

Third Statistical Account of Scotland - Parish of Blackford,  
in the County of Perth. - - - By, D.S. Stewart, J.P.

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The parish is in the Presbytery of Auchterarder and the Synod  
of Perth and Stirling.

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1.  
Geographical Background.

The village is 18 miles from Perth and 16 miles from Stirling, on the main railway line from Glasgow to the North. It is about 400 feet above sea level. The Parish extends 10 miles from North to South by a width of from 4 to 6 miles. It is bounded on the N. by Trinity Gask, on the E. by Auchterarder, on the S. by Glendevon and part of Clackmannan and on the W. by Muthill and Ardoch. In 1898 part of the western portion of Blackford Parish was taken to form part of the new Parish of Ardoch.

The soil is varied in a parish of this extent. The Southern part is occupied by a ridge of the Ochil Hills, on which are some good sheep farms. Apart from this hill ground, the rest of the parish is, on the whole, quite good arable land, which grows most crops common to Scotland. Potatoes grow well here. The ground to the north of the River Allan (which rises about a mile E. of the village) known as the Panholes district, is composed largely of light sandy or gravelly soil, and crops suffer there in a dry season. The northern part, mostly in the Strathallan Estate, consists of rich well-cultivated land, with the exception of the portion known as Tullibardine Muir.

The beautiful Glen to the S.-E. leading through the Ochils to Glendevon is Gleneagles, from which the wellknown Hotel and Golf Courses take their name.

There are quite a number of small streams in the parish. The Danny and Ogilvy rise in the Ochils and join the Allan a little to the west of the village. The Ruthven rises in Gleneagles and flows eastward at the foot of the Glen towards the Earn. The Machany rises in

mill parish, passes through Strathallan and falls into the Earn near Inzell. There are some fair trout to be had in all these burns.

The main highway from Glasgow to the north via Perth passes through the village and is kept in good condition by the Ministry of Transport. Where this road crosses the Railway line there is a level-crossing. Besides the danger from this on a main road it is often the cause of delays to road traffic. Owing to the nature of the ground and the proximity of the village it is not considered suitable to bridge the railway at this point: measurements and levels have been taken in recent years with a view to building a new road to the South of Blackford which will by-pass the village and cross the railway some little distance to the east.

The southern part of the parish, from the Muir of Tullibardine to the Ochils is somewhat bleak and bare of trees. Several plantations were cut down during the two recent wars and have not been replanted. There would appear to be considerable scope for afforestation here. The Strathallan and Kincardine districts are much better wooded.

In Sir Aylmer Haldane's book "The Haldanes of Gleneagles", there is a description of the old Castle of Gleneagles at the foot of the Glen, little of it is left now: He refers to the Loch which was close to the Castle, and which in those times stretched westward beyond the site on which the village of Blackford now stands: mention is made of shoots (or chutes) in the thickness of the walls of the Castle, so that slops etc., could find their way to an exterior cesspool, and thence by a paved channel to the adjoining loch.

There is a legend as to how Blackford got its name:-

Many centuries ago this countryside through which the Allan wound its course, was a large expanse of water, varying from one to three miles in breadth. It was a favourite resort of ancient Caledonian monarchs and chieftains. Tradition does not say which one, but one is said to have lost his wife at a place where the lake was fordable. The expression used by the disconsolate Monarch, in the vernacular, is understood to mean that it was a Blackford to him. Before the body was recovered the lake had to be drained: the remains of the lady were said to have been buried and a large mound raised over the grave.

A mound, oblong in shape, like an upturned boat, known locally as the Deaf Knowe, may be seen about a mile west of the village not far from the north bank of the Allan. It has the appearance of being a burial mound or barrow: the ground surrounding the mound is quite flat for some distance. There is evidence near Kinbuck (some miles to the west) of a cutting having been made at some time, which would have had the effect of draining the loch: between Braco and Blackford, to the north of the Allan, there are farms bearing the names of Redford and Clatteringford.

With regard to the district referred to above, geologists are of opinion that the formation was the result of the late glacial period about 10,000 years ago, and might perhaps more correctly be described as 'kettle-holes' instead of panholes. Dr. J.B. Simpson in a paper read to the Royal Society of Edinburgh in 1933 gives an interesting account of the striking formation of this area, caused by the retreating ice-front into the westward-draining Strath Allan Valley. The morainic belt in this valley illustrates the hummocky broken topography of this class of deposit. The accumulations are often pitted by 'kettles', marking the sites of buried ice masses, which have subsequently melted 'in situ'.

