

The New Statistical Account of Scotland (1845)
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Parish of Meldrum

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

Name.—The ancient name of this parish, and by which Spalding takes notice of it in his History of the Troubles and Memorable Transactions in Scotland, is Bethelnie, which is a derivative from the Hebrew words (Bethelnou,) signifying House of our God. It appears probable, that, at an early period, when sacred edifices were comparatively few in Scotland, the church situated in this parish may have served to accommodate the inhabitants of a large extent of surrounding country. For this reason it may have received the emphatic name of Bethelnie, or House of our God ; and the appellation has been at length extended to the district in the vicinity of the place of worship, which now constitutes the parish. But whether the supposition of a great central religious locality be correct or not, undoubtedly the parish church was, from the earliest time, situated in that district which, to this day, retains the name of Bethelnie. Its site is marked by the place of interment which remains, where its foundations can be seen; and the farm which formerly surrounded it, on which the manse was built, is still called the Auld Kirk.

The modern name of the parish (Meldrum) is probably derived from the Celtic words Mealldruim, signifying the shoulder or ridge of a hill. This conjecture is supported by the peculiar nature of the locality, as the whole parish occupies a rising ground of greater or less degrees of elevation. At the northern extremity, the ground ascends to a considerable altitude above the surrounding valleys, and descends by an easy inclination, presenting a variety of rich and well cultivated table-land sloping to the south, the east, and the west. From several points of this elevation, extensive views are obtained of the districts of Formartine and Buchan on the one hand, and of the cultivated valley of the Garioch on the other, bounded on the west by the lofty and well-proportioned mountain of Benochie.

Extent and Boundaries.—The length of the parish from north to south varies in different points from 5 to 8 miles, and its breadth from east to west varies from 2 to 5. It is consequently of an irregular figure, and contains about $11 \frac{2}{3}$ square miles. On the south, it is bounded by the parish of Bourtie; on the north, by Fyvie and Tarves; on the east, by Bourtie and Tarves; and on the west, by Daviot and Fyvie. A ridge of hills, none of which is of any great height, commencing at the northern extremity of this parish, stretches towards the north-west, but possesses no striking characters. The soil on the south and south-west aspects is rich and fertile; and the summits are generally covered with heath, but not of that luxuriant description which is common on the hills in the higher districts of Aberdeenshire. The prevalent winds during summer, autumn, and the later part of spring are westerly; and the severity of the northern blast in winter is no doubt moderated by the chain of hills already alluded to.

Climate.—The climate is temperate, but variable in spring; hence, during that season, pulmonary complaints are common, and others which are dependent on sudden changes of temperature.

Geology.—Hornblende rock is found in large detached masses in one part of the parish. It admits of the finest dressing, and might even be polished like marble; but the expense of obtaining it, on account of its very hard and compact structure, is such, that it is seldom employed for the ordinary purposes of building. Whinstone is common in different places; and rock-crystal is found in the hill of Bethelnie. Limestone was discovered several years ago in this parish, near the boundary line which separates it from Tarves, and was wrought with success for some time; the operations, however, have since been discontinued; but in Tarves they are still carried on advantageously, close to the borders of this parish. The soil of the northern extremity is inferior to that of the other districts of the parish. In the former it is more friable, of little comparative depth, and incumbent on a subsoil of rock or gravel. In this division, also, there is a portion of the soil of a mossy nature, and the climate is inferior : throughout the whole of it, the harvest is a week later than in the remaining districts, and the crops raised are deficient both in quantity and quality. A considerable extent of the highest parts of it

is covered with heath, and fit only for planting. With the exception of the northern extremity, the soil of the parish is of a superior nature. It consists of a deep loam, resting generally, though not uniformly, on a subsoil of clay, and produces weighty crops of grain. Plantations.—Since the last Statistical Account was drawn up, more than 500 acres have been planted in this parish. A considerable extent of the plantations is on the high lands of the northern extremity; but the greatest part of them is on the estate of Meldrum, about the centre of the parish, and in its eastern division. In addition to several large plantations which have grown with great rapidity, there are numerous detached clumps put down for the sake of ornament, which have a very pleasing appearance. Along with the different kinds of fir, there is a number of thriving ashes and elms; and of late years, oaks, planes, and various ornamental trees have been introduced. There are some fine old spreading beeches in the plantations near the House of Meldrum; and there is one in particular in front of it, of large dimensions and exuberant foliage. It is 60 feet in height and 243 feet in circumference; the girth of the trunk is 11 feet 8 inches, and the longest entire branch is 51 feet. The foliage generally comes close to the ground; it is very thick, and has a regular and rich appearance. There is another large and remarkable tree (an ash) supposed to be fully 200 years old, which stands on a rising ground at Parcock, above the town of Old Meldrum. Its position and appearance are altogether so singular and striking, that it is well known for many miles around by the name of the Tree of Parcock, or simply of the Tree. Before the town was built, there was an inn at Parcock, which must have been a place of some note in former days, as it is frequently mentioned in Spalding's history, and formed at the period when it was written, one of the principal stages between Aberdeen and the north of Scotland. It is probable, therefore, that the tree of Parcock may have been planted in its present solitary but very conspicuous situation, in order to point out to the traveller from a distance, the place where he might rest for a time from the fatigues of his journey.

