

*This is the Statistical Account of the Parish in 1952.
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THIRD STATISTICAL ACCOUNT: PARISH OF BLANTYRE 1952

THE PARISH OF BLANTYRE

by the Rev. A. Mackenzie

Name - In the *Old Statistical Account* it is suggested that the name, Blantyre, is descriptive of the sheltered nature of the parish. Blantyre being said to signify, in the Gaelic language, 'a warm retreat'. To the present writer this derivation appears unlikely, for the locality as a whole can hardly be regarded as a warm retreat. Undoubtedly, the name is of Gaelic origin. It might be observed in passing that the local pronunciation is *Blan-tir*, the accent being on the first syllable. *Tyr* or *tir* in Gaelic means 'land'. The first part of the word may be the name of the early missionary pioneer, Blaen or Blane, who has left his mark on several localities, as, for example, Dunblane and Strathblane. It is suggested, therefore that the name Blantyre may mean 'the land of St Blane'. And this derivation appears all the more reasonable when one remembers that from very early times there was a Christian settlement here.

Physical Features – The parish is situated in the north-west of the county of Lanark. It is bounded on the north and north-east by the river Clyde (which separates it from Old Monkland and Bothwell parishes); on the west by the Rotten Calder burn (with East Kilbride and Cambuslang parishes on the other side); on the east by the parishes of Bothwell and Hamilton; and on the south by Glasford. Its length from north to south is exactly six miles and two furlongs, while in breadth it varies from three furlongs to two and a half miles. The area is 3,885 acres. The parish retains much of its natural beauty, despite the changes wrought by industry. The banks of the Clyde and the Calder are richly wooded as of old: the most unpleasant features of the landscape are the coal 'bings', which have encroached upon many goodly acres in the lower part of the parish.

Population – The following census figures reveal the remarkable increase in the population of Blantyre parish over the past century and a half:- (1801) 1,751; (1851) 2,848; (1881) 9,760; (1901) 14,145; (1911) 16,821; (1921) 18,154 (the maximum ever recorded); (1931) 17,015; (1951) 17,766. Of these, 16,854 (nearly 95 per cent) live in Blantyre, which in population is the second largest village in Scotland, being exceeded only by Cambuslang.

In 1755 the parish was a quiet rural one, with under 500 inhabitants. Apart from some hand-loom weaving in the Kirkton and Hunthill districts, the chief occupation of the people was agriculture. The opening of a cotton spinning mill by the banks of the Clyde in 1785 brought about an immediate influx of population. In 1813 a weaving factory was established by the same company, this leading to further expansion of the population. By 1851 the population of the parish was more than five times what it had been a hundred years earlier. For the next

thirty years or so there was little change, but the discovery of valuable coal deposits in 1870 was the beginning of another period of expansion. Six collieries, employing thousands of men, were opened in the course of a few years, so that by 1901 the population had grown to roughly five times what it had been fifty years earlier. Over the next twenty years the growth continued at a slower rate until the peak year 1921, when the population began to decline again. This decline is likely to continue owing to the exhaustion of the coal measures and the transference of the mining community to the new coalfields in Fife, Ayrshire and the Lothians. Although, the figure for 1951 showed an upward trend after the fall in 1931, it is noteworthy that the male population in 1951 (8,713) was lower than in 1931 (8,842 males).

Communications – These are excellent. A first-class road from Hamilton passes through the northern part of the parish and leads *via* Cambuslang to Glasgow, which is about eight miles distant. Another modern highway, from Hamilton, passes through the centre of the parish and on to Glasgow by way of East Kilbride. Most of the population live within the area bounded by these two highways. Speedy and efficient motor omnibus services give easy access to Glasgow and other towns in the industrial belt. Although the cost of living has risen considerably within recent years, bus fares are still very reasonable, for example the return fare from Blantyre to Glasgow is 1s.

A railway line runs through the northern part of the parish, but since the advent of the more convenient omnibus service few people travel from Blantyre by train. Another railway line goes through the centre of the parish to Quarter and Strathaven, but since 1945 this line has been available for mineral traffic only.

