

**The New Statistical Account of Scotland (1845)**  
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**Parish of Bourtie**

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PRESBYTERY OF GARIOCH, SYNOD OF ABERDEEN.  
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I.—Topography and Natural History.

Name.—The etymology of the term "Bourtie" cannot be traced ; but, as in some old charters, it is found written Bourtiach, we may reasonably presume that the first part of the appellative is significant of some distinctive quality ; in like manner as the name of the district (Garioch or Geiriach) signifies shining or splendid field.

Extent and Boundaries.—Bourtie extends from west to east 5 miles; in average breadth nearly 2; and contains probably 9 square miles. In figure it resembles an irregular triangle, of which the western boundary, resting on Chapel of Garioch, forms the base, and the eastern point, where it touches Udney, the apex. On the north, it is bounded by Daviot, Meldrum, and Tarves; and on the south, by Udney and Keith-hall. Near the centre of the parish, and distant a mile from each other, rise two hills of considerable elevation, being probably 600 feet above the level of the sea. That on the north is named the Hill of Barra, the other the Hill of Lawhillside. These run in an easterly direction, and converging terminate in the Hill of Kingoody, by the foot of the eastern acclivity of which the parish is bounded.

Meteorology.—From the height at which the manse is situated, the thermometer and barometer stand comparatively low. The greatest depressions which I have marked in the latter were, 1st, on the 20th September 1830, when, in a few hours from ten a.m. with a violent south-east dry wind, it fell fully two inches, and stood rather below 28 inches; and, 2dly, on 1st April 1836, when, at ten p.m., in a tempestuous night of snow and rain, the wind very strong from south by east, it was as low as 27.7 inches. It need hardly be remarked, that, though the barometer, from its rise or fall, may lead us to expect a coming change of weather, it does by no means per se indicate what that change will be, and that for any purpose of practical value in common life the season of the year, the direction of the wind, the appearances of the clouds, &c. must be taken in connection, and the judgment deduced from a consideration of the whole. In making this judgment, considerable assistance may be occasionally derived from observing the habits of the common rook, which abounds in this neighbourhood. The signs which these afford have been pointed out with singular beauty in the Georgics of Virgil. Some allowance being made for the difference of climate, perhaps his interpretation of them still holds true, so indelibly have the instincts of animals been impressed by the great Fountain of Life.

The rocks in the parish are chiefly of the trap formation, and the summit of the Hill of Barra has been held, by some naturalists, to be the crater of an extinct volcano.

II.—Civil History.

The session register of Bourtie commences with the transference of a minister from a neighbouring parish in 1709. He was the first Presbyterian minister settled since Episcopacy was abolished; for the now ascendant church, with a moderation and regard to the peace of the country which do it honour, seems to have permitted many of the Episcopal clergy to continue for life in the unmolested discharge of their sacred function.

Antiquities.—The parish is by no means destitute of ancient remains. Three of the circles, which continue to be named Druidical, existed at the date of the last report. Two of these remain—one in a state of considerable preservation, on the lands of Thornton. Two barrows, or rather cairns, have been opened within the last ten years. In each there was found a stone-coffin enclosing two urns of hard-baked carved pottery. The urns were full of rich loam, mixed with charcoal. The largest of these cairns raised on an eminence called the Hawklaw, originally covered nearly half an acre, and was

surrounded with a circle of small stones set on end.