Church was built in 1855/6. In 1848 they built a school and a house for the teacher, and in 1850 a house for the Minister. About the end of the



### Outstanding Events in the Past Century.

Railway. About the middle of the 19th century (1848) the "Scottish Central Railway" between Stirling and Perth was opened. This passes close to the east end of the village. It was about this time that the undertaking known locally as the 'cutting of the Water Allan' took place. The Allan rises about a mile north of the village and previously wound its course through somewhat marshy ground. A considerable cutting was made to confine the river and drain the surrounding land. This cutting extended from about a mile east of Blackford westward past Greenloaning. A large squad of navvies, mainly Irish, was occupied on this work for some years. Doubtless the work was carried out by the landed proprietors, as well as, or in conjunction with the Railway Coy. since the surrounding land would be improved. The station buildings were built on piles, the ground was so soft. To the N.E. of the station and adjoining the railway, is a field locally known as 'the Bog'; part of this field is used as the village refuse dump, another part, fenced off, is known as the 'Marl Hole'.

### Church Disruption.

At the Disruption in 1843, quite a large number 'came out' from the Established Church and formed a congregation of the Free Church. Feeling was strong; only two elders were left in the Old Church. Within a year or two the Free Church had quite a strong congregation. They built a temporary Church which was opened in 1846. A permanent Church was built in 1855/6. In 1848 they built a school and a house for the teacher, and in 1850 a manse for the Minister. About the end of the



century the Free Church School was closed, the pupils being transferred to the public school. Then came the Union of the Churches in 1929, when St. Andrew's Church, (as the former Free Church was called), became a Church of Scotland. Now in 1950 when there was a vacancy in both churches, the St. Andrew's congregation has joined with that of the 'Old Parish Church'. This latter Church was built to take the place of the Old Church on the highground to the north of the village and was opened for worship in 1858. Oddly enough this old Parish Church was built on the feu adjoining the Free Church Manse; now that the two congregations are united the Church and Manse are conveniently side by side. The Old Parish Church Manse, built about 1760 is a rambling building with steading, in the glebe, nearly a mile to the north of the village.

The future of the old 'Free Church', with its tall spire, is not yet decided. In the Statistical Account of 1792 the writer says, 'we have frequent thunder and lightning but no remarkable accident has ever happened by it'. It is of interest that on the day before Good Friday in 1914, a sharp thunderstorm broke over the village. The Free Church Spire was split and shattered, and the Church set on fire. One old man who was passing at the time was killed and several roofs around were damaged by flying masonry from the spire, which was rebuilt during the summer; the repairs were completed shortly after the outbreak of the war in the Autumn.

It is perhaps appropriate here to say a little about the old Church on the high ground, now a ruin. It dates back to the early 17th century (1617). It was burned down in 1738 and rebuilt on the same

ite. The nucleus of a new village having grown up at Blackford, in 1613 an Act was passed by the Scottish Parliament that a Parish Church be erected there in place of the one at Strageath. On a few old tombstones an early 17th century date can still be seen. In 1932 it was found that the belfry was in a dangerous condition. The County Council, as successors of the Parish Council, asked the Ancient Monuments Department of H.M. Office of Works to examine the building and make a Report. This Report recommended repairing the structure of the Church, strengthening the belfry with metal bands and putting metal bars in the windows, to protect the structure: the Old Lych Gate was also to receive attention (a picture of the Gate appears in 'Chambers's Encyclopedia'.) The work was carried through under the supervision of the Office of Works in 1933 at a cost of £180, which sum was raised by public subscription, without any assistance from the County Rates.

About the end of the 19th century an extension to the burying ground was made by the Parish Council, immediately to the north of the old churchyard which was overcrowded.

In the 'Transactions of the Scottish Ecclesiological Society' for 1932 there is an address by Mr. James F. Whyte S.S.C. Edinburgh on the Abbey of Inchaffray. In his address he says that Strageath is the old name of the Parish Of Blackford dedicated to ST. Patrick of Ireland, and was planted by an Irish Missionary, St. Fergus, -long before the old Church at Blackford was built. He also says that it is of interest that to this day the Minister of Blackford (Strageath) still derives a part of his stipend from the great Vicarage Teind of the Abbey of Inchaffray.

There are three handsome stained-glass windows in the Parish church

to the memory of George MacGibbon who was killed in the South African War. He was a brother of the minister of the Church at that time.

