

# PARISH OF KIRKCONNEL.

PRESBYTERY OF PENPONT, SYNOD OF DUMFRIES.

THE REV. JAMES RICHARDSON, MINISTER.

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## I.—TOPOGRAPHY AND NATURAL HISTORY.

*Name.*—CHALMERS, in his *Caledonia*, derives the name of this parish from the saint to whom the church was dedicated; and the name *Conel* he considers as an abbreviation or corruption of *Congel*.

*Extent, Boundaries.*—The parish is bounded on the W. and N. W. by the parishes of New Cumnock and Auchinleck, in the county of Ayr; on the N. and N. E. by the parish of Crawfordjohn, in the county of Lanark; on the S. S. E. and S. W. by the parish of Sanquhar. From east to west, the parish extends about 8 miles, and from north to south, not less than 15 miles.

*Topographical Appearances.*—On the right and left banks of the river Nith, there is a continued range of hills, irregularly formed, and of considerable height, distant from the river on each side about two or three miles, and affording excellent sheep pasture; many of them capable of cultivation almost to the top. Upon crossing the ridge of these hills to the north and south, the soil becomes cold and swampy, or consists of a peat-moss covered with grass and heath, intersected by narrow valleys, deep ravines and winding rivulets. From the base of these hills towards the river, on both sides, there is a gentle slope.

From the elevated situation of this parish, and the number and height of its hills, one might expect a moist and cold air, with late harvests and early frosts. The extensive draining, however, of the hill pasture, and the agricultural improvements which for a long time past have been going on, have completely prevented these effects. The soil under cultivation is much diversified. It consists partly of a light gravelly mould, loam, clay, or mixture of moss and clay, and deep rich soil, especially on the holm lands upon the banks of the rivers.

*Minerals.*—This parish abounds with coal of the very best description, which some years ago was wrought to a considerable extent; but, with the exception of one coal pit for smith work, the present tacksman has removed his coal operations to the parish of Sanquhar, which is nearer the seat of general demand. Several beds of lime and ironstone have been found in the parish; but no attempt of any consequence has been made to ascertain how far it would be profitable to proceed.

*Mineral Waters.*—There are two mineral wells in this parish upon a farm called Rigg. The one is said to be of the same quality as the Kirkland spaw in Galloway; and the other, called Riggburn, resembles Hartfield spaw near Moffat: but, in both instances, the water of this parish is the stronger. These wells are little resorted to, because they have been much neglected: but the water is often sent to very distant parts of the country.

## II.—CIVIL HISTORY.

*Eminent Men.*—The late venerable and highly esteemed George Jardine, Esq. Professor of Logic in the University of Glasgow, was for a short time, in early life, parochial schoolmaster of Kirkconnel. The session minutes under his hand bear date 1759. A few years previous to his death, he visited this scene of his early labours, and such of his old friends as were then alive. He bequeathed for the behoof of the schoolmaster of Kirkconnel, in all time coming, the sum of L. 50, the interest of which was to be paid to him, and the capital laid out on the most advantageous terms.\*

*Antiquities, &c.*—Of antiquities or natural curiosities, this parish cannot boast much,—except baptismal font stones, which are found in different parts. It is said that St Connel, who built the kirks of Kirkbride and Kirkconnel, was buried on the top of that range of hills called Glenwhurry; but the writer never could discover the smallest vestige of the saint's grave. In the parish, there are several cairns of stone,—some of which have been removed for the purpose of building stone dikes, to save the expense of quarrying, and were found to contain a quantity of human bones †.

## III.—POPULATION.

In 1755, the population amounted to	-	-	899
At the time of the last Statistical Account,	-	-	1000
In 1811,	-	-	1099
1821,	-	-	1100
1831,	-	-	1111

The small increase of population during the periods above stated has in a great measure arisen from the recent division of the parish into more extensive farms, than formerly,—one farmer now occupying the land which perhaps had been held by eight or ten farmers. The whole village holds of the Duke of Buccleuch; but, no building feus having been granted, every householder is a tenant at will: he pays a small annual rent, and remains in undisturbed possession.

