

Duncan McNeil's Presentation on the Village of
Gargunnoch drawn from the old Statistical
Accounts of 1796 & 1841

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Mr McNeil's handwritten presentation, delivered in the church hall in 1947, is held in the Stirling Council Archives at Borrowmeadow Road. It runs to 74 pages and contains an instruction at the end of line 3 on page 49 to go to an additional page 50 on which there are two paragraphs, one on the village and the other on the Rev John Stark with the further instruction to then return to the first page 50. Doing so would have resulted in the additional paragraphs being so obviously out of context that I have instead placed them in locations where they sit more comfortably within the surrounding text. They are printed in red.

The photo above is of Duncan McNeil in the early 1950s. Duncan's father Dugald worked all his life for the Stirlings of Gargunnock and Duncan, in turn, served in the same way. He and his wife lived in Shrub Cottage, Manse Brae but after his retirement moved to Hillview, Main St., Gargunnock.

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The matter which has gone to make up this presentation tonight has been taken almost entirely from two old Statistical Accounts of the parish of Gargunnock, which I have been fortunate enough to come across some years ago. These accounts were compiled by the Parish Ministers of that time, one in 1796 almost 152 years ago by the Rev. James Robertson, who later became the Rev. Dr Robertson, minister of South Leith, and a later one in 1841, 107 years ago by the Rev James Laurie.

As the name implies these accounts do not give much of what we might call intimate information about the parish. They were written really for the information of readers who were not acquainted with the district and a good deal of space is taken up with description of the scenery, nature of the country and other matters with which Gargunnock people are already acquainted. Nevertheless they contain a good deal of information about the customs and conditions which prevailed in these days and which I hope will prove interesting to a Gargunnock audience.

While both these old writers agree that Gargunnock is a place of great antiquity, neither of them make any attempt to place any time or date upon its origin. There has always been much speculation as to how Gargunnock came by its name. The old tale of the small boy who, after hearing a gun fired for the first time told his father to "gar the gun knock, Daddy" is of course nonsensical. Gargunnock is much older than the day of firearms. Mr Laurie in the beginning of his account gives an interesting version of how the name Gargunnock was derived. The name he says was taken from two Gaelic or Celtic words, CAER – GUINEACH, meaning "the place of the conical hill or fort." He goes on to suggest that the hill or fort from which Gargunnock took its name was the Peel of Gargunnock which stood at one time near the bank of the river Forth. One wonders if he is quite correct in this suggestion. Personally I think it is much more likely that Gargunnock derived its name from the Gaelic or Celtic words Car or Caer and Cnoc or Knock. Car or Caer meaning a conical fort which we have in what we know as Keir Hill and which was undoubtedly an ancient Scottish or

Pictish fort while Cnoc or Knock which means a hill refers to the larger hill on which the village is built.

Gargunnock was certainly known at one time by the name Gargowno as we find it called thus in Blind Harry's story of Wallace written about 1410 and describing its capture by Wallace in 1296, about which we hope to have something to say later in the paper.

### **Boundaries**

The extent and boundaries of the parish do not seem to have changed much since 1796, the boundaries since then being apparently still the same on the east and south by the parish of St Ninians, on the west by the parishes of Kippen, Balfron and Fintry and on the north by the Perthshire parishes of Kincardine and Kilmadock.

### **Natural History**

In a note on the natural history of the parish all the commoner birds and beasts that we know in Gargunnock are mentioned including the polecat and badger which seems to have been quite common at that time, as they are only casually included in the list of animals without any comment. It is mentioned that herons, from time immemorial had built their nests in a row of Scots Fir trees, close by the mansion house of Meiklewood, but that after the new Meiklewood house had been built had taken their departure. It is also mentioned that peregrine or falcon hawks formerly built their nests in the cliffs of Ballochleam and the young hawks were in great request at one time by sportsmen in England for taming and training for the sport of falconry. Mr Robertson also tells us that in the spring of 1795 a perfectly white crow was found on a tree at Boquhan.