II.—Civil History.

There is a plan of the whole parish, of date 1780, in the possession of the proprietor of Meldrum, who is the principal landholder, patron of the church, and superior of the burgh of barony of Old Meldrum.

Parochial Registers.—The date of the earliest parochial register is 1698; and there are regular documents preserved from that period to the present time, with the exception of one year.

Antiquities.—The foundations of a small private chapel, built during the establishment of the Roman Catholic religion in this country, are to be seen on a farm in this parish, which for that reason still retains the name of Chapelhouse. They are surrounded by a place of interment, in which there is the appearance of many graves; and two bodies have been buried there within the memory of the present generation. The baptismal font, (or what tradition declares to be such) remains, and a well inclosed with rude mason-work, which we are given to understand from the same source, was formerly dedicated to the Virgin; it is called to this day the Lady well. During the prevalence of Popery, St Nathalin was reckoned the tutelary saint of this district. There was a tradition, that when a dreadful pestilence raged in the country, St Nathalin prayed fervently that it might be averted from this parish, going round it on his knees; and the fatal disease never entered within it. A day called St Nathalin's day was for a long period observed in honour of the supposed benefactor,— a proof of the powerful influence of superstition over the mind. Several persons yet alive recollect that, in their early years, St Nathalin's day was still so far attended to that no work was performed on it throughout the parish. Until a very late period, a market-day was held in Old Meldrum annually in the month of January, which was called Nathalin's fair. About half a mile from the ruins of the chapel lately alluded to, there was found by labourers employed in repairing a road a few years ago, a rude enclosure of stones about 3½ feet under ground; two long stones formed the sides, and two short ones the ends of the enclosure, and the whole was covered by one large broad stone. The space enclosed was 4 feet by 2 feet 6 inches, and it contained an earthen urn, a human skull, and some of the bones of the extremities. Two urns of a similar nature were discovered in the same neighbourhood, not enclosed by stones, but deposited under a rough pavement. The remains of a Roman encampment existed until lately on the farm of Bethelnie; they have now been levelled and the ground is ploughed. The encampment was a very small one, and could only have given lodgement to a detachment from the army. There is still a place of interment at Bethelnie, where the church of this parish formerly stood. Several families have their burial ground in it, and the sepulchral vault belonging to the proprietors of Meldrum is there. The present church is supposed to have been erected about the year 1684; it is consequently an old building, and has an antiquated appearance. In the immediate vicinity of Old

Meldrum, there is a place of worship belonging to the Scottish Episcopalians, and in the town, there is another belonging to the members of the United Secession. The town-house and town-hall of Old Meldrum are respectable-looking buildings, sufficiently adapted to the size of the place. The House of Meldrum, which is about a mile distant from Old Meldrum, is a large and elegant mansion, well sheltered and ornamented with wood.

III.—Population.

According to Dr Webster's report,	1603
In 1785,	1553
1793,	1490
1811,	1655
1821,	1772
1831,	1790

Previous to the year 1672, when the town of Old Meldrum began to extend itself, the population of this parish must have been very limited. An increase of 117 took place between the years 1811 and 1821, which arose, in all probability, in consequence of a number of crofts being set on previously uncultivated land, which has since been reclaimed and brought under cultivation by the occupiers. These little additional possessions are principally on the estate of Tullo, in the northern district of the parish. Between 1821 and 1831, the increase was only 18. The population of the town of Old Meldrum was, according to the former Statistical Account, 783; for many years past, its population has been about 1000. In the rural districts of the parish, the number of the inhabitants is 790. The average number of marriages yearly is 15; and of births 45. There is no register kept of deaths.