\* Archibald Macnab, Esq. merchant, laid out a considerable sum in improving and beautifying a small property in this parish which had belonged to his ancestors. During the greatest part of his life he was much engaged in mercantile transactions in Germany. While in the execution of his plans, he was overtaken by a storm, and perished in the Elbe during the late war. In this part of the country, he was much and deservedly respected, and the small property of Holm, which belonged to him was sold and purchased by His Grace the Duke of Buccleuch.

† A few years ago, when a road-maker was levelling down the sides of a gravel pit upon a very small knoll, about 200 yards west from the bridge which is thrown over the river Nith at Kirkconnel village, he came upon an earthen urn of Roman fabric, filled with human bones, which, upon being exposed to the air, were reduced to powder. The urn was broken to several pieces before he was aware.

*Character of the People.*—The people of this parish, in general, are sober and industrious. Their character cannot be more accurately described than in the words of my late respected predecessor in his Statistical Account. “They are acute, deliberate, cool, steady, serious, and well acquainted with the principles of Christianity.” In no case have they ever, even in turbulent times, manifested a turbulent spirit; they have always shewn a loyal disposition, and a readiness to submit to the laws of their country.

#### IV.—INDUSTRY.

By a late measurement, the number of acres belonging to His Grace the Duke of Buccleuch and Queensberry in this parish is as under, viz.

	A.	R.	P.
Arable,	6,091	1	10
Low pasture,	542	0	14
Hill pasture,	18,511	0	25
Meadow,	104	2	19
Under wood,	178	3	22
In roads,	12	3	22
Occupied by houses,	48	0	37
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	25,489	0	39

The property of the other heritors in this parish does not exceed 1000 acres in extent; of which, from 300 to 400 are arable.

*Husbandry.*—A regular rotation of crop is observed by the tenants, in terms of their leases. An iron plough upon an improved plan is generally used. For seed, the red and early Angus oat is employed; and sometimes the potato oat is sown where the soil is considered suitable. Barley and wheat are seldom sown, on account of the great distance from a regular market. Sowing generally commences in the month of March, or as soon after as the weather permits. Harvest is generally finished by the middle of September, and sometimes by the end of August.

Upon each acre of green crop, the farmer generally lays down from thirty-five to sixty bolls of lime, with a proportional quantity of manure, such as the land requires; and frequently, before breaking up pasture land, it is limed at the same rate; and for every Scotch acre, eight bushels of seed oats are allowed.

The expense of ploughing, sowing and harrowing an acre of land, amounts to about 15s.; of weeding, reaping, carting home, thrashing, cleaning and carrying the produce to market, L. 1, 14s. 6d.; and for tear and wear of farming utensils for do. annually, 6s. The average produce of an acre of land is about thirty-eight bushels.

*Cattle.*—The cows which are kept for dairy purposes are all of

the Ayrshire or Cunningham breed, and amount to about 560. Upon good pasture, each cow is expected to produce from sixteen to eighteen stones of what is usually called Dunlop cheese; but, as the pasture varies, the average may be fixed at twelve stones per cow. During the last eight years, cheese of the above description has varied in price from 7s. 6d. to 9s. 6d. per stone. The number of followers or young cows is about 160, of which 113 are usually reserved for keeping up the stock, and the remainder sold to dealers from the south, when rising three years old. About 113 cows are either stall fed for the butcher, or sold as early calvers to cowfeeders; or such as answer the purpose are kept through winter, and fed on grass the following summer for the butcher.