### **Landowners**

Gargunnock has always been particularly fortunate in having as landowners in the parish men who were always anxious to do what they could for the good of the community and who were not afraid to spend their money in developing the natural resources of the district. It is rather sad to note that of the families mentioned as holding lands in the parish in the year 1796 not one now remains. In 1796 the estate of Gargunnock was in the hands of Colonel Eidington who seems to have purchased it not long before from the Campbells in whose hands it had been for many generations. These Campbells were a branch of the family of Campbells of Ardkinglas in Argyleshire and the last member of the family, Sir James Campbell seems to have been held in great respect and veneration in the parish as Mr Robertson says of him "that his memory will long be held dear in the parish." This Sir James Campbell before his death seems to have made great improvements both in the house and in the surrounding grounds at Gargunnock. We learn that a high wall and strong gate were removed so that previous to this Gargunnock House must have been something of a fortified place. The ground round the place was levelled and the gardens and orchard formerly close to the house removed to their present position. Colonel Eidington in the summer of 1795 built the new wing that now comprises the front of the house.

The proprietor of Leckie at that time (1796) was a Dr Moir who seems to have been the guide, philosopher friend and medical attendant of everyone in the parish for we read that, "Much inconvenience arose from the want of a surgeon, but that is now removed. Dr Moir of Leckie, a gentleman of great eminence in his profession is ever ready to give his advice and assistance to the villagers without fee. There is still an unlucky prejudice against inoculating for the small-pox while the people have a strong inclination to frequent the house where the disease exists. Dr Moir

inoculates gratis and has had considerable influence in reconciling the common people to a practice which God in his providence has remarkably blessed for the providence of the human race” Besides attending to his medical duties Dr Moir did a great deal in the way of improving the estate of Leckie by planting, clearing, draining etc and tho’ we learn that he was greatly handicapped by the fact that when the gentleman whom he succeeded came to the estate it was encumbered by debts which only by the strictest economy he was successful in clearing off so that on Dr Moir’s succession he found “that Leckie,” as Dr Moir puts it, “ was far behind other estates in respect to those elegant improvements.”

Boquhan however in the hands of General John Fletcher Campbell seems to have led the way in the matter of improvements. We learn that 50 or 60 day labourers were employed in a scheme of improvements which had been in operation for a number of years. The writer says, and the words are printed in italics, that, “the sum of £25 Sterling per week is paid out in wages in this manner. £25 to pay 50 labourers!

Of Meiklewood our chronicler has very little to say save that it is the property of Mr Graham who is an heritor of this parish and remarks that the venerable oaks of Meiklewood attract the attention of every visitor.

By 1841, 45 years later the estate of Gargunnoch has passed into the hands of the Stirlings whose descendants happily are still its possessors, Leckie Estate into the hands of Mr Charles Alexander Moir who it would seem succeeded Dr Moir previously mentioned. It was this Mr Moir who built the present Leckie House, probably about 1836 or 37 as Mr Laurie tells us in 1841 that when the approach and pleasure grounds then being made are finished it will be one of the finest gentleman’s seats in the County. Boquhan is now, 1841, owned by Mr Henry Fletcher Campbell and Meiklewood by Colonel Graham who, during his ownership, built the present Meiklewood House. In 1832 Colonel Graham erected the first bridge across the Forth, beside where Gargunnoch Station now stands and at his own expense made and repaired a new line of road from the bridge to the great road from Stirling to Callander, a distance of 2 miles. So it would appear that we are indebted for the road known as the Kirk Lane to this proprietor of Meiklewood of whom, Mr Laurie says, “that in this undertaking he has displayed a well-informed mind and a most liberal public spirit.

