

*This is the first known Statistical Account of the Parish in 1791.  
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OLD STATISTICAL ACCOUNT : PARISH OF BLANTYRE : c1791

NUMBER XVI

PARISH OF BLANTYRE

(County of Lanark)

*By the Rev Mr Henry Stevenson*

*Origin of the Name*

The name of the parish is evidently expressive of its local situation. The principal part of it lies on the banks of the Clyde, and is surrounded by rising grounds. The lower part is but a few feet above the level of the sea, (though it is about 30 miles distant). From its low sheltered situation, it obtained the name of Blantyre, which, in the Gaelic language, is said to signify *a warm retreat*.

*Situation and Extent* – Blantyre is situated in the county of Lanark, in the presbytery of Hamilton, and synod of Glasgow and Ayr. It is about 6 miles in length; but, at an average, only about a mile in breadth. From the church, which is placed nearly in the middle of the parish, to the banks of the Clyde, the ground is almost a plain; divided into small inclosures, surrounded with beautiful belts of planting. In the whole parish there is neither hill nor mountain.

*Soil* – The soil is various. Some fields, adjacent to the church, are a fine rich loam. From the church to the Clyde, towards the north-east, the soil is in general a strong deep clay; and when properly cultivated is exceeding fertile. At the northern extremity, which is surrounded by the Clyde, and where the banks become low, there is a flat that consists chiefly of a sandy soil. From the church, towards the south-end of the parish, the soil is clay, but more light and free, than that in the lower part; and is in general of a very poor quality. In advancing farther from the church, towards the southern extremity, the soil becomes gradually more of a mossy nature; and, at last, terminates in a deep peat moss.

*Rivers* – Blantyre is bounded on the north, and north-east, for the extent of about two miles and a half, by the Clyde; which abounds with excellent salmon, trouts, pikes, pars &c. The exclusive privilege of fishing salmon belongs to the different proprietors, whose lands are contiguous to the river: but they are seldom caught in such plenty, as to become any great object for the market. A considerable part of the banks are covered with wood; and, from the

gentle bendings of the river, they form many beautiful and romantic prospects. Clyde is not navigable above Glasgow.

*Mineral Springs* – There is a mineral spring in this parish, the water of which is frequently and successfully used, for sore eyes, scorbutic disorders, and a variety of other complaints. The water is sulphureous; it is very strongly impregnated, and is accounted the best of the kind in this part of the country. About fifty years ago, it was the common summer resort of many families from Glasgow: but from the changes of fashion, so frequent in relation to such objects of medical regimen, it is now almost totally deserted.

*Iron Mines* – In the banks of Calder-water, which divides this parish from Kilbride, there has, of late, been discovered, a vast quantity of iron stone, of an excellent quality, which is now wrought to great extent. Many different seams of it appear on the face of the banks, at the distance of a few feet from each other: and the seams are usually about 6 or 7 inches thick. The stone is dug out, by mines driven forward into the bank. It is carried to the distance of about 7 miles, to a furnace erected near Glasgow, and converted into pig iron. The iron company usually pay the proprietors of the land, at the rate of 6d per ton, for the iron stone; besides making compensation for any damages that may be done in digging.

*Figured Stones* – Many of these iron stones appear to retain the original shape of the wood, from which, according to the opinion of some naturalists they have been formed. Some of them retain the original form of the branch of an exotic pine; and have rows of small protuberances winding round them, in an oblique direction; and some of them are covered with spines. Besides the stones, which retain the original shape of the wood, there are others, that are only marked with the impressions of the bark. These impressions are mostly chequered, some on a level, and others on a concave surface, answerable to the convexity of the original trunk or branch; and these impressions on the iron stone are sometimes very perfect.