Public Services – Main streets are well illuminated by modern electric lighting units; other streets are mostly lit by gas. Most of the shops and dwelling-houses have electric lighting, while the remainder have gas lighting. Gas is largely employed for cooking purposes. In the outlying parts of the parish neither gas nor electricity is yet available, but some householders have installed calor gas.

Water supply is excellent. Most of the houses, being of recent construction, have baths and modern sanitation. The older tenement houses in most cases do not have baths and sanitation is rather out of date.

Health – During the past fifty years much has been done to promote the health of the people and to care for the sick and aged. Better housing and modern sanitation are having a marked effect. Miner's silicosis is not nearly as prevalent as in the last century, but the increase in the incidence of tuberculosis among young people is giving cause for concern. This increase cannot be ascribed to bad housing conditions entirely. It is probable that the accelerated pace of life and restricted diet of the war years have been contributory causes. The children of school age are very healthy and well nourished. The daily supply of fresh milk and a good mid-day meal served in the schools has been a worthwhile experiment. At the child welfare centre free medical advice and supplies of cod liver oil, orange juice, and welfare foods, are available. In the case of the sick and aged in their own homes, the services of the two Queen's nurses have for many years been a boon and blessing to many. Although the Queen's Institute of Nursing has been brought into the National Health Service, the work goes forward faithfully as before.

Housing – The housing of the people has undergone great changes. Before the industrial period most of the people lived in the High Blantyre district at Barnhill, Hunthill and Kirkton. The houses were built of stone and lime and roofed with thatch. Many of them stood for hundreds of years, but few of them remain to this day. One house built in 1563 has been re-roofed with slate and is still in good habitable condition. Another, in Hunthill road, retains its thatched roof, but had been improved and modernised internally.

The erection of the spinning mills on the banks of the Clyde in 1785 brought a large influx of population. The company met the housing needs of its workers by building a self-contained village on land adjoining the mills. This village has now disappeared, with the exception of the block of tenements in one of which David Livingstone was born. It is now the property of the David Livingstone Trust.

The opening of the coal mines in the 1870s and the need for more workers created an immediate housing problem. To a large extent this was met by the coalmasters, who built rows of two-apartment brick houses with flagstone floors. Although lacking in all the amenities and conveniences considered necessary in this twentieth century, large families of fine sturdy folk were reared in these houses over a period of some sixty years. Within recent years these rows have mostly been replaced by modern dwellings of the two-storeyed cottage type, erected by local authorities. During the period when the population was growing most rapidly many blocks of two-storeyed tenements were also built in the parish by private enterprise for letting. Most of these houses are obsolete by modern standards and would have been replaced many years ago had not two wars held up the re-housing programme. Much was accomplished by the county council in the period between the two wars, but the demand for accommodation still exceeds the supply. After the second World War the shortage of ordinary building materials, especially timber, necessitated the adoption of new housing methods. A large number of prefabricated dwellings of aluminium, asbestos and other materials were quickly set up. These houses, consisting of a living-room, two bedrooms and a kitchenette, together with a bathroom, are equipped with many modern labour-saving devices. Outwardly, they are not very pleasing to the eye, but they do mean 'home' for many young couples with small families. Despite all these efforts to provide suitable accommodation, housing is still inadequate. Whenever a house is offered for sale demand is keen and the price realised is many times the original cost. Many newly-married couples have no alternative but to reside with in-laws or rent a room in a 'scheme' house. Such conditions give rise to many social problems and tend to foster a spirit of frustration and discontent.

In the village of Auchintibber, situated at the south end of the parish, there has been no new building during the present century. Before the discovery of the large coal deposits in the lower part of the parish, mining of iron ore and limestone was carried out on a considerable scale in the Auchintibber district. When these mines closed down the village gradually decayed and the population dwindled. Modern amenities, such as electric light, gas and sanitation, are lacking, yet the small community still remaining is healthy and happier and more contented than the people in the busy industrial area. There is a primary school with one teacher. The pupils have not exceeded eighteen within recent years. The only transport available to the villagers is a bus service to Hamilton on Fridays and Saturdays.