### **Agriculture**

In any account of Gargunnoch the subject of agriculture must of necessity take a prominent place and this certainly is the case in conjunction with these old records. Indeed Mr Robertson in his account of 1796 devotes nearly half of his available space to the subject. This is not surprising as the latter half of the 18<sup>th</sup> century seems to have been of particular importance in the development of agriculture in the parish and to have seen the introduction of many improvements in methods and conditions of farming. Prior to the year 1795 the Moor land or hill grazings in the parish seem to have been considered of very little value. No arable or dry field land was attached to them and no house or farm buildings seem to have gone with them. They appear to have been left from year to year to various tenants who even did not reside in the parish and to have been only grazed during the summer months. But in 1795 we learn that Col. Eidington the proprietor of Gargunnoch had retained the grazing of Gargunnoch Moor in his own hands and had purchased in the South a flock of Cheviot sheep and these together with a shepherd from the Borders he had transported north and with them stocked the Gargunnoch Moor. It would be interesting to know how long they were kept

and just why and when the Cheviots were discarded in favour of the hardier black-faced stock which Mr Laurie mentions as the prevailing breed of sheep in the parish 45 years later. There is little doubt, however, that this flock of Cheviots was the forerunner of the present permanent sheep stock on our hill farms. Of the dryfields, the land lying between the Carse and the Moorlands Mr Robertson writes, "The greater part of the dryfields until of late lay waste and wild, overrun with whins and broom. Few of them were sub-divided, enclosed or cultivated in any considerable degree. Plantations were not in use and excepting on the sides of the glens scarcely anything like a tree was to be seen. But as we have already noted, headed by the proprietor of the Estate of Boquhan, all the other proprietors united, or rather vied with each other in schemes of drainage, ditching, clearing, planting and other improvements that speedily achieved a complete change. The ground which shortly before had been covered in whins and broom soon became capable of carrying good crops. Oats, barley, grass seeds (for hay and pasture) and sometimes peas were grown. Potatoes were also raised in considerable quantities but turnips, which seem to have been a recent introduction, were not looked upon at that time with any great favour by the majority of the farmers in the parish and were only grown by the proprietors in their own home farms. Mr Robertson concludes his remarks on dryfield farming with the following interesting statement.

"Last year not quite an acre and a half of the minister's glebe which had been in pasture for the preceding seasons was ploughed only once, about the end of October, and sown with wheat and without lime or manure of any kind and the crop produced £20-11-6d. One boll was sown and fifteen were reaped." One boll of wheat I understand was equal to 4 bushels so the crop must have been equal to about 40 bushels to the acre which seems to prove that Mr Robertson besides being a good minister was also a capable farmer.

In the Carse grounds also the years previous to 1796 seem to have been years of progress. We learn that, "About 40 years ago the carse ground lay almost in a state of nature, unprofitable to the landlord for it was difficult to find men who would venture to possess them" and again Mr Robertson writes, "The houses on the carse farms are not good. There are two circumstances which must always prevent them from being so. Firstly the farms are small, some 20 and few more than 40 acres. Secondly the house is built by the tenant who is only allowed some timber by the landlord. If it serves the purpose of a dwelling during the currency of the lease nothing more is expected. It has to be acknowledged however that poor as the carse houses now are they are much better than they were 20 years ago. They consist of at least two apartments each having a chimney and a tolerable window. Nor are the cattle now as formerly permitted to enter the same door as the family.

Probably with many memories of dirty ministerial boots in the course of his visitations in the parish, Mr Robertson complains of the state of the roads in the carse. "All the roads in the carse," he says, "are so extremely bad that during the rainy season they are almost impassable. At such times carts cannot be used, everything must be carried on horseback. When the farmers are spoken to individually on the subject they are constantly complaining of their roads and seem anxious to assist in repairing them but no one chooses to set about the work alone. When the time is convenient for one it is inconvenient for another. Fair weather comes, the road is dry and firm and the matter drops. Truly what is everybody's business is nobody's."

The almost universal use of lime, then the only form of artificial manure available and the recent introduction of a system of rotation did much toward the improvement of crops. Wheat, beans,

barley and oats seem to have been the principal crops grown and 10 bolls, or from 40 to 60 bushels according to the crop grown was looked on as the average yield per acre. Seed time does not seem to have differed much from the present day, the weather being then as now the deciding factor. Beans sown and ploughed down on the 9<sup>th</sup> of January are mentioned as having produced one of the best crops on record and on another occasion owing to wet weather no seed was sown before 6<sup>th</sup> April which seems to have been regarded in those days as having been very late in the season. The weather appears to have been the one thing which has not changed in the last 135 years. It is a pity that Mr Robertson does not give any indication of the rents paid at that time.