Moray Institute.

In 1887, the year of Queen Victoria's Jubilee, it was proposed to erect a village hall. A committee was formed to attend to this and a Hall was opened in 1888. It was called the Moray Institute in recognition of the financial help and grant of a site given by the laird of Blackford Estate, Mr. Drummond Moray of Abercairny. The ceremony of laying the foundation stone was in the hands of the St. John's Lodge, Auchterarder. It was a red letter day in the village. The ceremonial was associated with the celebration of the Queen's Jubilee. A procession composed of Good Templars, Ancient Order of Foresters and Free Masons in full regalia from surrounding towns, a flute band and a pipe band paraded the length of the village. In the evening a complimentary dinner was given in the public school to Colonel Drummond Moray who laid the Memorial Stone of the building. The Hall cost over £1000.

Scobie Bequest.

James Scobie, a mason to trade, emigrated to America and there made a fortune, largely through building bridges for one of the new railways crossing the American Continent. He settled in San Francisco where he built many prominent buildings. On his death in 1903 he left to Trustees in Blackford the sum of £3000, the interest from which is paid to aged and deserving poor in the village. This has been a great boon to many whose income is small.



A BEQUEST.

A smaller bequest, £500, was left by Thomas Whyte who left Blackford as a young man. He was a joiner and built up a good business in Glasgow. The interest is paid by the County Council (as successors of the Parish Council) on the recommendation of the local District Committee, to deserving cases in the village.

GLENEAGLES HOTEL.

The L.M.S. railway built this large hotel and laid out the wellknown Golf Courses, on what was known as the White Muir, after the first world war. The work had been begun before the war which held up completion. The Golf Courses were opened in 1918, they are in Blackford Parish about two miles from the village: from them can be had a good view of the beautiful Glen after which they are named.

During the Second World War this Hotel was used as a Hospital for wounded and later as a Rehabilitation Centre for Miners. It was reopened as a Hotel about two years ago.

WAR MEMORIAL.

After the first World War a Memorial was erected, by public subscription, opposite the Moray Institute. It was unveiled in 1921 by Captain Home Drummond Moray of Abercairny, who gifted the site. The local ministers took part in the ceremony, also the Rev. James MacGibbon D.D. of Glasgow Cathedral, who was a former minister of the local Parish Church. After the second World War the names of those who gave their lives were added to the Memorial in 1946.

Some 70 or 80 years ago there was a typhoid epidemic from which several died. Up to that time the villagers got water from pumps which were blamed for the epidemic. A great many people in the village at that time kept a cow in a byre adjoining their dwellings. These

This is a note of the population changes during the past 150 years:-

Year	1801	Pop. of parish	....	1520
Year	1851	..	....	2012
	1891	..	....	1522
	1901	..	....	1539
	1911	..	....	1374
	1921	..	....	1593
	1931	..	....	1399

The increase shown in 1851 is almost certainly due to the large number of navvies employed in the cutting of the new course for the River Allan (referred to in 2nd. sect:.) It is difficult to account for the fall in 1911 except that it might be the drift to the towns; there were few opportunities of employment for young people in the village. Around the year 1921 a fairly large force of workmen was employed in the construction of a dam on River Devon in the Ochils, to form a reservoir to supply water to Dunfermline and Rosyth: the work went on for some years and not completed until 1924/5. The huts in which the workers were housed were in this parish. This would account for the increase in the 1921 census. Quite a few German Prisoners of War were employed in this work, many of them from the German raider "Emden".

Most of the inhabitants of the village and district have been brought up in the parish. A few families who came here for the Allan Water Cutting stayed on in the district.

#### IV. PUBLIC AND SOCIAL SERVICES.

Some 70 or 80 years ago there was a typhoid epidemic from which several died. Up to that time the villagers got water from pumps which were blamed for the epidemic. A great many people in the village at that time kept a cow in a byre adjoining their dwellings. These

animals went out to graze in the Cow Park. One person only was needed to let the cows out of the park in the evening; each cow found its way home to its own byre.

A few leading men in the village about 70 years ago, raised money to supply the people with good spring water from the foot of the Ochils. The supply is good and still sufficient for the needs of the people: a large additional reservoir had to be made in 1933 when an up-to-date system of drainage was introduced, since much more water was used than formerly. At that time the County Council took over the water supply from the local committee. Dry closets and cesspools are all done away with. Even in a dry summer of 1949 the springs never failed and the supply was ample for all domestic needs, in addition to supplying water to numerous railway engines.

