

THE STATISTICAL ACCOUNT OF SCOTLAND
SIR JOHN SINCLAIR 1799
of Carsefairn.

PARISH OF CARSEFAIRN
(1792)
(Stewartry of Galloway. – Presbytery of Kirkudbright
Synod of Galloway)
By the Reverend Mr. Samuel Smith.

Name.

Carsefairn or Carsefern, compounded of *Carse* and *fern*, most probably derives its name from the situation of the church, which is upon an extensive plain on the banks of Deugh, and which at the time of its erection had been covered with *fern*.

Soil, Produce, &c. – Excepting the plain on which the church is situated, and a few more very small spots on the banks of the rivers, the country is all hilly. The high hills are all green –the lower ones generally covered with heath, and interspersed with large flats of moss. The soil for pasture is chiefly of two kinds: The spongy and wet, which yields the most luxuriant herbage; and the dry, which is by far the most nutritive pasture. It is reckoned, however, an advantage for a farm to have both kinds, and most farms have this advantage. There are perhaps 1000 acres of arable ground in the parish, though seldom above a tenth part in tillage. Double that quantity of meadow grounds; a good deal of which is cut only once in two years. About 150 years ago wood had abounded; now any that remains scarcely serves to be mentioned. Iron ore might be found in abundance, and formerly iron mines were wrought; but discontinued as soon as the wood for charcoal was exhausted. Were the working of iron to be again resumed, it is probable from the expence of coal, and the great distance to any sea-port, it would yield but little profit. Almost all the springs are chalybeates, some of which are excellent; but as they lie remote from any habitation, it is probable they never will be frequented.

Air, Climate, and Diseases – Much more rain falls here than in the lower parts of the country; and as the situation is high, and the grounds in most places wet, the air must be comparatively moist, yet it is extremely salubrious. Epidemics are rarely known. An intermittent fever was a native of the parish. They are indeed occasionally imported by the cattle drivers, when they return from the fens of England; and in a variety of instances it has been observed, that the disease did not make its appearance for several weeks after the infection had been received. Other fevers here are of the slow nervous kind. They appear only among some of the lower classes, and are evidently owing to cold damp houses, want of cleanliness, and of proper food. Scurvies are little known, though most of the inhabitants live all the year round on salted provisions, which they use in great abundance. The pernicious consequences of this mode of living are obviated by the plentiful use of potatoes, and other vegetables. The rheumatism, it might be expected, would be a prevalent disorder in a cold damp country, particularly when it is considered, that the shepherds must often after being overheated in climbing the steep mountains, be exposed to the piercing air on their summits, and that they often continue wet for a whole day and nights. That it is not so must be attributed in a good measure to the discreet use of warm woollen clothes, particularly the *plaid*, with which every inhabitant of the parish male and female is provided.

State

It may not, perhaps, be improper, to take notice of one other disease which formerly

prevailed in this, and still prevails in many other places of the south of Scotland, viz, the *yaws*.

This disease is always caught by infection. The virus which spreads the contagion, is evidently of the venereal kind; but the mode of receiving it is different in this and the lues venerea. The infection is almost invariably communicated by the saliva of the person diseased. The first symptoms are usually a pricking pain, with a slight inflammation, and sometimes a small ulcer in one or both side of the throat. The inflammation often extends over the fauces and uvula. The amygdalae, and sometimes parotids, swell on one or both sides. In this stage of the disease, it is impossible to distinguish it from a slight cynanche, or common sore throat. Afterwards the pain and inflammation, instead of being removed by the means which usually prove effectual in the cure of the cynanche, gradually increase for several weeks or months. By this time the whole of the fluids are tainted, and the disease further makes its appearance on the scrotum, penis, and sides of the thighs, or perhaps more frequently in tumours in the anus, which soon break, and become painful ulcers. Red or purple spots sometimes appear on the breast, or other places of the skin, and the whole habit of body is disordered. Though the disease usually begins in the fauces, yet the palate is seldom much injured, or the cartilage of the nose affected, as in case of lues when of long-standing. The writer has seen no case where the bones either of the legs or arms were affected.

The mode of cure is exactly the same as in confirmed lues, by the use of mercury, to such a degree as gently to affect the mouth, and for such a length of time as may remove every symptom, which will seldom be less than six weeks or two months, and often considerably more. An effectual mode of preventing it is neither to sip from the same dish, drink from the same cup, or smoke the same pipe, which hath been used by a person infested. By the use of these precautions, a very troublesome disorder is removed from this parish, and might soon be extirpated every where.

State of Properties – One half of the parish belongs to Mr. Macadam of Craigengillen. The other half is divided among 14 different heritors, only two of whom are residents. The valuation of the parish is 576l. Scots. The real rent 2800 l. Sterling. The farmers at an average pay upwards of 200 l. yearly rent.

Number of Sheep	30,000
Black Cattle	1203
Horses	83
Ploughs	20
Carts	19
Goats	40

Population. – In 1755, the numbers were 609 – At present 461. – Decrease 148 – Under 10 years 112 – From 10 to 50, 278 – Above 50, 70. No accurate parish register has been ever kept; but it is evident, from remains of old houses in every farm, that the inhabitants had at some former period been nearly double of what they are at present. They have increased a little of late years, and appear still to be increasing, from the building of a village which contains 60 inhabitants.

