

BURNTISLAND PARISH

PAROCHIAL REGISTERS:-The session records commence at March 1602. They consist of eight volumes, and have for the most part been regularly kept. Blanks occur from 1670 to 1672; from 1686 to 1693; from 1711 to 1719; and from 1748 to 1769. From 1786 there is a series of fragments on to 1821; after which period, the record has been regularly kept. The register of births, baptisms, and marriages commences at 1672, and is continued more or less perfectly to the present time. As in the session records, there are some considerable blanks. At various periods, a record of deaths has been kept, but it is very scanty.

ANTIQUITIES:.-The town was at one time fortified. On the southeast side of the harbour, part of the walls of a fort is still standing; and till within a few years back, traces of the ancient fortification were discernible on the small eminence in the north side of the town. At Lamberlaws, on a knoll projecting into the sea, are the traces of an encampment ascribed to Cromwell; in consequence of which, the name of Oliver's knoll has sometimes been given to the locality. In the same situation, there appears to have stood at one time a gallows for the execution of criminals under the feudal system. In allusion to this circumstance, the locality is sometime called Gallows Knoll.

On an eminence overhanging the harbour stands Rossend Castle, erected, it would seem, at some period in the fifteenth century, by Dury of that Ilk. Sibbald, in his History of Fife, states, that " in the chartulary of Dunfermling (to which abbacy this town, castle, and harbour belonged,) there is a grant by George Durie, commendater of Dunfermling and Archdeacon of St Andrews to Robert Durie of that Ilk, of our lands of Nether Grange of kinghorn Wester, called Le Mains; together with the keeping of the place or fort of the same: ' and for the preserving and custody thereof, we dispone heritably our lands of Grefland an Cuningerland, now called Brunt-island, within our shire of Kinghorn, regality of Dunfermling, and sherifffdom of Fife; 'dated anno 1538" After the Reformation, according to the same authority, the castle was given first to Kirkcaldy of Grange, then to Sir Robert Melville of Carnie. Since that period, it is understood to have passed through the hands of many different proprietors. It served as head quarters to the detachment of the Covenanters' troops that was raised in this part of the country. In modern times, considerable additions have been made to it. It is surrounded by plantations and garden ground ; and forms a fine object in the foreground of the rich and extensive view commanded by the environs of the town.

At the village of Kirkton, are the ruins of the original parish church, surrounded by a small burying-ground. The date of its erection is unknown; but it bears the marks of great antiquity. On a small eminence at Stenhouse, in the northwest part of the parish, stand the ruins of a small fort or castle, called Knockdavie. It belonged anciently to an individual of the name of Douglas, of whom some notice is taken in " The Judgments of God on Persecutors," appended to some of the old editions of the Scots Worthies. At Balbee, a mile and a half eastward, there existed a structure somewhat similar. It was taken down about sixty or seventy years ago, and portions of the fine hewn freestone of which it was built may still be seen in some of the walls in the

neighbourhood. Near the same place, a barrow or tumulus was opened fifty years ago, when some square stones were found, arranged in the form of a coffin, but containing no particular relics. There appears to have been a number of tumuli in the same neighbourhood.

POPULATION.

Population in 1811, (seamen included,) 2000

1821, 2180

1831, 2399

The following abstract of the population was drawn up by Mr Davidson, the burgh schoolmaster, in 1831

Ages of Males	under 5	6 - 10	11 - 15	16 - 20	21 - 30	31 - 40	41 - 50	51 - 60	61 - 70	71 - 80	81 - 90	Totals
Burntisland	116	120	107	86	128	86	87	57	45	24	7	863
Kirkcoun	16	17	10	6	15	12	11	2	2	-	-	91
Country	22	24	17	12	35	24	19	10	7	1	2	173
Total Males	154	161	134	104	178	122	117	69	54	25	9	1127
Ages of Females	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.
Burntisland	101	128	107	83	162	117	113	84	75	33	7	1010
Kirkcoun	22	15	10	4	11	14	8	7	7	1	-	99
Country	18	17	22	11	30	23	18	3	6	5	-	163
Total Females	141	160	139	98	203	154	139	94	88	39	7	1272
Males and Females	295	321	273	202	381	276	256	163	142	64	16	2399

Exclusive of seamen not constantly resident, the whole population was found

to be 2366

Of which number there resided in the town, 1842

In the village of Kirkcoun, 189

And in the landward part of the parish, 335

The number of families was 537

males above 20, 574

under 20, 553

houses 295

Of which 2 were building, and 24 uninhabited.

Illegitimate births in the course of the last three years, 6

From temporary causes, the population seems to have been somewhat greater when the census was taken, than it would otherwise have been. There has since been a considerable decrease. According to a census taken four years after by the writer, the number of families was found to be 500, giving a population of about 2100. This decrease must chiefly be attributed to the great failure in the herring fishery during the last five years. Employment having thus become scarcer, many have been compelled to seek for it elsewhere. It has also happened, that several families not dependent on trade, have removed from the parish since the Government census was taken, while others in similar circumstances have not come in to occupy their place.