Number of persons under 15 years of age,	590
between 15 and 30,	456
30 and 50,	371
50 and 70,	286
upwards of 70,	87
Total population,	1790

The number of families is 402, and the average number of children is 3.

There are 8 proprietors of land of the yearly rent of L. 50 and upwards; and there is a large body of feuars in Old Meldrum.

The people enjoy in a reasonable degree the comforts and advantages of society, and are contented with their situation and circumstances.

IV.—Industry.

Agriculture.—The number of acres, standard imperial measure, in this parish, which are either cultivated or occasionally in tillage, is about 5774; and the number of acres which never have been cultivated, but are planted or remain constantly waste, is about 1700. Of this last number, a small proportion upon the hill of Bethelnie appears to have been formerly under tillage. It is most likely, however, that, owing to the poverty of the soil, the crops had not paid the expense of cultivation, and the land had been allowed to fall back into its natural state. Indeed, almost the whole land in this parish that has not already been brought under cultivation, would be turned to most profitable account by being planted. There is an undivided common near Old Meldrum, extending to about 25 acres.

The rent of the best land around the town of Old Meldrum is L.4, 10s. per Scotch acre, and of inferior quality, L.3, 10s. In the country districts, the average rent of the best quality of land per Scotch acre is L. 2, and of inferior quality from 5s. to L. 1.

Wages.— Farm-work is mostly performed by servants hired for the half year ; the average rate of their wages is L. 5 in winter, and L. 6, 6s. in summer. Servants of a superior description obtain higher wages. Day labourers, in winter, earn 1s., and in summer, 1s. 6d. with victuals.

Live-Stock.—The Aberdeenshire breed of cattle is by far the most common; and, as great attention has, for many years, been paid to the rearing of them, they are much approved of in the southern market's. Crosses have of late been introduced with the Teeswater breed, which are said to feed well. Sheep are of various kinds, as Southdown, Leicester, and crosses with the Scotch hill breed.

The usual duration of leases is nineteen years, and the conditions are in general sufficiently liberal and favourable to the occupier.

The state of farm-buildings is good, being adapted to the value and situation of the farms. The methods employed for reclaiming waste lands have been judicious, and draining to a considerable extent has been successfully executed. As an evidence of the improvement of agriculture, it may be mentioned, that the prize which was bestowed by the Aberdeenshire Agricultural Association, for the best cultivated farm in the county, was gained by the tenant of Bethelnie in this parish. A considerable proportion of land has been substantially enclosed with stone dikes. On some of the largest farms, there are enclosures of hawthorn hedges; and several fields in the vicinity of Old Meldrum, have, within these few years, been surrounded with a double row of hedging, consisting of beech and hawthorn, which has advanced with great rapidity, and is now very ornamental as well as useful.

The crops raised are, oats, bear or big, turnips, potatoes, and a small proportion of wheat and barley. In the vicinity of Old Meldrum, all the varieties of turnip seeds are raised of a superior quality; and the character of them is so well established, that some of the most celebrated agriculturists, both in England and Scotland, have, for several years past, supplied themselves from this quarter.

Produce.—The average gross amount of raw produce raised in the parish, as far as it can be ascertained, is as follows:

2317 acres of oats, at L. 4,	L. 9268	0	0
96 acres of bear, at L. 6,	576	0	0
20 acres of barley, at L. 7,	140	0	0
30 acres of wheat, at L. 8,	240	0	0
741 acres of turnips, at L. 4,	2964	0	0
80 acres of potatoes, at L. 5,	400	0	0
821 acres of new grass, at L. 2, 10s.,	2052	10	0
1642 acres of pasture, at L. 1,	1642	0	0
12 acres of turnip seeds, at L. 20,	240	0	0
Produce of gardens,	100	0	0
Thinnings of woods,	20	0	0

Manufactures.—The knitting of worsted stockings is still much practised by females in Old Meldrum, although at a much reduced rate of remuneration. There are two pretty extensive weaving shops in Old Meldrum, rented by the proprietors of some of the large manufacturing establishments in Aberdeen, in which a considerable number of young persons of both sexes are employed at the hand-loom. Their wages have fallen very much of late years.

Since the act of Parliament was passed in 1823, two distilleries, upon a small scale, have been set to work, one of them in Old Meldrum, and one on the estate of Tullo; in the former place, there is a long

established brewery.

V.—Parochial Economy.

