

PARISH OF URQUHART.

PRESBYTERY OF ELGIN, SYNOD OF MORAY.

THE REV. JAMES MACLEAN, MINISTER.

I.—TOPOGRAPHY AND NATURAL HISTORY.

Name.—THE name *Urquhart* appears to be compounded of three Gaelic words, viz, *oire*, a coast, an edge, a brink,—*fad*, long,—and *amhan*, a river or water; and would seem to have been imposed to denote the great length of sea coast by which the parish is bounded on one of its sides. That this etymology is the true one, “appears highly probable from two circumstances; of which one is, that the name *Urquhart* is pronounced by Highlanders, when speaking Gaelic, *Urachadan*, which differs very little in sound from the three Gaelic words above-mentioned, when joined in one, and pronounced by a Highlander: the other, that the two Highland parishes of the same name are similarly bounded on one side; *Urquhart* in Ross-shire by the Frith of Dingwall, and *Urquhart* in Inverness-shire by *Lochness*,—the line of coast in each being of very considerable length.”

Boundaries, &c.—The parish of *Urquhart* is bounded on the north by a line of sea coast 5 miles in length, extending from the mouth of the river *Lossie* on the west, to that of the river *Spey* on the east; and an equilateral triangle erected on this line as a base, gives a pretty correct idea of its shape or figure. It excludes from the sea the two contiguous parishes, *St Andrews Lhanbryd* on the west, and *Speymouth* on the east, which two parishes meet where the parish of *Urquhart* terminates on the south. The barony of *Garmouth*, situated in the angle formed by the river *Spey* and the sea coast, was annexed, *quoad sacra*, to the parish of *Speymouth*; but the teinds of that barony still form a part of the fund from which the incumbent of *Urquhart* derives his income.

Topographical Appearances.—The sea coast, through its whole extent, is a sandy beach, with the exception of a small rock called “*The Bear’s Head*,” not visible at high water. The shore has no creek or landing-place capable of receiving or accommodating so much

as a fishing boat. The small lake, called the Loch of Cotts, having been drained about thirty-three years ago, there is now no lake in the parish; neither are there hills in it deserving the name, yet the names of places would indicate that it abounded in both. It must appear somewhat strange that the elevation of places called Longhill, Broomhill, Lochhill, Gladhill, and Hills, should not exceed twenty-five feet above the level of the sea; and that the inhabitants of Easter Lochs, and Wester Lochs should be but indifferently supplied with water even for domestic purposes. There is no river in the parish; the only streams which run through it are three small brooks or rivulets, on one of which there are two mills, one for grinding corn, and the other for sawing timber; on another of them a corn mill has been lately erected by a tenant in the neighbourhood, as a speculation, and is sufficiently employed. Thirlage being abolished, the tenants are at liberty to grind their corns at any mill they please.

With the exception of a plain of about $2\frac{1}{2}$ square miles on the north-west, elevated not more than ten feet above the level of the sea, the surface of this parish is unequal and waving, but no where so steep as to render more than two horses necessary for drawing the plough. The general appearance of this parish is beautiful, the moors having been long since planted, and every barren hillock in the arable part of it covered with a clump of fir trees.

Finfan Well.—Near the line which divides Urquhart from Spey-mouth, at a place called Finfan, there is a well which is resorted to in the summer season by a few invalids, (not more perhaps than five or six) for the recovery of their health. It does not appear that the water of it has been analyzed, but its taste and smell resemble those of the Strathpeffer spa, and its effects are said to be the same; and it might have attained to equal celebrity had it had the good fortune to be recommended with the eloquence and zeal by which the late Dr Morrison brought the Strathpeffer spa into such high repute. General Sir James Duff, who till lately was in the habit of spending a part of the summer at Innes House, built a neat cottage at Finfan, and placed a person in it to keep the well and furnish water to occasional visitors. Sir James, while at Innes House, visited this well almost every day; owing to which circumstance, and the trouble and expense he put himself to respecting it, it is now usually called Sir James's well.

