

DAIRSIE PARISH

CIVIL HISTORY

Parochial Registers.- These are of baptisms, commencing February 27, 1705; marriages, October 1, 1783; burials, October 1, 1783.

Land-owners.-The names of the land-owners and their properties are as follows: Chapelwell and Dairsie, Judge Erskine; New Mill, Mrs Bayne ; Todhall and Middle Foodie, the Trustees of James Cheape, Esq. ; Fingask, Heirs of the late Mr Somerville, now sold to Thomas Whitson, Esq. ; Wester Craigfoodie, William Fortune, Esq. ; Pitormie, John Meldrum, Esq. ; Craigfoodie, David Meldrum, Esq. ; Foodie, John Small, Esq.

Mansion Houses.- These are, Craigfoodie, Mr Meldrum ; Pitormie, Mr Meldrum ; Newmill, Mrs Bayne.

Castle of Dairsie .-The old Castle of Dairsie, now in ruins, although still in wonderful preservation, is situated on that part of the estate of Dairsie parish known by the name of Dairsie, the property, at this time, of Judge Erskine, by his marriage with Miss Traill, the daughter of the former proprietor. It is built upon a rising ground near the banks of the river Eden, which stream forms the southern boundary of that beautiful estate for about one mile and a half. This must have been a place of some consequence in early times, for we learn, that, in the minority of David 11., 1335, the then Regents of Scotland, Stewart and Moray, held a Parliament in the Castle of Dairsie, probably selected as a place of strength and retirement in these troublesome times.

The estate of Dairsie, like most others in the country, has had many owners. On 28th December 1520, it was conveyed by feu-charter by Andrew Archbishop of St Andrews and his chapter, to David Learmonth of Clatta and his son James. Continuing in the possession of the family of the Learmonth's till 1616, it became the property of the Spottiswoods, the unfortunate family who suffered so much by opposing the Covenanters. Dr John Spottiswood of Dairsie was Archbishop of St Andrews and Chancellor of Scotland about 1590. His son, Sir Robert, recovered many records and documents about the Scottish Church from abroad, which had been carried away by the monks at the time of the reformation. He was beheaded at St Andrews, 1646, by decree of Parliament assembled there. Captain John Spottiswood, younger of Dairsie, was put to death in Edinburgh, 1650, at the same time as was the gallant and renowned James Graham, Marquis of Montrose, and many others. In 1646, Sir John Spottiswood conveyed Dairsie to Sir G. Morrison,

Knight, and it was adjudged by his creditors, and purchased by Thomas Earl of Kincardine for L.73,636, 3s. 4d. Scots. In 1772, it was again sold by the Earl then of Elgin and Kincardine, to General Scott of Balcomy, and falling to his eldest daughter Henrietta, who was married to the Duke of Portland, it was purchased by Mr Barnes of London, and afterwards became disjoined, in consequence of speculating purchasers, until it remains with the heritors already enumerated.

On the estate of Dairsie is a pleasant small residence, called Dairsie Cottage, of modern date, and surrounded with wood. It stands to the west of the castle, overlooking the Eden. A number of years since, it was occupied for some time by that unfortunate nobleman, Lord William Russell, who was so inhumanly murdered in London lately by his French valet, Courvoisier. During his residence there, his Lordship was much admired for his unpretending mode of life and kind behaviour, although he lived strictly private, and was held in high esteem in the neighbourhood.

Near the old castle, the grounds of which the present proprietor keeps in great order, is the parish church built by the Archbishop Spottiswood about 1615. In the life of Spottiswood, prefixed to his History of the Church, it is said, " He, the Archbishop, built upon his own charges the church of Dairsie after the decent English form: which, if the boisterous hand of a mad reformation had not disordered, is at this time (1678) one of the beautifullest little pieces of church work that is now left to that now unhappy country."

The above is far from an overstretched account of this edifice, which originally had a flat roof with lead, and most grotesque shaped windows in the Gothic style, and a belfry tower near it. Now it is modernized by a roof of the modern shape, and the steeple pointed as others.

In the records of the synod of Fife, lately published for the Abbotsford Club, we find that, in 1641, a report anent the church of Dairsie was presented, when it appeared that the brethren and ruling elders had been appointed to visit the church of Dairsie, " anent superstitious monuments and kirk burial," who found that, " at the entrie of sindrie desks upon the platform., and above the great west door, there are crosiar staffes, being a sign of the degree or the last prebend and bishops, as not hierarchical according to the manner and form used among the Roman hierarchs, and further found superstitious " a glorious partition wall, with a degree ascending thereto." All these were denounced by the provincial assembly, and the minister, and elders, and heritors were ordained " to take order of the same," and this order was several times renewed in after meetings. In 1645, in an assembly held at Dunfermline, an order was made about " the levelling or the queer in Dairsie Church."

Within these few years, a vault was discovered in the east end of the church, near the pulpit, and found to contain coffins and bones, being used as a place of interment. It is understood that this practice of burying in the inside of churches is in future to be done away with, as prejudicial to the health of the sitters.

POPULATION

Population in 1755	469
1790-8,	540

1801,	550
1811	553
1821,	589
1831,	605
1841,	669

The number or illegitimate births in the parish within the last three years, 5.

Manufactures; These are, manufacture of dowlases, by Mr John Inglis, employing, 35 hands; flax-spinning, by Mr John Annan, 5200 spindles annually; flax-spinning, by Mr Michael Smith, 31,200 spindles annually.

PAROCHIAL ECONOMY.

Villages.- The villages in this parish are those of Middlefoodie and Osnaburgh, or Dairsie Moor. The former consists of a few straggling houses and some small feus. The houses are principally of little value, most of them being occupied by the labourers on Todhall, to the proprietor of which (Mr Cheape's Trustees) most of them belong. The village of Osnaburgh is becoming more populous, and is a thriving village about a quarter of a mile from the church to the northward, and is intersected by the great posting road from Edinburgh by Cupar to Newport. The turnpike road is well kept, and several coaches pass daily through this village.

Ecclesiastical State.- The number of Dissenting or Seceding families in the parish is about 12 or 15. There is a good manse, which was built in 1825.

List of Ministers of Dairsie.

Mr Peter Ramsay, admitted 1567.

Mr John Williamson, vicar, admitted November 24th 1577. Mr James Yuille, 1590, died 1610.

Mr John Rutherford, admitted February 1611, translated to Monifieth 1626.

Mr Patrick Scougal, 1636, translated to Leuchars 1645.

Mr David Rait, translated from Newburgh 1645, conformed to Episcopacy 1662, translated to Kinnaird 1664.

Mr George Paterson, admitted 1665, outed 1689. Vacant from 1689 to 1696.

Mr Andrew Geddie, March 3, 1696.

Vacant October 1703.

Robert Macculloch, D. D.

Mr John Macarthur.

Mr Angus Macgillivray, present incumbent.

Education.- The number of schools in the parish, exclusive of Sabbath schools, three. The yearly amount of parochial schoolmaster's salary, L. 34, 4s. 4 1/2d., with house and garden. The probable yearly amount of fees actually paid to parochial schoolmaster, L.25.

Poor; Average number of persons receiving parochial aid, 12. Average sum allotted to each of such persons per week 1s. Average annual amount of contributions for relief of the poor: from church collections, L.18 ; from alms, legacies, &c. L.17.

February 1843 (Rev. Angus Macgillivray)