Market-Town.—The only market-town in the parish is Old Meldrum, which was erected by charter into a burgh of barony in 1672. There is a good weekly market in it for provisions. During the winter and spring months, there is a market every fortnight for the sale of cattle and grain; and there are two annual fairs in the months of May and November, at which farm-servants are engaged. From the year 1726, and for a long period thereafter, the town of Old Meldrum was governed by two bailies nominated by the superior; but at present there is no local magistrate, and no regular system of police.

Means of Communication.—Since the year 1804, this parish has enjoyed excellent means of communication, both with the south and north, by the turnpike road which was opened at that time between Aberdeen and Banff, which passes through Old Meldrum, and for the distance of six miles through the parish. Upon this road, two carriers belonging to Old Meldrum go from it to Aberdeen, and return every week, and one of them twice a week. The distance is seventeen miles and three-quarters. A post from the south, and another from the north passes twice a day through Old Meldrum, where there is a post-office. There is a stage-coach on the turnpike road, which affords both an economical and expeditious mode of travelling.

Ecclesiastical State.—When the parish church was removed from Bethelnie, the present one was built in the close vicinity of Old Meldrum. It is most likely that this situation was chosen in order to accommodate the people of Old Meldrum, which at that time had probably a considerable population, and now contains nearly three-fifths of the whole inhabitants of the parish. The rural district in the neighbourhood of Old Meldrum is also the most populous. The church, upon the whole, is central, taking for the criterion its vicinity to the greatest number of the people, as probably not above a tenth part of the present population reside beyond the distance of three miles from it. It affords accommodation to about 700 persons; but it is too small for the parish, and many who want seats in it cannot obtain them. The first and oldest part of the manse was built about the year 1710; a small addition to it was built in the year 1813, and a larger in the year 1829; it is now a most comfortable and commodious house. The glebe measures between 10 and 11 imperial acres. The stipend was last augmented in 1832, and is now 16½ chalders, half meal, half barley, with L. 8, 6s. 8d. for communion elements. The ministers of the Episcopal and Secession chapels are paid by the seat-rents and contributions of their hearers, and they have each a house and garden. The Dissenters do not perhaps exceed a tenth part of the whole population. Divine service is well attended, and the number of communicants in the Established Church is above 800.

Education.— There are at present three schools in the parish, besides one for girls, the parochial in Old Meldrum, and two others in different districts of the country. They are all unendowed, except the parochial, and supported by the scholars' fees. A benevolent native of the parish bequeathed by his deed of settlement in 1795, to the kirk-session, the sum of L. 600, the interest of L. 200 of which he appointed to be paid annually to a teacher, who should instruct, without any other remuneration, such a number of the children of the poor inhabitants of the parish, as the session should consider he might be able to educate for that allowance. The parochial schoolmaster has hitherto received this sum, upon the condition, (which is rigidly fulfilled), that he shall give education to all whom the session recommend. Another inhabitant of the parish left also, by his deed of settlement, to the kirk-session, the sum of L.90, (legacy-duty deducted,) the interest of which he appointed to be applied to the conducting of a Sabbath school in Old Meldrum. This school is now taught gratuitously, and is in a very flourishing state ; and the interest of the sum of L.90 alluded to, is laid out in the purchase of a religious library for the use of the Sabbath school scholars. The branches of education taught in the parish school are, reading, writing, mathematics, Latin, and Greek. In the other schools, English, writing, and arithmetic are taught. The parochial schoolmaster's salary is L. 28, and his fees for teaching are, per quarter, reading, 2s.; writing, 2s. 6d.; arithmetic, 3s. 6d. ; Latin, 5s. ; Greek, 5s. He has no dwelling-house from the heritors, but receives from them in lieu of it L. 6 per annum. The people are fully alive to the benefits of education, as is shown by the number of schools supported in the parish, without salaries from the heritors. By reason of the advantages which these schools afford, there is no part of the parish where children may not have the benefits of education ; but the

want of salary renders the continuance of these seminaries uncertain.

Friendly Societies.—There were until lately two or three Friendly Societies in the parish; but they have been dissolved.

Savings Bank.—A Savings Bank, however, was opened in the spring of 1834, in which a considerable sum of money has already been deposited, and it is hoped that the advantages of such an institution will be duly appreciated by the labouring classes.