Ploughing matches were instituted in the district about this time. Prizes being given by local gentlemen which we are told were eagerly contended for. A Farmers Club which is still in existence and whose annual show is still a feature of agricultural life in the parish was instituted in 1796 by Gen. Campbell of Boquhan and in 1807 this was enriched by a bequest from the same gentleman of £500.

Mr Robertson sums up the art of good farming very pithily in his concluding remarks on the subject. "The whole secret of farming," he says, "lies in preserving the land dry and clean, observing a regular rotation of crops, taking care not to impoverish the soil, and to be seldom from home especially in seed time and harvest, ready to seize the favourable opportunity when it occurs. The land of the Diligent Maketh Rich"

The effect of the activity in agricultural matters from the year 1750 onwards is evident from the account of 1841 though Mr Laurie does not go into the same detail as his predecessor. He contents himself with giving figures of acreage, descriptions of rotation etc. He gives the area under cultivation in the parish at that time as 5332 acres. Area which has never been cultivated and in pasture 3762 acres and area under woodlands 574 acres. The valuation of the parish in the previous 45 years had more than doubled. He gives the rent of dryfield land at from 25/- to 40/- per acres and of carse land at from 45/- to 60/- per acre and mentions that one farm on Leckie had recently been let at 63/- per acre. He also gives a very interesting account of a system of wedge draining which seems to have been much in vogue at that time. At the risk of being tedious but as it may be of interest to some of my hearers I will give his description in full.

The wedge drain is 3 feet deep, 12 inches broad at the top and 2 inches at the bottom. Three kinds of spades are used. First a common spade, second a spade 4 inches broad at the point. Third a spade 2 inches broad at the point. The clay is dug out with a gradual slope on both sides to the bottom for 3 feet. The clay is then cleaned out of the bottom with a cleaner. Peat, hard clay or green turf. 14 inches long 4 inches broad and 4 to 5 inches deep is then pressed firmly into the drain, grassy side downward leaving a clear space of 5 or 6 inches at the bottom of the drain which is then filled up with clay to the top. They were set 15 to 18 ft apart

The necessity for a great amount of draining of this kind and later of tile drains was no doubt responsible for the settling in Gargunnock in later years of a number of professional drainers whom I have no doubt some of the older members of the audience will remember and no doubt many of us will have heard of. Rab & Wull McLeod, Jock Rae, Bauldy Cram. Hefty men all of them who worked hard and lived hard. One of them (I think it was Rab McLeod) being in great need of a dram one day made his way down to Brown's Public House to see if he could raise the wind. He was unfortunate as the publican's cow had died that morning and he was going about bemoaning his loss. Seeing

his hopes of a dram fading Rab said to him, "Man, John, dinna pit yersel about. We've bocht ye a horse already and noo we've got a lot o' new drains tae pit in at the Offers we'll sune buy ye a new coo. Gies a dram."

Jock Rae in his younger days was an incorrigible poacher and a thorn in the flesh of all the estates of the district till one of the landowners in the parish hit on the happy expedient of making him gamekeeper on his estate, an experiment which is believed to have had a happy result for all parties. Poor Jocks activities in his later days were restricted as the result of a blasting accident in which he lost several fingers of one hand. He lived to a good old age and died not so many years ago regretted and respected by the community.

### **Historical**

At the beginning of this paper mention was made of the Keir Hill and the Peel of Gargunnoch as possibly having some part in the naming of Gargunnoch. The Keir Hill still remains but alas the Peel has disappeared. What exactly the Keir Hill originally was there seems to be some doubt. The fact that its formation is circular seems to preclude the possibility of its being of Roman origin but it may quite possibly have been an old Scottish Fort or lookout, from which the Scots could have watched for the invading Romans as they made their way through the ancient Caledonian forest that once covered the carse of Stirling. It is certain that when the Romans were in this neighbourhood the carse was covered with trees of a large size. Mr Robertson states that trees of extraordinary bulk are found in the moss, the trunks separated from the roots and lying at a considerable distance with the marks of the axe upon them, the forest having been cut down in the beginning of the 3<sup>rd</sup> century by the Romans to dislodge the Scottish army that took refuge therein. Mr Robertson also suggests that the name Mucklewood or Micklewood refers to a locality where a portion of original forest may have been left standing after most of the surrounding forest had been cut down.