Estates – The people of the parish nowadays follow many different trades and callings. Agriculture still holds its own, although there have been many changes in the ownership of the land and modern methods of farming require fewer workers. The old land owning

families have mostly died out or removed to other parts. The mansion houses, which have stood for long in quiet sheltered nooks by the banks of the Calder, will soon be a memory only. Crossbasket House is let out in flats and now provides comfortable homes for a number of people who have sought escape from the noise and turmoil of the city. Millheugh, for many generations the home of Professor Millar and his descendants, is now almost a ruin, inhabited by a few 'squatters'. Very few of the present generation appear to know that Joanna Baillie (1762-1851), the poetess, lived for some time in this fine old house and composed many of her lyrics there. Calderglen is another mansion which has seen better days; it is now owned by a greyhound racing company.

Farming – The agricultural statistics for the parish, as supplied by the Department of Agricultural for Scotland, are as follows:- tillage, 649 acres; rotation grass, 448 acres; permanent grass, 1,087 acres; and rough grazings, 242 acres. The lands which comprised the old estates are either owned or rented by small farmers. Cultivation is probably better now than in any former age. Good herds of dairy cattle are kept and every farmer's ambition is to own a tuberculin-tested herd. The crops grown are potatoes, turnips, oats, barley, rye grass and a little wheat. Methods of cultivation have changed considerably in recent years. Scarcity of suitable workers and the intensive cultivation demanded by the Government in wartime obliged farmers to introduce more machinery. Milking is done by machine. The motor tractor is employed for all field work. Horses are few in number; there are probably no more than eighteen on all the farms within the parish. The average rental is £2 an acre.

Mining and Other Industries – When the last *Statistical Account* was published the majority of the population were employed in the local cotton mills and most of them lived in the village standing on the company's land. Towards the end of the nineteenth century, however, trade fell away and the mills had to close down, the workers finding employment elsewhere. But while the prosperity of the mills was declining another industry came into being. The *New Statistical Account* states that 'coal has been wrought on a small scale at Calderside and Rottenburn; but there are only some thin seams and all of a lean quality'. Great was the surprise, therefore, when in the late sixties of last century a boring revealed the existence of seven seams of excellent coal, one hundred fathoms down, these extending over the whole of the lower or northern half of the parish. The following are the seams and their respective thickness:- Upper Coal, 2 feet 6 inches; Ell, 4 feet 9 inches; Pyotshaw, 4 feet; Main, 4 feet 3 inches; Humph, 2 feet 9 inches; Splint, 4 feet; Virgin, 2 feet 9 inches. The extraction of this coal began in 1871 and has continued until the present time. The firms concerned were William Dixon, Merry and Cunninghame, and William Baird and Company, seven or eight pits being in operation, with a daily output of several thousand tons. This development resulted in a great influx of population, drawn from different parts of the country. A large section of the present mining population is of Irish extraction. Over two hundred miners lost their lives as a result of an underground explosion in Dixon's No. 1 pit in 1879. The Blantyre coalfield is now almost exhausted. It is said that a considerable tonnage of coal still remains in parts of the field but flooding makes it both hazardous and uneconomic to extract. Gradually the men are being transferred to the coalfields in Ayrshire, Fife and the Lothians. Within a few years coal mining will have ceased entirely in the Blantyre area.

Efforts have been made to meet the new situation. A large industrial estate is being developed to the south of Birdsfield Farm. Modern factory buildings, suitable for light industries, are being erected. Several firms are already in occupation of premises and

hundreds of workers, mostly female, are employed. When his estate is completed and fully occupied it should help greatly to solve the local economic problems arising as a result of the closure of the mines.