The average number of births for the last seven years may be stated at 65

proclamations, 18

deaths, 34

Twelve of the heritors are proprietors of land of the yearly value of L. 50 and upwards. Of these only three are resident,

viz. the Messrs Young, who occupy the elegant residences of Collinswell, Grange, and Newbigging.

There are four fatuous persons in the parish, one insane, and one or two blind.

The chief game is golf, the links, though not very extensive, being well adapted for it. A golf club has been in existence upwards of forty years.

PAROCHIAL ECONOMY

MARKET TOWN:-The nearest market-town is Kirkcaldy, six miles distant. The only village in the parish is Kirkcoun.

MEANS OF COMMUNICATION .-- There is a regular post-office, the revenue of which amounted, some years ago to about L. 300; but, from the decay of trade, is now understood to fall short of that sum. The communication with Edinburgh, by means of the post, is twice-a-day. There are about five miles of turnpike road, but no public carriages travel regularly through any part of the parish. The Dundee and Perth coaches come occasionally this way, when the weather is too severe to admit of the passengers embarking at Pettycur. This being one of the stations of the Fife and MidLothian ferries, there is regular communication by steam with Newhaven; but great complaints are made of the extravagance of the fares, which are 2s. in the cabin, and 1s. 6d. steerage, very high rates, it must be allowed, for a distance short of six miles, In addition to the steam-vessels, there are large sailing-boats which ply at tide time every lawful day, and are principally employed in carrying goods, etc.

ECCLESIASTICAL STATE:-The parish church stands on the ridge which rises from the sea. It was built in 1592, on the model, it is understood, of the North Church of Amsterdam, and is thus an indication of the ancient intercourse which subsisted between this port and Holland. It was erected, not by the heritors, but by the inhabitants of the town, who began to find it inconvenient to go over to the old church at Kirkcoun. They asked nothing of the heritors but their consent; and, as an inducement, offered them their due proportion of seats, taking the whole burden, not only of building, but also of repairing on themselves. They reared, accordingly, a substantial square edifice, surmounted by a tower, the height of which is not proportioned to its thickness; but want of funds is understood to have prevented it from lifting its head so high as was contemplated. Though situated on the boundary of the parish, and distant about three miles from its northern extremities, the church is perfectly convenient for the great mass of the population. It is at present in a good state of repair, and affords accommodation for 900 or upwards, but might easily be made to accommodate a hundred or two more, as the area is very uneconomically seated. In the former Account, it is stated as a fact well known in this place, that it once held within its walls between 3000 and 4000 Hessians, who were lying encamped near the town in 1746.

The manse was built in 1824, and is considered one of the best in Scotland.

There is a chapel in the parish in connection with the United Secession Synod. The minister is paid out of the seat-rents, and his stipend is understood to be L 100. An assistant and successor is about to be appointed, when it is proposed that the former shall receive L. 60, and the latter L. 80. A house belonging to the congregation forms part of the living of the minister.

Taking 500 as the number of families, about 330 of these belong to the Established Church, and the rest, with very few exceptions, to the United Secession. A very small number are connected with no religious denomination, and there are three or four roman Catholics. Divine service is respectably attended both at the parish church, and at the dissenting meeting-house ; at both it might be better. The average number of communicants at the Established Church is about 400. In connection with the congregation of the parish church, there is a society in support of the missions, etc. of the Church of Scotland. As it is but of recent origin, it would be premature to Conjecture the amount of its annual contributions. The collections at the parish church for religious and charitable purposes may be stated as averaging for some years between L.20 and L. 30 per annum. This is exclusive of collections for the poor, which amount in the year to between L. 60 and L. 70. The sum realised during the last two years and a half for religious purposes, including collections, subscription for church extension, and the contributions already obtained by the society in connection with the parish church, falls very little short of L. 130.

EDUCATION.-There are in all seven schools in the parish; but five of these are small, and four of them are taught by females. There is no parochial school. The burgh school has always been under the direction of the magistrates and council, and the teacher is appointed by them. His salary is L. 37 a-year, and is paid out of the burgh revenue. The regulated fees are, for English reading, 2s. per quarter ; do. with writing, 2s. 6d. ; with arithmetic, 4s. 6d.; Latin, with Greek, French, arithmetic, mathematics, English grammar, geography, 6s. per quarter; navigation and bookkeeping, L. 1, 1s. per course. These fees have been the same for the last twenty years. All regulations for the school are made under the sanction and control of the magistrates. There are certain lands in the parish mortified by a Mr Watson, and a house and garden in the burgh, for behoof of the schoolmaster and three poor widows. Each of the widows has an allotment in the house, and each a third of the garden. The land is let to a tenant at the money rent of L. 18, 10s., and 34 bolls of barley and 6 bolls of oatmeal yearly, the growth of the lands; and if he has no barley on the lands, he is bound to pay the highest Mid-Lothian fiar prices for the barley and oatmeal. Ten bolls of the barley, and one fourth of the money rent are paid to the schoolmaster, for which he is obliged to teach as many poor children belonging to the town and parish as the magistrates recommend, at the rate of 1s. 6d. per quarter, the number of scholars not to exceed, at this rate, the sum he may draw yearly. The rest of the barley, oatmeal, and money rent, is divided equally among the three widows.

