholera, and the proceeds were handed over to the Board of Health. Almost all of the heritors give seats to their tenants and others. A very commodious manse, and what offices were considered necessary, were built for the late incumbent in 1835.

The number of Dissenters in the parish is just 15, in addition to 4 Episcopalians. Almost all the families, and almost all the individuals are connected with the Establishment; and, in proportion to the population, divine service at the church is generally well attended. The number of communicants borders upon 200. A Bible and Missionary Society exists in the parish. Average amount of contributions for religious and charitable purposes L. 6. There was lately a collection, amounting to L. 2, for Church Extension, and L. 7, 1s. 6d. for the Colonial Churches. These, perhaps, are fully the average of what might be expected in any one year.

Education.-The parochial school is the only one in the parish. In it the branches taught are, reading, writing, arithmetic, geography, Latin, French, algebra, pure and practical mathematics. The schoolmaster has the maximum salary of L. 34, 4s. 4d. In 1833, when answers were returned to the Lord Advocate's queries on the subject of education, the average of fees for the four preceding years was L. 74, 16s.9d., and in addition the teacher enjoys L. 4, being the interest of L. 100 left for the behoof of the school. It may be doubted, whether the average of the fees is quite so high at present. The schoolmaster, who was only lately elected, has not furnished me with the means of ascertaining, and perhaps could not very well tell; but I should think, that it could not be greatly reduced. The general expense of education should, I think, be from 10s. to L. 1, 5s. per annum, according to the age or attainments of the children. There do not appear to be any of the young betwixt six and fifteen years of age who cannot read or write, or who are not learning to do so, neither are there any of those upwards of fifteen who cannot read. Two do so very imperfectly. There are about twenty-five grown up people, most aged females who have not been taught to write. The people, in general, are alive to the benefits of education; and even the very poorest will make considerable exertions to procure it for their children.

A bursary connected with the United College of St Andrews, was endowed by the late Bailie William Thomson, a former chief magistrate of the burgh, in favour of some young man belonging to the parish. The value of the land mortified by the benevolent donor was about L. 700; but it was reduced to L. 500 by an unfortunate lawsuit. The magistrates and minister are patrons. The endowment may occasionally be of use to young men of merit; but it may also encourage some to become students before they are qualified to profit by the education which a college imparts.

The following short account of an association which exists among the parochial schoolmasters in the East of Fife, may be of sufficient importance to be noticed in the Statistical Account. The association was begun in 1818, under the designation of " The East of Fife Educational Society." At present, it embraces, as members, all the schoolmasters along the coast from Elie to Kingsbarns. They meet once a-month at each others houses in rotation, and regular minutes are kept of the proceedings. The object of the association is for the mutual improvement of the members, in matters connected with education. They are in possession of a small and select library, consisting of works on education, science, &c. and they have also a set of chemical and other apparatus, both of which are, receiving additions from time to time. At each meeting of the society, a subject is appointed for discussion at next meeting. An essay is occasionally read, though the stated production of one is not imperative on the members. They are, however, expected to bring before the meeting any information or suggestion connected with the

profession, which they may have acquired by reading or observation ; and to give an account of the schools which then may have visited, plans of teaching, and improvements they may have observed. Such communications lead to many an interesting and useful conversation,-keep the members alive to the improvements that are going on in education,-stimulate their diligence, and prevent them from falling behind the time, in the art of communicating instruction.

At these meetings, the " brethren" really meet as brothers, and an unbroken course of good feeling is kept up amongst them.

I believe the East of Fife Educational Society is unique in its kind ; but it might not, perhaps, be unworthy the consideration of the schoolmasters in other parts of the country, whether something of the same kind ought not to be originated among them.

