



**OLD  
STATISTICAL  
ACCOUNT (1795)**

**FOR BALFRON  
STIRLINGSHIRE**

**NUMBER XXXVII. – PARISH OF BALFRON**  
**(COUNTY OF STIRLING – SYNOD OF GLASGOW AND AYR. –**  
**PRESBYTERY OF DUMBARTON.)**

**By Mr James Jeffrey, Minister – written c1795**

*Name, Extent, &c.*

**BALFRON** is a word of Gaelic derivation, and is said to signify “the Town of Sorrow.” On what account the place obtained this name is not certainly known.. The form of the parish is nearly an oblong square. Its length, from east to west, is somewhat more than 8 miles; and its breadth, from north to south, from 1 to 2 miles. It is bounded by the parishes of Drymen, Killearn, Fintry, Gargunnoch, and Kippen. The greater part of the grounds in this parish have the advantage of a fine southern exposure, rising gradually from the water of Endrick.

*Climate, Soil, &c.* - The climate is wet, but not unhealthy, several of the inhabitants living to a great age; and there we few instances of epidemical diseases. An epidemical fever, indeed, prevailed in the winter and spring of 1791 and carried off, in the village, upwards of 46 grown up people. But this mortality may be ascribed, not so much to the unhealthiness of the climate, as to the intemperance of people at the time, and the damp state of many new houses, which were occupied as soon as they were covered in and plastered.

The soil is various. To some places it is light and sandy but, for the most part, wet and tilly.

Agriculture is here in a state of infancy. The principal corn crop is oats. Barley is raised but in few places; and, green crops are seldom attempted. Among the disadvantages that have hitherto retarded agricultural improvements may be reckoned the badness of the roads, the distance from foreign manure, and especially the poverty of the greater part of the farmers to whom the land is at present let, in very small portions. Their rents are from 5*l.* to 35*l.*; two for three of there about 70*l.*; and one only up to 100*l.* Sterling. But the disadvantages under which the parish has hitherto laboured, are now in the way of being removed, or sufficiently compensated, by the extraordinary advantages arising from some new manufacturing establishments; and, in as far as their influence has hitherto extended, to improvements in agriculture, as soil has appeared very susceptible of melioration. There is abundant reason, indeed, for supposing that a spirit for such improvements will not be difficult to excite; for, of late, many substantial inclosures have been made in different parts of the parish, and particularly on the estate of Ballindalloch, where, in addition to these, there have been, several plantations of wood formed, with an equal regard to beauty and utility.

*Manufactures, &c.* – About the beginning of the year 1789, Robert Dunmore, Esq; of Ballindalloch, introduced a colony of cotton weavers into the parish. For these, he, at first, built a few houses, at his own expense, in the neighbourhood of the church and let them out at a small yearly rent. This branch of manufacture was immediately carried on to such an extent, that the value of the goods manufactured during the currency of the year 1792, amounted to the sum of 7626*l.* Sterling.

In the spring of the year 1790, the public spirited exertions of Mr Dunmore having already been directed to this corner, he applied himself, with success, to procure the erection of a cotton mill in the neighbourhood of his new village; and a happy situation having been chosen on the banks of the water of Endrick, the work was carried on, through his means, with such astonishing dispatch, that, in the month of June of the same year, yarn was spun in it. This branch of manufacture, in December 1792, gave employment to 390 people. Of these, 120 were men; 90 women; 180 children, from 6 to 16 years of age.

The cotton mill, thus erected, fully answered the purpose of extending and improving the village. Mr Dunmore readily feued out ground, to the new settlers, for the site of a house and garden, most commonly to the extent of a quarter of an acre, and, at first, upon such easy terms as to afford them ample encouragement; but here, as in many other cases; well directed liberality proved good policy; for the consequent prosperity of his village, and its manufactures, soon enabled him to raise the rate of his feu-duty from 2*l* to 4*l* per acre, without retarding the progress of building, or at all distressing the people. The houses, in general, are substantial. Most of them are covered with slate; and some of them are three storeys high. The village now consists of 105 new houses, in which there are upwards of 430 rooms with fireplaces.

For the rapid rise, and increase of the population of this new village, we are partly indebted to a printfield and bleachfield, which Mr Dunmore, with the same patriotic views, procured to be established upon the opposite banks of the water of Endrick, and in the adjoining parish of Killearn; for, although the necessary works connected with these establishments, be separated from this parish by the river, yet almost all the people belonging to them have their dwelling places in the village of Balfron, and a considerable part of the grounds originally intended for carrying on the bleaching and printing operations, are on the Balfron side of the river.

**Roads.** - Till within these few years the roads of this parish, during the winter months, were almost impassable; but in this respect also, we have derived much advantage from the introduction, of our manufactures and the spirited exertions of the gentleman who has so laudably patronized them.