Every milk cow, in many parts of this parish, requires from two to three acres of pasture, where the land has not been properly laid down,—also house feeding, which consists of clover and tares in the season, and turnips in autumn and at the end of the year. During winter, each cow requires not less than 160 stones of hay, generally meadow. From the extensive agricultural improvements which have been made and are still going on in this parish, few or none of the west Highlanders or Galloway breed of cattle are grazed or fed in this parish for the English market as formerly.

*Sheep.*—Most of the farms in this parish have a great quantity of hill pasture as well as arable land. The hills are stocked with sheep of the black-faced breed,—these being found more suitable for the climate than any other. Upon an average, the number of sheep kept in this parish, on the different farms, amounts to from 11,000 to 12,000. The number of lambs reared annually is about 7000,—of which 2000 are reserved for keeping up the stock, and the remainder carried to market, the average price of which, for seven years immediately preceding 1834, amounted to about L. 5 per score; and the price of sheep for the above period, about L. 11 per score. Every score of sheep generally produces four stones of wool, which was sold, during the years stated, at 7s. per stone; but, in 1834, wool was greatly in demand, and prices exceedingly high and much beyond the real value.

Every 600 sheep require a shepherd, who is generally allowed a certain number of sheep as part of his wages; and such shepherds as are married, and do not live in the houses of their employers, are allowed, besides a number of sheep, pasture for one or two cows, a house, and a certain quantity of meal,—which in all may amount

to nearly L. 30 per annum. The expense of smearing a score of sheep may be about 5s. and pasturage L. 4 per annum.

*Rental—Heritors, &c.*—The rental of the property in this parish of the Duke of Buccleuch (who is nearly the sole proprietor) amounts to L. 4160, 7s. 6½d; that of the other heritors, (who are only four in number,) does not exceed L. 450.\* The total valuation of the parish is 6964 merks Scots.

*Employments—Wages.*—With a very few exceptions, the working classes of the community are mostly employed in agricultural pursuits or as day labourers. A few families are employed in working coals in the adjoining parish, and may earn from 1s. 8d. to 2s. per day. The latter are sober, industrious, well-behaved, and well-informed, and by no means of that description of character which is generally ascribed to their craft. As the time employed in their mining operations is not above six hours, they generally spend their spare hours either in reading, or in working where they can find employment, in order to add a little more to their gains for the support of their families.

There are the following trades in the parish: masons, 2; tailors, 6; shoemakers, 4; weavers, 15; stone-dikers, 8; blacksmiths, 10; house-carpenters, 4; corn-miller, 1; innkeepers, 5; flesher, 1; merchant, 1; cooper, 1.

There are no public works of any description within the parish, except an iron-plating forge, upon a very small scale, and employing about eight or ten men in its various departments.

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

Produce of grain of all kinds, including fodder, deducting seed,	L.	7830	0	0
Of potatoes, turnips, &c.		1880	0	0
Of hay,		1292	0	0
Dairy produce,		2800	0	0
Sheep, wool, and lambs, young cattle,		3280	0	0
Gardens and orchards,		480	0	0

Total yearly value of produce, L. 17,562 0 0

#### V.—PAROCHIAL ECONOMY.

*Means of Communication.*—The roads are in a good state of repair; but bridges are much wanted on the great public road in the upper district of this parish. A public coach runs daily through this parish from Glasgow to Carlisle, and from Carlisle to Glas-

\* A small portion of land, not amounting to more than three-fourths of an acre, was held under charter so far back as the year 1444; the reddendum of which "unus solidus monetæ regni Scotiæ," is to be paid "ministro ministranti ad altare beate virginis;" and afterwards by *clare constat* from Lord William Crichton of Sanquhar to the minister of the parish and his successor in office.

gow, which both enlivens the country, and affords great accommodation to the inhabitants of this district engaged in business,—as, by means of it, they can have daily access to any part of the kingdom. There is also a regular post daily from the south in the morning, and from the west in the afternoon. The letter-carrier goes from Sanquhar, the post-town, to old Cumnock, every morning; and leaves the letter-bag at Kirkconnel in passing; and upon returning from Cumnock to Sanquhar he delivers his letter-bag here, and takes the post-bag for the departure of the post from Sanquhar to Dumfries. The present arrangement is good; but, were a mail-coach to start from Dumfries *via* Thornhill, Sanquhar, Kirkconnel, New and Old Cumnocks, Ochiltree, Ayr, and Kilmarnock, there is every reason to believe the contractors would be indemnified for their expense, and that district of country would receive much benefit.