*Population* – The state of the parish, with respect of population, as far as can be traced back, seems to have been nearly, for many years, the same. The return to Dr Webster, in 1755, was 496 souls. But in 1787, the number of inhabitants was immediately and greatly increased, by means of a cotton mill erected upon the Clyde. Before that period, the number of families, including every individual who possessed a separate lodging, was 130; and, calculating at the rate of 4 to a family, the number of souls might be about 520. The annual average of births, for ten years preceding 1787, was 17, - of deaths, during the same period, 11 – and of marriages, 6. Since the year 1787, when the cotton mill began to work, the population has been making continual and rapid progress; and, as the machinery is not nearly completed, they are still daily increasing. The numbers at the cotton mill were not exactly ascertained, till the 14<sup>th</sup> of March 1791; and, at the date they stood as follows:

Men, women and children, employed in the mill	295
Barracks children*, who are also employed in the mill	60
Piecers to the jeannies	<u>13</u>
	368
Wives and widows employed at home in family affairs	56
Children, not of age to be employed	<u>96</u>
	520

*\* These children are in general orphans, between 8 and 12 years of age. They are generally bound to the work by their relations, for a few years; and are fed, cloathed and lodged by the proprietor of the mill. He has a school-master employed in teaching them at their spare hours; a surgeon to attend them when sick: and much praise is due to such a guardian of youth, for his attention both to their health and education.*

Thus, the number of inhabitants, in the parish, has been doubled, in the course of about 4 years, and may now amount to 1040 souls. In the mill there are, at present, 4096 spindles driven by water; and the company are still greatly extending their operations. There is another very large house built contiguous to the mill, which is to contain 15000 spindles, to be driven by the hand: but only a very small part of these machines are as yet finished. A considerable village is now built, for the accommodation of the people employed at this work, where formerly there was not a single house.

The employment at cotton mills, has, in general, been accounted unfavourable to health; and yet, what is singular, in the present case, is, that out of a great number, employed at work within the mill, only two have died since it was erected. Great care indeed is taken to keep both the house and machinery as clean as possible; fresh air is carefully thrown in; and tar is burnt, to remove or counteract the noxious smell of the oil that must necessarily be used about the machines.

*Heritors* – There are at present 37 heritors, who pay costs and of these, 10 do not reside in the parish. The landed property has very seldom been transferred: for, though there are few possessed of more than a plowgate of land, and some who have only a few acres, yet many even of these small possessions have been inherited by the same family, for some hundred years. This retention of landed property is plainly to be imputed to the industry, frugality, and amiable rural simplicity of the inhabitants. The whole parish consists of 24 plowgates of land, each plowgate containing about 80 acres; and, for the most part, the proprietor occupies his own lands.

*Produce* - The parish consists, for the most part, of arable grounds; and oats are the crops most frequently raised. Pease, a few beans, barley, and wheat are also raised; but the quantity of these kinds of grain is but small, when compared with oats. Potatoes are also cultivated by almost every family, whether of farmers or labourers, for their own subsistence; and the practice of feeding cattle with them is become pretty general. Of late, more attention begins to be paid to the potato crop; because a ready market is found, for a consideration quantity, at the cotton mill. The old Scots plow is almost universally used. There are few sheep kept in the parish, not much exceeding 100. Flax is seldom raised, in any greater quantity, than what the farmer thinks sufficient for the use of his own family. A very considerable quantity of rye-grass, and clover hay, is cultivated in the parish, and carried to Glasgow, about 8 miles distant; where it always finds a ready market, and in general sells at about 5d. per stone. Considerable quantities of butter and cheese, used also to be carried to the market at Glasgow; but there is now a great demand for these articles at home.

*Rent of the Parish* - The valued rent of the parish is L.1684 : 11 : 8 Scots: the real rent may be about L. 1400; but as the land is, for the most part, possessed by the proprietors, this cannot be exactly ascertained.

*Manufactures and Price of Labour* - There are no manufactures established in the parish, except the cotton branch already mentioned. The only tradesmen in the place, are such as find employment from the country people; except a few weavers, who are employed by manufacturers in Glasgow. The iron mines in the neighbourhood, together with the

operations of the cotton manufacturers, have contributed greatly to raise the wages of labourers. Before the iron age, (as it may be here called) overtook us, a man's wage by the day was never above 1s.; but now they are advanced to 15d and 16d. The average rate at which men-servants are hired by the farmer for the year, and who are maintained in the family, is from 8 to L.9: and women-servants usually get from 3 to L.4 per annum. The work in agriculture is, for the most part, carried on by hired servants.