II.—CIVIL HISTORY.

Antiquities.—About half a mile from the church, and near to

Innes House, the remains of a Druidical temple are still to be seen, consisting of nine tall stones fixed in the earth, and placed in a circle, the entrance to which, fronting the east, has a stone on each side taller than the rest.

In a hillock, called the cross-hillock of Kempston, there was lately found a human skeleton in a reclining posture, with its head to the north-east. It crumbled quickly to dust when exposed to the air.

A hillock, or barrow, on the farm of Mest, on being opened, was found to contain two very rude urns full of ashes and burnt bones.

In the moor (now covered with wood) about a mile and a half east from the church, there is a rising ground almost entirely surrounded by a trench, and which, if tradition may be credited, was a Danish camp. Near it there is a hollow called the "Innocents Howe," where, it is said, that the women and children of the natives had taken shelter, and that the Danes, having discovered their retreat, put them all to death.

No vestige of the richly endowed priory of Urquhart now remains; its site only is indicated by the name *Abbey well*, still given to the fountain which supplied the monks with water. Its ample possessions shared the fate of the property of the church throughout the kingdom in the reign of James VI. The lordship of Urquhart, the lands of Fochabers, and some other lands in this country, together with a part of the salmon fishing of the Spey, which all belonged to this priory, were seized by the crown, and granted partly to court favourites, and partly as rewards to champions of the Reformation.

Modern Buildings.—Innes House and the grounds around it are particularly attractive of notice. The house, a large, tall, irregular building, was for a long period the residence of the lairds of Innes, and is now that of James Duff, Esq. by whom it has been rendered one of the most elegant and commodious mansions in this county, and by whom also the grounds around it have been laid out in excellent taste. The only other mansion-house in the parish is that of Leuchars, a more modern structure, and much smaller than Innes House, but in thorough repair, and a most comfortable residence for the gentleman who now occupies it as a tenant.

Exclusive of the barony of Garmouth, which, as has been stated, is not in this parish *quoad sacra*, and with the exception of two or three very small farms on the eastern side which belong to the Duke of Gordon, the whole landed property of it was acquired,

partly by purchase, and partly by excambion, by the late James Earl of Fife; and, under a trust-deed executed by that Earl, has, since his death, been managed by trustees.

III.—POPULATION.

For nearly a century previous to 1755, the annual average of baptisms recorded in the session register was double what it has been in the last seven years, and hence the parish must have been then considerably more populous than it is at present; but probably not so much more so, as the greater number of births would indicate, a greater number of children having died then, than die now, owing to the small-pox and other diseases not being now prevalent, or having ceased to be fatal, except in a few instances.

Population in 1801,	-	1023
1811,	-	986
1821,	-	1008
1831,	-	1019

The number residing in Urquhart, the only village of the parish is	160
of families in the parish is,	220

In this village there are about twelve tradesmen, consisting of shopkeepers, masons, wrights, blacksmiths, shoemakers, and tailors, but these with only four exceptions, occupy crofts of land, so that the whole parish may be said to be agricultural. The annual average of baptisms in the last seven years is $18\frac{2}{7}$, of marriages $5\frac{5}{7}$. There is no register of deaths.

Character of the People.—The people are shrewd, intelligent, industrious and well-behaved. They have all of them been taught to read and write; and though they cannot talk fluently on religious subjects, they seem sensible of their obligations to live in the fear of God and in the practice of Christian duties. Their attendance on the public ordinances of religion is upon the whole regular.

IV.—INDUSTRY.

Agriculture, &c.—The number of Scotch arable acres in this parish may be stated at 3100, and the average rent per acre at L. 1, 5s. The valued rent is L. 5567, 15s. 6d. Scots. There are six farms of more than 100 acres each. With the exception of about 120 acres possessed by the villagers of Urquhart, in lots of from two and a-half to seven acres each, the rest of the parish is divided into farms, varying in size from 20 to 100 acres. The number of tenants qualified to vote at the election of a Member of Parliament for the county is 21.