The rainfall in 1939 was 47.7 and in 1949 it was 39.7.

The cost of the drainage system was about £6000. This sum was borrowed through the County Council to be repaid in 30 years, the annual charge being included in the County Rates.

A few years later the Grampian Electricity Supply Company brought electric current to the village, which was a great boon. The old Gaslight Company had gone out of existence some years before. The village streets and all public buildings are well lit by electric light and at least ninety per cent of the houses are connected to the supply.

There are several good shops which supply the district with all the usual household requirements.

With a good water supply and modern drainage the village has been free from any serious epidemic.



The rural roads in the parish are in a fair condition. The expense of putting all rural roads in good condition would greatly increase the County Rates, which are already high. A few country roads require considerable repairs but the money available for this class of work by the County Council is quite inadequate to do more than a little patching.

Being on the main road the village has a good service of motor omnibuses. These are largely taken advantage of by people whose employment is in Auchterarder, Perth or Stirling : the train service is not so convenient and is, at present, more expensive.

#### V HOW THE PEOPLE ARE HOUSED.

The village has not increased greatly in size during the past century. A few houses have been built by private builders at the western end of the village. After the first world war the County Council built four blocks of two houses each, brick and harled, and there was need for more. The second world war stopped all building of this kind: the need for more houses still existed so the County Council have now erected eight pre-fabricated houses, and are now erecting twenty of the traditional type of brick built house.

Many of the older houses and cottages in the village have been rebuilt, or renovated and modernised, especially since the advent of the drainage scheme and the supply of electricity.

Generally speaking the people are well housed without overcrowding; practically every house has gravitation water and is connected to the drainage system. Most houses and cottages have their own garden.

The farm houses and cottages too are for the most part up-to-date. There are still two or three without a satisfactory water supply.

The majority of the houses in the village are owner-occupied.

## VI

### HOW THEY MAKE A LIVING.

Like many other villages, hand-loom weaving occupied many of the people a century ago: then machinery was introduced in making coarse woollen cloth for a number of years. This industry however died out nearly a hundred years ago: a very few hand-looms remained in operation at a somewhat later date.

For many generations the chief industries were brewing and boot making: now these too have completely gone. It was found difficult for these comparatively small firms to compete with the many large concerns throughout the country; so between 1925 and 1936 the last brewery and boot-factory closed down. The maltings of one brewery is occupied by a company which makes malt for a certain kind of bread; this however, employs only a small number of workers.

The local shops, joinery works and railway give employment to quite a number, but the largest number of people are employed in agriculture. A large force of workers, male and female, are employed in planting, harvesting and marketing potatoes.

The wages earned by all these workers are the same as in other parts of the country, being the trade-union wage for the job. The cash wages are very much more than those of a generation ago but the cost of living has correspondingly risen.

The old disused brewery at the west end of Stirling Street has recently been bought by a distillery company and is now producing

nisky. Distilleries like breweries do not employ a large number of workers as compared, say, to boot-factories, considering the amount of capital involved.

It is to be hoped that some new industry will come to the district, otherwise there will be a tendency for the young people to seek employment in the larger towns.

VII     THE WAY OF LIFE. Changes that have taken place in outlook and customs during the past century.

Since the date of the last Statistical Account, 1837, there have been great changes. The biggest change is in the method or means of transport. The posting and hiring establishments of these days have gone, in their place are the garage, petrol filling station, railway station and 'bus stop' for motor omnibuses. A century ago a journey of 50 miles or more was a matter for considerable thought and preparation; now, with trains, cars, buses and even aeroplanes very much longer journeys are undertaken with little comment. The convenience, speed, comfort and safety of modern transport have made a vast change in the outlook and customs of the people.

The packman, as he was known a few generations ago, has quite disappeared; the modern village is well supplied with a variety of shops and stores.

Two world wars have also altered the outlook of the younger generation in particular. Young men and women from the village have travelled to the ends of the earth in the service of their country. Their grandparents, more than likely, lived all their days in Scotland, some even in their native parish.

-With a good service of 'buses, many people travel daily to work



nearby towns. Cinemas and shops in these towns also attract the people, while on Saturday afternoons the football matches in Stirling and Perth draw many of the young folk.