*Ecclesiastical State* - The manse was built in 1773: but there is no record of the time when the church was built. It bears evident marks of great antiquity; and is in a most deplorable condition. Lord Blantyre is patron. The stipend consists of 56 boils of meal and barley, and L. 53 : 6: 8 of money; with the addition of a manse, and glebe of about 12 acres.

*Schools* - There is only one school in the parish, besides the one already mentioned, at the cotton mill. The school-master's salary is about L. 6; but he has neither house nor garden belonging to the office. The number of scholars is usually about 50; and the whole living may amount to about L. 20 *per annum*.

*Alehouses* - There are 8 alehouses in the parish. Before the cotton and iron works found their way to us, there were only two or three alehouses; but the increase of numbers, has also increased the demand for liquor. Upon the whole, however, there is very little alteration, to be observed, in the character and morals of the inhabitants. They are, in general, remarkably industrious, sober and contented: and from the smallness of the parish, as well as their peculiar circumstances of independence, they have acquired a strong spirit of equality, and a sort of *esprit du corps*, that renders them ready to unite in supporting their common privileges. There is no instance can be remembered, of any person belonging to the parish, suffering any capital punishment.

*Poor* - The number of the poor, on the parish roll, is usually about four or five. The parish have a stock for the support of the poor, amounting to about L. 200; the interest of which, together with the weekly collections, affords a comfortable supply for the indigent. All the heritors are joint managers for this fund; and also in appointing supplies to the poor, along with the minister and kirk-session. The stated meetings for the affairs of the poor are on the first Tuesday of February, and the first Tuesday of August. At these meetings, a committee is appointed, consisting of heritors and elders, to collect each in their turn, at the church doors, for the following half year: a treasurer is appointed to distribute to the weekly pensioners; and in his hand, all the weekly collections are lodged. Occasional supplies are also given, to relieve those who fall into accidental distress.

*Fuel* - The fuel commonly used in the parish, is coal; which is generally brought from Cambuslang, at the distance of between 3 or 4 miles. It is sold at the coal pit at 9d per hutch, amounting to 400 wt. two of which make an ordinary cart-load; so that a ton, containing five hutches, or 2000 wt. costs 3s 9d. There are plenty of good peats in the parish, which are used for part of the fuel; but the coals, being exceedingly good, are preferred.

*Antiquities* - There are few remains of antiquity besides the ruins of the priory. A considerable part, of the walls of that ancient building, is still standing. It was built on the top of a high rock, which rises perpendicular from the Clyde; the walls are in a line with the brink of the precipice; and to look down from them, is indeed, to look from the pinnacle of the temple. On the top of the opposite bank, which is lofty and bold, stand the majestic ruins of Bothwell castle: so that few places are to be found, affording such awful monuments

of the devastations of time; together with such a romantic prospect, formed by the bendings of the river, and the boldness of its woody banks.

Little account can now be found, of the origin and history of this religious establishment. It appears from some ancient records, that it was originally a sort of colony, from the monastery at Jedburgh. It is also recorded, that, "Friar Walter, of Blantyre", (probably he should be stiled, Prior Walter) "was one of the Scottish commissioners, appointed to negotiate the ransom of King David Bruce, taken prisoner in the battle of Durham, in 1346". The following facts, concerning the Priory, are also mentioned in Hope's Minor Practics, Appendix No.1. Chap 2, Canon Regulars, page 420. "Blantire, in Clydesdale, a Priory of this order, was founded before the year 1296; for, at that time, Frere William Priour de Blantyre, is a subscriber to Regman's roll," Prynne, page 663. "Walter Stuart, commendator of this place, was Lord Privy Seal, in the year 1595; and, shortly after, treasurer, upon the Master of Glammis's dimison. He was made a peer, by the title of Lord Blantire in 1606 from whom is descended the present Lord Blantire".

Urns have been dug up at different times, in several parts of the parish; and some of them were found lately in a large heap of stones. In the center of the heap, square stones were placed, so as to form a kind of chest and the urns were placed within it. They contained a kind of unctuous earthy substance; and some remains of bones were scattered around them. They are now in possession of the College of Glasgow. Strong impressions of fire were also evident on some of the stones.