The extent of waste land may be stated at about 200 acres, and of woods, all planted by the late James Earl of Fife, at 2478, consisting chiefly of Scotch firs. They are thinned annually by

sales, partly of decayed trees for fuel, but chiefly of young trees for hurdles, and full grown ones for rafters and deals. Of late years, there have been planted annually in the parish from 20 to 30,000 hardwood trees, but very few Scotch firs. The woods appear to be all in a thriving state.

Husbandry.—The soil is light and sandy, generally of a kindly nature, and well adapted for producing turnips, potatoes, barley, grass, and oats, to which crops the cultivator till within these few years chiefly confined himself; but his great object now is to raise as much wheat as possible; and, accordingly, an eighth, and in some instances, a fifth part of the farm is sown with wheat; whether to the advantage of the farmer upon the whole may admit of a doubt; his inducement to adopt this management appears to be, that wheat is the grain most easily and readily converted into money to meet the rent and expenses.

The rotation of cropping most common in this parish is, *1st*, turnips and potatoes; *2d*, wheat and oats; *3d*, grass, (of which but a small proportion is made into hay); *4th*, grass (pastured); *5th*, wheat and oats; *6th*, oats. When barley is wanted, it is sown in a part of the fifth or sixth lots, in place of oats; seldom in the second. The average quantity of grain obtained from an acre is probably not equal to what it is in some other parts of Morayshire; but the quality of it will bear a comparison with that of any grain in the kingdom. The average produce of a Scotch acre may be estimated at from three to four quarters.

The improvement of waste lands in this part of the country would be attended with no advantage to the farmer. Most of these lands are overrun with furze and broom, which it would cost a very considerable expense to root out, and carry off; and the soil when turned up by the plough, would produce nothing if not richly dunged, which, obviously it could not be, without obliging the farmer to his great loss, to stint his fields already in cultivation of their usual allowance of manure. The improvement most likely to be profitable, it is apprehended would be, to lay plenty of lime on the land already under the plough, and to use bones as a manure for raising turnips. These substances have been tried in this quarter, and have answered remarkably well; but the cost (from 3s. 6d. to 4s. for a boll (128 Scotch pints) of unslaked lime, and 3s. per bushel of ground bones,) rather exceeds the ability of the smaller farmers to procure them in any considerable quantity.

Rabbits, owing to the prodigious increase of their number within the last three or four years, have become destructive in no inconsiderable degree to the wheat and rye brairds, and turnips. The measures taken for abating this nuisance by the gentlemen who manage this property as trustees, have not yet had all the effect that could be wished: and perhaps it might be well that the farmer himself were permitted to use such means as he might find necessary for protecting his crops from this sort of depredation.

Produce.—The average amount and value of raw produce yearly raised in the parish, as nearly as can be ascertained, is as follows:

Grain of all kinds,	L. 7456	0	0
Potatoes, turnips,	1854	0	0
Hay,	150	0	0
Pasture,	1500	0	0
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	L. 10,960	0	0

V.—PAROCHIAL ECONOMY.

Market-Town.—The nearest market town is Elgin, which is five miles distant from the church of Urquhart.

Means of Communication.—The length of turnpike road passing through the parish is $2\frac{1}{4}$ miles. County roads have been made where they are wanted, and are kept in tolerably good repair. There is no Justice of Peace resident in the parish, not even a Constable. To give a small matter to vagrants is found to be attended with less trouble and expense than to deal with them as they must often be dealt with in towns.

Ecclesiastical State.—The only place of worship in the parish is the parish church, of which the situation is sufficiently convenient, its distance from the farthest extremity of the parish being scarcely three miles. The church is an old house, but in good repair, and affords sufficient accommodation for the population. The sittings may be said to be free, excepting those in a small gallery, for which the kirk-session draw about L. 4 of rent annually for behoof of the poor. A certain space has been allotted by the proprietors of the parish to each farm according to the size, for which the tenant at his entry pays at the rate of 9s. for a pew, which, however, is repaid to him at his removal; so that for six sittings, the number of sittings in a pew, the rent paid yearly is no more than the interest of 9s.