In general with other places, the standard of living, particularly of the poorer people, has risen. Sanitation, electricity, convenient shops, ease of travel, better education, daily papers and radio, all have a share in this improvement. Ways of occupying one's leisure are more varied. Apart from gardening, in which most householders take an interest, there are outdoor games such as bowls or golf for those inclined to indulge in them. In winter the Women's Rural Institute is an active body with a large membership; there is badminton for the younger folk.

During the past thirty years there has been a marked falling off in the attendances at Church Services; this it would seem is fairly common throughout the country. Two or three generations ago we were a nation of church-goers and the place of the Church was unchallenged. The minister was respected because of his office, now he has come down from his pedestal: he must now win for himself the esteem of the community. It does not mean that people are hostile to the Church, but many are uninterested and critical. This lack of interest is not entirely the fault of the minister; the way of life through Sunday Travel and Sport etc., entices people away from Public Worship. Then, also, the average person has more money to spend on these counter attractions. In spite of this lack of interest, many of the young people, when they come to be wed, like to have a Church Wedding. It may be that in past generations the young people were compelled to attend Church Service by their parents, now this is not so.

The passing of locally elected Parish Councils is regretted by many (it may be in time it will be justified). Now that so much control of local affairs is in the hand of the County Council, less interest is taken in these matters by the general public, except when paying their annual rates, which in the past four or five years have more than doubled.

With the rising world population and the desire to import less food from abroad, it is necessary to increase the fertility of the soil. This means more men and more tractors are required in the country districts. Villages which have dwindled during the last 50 years may, it is hoped, again grow in prosperity and population, and become of increasing importance in the future. The introduction of mechanised implements makes it possible for farmers to cultivate much more ground than formerly. Almost every farm has at least one tractor.

A hundred years ago there were many crofts and small-holdings these are now all taken into larger farms. A few heaps of rubble and perhaps a gooseberry bush or two are all the remaining evidence of a former habitation.

#### VIII      CHANGES IN OWNERSHIP OF ESTATES.

During the past century there have been several changes. The Blackford Estate, in which the village stands, has been in the hands of the Drummond Morays of Abercairny since about the year 1300. It has been sold this year (1950) to Messrs. Keir & Cawder Ltd. There is no mansion house on this estate.

The Estate of Gleneagles has returned to the Haldane family after the death in 1918 of Robert Haldane Duncan, Third Earl of Camperdown. The old Chapel in the Glen is in a good state of preservation, it was renovated within the past generation. Lord Haldane of Cloan is buried in the family burying ground adjoining the Chapel. A few hundred yards from the Chapel stand the ruins of the Castle of Gleneagles.

The small Estate of Duchally is still owned by the Monteath family, Kincardine Estate, on which stand the ruins of an Ancient Castle, now belongs to the family of the late Mr. George M. Borland, who bought it about twenty years ago.

The Strathallan Estate, was sold by the Strathallan Family to Sir. James Roberts Bart., in 1910. The present owner, Sir James Denby Roberts Bart., succeeded to the Estates in 1928. The old Chapel at Tullibardine built in 1446, is still standing. It is only used now as a burial place for the Earls of Perth. It was formerly used as such by the Murrays of Tullibardine, but their remains were removed when Lady Amelia Sophia Murray married the then Lord Strathallan. There is now nothing to be seen of the old Tullibardine Castle, except some old carved stones built into various steadings.

At Tullibardine (on this Estate) the village hall was built for the community in 1924 by the Laird, and a new school nearby was erected in 1929. Within the past few decades a supply of water and electricity has been made to nearly all premises. The hall and school form a popular centre for social life in this agricultural community.



The recent trend in this district has been to increase the size of farm holdings, owing to greater mechanisation and the higher cost of buildings. Thirty years ago the average size of holding was 120 acres the tendency now is more in the region of 300 to 350 acres.

The present owner of the Estate has gradually taken over most of the farms: instead of putting in new tenants he decided to employ managers on a profit-sharing basis, so that a proportion of the profits would accrue to the estate, and full control of the management of the land be retained. The manager is responsible for the labour and day to day running of the farm. He gets a guaranteed weekly wage and a share of the profit of his unit, after it has been charged with rent, tenants' repairs, interest on capital and share of management expenses. Buying and selling are done through a central office, except for small replacements. Sir James D. Roberts says the plan has worked well so far, and seems likely to continue to do so. The manager as opposed to the tenant has no capital worries, he has a competent office and technical staff to back him.

In recent years the banks of the Earn have suffered more damage by flooding, aggravated by increased drainage in the hills and by the felling of large areas of woodland.

BLACKFORD, AUGUST 1950.