Pasturage – Though agriculture is yet in a rude state, this is by no means the case with respect to the management of sheep and black cattle. In this, perhaps, the farmers in this parish are inferior to none in any part of Galloway. Few of them have less than 2000 sheep; and they are attentive to every method of improving them, and guarding against the various accidents to which they are liable. The principal methods of improvement which have been adopted of late years are, stocking lightly; taking low farms for winter, or

reserving winter grass in the lowest parts of the same farm; selecting the best rams, which they often bring from distant places where they can find them, of better size and shape, and equally hardy; selling off the weak ewes in the latter end of the season, and the small lambs either at that time or about Lammas. Where the farm is large, dividing the sheep into different flocks, which are kept separate all the year round, and changing the rams from one flock to another; sending the rams to richer pasture in the winter and spring; smearing much lighter than was formerly the practise. It is never found advantageous to give up smearing altogether, though it has often been tried. The sheep always became worse, and the wool less in quantity, and inferior in quality, unless the season was remarkably mild.

The farmers here have certainly given less attention to the improvements of wool than it merits. The only sheep used is the common black and grey faced, and no fair trials have been made, whether any other species with finer wool would thrive with them, though they are invariably of opinion that they would not. Hence the wool is in general coarse. It sells these two years past from 6 to 8 s. per stone, or 26 lb. averdupois. The mutton is excellent, and improves in quality till the wedder is 6 years old. They are usually sold at three. A wedder of this age weighs 10 or 11 lib. averdupois per leg, has 6 or 7 lib. ditto of fat, and sells at 11s. Part are sent to the markets in the north of England in summer, but the greatest quantity to Edinburgh in the end of harvest – The two most fatal diseases of sheep are the rot and sickness. These two dreadful maladies used often formerly to sweep away the half of a flock, but seldom now make very great havock. The means to prevent the former is to stock light, and after bad seasons to sell off every one that is suspected. The best method of preventing the latter, is to take the young sheep which are most laible to it either to a different farm, or to another part of the same farm, where the quality of the soil is different. The cure of either is never attempted, though there can be no doubt it would often succeed, if the diseased sheep were observed on the first attack. The proper cure of the rot would be salt marshes, or house feeding. The sickness is an inflammation of the intestines, and ought certainly to be treated by bleeding, injections, and warm fermentation.

In one or two farms a disease also prevails termed the vanquisb. It arises from feeding on dry barren moss, void of all nourishment, to which the creatures are so attached, that they will never leave it till they die of emaciation. In this disease the horns usually become red. This disease almost constantly prove fatal, unless the sheep are removed to the low grounds, and put on better pasture, which always operates a cure.

Another disease very common on some farms termed the gripping. This is evidently a paralytic or nervous affection, where one or more of the limbs, or sometimes the whole body is affected. It might probably be cured by laudnum. The cold bath is often used with advantage.

The sturdy or hydrocephalus is also a well known disease among the sheep. It admits of no cure but cutting and taking out the water, which sometimes proves successful, even when performed by the course hand of the shepherd, with no other instrument than a common knife.

The farmers in this parish are also well skilled in the management of black cattle, and breed great numbers of them. They never attempt to raise them of a large size; but are very attentive to the shapes both of bull and cow, and accordingly rear them very handsome. It is a well known fact, that in muir farms where the pasture is coarse, a small cow will not only give as much milk, but even breed as good calf as one much larger. By a little more attention to the breed of horses, which they now begin to pay, they might produce some of the hardiest and most serviceable for riding or light carriage of any in Scotland.

Manners, Etc. –The inhabitants of this parish have not been careless of their own

improvement, and have made no inconsiderable progress in civilization. Placed all in easy circumstances; enjoying not only the necessaries, but many of the conveniences, and some of the luxuries of life, favoured with many intervals of leisure without enticements to dissipation, they have been careful to cultivate their minds; they please themselves with rural or innocent social amusements, of which they are extremely fond; and, upon the whole, appear to be in that middle state betwixt opulence and want, barbarity and refinement, which is perhaps of all others most favourable to happiness. Pride, envy and ambition are, perhaps, the most prevalent vices; Sobriety, industry, and hospitality the most distinguishing virtues. The writer of this has been surprised to find oftentimes in their little libraries, some of the best authors in the English language.

Church, School, and Poor. – The church and manse are small, but in tolerable repair. The stipend 500 l. Scotch, and 3 chalders of victual, two-parts meal, and one-third bear with a legal glebe and grass; but in so high and exposed a country not very valuable. The emoluments of the school are 16 l. a -year at an average.

The poor are few in number, and well provided for. The funds of late years have considerably increased. Seceders of all descriptions are almost entirely extirpated. All the inhabitants are punctual in attending on public worship, yet by no means either superstitious or enthusiastic.

*Parish of Carsphairn.
Additional Communications, from the Rev. Sam Smith.*

I have been blamed for many omissions in the history of Carsphairn – with respect to the origin, extent and boundaries of the parish, description of rivers, mountains, and game, and some other particulars for which the parish is remarkable – and which were contained in the manuscript.

Abridgers who are unacquainted with the state of the country, cannot always judge what to omit and what to insert. When the narrative is very concise, and contains no extraneous matter, the writer has reason to expect that it will not be curtailed; and when his name is prefixed, he is responsible to the public. In making these observations, I have not the most distant intentions to throw any blame on your conduct, which, in this most laborious and patriotic undertaking, justly entitles you to the most grateful acknowledgement of the public in general, and of the clergy of the church of your Scotland in particular, and to the merited esteem of your countrymen in future ages. They will, however, I apprehend, justify me, in your opinion, for transmitting you so abridged an account of this parish, which is neither small nor inconsiderable – an account which would have been much more full and copious, had the limits of your work permitted its insertion.