Poor and Parochial Funds.—The number of persons receiving parochial aid has varied considerably at different periods. At present it is about 50, and the average sum allotted to each is about 8s. per quarter. In addition, two poor lunatics are maintained by this parish in the Aberdeen Asylum, with the assistance of a sum allowed from the lunatic fund established by the presbytery of Garioch. A collection is annually made in the parish church towards defraying the expense of maintaining these lunatics. Another yearly collection is made at church for the Aberdeen Infirmary. There are also public contributions annually made for the whole of the General Assembly's Religious Schemes. The collections in church for the relief of the poor of the parish, including those received during the time of the communion, amount to about L. 51 annually, and they have been on the increase for several years past. In addition, there is the annual interest of L.1400 Sterling, bequeathed to this parish by benevolent individuals formerly connected with it. Of this sum, L 1200, which had been lent previously, partly on heritable, and partly on personal security, was, on the 20th of June 1834, invested in the purchase of land in a neighbouring parish, which promises to yield a good return for the capital. One tenant occupies the land, and pays his rent into the poor's funds. The other sums, arising from the use of the mort-cloth, and from seat-rents of a part of two galleries, set by the kirk-session, with permission of the heritors, for behoof of the poor, amount to about L. 8 annually. But from the produce of these funds available to the poor must be deducted annually the salaries of the teacher already alluded to, of the session-clerk and officer, and other smaller charges. There are no other regular funds for the supply of the poor, but frequently in seasons of scarcity, or during the prevalence of disease, meal and other necessaries are purchased for their use, by a fund raised by private voluntary subscription. A great deal of charity is bestowed by all ranks according to their circumstances; and if this source of relief were not always open and ready, the parochial funds, although comparatively extensive, would be totally inadequate to supply the wants of the poor, especially in Old Meldrum, where the greatest number of them reside. There is a reluctance felt by the labouring classes to ask parochial relief.

Fuel.—At one time, there was great abundance of excellent moss in this parish, but it is now much exhausted, and what remains is generally of inferior quality. Coals, therefore, are commonly used, especially in Old Meldrum; and as they are brought from Aberdeen and Newburgh in carts, the expense of fuel is greater in this than in any of the neighbouring parishes.

Miscellaneous Observations.

Since the time that the last Statistical Account was written, the whole appearance of the parish has been much improved, and the quantity and value of its produce greatly augmented, by the superior system of farming which has been adopted. A regular rotation of cropping, suited to the nature of the soil, has been introduced, one indispensable part of which is the meliorating crop of turnips. For it, the soil is carefully prepared and properly manured, and the operations of thinning and hoeing are well attended to, as this crop is considered of great value in a district, where the rearing of a superior quality of live-stock is one of the most important objects which the farmer has in view. Bone manure has been extensively and successfully employed in this parish for raising turnips. In deep clay soils it does not answer well; but in those of a less tenacious nature, the produce after its employment is very great. Every effort has been made to reclaim waste lands, and to bring them into a proper state of cultivation. The old system of mill-mulchures has been discontinued, which will have a favourable effect upon agriculture. Another most important improvement has taken place in regard to the state of the roads. About thirty-six years ago, the turnpike road from Aberdeen to the north was carried through this parish, and at once established a regular and excellent communication, by which farm produce can be carried for sale to Aberdeen at every season of the year.' The increased facility of every other communication by this road is equally obvious, both for the comfort of the inhabitants and of travellers, and a far greater intercourse is also enjoyed with the neighbouring districts. Hence, a

general stimulus has been given to industry, and improvements of an extensive nature have been undertaken and completed, to which the former bad state of the roads would have presented an insurmountable obstacle. There is also a manifest improvement in the style of agricultural buildings. In some instances, this improvement has extended itself to new houses in Old Meldrum; and there seems to be a growing desire for it which is worthy of every encouragement. The extent of new plantations has already been taken notice of. A new line of communication with Old Meldrum by a turnpike road has lately been opened from the upper part of the Garioch on the one hand, and from the sea coast on the other. A new station for the disposal of grain and for the purchase of lime, will thus be obtained by that district of country. The peculiar advantage to Old Meldrum will consist, in the more extensive communication by travelling, which will take place on the new road, and in the easier access to its home markets. Its inhabitants will also obtain their coals at the port of Newburgh, which is six miles nearer than Aberdeen, where they were formerly supplied with them. Upon the whole, since the publication of the last Statistical Account, the progress of agriculture has in this parish been rapid and extensive, the facilities of communication, by new lines of road, have been greatly increased, and the general aspect of the country is very much improved.

November 1840.