The manse, an excellent house, was built in the year 1822. The extent of the glebe is five acres, the value about L. 1, 5s. per

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acre; the amount of stipend, as modified in 1829, is fifteen chalders, the one-half meal and the other half barley, and L. 10 of money. The only Dissenters in the parish are three families of Antiburgher Seceders, and three of Episcopalians, consisting of about 25 individuals. The sacrament of the Lord's Supper is dispensed once a-year; and the average number of communicants is 200.

Education.—The parochial school is the only one in the parish at present. The branches taught in it are, English, English grammar, Latin, Greek, writing, arithmetic, book-keeping, the elements of algebra, and practical geometry. The schoolmaster's salary is the maximum. He has a comfortable dwelling-house, and is paid the statutory allowance for a garden. The Earl of Dunfermline's mortification to the school of Urquhart of twelve bolls meal annually (eight and a-half stone Dutch weight to the boll,) is now paid to the schoolmaster according to the *fiar* price of the county. The amount of school fees does not exceed L. 8 a-year.

Last year there was another school in the parish, but the master left it for a better situation. Another teacher is wanted, and in all probability will soon be found, to supply his place. The emoluments of the last teacher consisted of school fees, and an allowance of three guineas annually by the trustees of the late James Earl of Fife.

Poor and Parochial Funds.—The average number of persons receiving parochial aid is thirty, and the average sum allotted to each annually is L. 1. In the course of a year, casual relief is afforded to persons not on the roll, to the amount of from L. 2 to L. 3. The annual amount of contributions and other funds for relief of the poor is as follows:

Average of weekly collections in the church,	L. 24	0	0
Mortification payable by the town-council of Elgin from land called the Shooting acres,	2	13	6
Rent of gallery in the church,	4	0	0
L. 64 in bank, reserved to meet a time of unusual distress, at 2 per cent.	1	5	7
Donations, average cannot be calculated, but say,	2	0	0
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	L. 33	19	1

Applications for parochial relief are not frequent, and the circumstances of those who do apply for it are so well known to the members of the kirk-session, that there is little danger of its being given to such as do not really stand in need of it.

MISCELLANEOUS OBSERVATIONS.

The improvements in husbandry, which, at the time of the last

Statistical Account, were in their infancy, and hesitatingly attempted by some of the more wealthy tenants, are now generally adopted. Turnips and sown grass, which were then far from common, may now be seen on every, even the smallest farm; and with regard to the dress and diet of the people, a considerable change to the better has evidently taken place in both.

April 1835.

PARISH OF SPEYMOUTH.

PRESBYTERY OF ELGIN, SYNOD OF MORAY.

THE REV. JOHN GORDON, MINISTER.

I.—TOPOGRAPHY, &c.

Extent and Boundaries.—THE extent of the parish from north to south is about 7 miles; and from east to west about 2 miles, on an average. It is bounded on the north by the Moray Frith; on the east by the Spey. The parish is formed of the two old parishes of Essil and Dipple, which were united in 1731.

Topographical Appearances.—At the distance of about half a mile from the sea, the ground rises suddenly to a small hill. Beyond this there is almost one continued plain, of $3\frac{1}{2}$ miles in length, and about $1\frac{1}{2}$ in breadth, bounded on the side towards the river by a steep bank, from forty to fifty feet in height. The soil is for the most part light.* The climate is mild and temperate, and the situation healthy.

About the year 1800, the extensive moor adjoining Garmouth, called the Common, was divided among the feuars, the Duke of Gordon retaining a portion. Nearly the whole was planted with Scotch firs, which are thriving well, and have much improved the appearance of the country.

II.—CIVIL HISTORY.

Antiquities.—The only relic of the past in this parish worth preserving, was part of the house in which Charles II. is said to have signed the Solemn League and Covenant; but this was razed to the foundation last year. In digging in several parts of the beach at

* *Vide* Old Statistical Account.