The average number attending all the school-- is not much short of 300, which, taking the population at 2100, gives about one seventh attending school. - The people in general seem alive to the benefits of education. Very few above six or seven are unable to read, and most can both read and write.

There are two Sunday schools, besides a class connected with the congregation of the parish church.

LITERATURE;-There is a subscription library of between 500 and 600 volumes. Along with the proportion of trash which is usually found in such libraries, it contains a good deal of the standard literature of the country. It has not of late, been in a very flourishing condition. There is also a parish library, chiefly for the benefit of the poorer classes and of the young. It consists of about 300 volumes, chiefly of a religious nature. The books are given out gratis, and the number of readers, both old and young, is very considerable.

CHARITABLE INSTITUTIONS:.-Watson's mortification, already mentioned, is the only thing in the shape of an endowment for the poor. In January 1829. a society was formed called "The Burntisland Funeral Insurance Society." It is divided into three classes the first, including those who insure a sum of money to be paid at their death; the second, those who insure a sum to be paid at the death of their wives or husbands; and the third, those who insure a sum to be paid at the death of any of their children under eighteen years of age. Any person qualified may enter any one or more of these classes. By the original regulations, it is provided that persons under forty years of age shall pay 2s. and those above that age 4s. on their admission as members ; and that at each quarterly meeting, each member of one class shall pay 3d.; each member of two classes, 6d.; and each member of three classes, 9d. On the death of a member of the first or second class, L. 5 may be drawn from the funds of the society by the party having a right and on the death of a child of a member of class third, if under three months, L. 1, 10s. may be drawn ; if above that age and under three years, L. 2; if between three and eighteen years. L. 3. On these regulations some slight changes have been made, the sums payable on the death of members being now somewhat smaller. This Society has proved of considerable benefit to the working classes, and now numbers upwards of 300 members.

There is no savings bank in the parish. An attempt was made to establish one, some years ago, but it unfortunately failed.

POOR AND PAROCHIAL FUNDS:.-The number at present on the Poor's roll is 35. individuals receive 6d. 1s. or 1s. 6d. per week, according to their circumstances,-some, who have children to support, receive larger sums. The highest allowance at present is 3s. The funds arise from the collections at the church door, which may be stated at L. 65 ; from proclamations which, at 2s. 6d. each, yield from L. 2 to L. 2, 5s. per annum; and from a voluntary assessment on the part of the landward heritors to the extent of L. 50, the whole of which, however, has not for some time been realised. For a year or two, these funds have proved insufficient to meet the demands made upon them, and the kirk-session have been under the necessity of calling upon the heritors to renew their contribution before the expiry of the annual term. On account of the decay of trade, and the consequent lack of employment, pauperism has been, for some time, decidedly on the increase. Among many of the poor, there is very little reluctance to apply for parochial aid. There are some honourable exceptions ; but the old Scottish spirit of independence is gradually disappearing. Instances also occur of extreme unwillingness to contribute towards the maintenance of infirm or aged relatives. As yet, the spirit of beneficence is far from being dormant in the breasts of the wealthier classes. The amount of private charity is considerable ;

and subscriptions are occasionally made to meet cases of peculiar destitution. Coals, procured in this way, are generally distributed in the winter season and to the liberality of James Strange, Esq. and his household, by whom Rossend Castle has for some years been occupied during the summer months, have the poor been indebted for a seasonable supply of this necessary article, in the course of the present and two preceding winters.

JAIL:- The jail of Burntisland is neither large nor commodious; but there are seldom any prisoners.

INNS ETC.;.-There are 2 respectable inns, and 15 or 16 ale-houses, which, as in most other places, have an injurious effect on the morals of the people.

FAIR:.-A fair is annually held in the town on the 10th day of July.

MISCELLANEOUS OBSERVATIONS.

Since the date of last Account, both the town and the landward district have undergone great improvements. For a number of years, the town has been a favourite watering-place. The pure air, the good bathing-ground, the agreeable and extensive walks, the rich and varied scenery, together with the facility of communication with Edinburgh, attract annually a great number of visitors; so that, between June and October, the town assumes a much more animated appearance than during the remainder of the year. There is good accommodation for visitors, at rates varying from a small sum up to fifteen or twenty guineas per month. The vitriol work., which was in operation when the last Statistical Account was written, has been long suspended, and the premises have been converted into cottages for the summer visitors.

The country part of the parish is in a much higher state of cultivation than it was forty years ago. The farms are large, and the country population is consequently smaller. In this, as in many parishes, a want of hands is sometimes experienced in harvest, many who formerly inhabited rural districts having been attracted to towns by the thriving state of manufactures. Would it not be for the advantage of all parties, if proprietors were to erect cottages, or give greater facilities for feuing or otherwise encourage labourers and their families to settle in the country? This would be preferable in many ways to the system of bothies; and we should look for a much healthier state of the community, both in a moral and an economical point of view, were the proportion of the rural to the town population much higher than it is.

December 1836 (Rev David Couper)