*Ecclesiastical State.*—Of this parish His Grace the Duke of Buccleuch and Queensberry is patron.\* The stipend amounts to 15 chalders, at the county fiars' conversion, one-half meal and one-half barley, together with L. 8, 6s. 8d. for communion elements. The glebe is of considerable extent, but of very inferior soil in many places; and part of it is liable to be flooded in winter, by the melting of snow from the overflowing of the Nith. There is abundance of free teinds. †

The only Dissenters in the parish from our national church are Presbyterians under the different denominations of Cameronians and United Secession;—of the former, there are only two families, and

\* Chalmers, in his *Caledonia*, states, that the church of Kirkconnel at one time belonged to the abbot and monks of Holywood, who held the rectorial revenues to their own use, and a vicarage was established for the service of the church. In Bagimont's Roll, as it stood in the reign of James, the vicarage of Kirkconnel, in the deanery of Nith, was taxed with L. 5, 6s. 8d. At the epoch of the Reformation, the rectorial revenues of the church of Kirkconnel were held by Lord Crichton of Sanquhar for the payment of the small sum L. 20 (Scots) yearly, to the abbots and monks of Holywood. Small, however, as this sum was, his Lordship withheld it for many years, and they were unable to enforce payment. After the Reformation the patronage and tithes of the church of Kirkconnel, with the other property of Holywood Abbey, were vested in the King, by the general annexation act, and granted to John Murray of Loehmaben, Act Parl. iv. 575—665. In the reign of Charles II. the patronage of Kirkconnel was transferred to the Duke of Queensberry, and, upon the death of the last Duke William, came with a very princely property and title into the Noble family of Buccleuch.

† It appears that Mr John Carmichael was ejected from his charge of this parish in 1662, when Episcopacy was violently obtruded upon this kingdom. In the year 1681, Mr Samuel Moat, the Episcopal incumbent, was also obliged to leave his charge, because he could not take the oath required by the Test Act. From that period, the vacancy was protracted until the year 1732. The present church was built in the year 1729, and removed nearly two miles south from the site of the old church, being more central and convenient for the parish. Mr Peter Rae, then minister of Kirkbride, within the presbytery of Pont, was admitted minister of Kirkconnel, and the parish of Kirkbride suppressed, and divided betwixt the parishes of Sanquhar and Durisdeer.

of the latter, six or seven. The inhabitants are much attached to the Established Church, and are a church-going people.

A few years after the induction of the present incumbent, which took place in 1803, the present church was considerably enlarged for the accommodation of the villagers. Since that time, the church, manse, and offices have undergone complete repair, and at present, perhaps, there is not a more comfortable place of worship within the county. The offices were rebuilt, and are in good condition.

*Education.*—Besides the parochial, there are at present several private schools in the parish; and the number of scholars who attend these different seminaries, and were present at the annual examination, amounted to 159: but the average number during the year may amount to 170. The branches of education taught are only English, writing, and arithmetic. The Scriptures are regularly read, and the children daily repeat the Shorter and other Catechisms usually taught in schools; and weekly, they recite portions of Scripture. The salary of the parochial schoolmaster is the minimum, with a good house and garden; he has, besides, the interest of different small sums of money, for which he is to teach one or two orphan children when any are in the parish, or such whose parents are so indigent as not to be able to pay the school fees, which are extremely moderate. The fees which he actually receives may amount to L. 30 per annum.