Cumming's Camp.—The most remarkable, however, of our ancient remains is the fortification on the Hill of Barra, [The small western isle Barra is thus described; "This island, which is low and flat on the west side, and steep and irregular on the east," &c. These features correspond exactly with those possessed by the estate of Barra, so that I should be inclined to question the accuracy of Chalmers's derivation of Barra. It is, according to him, from two Celtic words Bar and ra, rae or Bath, signifying the fortified ground.] known by the name of the Cumming's Camp. This, and the circumstances connected with it, have afforded a fertile theme of discussion to antiquarians, and I shall therefore, perhaps, be excused if I dwell on it at some length. The fort occupying the flat summit of the hill contains fully three acres of ground, and is surrounded with three nearly parallel walls of circumvallation, composed of earth and stone. Apart from its name, the camp would be considered merely one of those hill-forts, which, by no means rare in Scotland, are pretty numerous in the adjacent country. Thus we have, with such differences merely as arise from the nature of the accessible materials, the forts on Benachie and the Keirhill in Skene, and the Barmekyn in Echt. These all lie in the vicinity of the Roman Iter, from their camp ad Devanham (Norman dikes in Peterculter), to that ad Ituriam (Glenmailen in Forgue), towards the Castra alata on the Moray Frith. Is it not probable, then, that, as these forts flank on either side, the line of the Roman progress northwards, they were erected by the then inhabitants of the country (the Faixali), as places of refuge for themselves and their families, from which, sallying forth, they might engage in a Guerilla warfare with their haughty invaders? The tradition which gives the building of this camp to the Cummings is evidently fabulous, —for to it their age affords nil vel simile aut secundum. That it was even occupied by them previous to their battle with Bruce, the accounts of that battle, whether by Hector Boece or by Barbour, seem to render very doubtful. They were the invading and more powerful party, and came to seek not a secure retreat but, as they believed, an easy victory over the Bruce, already depressed with reverses and wasted by most valetudinary health. Barbour's account of the battle, which is the most authentic, is here subjoined. It was fought on 22d May 1308. "The King having crossed the Grampians received the allegiance of some barons, but, in a short time, fell sick at Inverury; he was unable to take any sustenance, and his strength entirely failed him. Having been placed in a litter, he was carried to the Slenach or Sliach, in the parish of Drumblade, a fortification of some strength. After Martinmas, when the ground was covered with snow, the Earl of Buchan raised an army, and along with his brother, Sir John the Mowbray, and Sir David Brechin, nephew to the Bruce, marched against the monarch.

The conflict lasted three days, but, being confined to discharges of arrows, little harm was done. The forces of Bruce were at last obliged to quit their defences by famine, and having placed the royal litter in the centre of their army, they proceeded to Strath-bogie without any molestation from Buchan, who seems to have feared to attack them. Shortly after, they removed the King to Inverury. Meantime Buchan, Mowbray, and Sir David Brechin, assembled another army, and encamped at Old Meldrum. The next morning, Sir David Brechin, with a small party, rode towards Inverury, and so suddenly entered the west end of the burgh, that he drove the King's troops before him, and killed several. The Bruce lay at the east end of the town, and on receiving tidings of the onslaught by his nephew, instantly called for his horse, that he might do battle with the enemy. It was in vain that his friends remonstrated with him. "The insolence of these men," he replied, "has made me hale and fair; no medicines could so speedily have cured me as they have, and so may God be my help, for either I shall have them, or they shall have me." At the head of his troops, in number about 700, Bruce marched towards Old Meldrum, and was met by Buchan. Astonished at the sudden apparition of the King, the soldiers of dimming hesitated, and were confused: Bruce pressed furiously upon them; and in a few minutes they were put to flight, and utterly discomfited.

[The disjecta membra of the various popular legends on this subject may be somehow thus incorporated: "On a time lang syne, whan the English wished to tak awa our liberties, the fause Comyn cam up frae Buchan wi' a' his falluwers and a fouth o' English forbye, to win the Crown to the English Tirran Edward. In ae nicht, they biggit a' that Camp o' the Hill heed, for the country was mensely agen them. But they thocht themselfs that they had the ba' fairly at their fit noo, for Bruce was lyin at death's door at Inraurie: and frae the time that he took ill, his folk, thinkin' a' was o'er wi' them, had turn't few in number. But fan the nicht's mirkest, it's nearest the crawin' o' the cock. Fan he heard o' their bein' at's very door as 'twar, up he sprang fra his bed, like a fey man, and cryin' for's sword said 'Is'e mak' a speen or spuil a horn. These loons are physick to me.' So out he gaed amang's folk, and fan they were dwindled awa' till a hanfu' amais, and sair he seem't dishertent, but only said, 'Fot