In the southern part of the parish extensive deposits of limestone and ironstone were being worked in 1835. These workings were abandoned many years ago as higher quality iron ore from Spain and elsewhere became available at lower cost. Most of the miners and quarrymen displaced at that period found employment in the coalfield then being opened up in the lower end of the parish. Stone quarrying for building purposes is still carried on on a reduced scale at Auchintibber. There is a good supply of excellent freestone.

For many years several hundred men have found employment with the Blantyre Engineering Company. This firm specialises in the manufacture of machinery for coal mining. The local industries are not sufficient, however, to provide work for all the population. Hundreds of men and women travel daily by road and rail to Motherwell, Cambuslang and Glasgow to work in office and factory.

Shops, etc. – On the Glasgow Road, Stonefield Road and Main Street there is a great variety of small shops catering for the different needs of the inhabitants. Blantyre Co-operative Society, which has a very large membership, has commodious premises in Station Road, Glasgow Road, Auchinraith Road and Main Street. There are 10 public houses in the parish and in addition several grocers have spirit licences.

Churches – The parish comes under the jurisdiction of the Presbytery of Hamilton. Since the last *Statistical Account* was written (1835) many changes have taken place with regard to ecclesiastical matters. Blantyre Old parish church is centrally situated, near High Blantyre cross. The congregation was founded by the Rev. William Chirnside in 1567. From 1552 to 1567 Mr Chirnside had been priest in charge of Blantyre Priory. The parish church in use from the Reformation stood until 1793, when it was replaced by a plain and barn-like building erected on the same site. This in turn was demolished when, in 1863, a large and more beautiful church was erected within a few hundred yards of the original site. It will be of interest to many to know that the two silver Communion cups purchased for the congregation by the Rev. William Chirnside are still in regular use. They have been well cared for and are in excellent condition. The manse, erected in 1773 and so highly spoken of in the *New Statistical Account*, shows definite signs of deterioration through age. The glebe, comprising about four acres of excellent arable land, still forms part of the minister's emoluments.

The Disruption of 1843 marked the beginning of an era of changes. The parish minister, Rev James Anderson, with many members of his flock, left the parish kirk, founded a new congregation, and erected a church in Stonefield Road, half a mile from the mother church. In the course of the following half-century, as the population rapidly increased, other congregations of the Free Church, known as Livingstone Memorial and Burleigh Memorial, were formed. In 1889 the *quoad sacra* parish of Stonefield was formed and a fine commodious church erected in the Glasgow Road at the south end of the district. Since the Union of the Churches in 1929 all these congregations have been Church of Scotland and have been assigned their own separate parish areas. It is probable that, in the near future, these congregations will be reduced in number through local unions. Within the parish there are also small but active congregations of Baptists, Nazarenes, Congregationalists and

Plymouth Brethren. The Roman Catholics form about one-third of the population, their place of worship being the church of St. Joseph's in the Glasgow Road.

The membership of the Church of Scotland congregations is as follows:- Blantyre Old 647; Anderson 244; Livingstone Memorial 422; Stonefield 679; Burleigh Memorial 276. For the Roman Catholic church figures are not available, but apparently the total is between 5,000 and 6,000. The Baptists, Plymouth Brethren and Church of the Nazarene also have meeting places and in each case the membership will be about 100. In regard to all the denominations it may be claimed that church attendance is as regular and faithful as in any part of the country, but there is a large section of the population without any church connection.

The old burial ground, adjoining the original parish church, is no longer in use, another cemetery having been provided by the local authorities. The district council is now responsible for the care and maintenance of the old burial-ground.

Education – The parish is well provided for with the following schools:-

<i>Schools</i>	<i>Pupils</i>	<i>Teachers</i>
<i>Auchinraith Primary</i>	437	10
<i>Auchintibber</i>	18	1
<i>High Blantyre Primary</i>	407	9
<i>Low Blantyre Primary</i>	522	14
<i>Calder St Junior Secondary</i>	387	8
<i>St Joseph's Roman Catholic</i>	1,182	29

During the winter months evening classes, providing instruction in a great variety of subjects, are held in several of these schools. Pupils taking the complete secondary course and preparing for the University attend Hamilton Academy.