In this particular line of improvement, indeed, the other landed proprietors, not immediately connected with the mercantile manufacturing interests, readily afforded him the most liberal and manly support, and thereby materially promoted both the particular interests of the manufacturing establishments, and the general good of the country; in which view Peter Spiers, Esq; of Culcreuch, a considerable heritor in this parish, ought to be particularly mentioned with honour. In consequence of these exertions, a bridge of two arches, at Ballindalloch, has been thrown over the Endrick, which, when *swelled*, is a rapid and dangerous river. A turnpike road has been made from Glasgow to the village of Balfron, and leading from it into the military road between Stirling and Dumbarton. Another turnpike road has also been made, which, passing through the east end of this parish, leads from Kippen to Glasgow. Good cross roads are begun to be formed, and considerable progress has been made in them. Arches have been thrown over all the streams of water, and hollow places; so that there is now the certain prospect of having good roads through every part of the parish.

**Population, &c.** – The return to Dr Webster in 1755, amounted to 755 souls. The population of the parish has been in a fluctuating state, in so far as regards the village, since the year 1790, seldom remaining stationary for a week. In December 1792, there were in the parish contained 1381 souls. Of this number the village contained 981, and of these 930 were new settlers.

Of the above number, 805 were of the Established Church, 459 Antiburgher Seceders, who have had a place of worship in the parish about 60 years, 64 Papists, 18 of the Relief Persuasion, 17 Cameronians, 9 Burgher Seceders, and 9 of the Church of England.

There were besides about 200 people, including all ages, imported to the village at Whitsunday 1793, when the printing and bleaching commenced; so that, at that period, there were in the village about 1181, and in the parish 1581 souls.

The people employed at the printfield and bleachfield are almost wholly of the Relief and Burgher Persuasion; and, besides these already mentioned as residing in the village in December 1792, there were several families of the same persuasions who had given a temporary adherence to the Established Church; but at Whitsunday 1793 being joined, all at once, by so many of their sect, each party immediately set up a tent for themselves, and have ever since been contending, with much animosity, for the honour of making proselytes. It is not, therefore, easy to ascertain the present state of the parish, with respect to sectaries; and it is still more difficult to say what it will be a few years hence.

Till very lately, there was no regular record kept of births, deaths, and marriages. From Whitsunday 1792 to Whitsunday 1793, there were 67 births, 46 deaths, and 30 marriages.

**Church and Stipend. Poor. School.** – The manse and offices were built new from the foundation is 1789, and the church, which is neat, and even elegant, in 1793. The value of the stipend is from 70*l* to 80*l* Sterling, according to the rise or fall of grain, part of it being paid in meat and barley. The glebe consists of about 18 acres. The Earl of Kinnoul is patron.

The poor have hitherto been well provided for out of the collections made at the church, dues of mortcloths, and the interest of about 100*l* Sterling of the poor's money; but that they will continue to be much longer so, out of these funds, considering the great influx of inhabitants, is very doubtful. There are no vagrant poor in the parish.

The schoolmaster's salary is 100*l* Scotch, out of which he pays, annually, 2*l* Sterling for a person to teach a school in a distant part of the parish. Besides the parish dues, which are now pretty considerable, the schoolmaster has somewhat more than an acre of land, originally feued by the session for his behoof. This piece of ground was lately exchanged for an equal quantity, with much advantage to the schoolmaster, by Mr Dunmore, as it stood in the way of some of his improvements. Upon the ground Mr Dunmore gave in exchange, he built, at his own expense, a neat and commodious school room, with a lodging for the master, of 4 rooms, all under one roof.

**Miscellaneous Observations.** – Peat and turf, of which there are great abundance in the parish, were, previous to 1790 almost the only fuel used; but, since roads were made, coal is chiefly burnt, at least by the people in the village. It is brought from Campsie or Baldernock, the carriage being upwards of ten miles. Red and white freestone are found in great plenty. There is also limestone. Repeated attempts have been made to find coal, of which, in the opinion of good judges, there are the most flattering appearances, tho' hitherto without success. The price of labour, of all kinds, is of late advanced more than a third. In many instances, it is doubled. In the year 1787 the wages of an ordinary manservant were from 4*l* to 6*l* a year. In 1794 they are from 8*l* to 10*l*. A day labourer, in 1787, could have been hired for 7d or 8d. per day; but in 1794 they require 1s or 1s.6d. or 1s.8d. From the vicinity of Glasgow, and the easy access to it, the price of provisions is now, in a great measure, regulated by the Glasgow market. There is no public house in the parish, excepting in the village, where there are a tolerably good inn, and two respectable public houses. There are, besides, a great many low public houses, which deal only in whisky, and which are productive of the worst effects, both to the health and morals of the people.

(Scanned and edited by Jim Thomson – Jan.2005)  
JT/OSA1795/BALFRON