we wint o' folk, we man men' wi' can:' so he order't them a' to be ready by 12 at nicht, wi' a' the nowt and horse they could gather. A' well aff they set but nae by the stracht road, but o'er the tap o' Lawel Side, which they cam 'till jist afor' the sky; and for as bare as it is noo, it wis than as I'm tauld a brow forest coveret wi' bonny trees. Bruce noo tied lichts to the horns o' the nowt, and reed cloth and white napkins to the horse necks, and dreve them here and there through the wood, ordering folk to mak a' the din they could. The heart o' the Comyns lap to their mou, for they thocht the haill o' Scotlan' was risen agen' them. Jist at this time whan a stir began amo' them, Sir William Wallace, as wus agree't on wi' the Bruce, up's wi' a stane like a House-side, and wi' the strenth o' 10 Galiachs, bungs' 't frae the tap o' Benachie; and that they nicht ken fa the compliment cam' frae, he first prented the initials o' his name ( W. W.) i' the side o't. Fung it gaed thro' the air and lichtin' i' the middle o' the camp kill't not a few, and gart the yird stot to the very clouds. The hurly wus noo compleet, and oot they ran oot o'er ither's heeds like as mony sheep oot o' a tauld. In this confeesion, the Bruce and his folk cam upo' them, and tho' they foght hard, they war' sae sair defait that they could never haud up their heeds ahint it. The King's spirits waur noo high, as ye may believe; but he wus doom't to get a sair heart brak afor' nicht. His bosom Comarade, the brave Englishman, Sir Thomas de Longueville, wus mortally wounded i' the battle, but he continuet to feght while it lasted. He raid aff the field 'till he cam' to the Dykes o' Fala, but there fell frae his horse. Callin' to the King, ' Noo, Robin,' he said till him, ' my een will soon be clos't, and I've ae request to mak. Ye maun jist lay my banes whar-ever this arra fa's.' So drawin's bow, he sent the arra wi' a' his micht through the air, and it fell i' the Kirk yard o' Bourtie here, twa mile awa. The king's love o Sir Robert wus great, and he caus't mak' that image o' him, whilk ye see lycin' yonder, and placet it on's grave. That ither image, as I've hard say, is Sir Thomas Ladye, wha fan the news o's death reach't England, gaed oo't o' ae dwawn intill ani-ther, and wi' her last breath beggit to be laid aside him."]

[This derives some vraisemblance from two rather rude images of a knight in armour and his dame, which occupied a niche in the old church of Bourtie. They lie now in the church-yard, neglected like the stranded remains of Polydorus. It is hardly necessary to remark, that no such knight as Sir Thomas de Longueville is known historically to have been amongst the followers of either party.]

The Earl of Buchan and Sir John Mowbray fled to England, where they died soon after; and Sir David Brechin soon after embraced the cause of his royal uncle. The Bruce wasted the district of Buchan with fire and sword, and such was the desolation he left behind him, that the herschip of Buchan was mourned for more than fifty years."—(Barb. Bruce.) Boece says, "Qua victoria ad Hene-raurie (Inverury) parta:" it is accordingly by some historians called the battle of Inverury, by others the battle of Old Meldrum. From Barbour's account, however, and from other circumstances there is no reasonable doubt, that the scene of the conflict was a level field lying immediately under the Hill of Barra, called at this day, "the Bruce Field," which, though now levelled by the inexorable plough, contained, until very lately, a number of small elliptical entrenchments.

Scilicet et tempus veniet, quum finibus illis  
Agricola, incurvo terram molitus aratro  
Exaesa inveniet seabra rubigine pila.

The only witness of this kind found in the entrenchments was an English bill-hook, now in possession of the tenant of North Mains of Barra.

[In the year 1395, the parish was the scene of a feudal conflict, which is thus re-corded by Wyntoun, (Book ix. cap. xvi. vol. ii. p. 371-373):

"A thousand and thre hundyr yere,  
Nynty and fyve or thare-by nere,  
Robert the Keth, a mychty man  
By Lynage, and apperand than  
For to be a Lord of mycht  
Of mony Landis of rycht Richt,  
In Fermartine, at Fivy,  
Assegit his Aunt, a gud Lady  
That tyme the Lud of Craufurdis wyf,  
(That led in all her tyme gud lif.)