Social Organisations – In addition to the many organisations for old and young under the supervision of the local churches there are various other agencies and associations which cater for people of all types and ages. The Masonic Order, Order of the Eastern Star and the Orange Order have large memberships and meet regularly throughout the winter months. There is an angling club whose members fish on the Calder. The private bowling and tennis clubs, which own playing grounds in Stonefield Road, have large memberships. Both clubs are open to male and females. The many bird fanciers in the district have their Ornithological Society and Homing Pigeon Association. Football enthusiasts are catered for by two junior teams, Blantyre Victoria and Blantyre Celtic. Each team have strong supporters' clubs.

Livingstone Memorial – During the period under review the parish has produced one outstanding personality, David Livingstone (1813-1873), the missionary explorer. The cotton mill where he worked as a lad has long since disappeared, as has most of the adjoining village belonging to the cotton company. The house in which Livingstone was born has been preserved, however, and acquired by the David Livingstone Memorial Trust, who have set it apart as a memorial and museum housing relics of the great missionary. Several acres of the adjoining land were also purchased by the Trust and ample provision is made for parties of adults and children visiting the museum. The Memorial was opened on 5 October 1929 by Her Royal Highness the Duchess of York. During the summer months many

thousands of people come from far and near to this interesting memorial, and it is a favourite spot for children's picnics.

Way of Life - During the past fifty years marked changes have taken place in the customs, habits and ways of life of the population. Easy access to neighbouring towns and city by road and rail has meant a widening of interests. The introduction of the forty-hour week in many industries within recent years has provided the worker with ample opportunities for relaxation and recreation. It is doubtful if this increased leisure has been altogether a boon and a blessing. Few appear to have learned as yet how to make profitable use of the free time at their disposal.

The local authorities have laid out two beautiful parks, with flower beds and shrubs, where the citizens may relax and enjoy the beauty of nature. Paddling pools and playing-field facilities are available for the young. There are private bowling greens and tennis courts which provide pleasant recreation for men and women in the summer evenings. These are well patronised. Within recent years day outings by motor coach to the Ayrshire coast or places farther afield have become very popular with the middle-aged and the elderly in the summer months. In winter many of these people arrange for a coach to take them to the city for an evening meal and a visit to the pantomime.

Throughout the year the cinema has a strong attraction for young and old. The two local picture-houses are always well filled. Many people also travel to Hamilton, where there are several large up-to-date cinemas. Some make a weekly visit to the 'pictures', while many go as frequently as three or four times per week. Probably people find there some touch of romance and adventure that are so lacking in their own rather drab and colourless lives. The films shown are not often of a very high standard and one feels that their influence – especially on the minds of adolescents – must be far from ennobling and inspiring.

The local churches have done much to meet the recreational needs of young and old and encourage a healthy use of leisure. Well appointed halls enable badminton, carpet bowls and other games to be enjoyed. These facilities are taken advantage of by a great many. The church halls are also available for the weekly meetings of Girl Guides, Boy Scouts, Boys' Brigade and other organisations of youth. These movements are in a most flourishing condition and are doing a really valuable service to the community in providing the young with a healthy outlet for their energies and in encouraging good citizenship.

It will be evident that, with all the foregoing activity on the part of young and old, home life will have suffered to a very great extent. For a great many 'home' is merely a place in which to eat and sleep. Everybody is always 'going somewhere', and always in a hurry. Despite the higher wages, better housing, greater leisure, and fuller freedom of modern times the people as a whole are not better than their fathers. There is more discontent and disquiet, less real happiness. But it must not be forgotten that this generation has experienced two great wars, with all their disturbing and unsettling influence upon our way of life. 'The old order changeth giving place to new'. This is doubtless a period of transition. Eventually people will settle down again and realise that the happiness they crave cannot be bought but must be sought within themselves. Then the leisure made possible by modern science and the Machine Age will be intelligently devoted to the recreation and improvement of both mind and body.

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