*Poor.*—The most necessitous of the poor receive some supply in aid of their own industry, from the weekly collections made in the church, which annually amount to from L. 16 to L. 20. This, together with a small sum laid out at interest, is all that can be calculated upon for their relief. There is no assessment for parochial relief, nor is there any occasion for it. The farmers are extremely attentive to the poor, by occasionally sending meal and potatoes to be distributed by the session among them; and the heritors occasionally send donations for the same purpose.\* The

\* In the year 1817, when markets were very high and provisions scarce—and when many of the labouring class, from the rate of wages, were unable to procure support for themselves and families, a parochial subscription was voluntarily entered into, aided by the resident and non-resident heritors; by means of which, a fund was raised to a considerable amount, with which provisions were purchased, at a considerable distance, by farmers in the parish, and brought by them free of expense. Such of them as had any stock of meal or potatoes for sale, reserved the same for the behoof of the parish. By this means, a store of provisions was formed; and a committee of management was appointed, who met weekly to consider the cases of the applicants; and from the representations laid before them, instructed their store-keeper to give out a certain quantity of provisions gratis, to the most necessitous; to others at reduced prices, according to their circumstances; and such as could afford to pay received the article at prime cost. The quantity of meal served out and sold, as above stated, amounted to 1950 stones, (besides potatoes and pot-barley,) within the space of

average number of persons receiving parochial aid is 10; and the average yearly allowance to each L. 1, 4s.

#### MISCELLANEOUS OBSERVATIONS.

In the former Statistical Account of this parish, it is stated, that there were then not 700 acres under the plough; and now there are no less than 6391 acres, 1 rood, 10 poles, fit for every purpose of husbandry. Still, however, there is a great want of shelter and enclosures with belts of planting judiciously laid down. In the measurement of his Grace's property in this parish, it is stated that there are upwards of 178 acres under wood; but that wood consists chiefly of brush and sproutings of trees formerly cut down, and is confined to the sides of deep ravines and the banks of the different rivers. The valuable part of the wood, many years ago, was set up to public sale by order of the late William Duke of Queensberry; and the purchasers were not required, by the articles of sale, to enclose the wood, so as to preserve the young shoots from being destroyed by the sheep or black cattle. No doubt, in some places, these young shoots have got the superiority over their enemies; yet there is not a single tree of any considerable value within that portion of this parish which originally belonged to his Grace. The present Noble proprietor, however, has done much, and is still going on improving his princely property in Nithsdale, by planting, draining, and enclosing, and by erecting commodious farm-houses and offices to his numerous tenants. These improvements first commenced near his own residence at Drumlanrig Castle; but, from the great progress which has been made, there is every reason to hope that his Grace will soon carry them into this upper district; and, when these are once completed, it may be safely asserted, that there will be few more pleasant country districts, or more delightful tours than from Dumfries by the bank of the Nith to New Cumnock in Ayrshire. More than twenty miles of that road, without intersection, passes through his Grace's property. When these improvements shall have been completed, many of the disadvantages arising from an unfriendly climate will be removed. For the advancement of agriculture, every facility is afforded by good roads, and a constant supply of lime from Ayrshire, about six miles distant from the centre of this parish. In the north-east district, there is a regular supply of lime during summer from the farm of six months, the time required. In consequence of this plan, the needy were well supplied with wholesome food, and, upon closing the whole concern, the sum necessary for reducing the price of provisions was found to be not much to every individual contributor.

Whitecleuch, parish of Crawfordjohn, which adjoins the parish of Kirkconnel. The road to that limework, at present, is not in good repair; but in the course of a few years, it is expected that that district of the parish will be completely opened up with excellent roads, sufficient to convey the mail-coach and carriages of every description from Portpatrick to Edinburgh and Glasgow, by connecting it with a new line of road already made in Galloway. From the survey and measurement taken, it is said, that the above line will shorten the distance about thirty miles.

*October 1835.*