Schir James de Lyndesay, than her Lord,  
 Merit agane hym in discord:  
 For his Masonry's first gert he  
 Fra thare werke removit be,  
 And quha, that Watty broucht fra the Burn,  
 He gairt thaim oft wytht his Ost spurn;  
 Thus he demanyt that Lady  
 Wythin the Castil of Fivy.  
 Than Schir James de Lyndesay,  
 Quhen he relatioune he hard say  
 That then his Wyf, that gud Lady,  
 There wes assegit sa straitly,  
 He gadryt of his Frendis then,  
 Thre, or nere foure, hundyr men,  
 And owre the Mouth than als fast  
 As he til Fivy could haif past.  
 This Robert of Keith of purpos set  
 In the Ganyauch with James met,  
 And, nere the Kirk than of Bourty,  
 Of Rotertis men were slane fifty  
 And wele ma; swa Robert gwyte  
 Wes in that Bagane discumfyte;  
 Fra thine he past noucht till Fivy,  
 For till assege that gud Lady." ]

III.—Population.

In Dr Webster's tables, the population is given as being	527
1811, by Parliamentary census, it was . . . . .	442
1821, . . . . .	461
1831, . . . . .	472
1841, . . . . .	469

	Boys.	Girls.
1829, . . . . .	4	6
1830, . . . . .	7	9
1831, . . . . .	10	5
1832, . . . . .	4	5
1833, . . . . .	9	5
1834, . . . . .	5	5
1835, . . . . .	5	9
	44	44
Unmarried men and widowers above 50, . . . . .		8
Unmarried women above 45, . . . . .		7
Widows above 45, . . . . .		10
Number of families, . . . . .		82
Average of persons to each family, . . . . .		5 $\frac{3}{4}$

The decrease from the middle of last century to the beginning of this, was owing to the increased size of farms. The births for the last seven years stand thus: [The reporter, as well as some of his brethren

in this neighbourhood, enrolls in a pocket register, immediately when he baptizes it, the name of every child; and though he exacts the fee to the session-clerk, the people regard it as a kindness rather than any hardship. Might not the church recommend the general adoption of some such plan, and thus save the country the heavy expense of the registration apparatus with which it is threatened.]

Land-owners.—The landholders are, Mr Ramsay of Barra (a minor); Mr Leith Lumsden of Leithfield; Mr Duguid of Bourtie and Collyhill; Mr Mackenzie (of Glack) Thornton; and Mr Ross of Arnage (part of Bourtie.) None of these are resident.

#### IV.— Industry.

The valued rent is L.2501 Scots. The real rent is about one-fifth part greater, or L.3000 Sterling.