Charitable Institutions.-Two friendly societies are in existence, called the Mortcloth and Benefit Society, and the Sea Box. The former has existed since 1670, but was re-established in 1819. Its members pay 1s. 6d. quarterly or 6s. a year. In case of sickness, any of the members is entitled to 5s. weekly for nine weeks during the year, and no longer. When a member dies, each of the survivors is bound to pay 6d. to the treasurer, who gives the amount to the widow or nearest relation of the deceased, as funeral money; and each widow is entitled to an annual pension of L. 2, 12s., paid quarterly or yearly, as she may require. The writer is uncertain whether the Sea Box is a separate society or whether it is connected with that of Anstruther Easter. Both of them, however, are useful in supplying the wants of their members, and in keeping up a spirit of independence, by preventing them from sinking down to the grade of paupers.

Poor and Parochial Funds.-The number of the poor on the roll is six ; but there are others who receive occasional relief. None get more than 10s. per month, and none less than 4s. The average may thus be about 7s. The sum collected yearly at the church door amounts to about L. 9. This, however, is exclusive of what is collected upon sacramental and other extraordinary occasions, which is applied to the occasional relief of individuals in indigent circumstances, who either do not require or do not choose to be put on the list of regular weekly pensioners. Besides the collections, however, the session are in possession of considerable funds derived from the rent of land bequeathed for the behoof of the poor, which enables them easily to meet all the demands made upon their charity. Several tons of coal are also Yearly distributed among the indigent. The late incumbent, who had great sensibility, was particularly attentive to the poor; and I have been informed that intimation has sometimes been made from the pulpit, that, if any were in want, they had nothing to do but apply to the session for relief. It seems to be the general opinion in this quarter, that there is now less disposition among the poor to refrain from seeking parochial relief. The spirit of independence appears to be wearing out apace, and many, so far from considering it a degradation to be pensioners on the poor funds, think that they have a right to them, and cannot get enough. There are, however, some honourable exceptions to the remark.

Fairs, Inns etc - No fair is held in the burgh ; but there is one inn, quite enough for the population, and the effects of which are said to be very pernicious.

MISCELLANEOUS OBSERVATIONS.

The burgh of Anstruther Wester has undergone considerable improvements within the last few years. Across the burn which separates it from Anstruther Easter, a bridge was erected at the mutual expense of the two burghs in 1831. Before that period, the only communication betwixt them for carriages was by a ford, at all times inconvenient, and sometimes impassable. Besides this, there may also be noticed, the widening of the main street at the West Port, from 13 to 30 feet its Macadamization, and the formation of a neat footway or pavement, at an expense of L. 450, contributed equally by the burgh and county. The town is also now supplied with water, the streets lighted, and common sewers and other conveniences constructed, whereby the public thoroughfares and lanes are kept in a clean and orderly state. A new manse and offices for the clergyman, and a handsome school and dwelling-house for the schoolmaster, have likewise been lately erected. The landward part of the parish has in like manner partaken of the general improvement. Notwithstanding the late depression in all kinds of produce, agriculture is carried on with spirit, and not without profit to the farmer. At the date of the last account, the rent of land varied from L. 1, 1s to L. 1, 10s. per acre : now it is from L. 2 to L. 3, 10s. Great attention is paid to the breeding and feeding of cattle: and this is sometimes found to be one of the most profitable modes in which the farmer can employ his capital. Draining, too, is carried on to a considerable extent; and although the parish is small and not naturally very fertile, the produce of the land bears a full proportion to the surrounding district. In some respects, too, the morals have undergone a change for the better. Hard drinking, which was formerly so common, is never heard of in any family, having the least pretensions to gentility, and it is to be hoped that the example of their superiors will not be without effect on the lower orders, among whom it is still too generally practised.

The writer cannot conclude without adverting to the circumstance which has imposed on him the task of drawing up the foregoing account, the death of his much esteemed and lamented friend, Dr Carstairs, late minister of the parish. In him, his family, the church, and society at large, have lost a very valuable member. All the duties, whether of his public or his private station, he discharged with exemplary fidelity and zeal ; and it has seldom been our lot to see any one more deeply or sincerely regretted. He will long live in the memory of all that shared in his friendship, or with whom he was in any way connected.

November 1838.