Agriculture.—The parish contains about 5000 imperial acres. Of these nearly 3600 are in cultivation, giving an average rent of 16s. per acre; in plantations, chiefly Scotch fir and larch, 360; 1000 uncultivated and waste, and a few acres of moss. The most general rotation of cropping pursued here (as indeed through Aberdeenshire), is what is called the seven-shift; i. e. after grass, two successive grain crops; third year, turnips or potatoes; fourth year, grain crop sown down with grass seeds; fifth, sixth, and seventh years, grass crops. From trials made by some distinguished agriculturists, the reporter is inclined to state his belief with some confidence, that, through the greater part of this county, which holds chiefly by a light loam, a six-shift, i. e. one grain crop after grass, instead of two, would be more beneficial to the soil, and, as a consequence, more beneficial eventually to the cultivator. Leases are generally for nineteen years : it might be desirable that their endurance should embrace at least three complete rotations. Within the last ten years, between 300 and 400 acres of waste land have been improved. To this good work, Mr Duguid of Bourtie has greatly contributed, both by his example, and by judicious aid granted to his tenants. Of the 1000 acres remaining waste, nearly two-thirds might with advantage be brought into cultivation; and not only so, but what is already in tillage might be rendered very greatly more productive. According to what we even at present see, it is perhaps not extravagant to affirm, that every acre in Aberdeenshire, under whatever crop, might, on an average, be brought to produce one-fourth more. It is not want of skill nor enterprise that prevents this; nor want of capital; nor want of proper encouragement by proprietors; one and all of these may partially operate as retarding causes. There exists one barrier to our onward progress, of such supereminent magnitude that it stands alone, and before it, the others "hide their diminished heads." This is want of confidence in the stability of our external agricultural defences. Could it be whispered into the ears of those men whose motto is, "We are the people, and for the people," how many ten thousand pounds their motions for demolishing the corn-laws prevent annually from being committed to the bosom of that "tellus gratissima, quae nunquam reddit nisi cum foenore," we believe that, having the end in view which they profess, they would cease from agitating this question. Farmers will not lay out on waste ground the value of 100 bushels of grain, even with the prospect of reaping in time '200, for that time embraces a period of some years, if the sword be ever suspended over their heads. The capital thus withheld would incalculably increase the productions of the earth for man and beast; for each acre of land brought into cultivation does not increase grain and herbage only pro tanto, or arithmetically, but adds to the productive powers of all the land around, from the increased temperature which it induces, and the diminution of mildews and early frosts. Nor is this all: the "bare boll," (as the farmer significantly calls it), brought from abroad, is a very different thing from an additional boll raised at home; because this last carries with it the capacity of feeding more cattle, and thus brings a greater supply of milk, butter, cheese, and well-fed butcher-meat within the reach of the great body of the people. But this, says the modern school of economists, is forcing things unnaturally. It is, every Briton may answer, adding to the beauty, the fertility, the salubrity, and the riches of that land, "quae me genuit atque aluit;" it is following the dictates of a sound mind, for preventing under Providence those violent and sudden alternations of ruinously low and ruinously high or famine prices, as to the desolating effects of which the traditional annals of this and other parishes bear appalling testimony.

#### V.—Parochial Economy.

Market-Town.—There is no market held within the parish: the nearest market-town is Old Meldrum, which lies towards the north, but much the greatest intercourse is with Inverury, though rather more

distant to the south-west.

Ecclesiastical State.—The church is near the centre of the pa-rish : it was built in 1806, is in tolerable repair, and contains about 300 sittings. There is no other place of worship. The Dissenters are, Episcopalians, 2; Quakers, 2; Seceders, 14; total, 18. [This, according to my recollection, is the precise number of Dissenters given in the Report 1797, but the Episcopalians were then most numerous.] All the others attend church with commendable punctuality the average number of communicants is 210.

Education.—The parochial school is the only one in the parish it is well attended, for the people are universally alive to the benefits of a sound, cheap, and religious education. All come to years can read and write, and there are scarcely any, even among the peasantry, who have not made some progress in accounting. The work of education is begun at the age of four or five, and children are sent to school for the first time, from that period of life to six or seven, according to their distance from school. About one-eleventh part of the population are in attendance during winter.

Poor and Parochial Funds.—The average number of paupers is seven ; the sum allotted to each varies from 1s. to 1s. 4d. per week, and averages nearly L. 3 a-year. The annual collections amount to about L. 20; we have besides L. 7 or L.8 of interest on stock created chiefly by savings made in prosperous times. These sums are quite sufficient for all our wants. There is a creditable spirit of independence among the people. I am not aware that any one has ever directly applied for parochial aid ; while, on the other hand, there are not a few cases in which it has been declined when offered. "Not that I would refuse it, Sir," have they said on such occasions, "if I were in want; but I ought not to take it, until that comes: and I have yet something remaining, or am yet able to do such and such work."

Miscellaneous Observations. The inhabitants are a sober-minded, industrious, frugal, an temperate people, and readily contribute according to their means, to advance any well-digested scheme of benevolence, whether at home or abroad. Several are reckoned very skilful farmers, and the agriculture is, on the whole, equally advanced with that in the neighbourhood. There is neither inn nor alehouse in the parish. Our greatest reproach is the quantity of land unimproved or implanted, and the state of the roads. These have been of late somewhat improved, but still they are worse than those in any other parish within the district.

May 1842.