Of the Peel of Gargunnoch we have much more authentic information to go upon. Mr Robertson without going into the exact position tells us, that "the curious stranger may be conducted to the ground which it once occupied and may perhaps regret that scarcely a stone is now left to tell its story" so there seems to have been some small remnant of it in existence at that time.

Mr Laurie in 1841 gives an exact account of the position it once occupied though he says, "that now the plough passes over the place where it once stood." He says it was situated on a rising ground about 50 yards from the Forth where the river takes a direction to the north and about 50 or 60 yards east from where the Gargunnoch burn enters the Forth. It is not known whether the Peel had an existence previous to the English occupation of Scotland though this is unlikely as ancient forts invariably had their situation on high ground. It was used by the English as an outpost to guard against possible crossing of the Forth at the mouth of the Gargunnoch burn which when the river is low is quite possible. Blind Harry tells the story in some detail in his poem "Wallace" written about 1410. About the autumn of 1296 Wallace, who by reason of his activities against the English in Lanark and Ayrshire had been forced to fly till things quietened down somewhat, . Accompanied by a small band of faithful followers they crossed the Clyde into Lennox where they rested safely for a time. The little band then proceeded eastwards till they reached Gargunnoch or as it was known then Gargowno. On arrival at Gargunnoch the Minstrel tells he lodged his men in a "waille" or rude fortification of feal and turf believed to have been the Keir Hill. The story of Wallace's attack and capture of the Peel may best be told in the Minstrel's own words

At Gargowno there was built a sma peel  
Yet furnished baith wi' men an' vittles' weel  
Within a ditch, baith close chambers and ha'  
And the Captain thereof was named Thirlwall  
They Wallace led to whaur that building stood  
He thought to assail it boldly ere he gaed  
Two spies he sent to view out all that land  
Richt loathe was he tae tak that hing on hand.  
In case it should against him gang  
Rather had he thro' adventure been slain  
His spies went forth as it was mid-nicht deep  
And all about the house they spied weel  
The watchman was heavy fa'en on sleep  
The drawbridge doon that should the entrance keep  
The labourers unheeded went they out and in  
The spies returned without a noise or din  
And told their Master all that they had seen.  
Then speedily donned the men their arms keen  
Quietly on foot to the house they sought  
And entered in for hindrance found they nought  
Some men essayed with a' their busy care  
A locked bar was drawn across the door  
but this they could not break oot o' the wa'  
Wallace was grieved when such delay he saw  
And wi' his hands raised it oot o' the way  
Three yards of wall he also pulled out  
Then marvelled all his men that were about  
That he did mair than 20 o' them micht  
Syne wi his foot the gate he struck upright  
And brass and bolt he busted a' at aince  
And quickly they raised it that were in the lead  
The watchman had a short stout staff o' steel  
At Wallace struck but he kept him aff weel  
Rudely frae him tore it in the thrang  
Dung oot his brains and in the ditch him flang  
The rest by this time were upon their feet  
And Wallace soon did wi' the Captain meet  
The staff he had heavy and forged new  
Wi it Wallace upon the heid him drew  
While bane and brain all asunder flew  
His men followed that worthy were indeed  
Sword in hand and slew all the lave  
Wallace commanded that they should nae man save  
Two and twenty slew they in that fight  
Women and bairns that when the men were deid

*He gart be tain and in close hoose kept weel  
So that they without might have nae faille  
The deid bodies they put out of sicht  
Took up the drawbridge ere the day was bricht  
In that place they bode four days ere they would pass  
Nae man outside knew what had come to pass  
Spoiled the place and took them muckle gear  
Jewls and gold away with them did bear  
When Wallace thocht it time they moved forth by nicht  
And to the near woods they went with all their micht*

Both our Chroniclers make mention of a battle fought at Ballochleam between the Grahams and the Leckies the date of which is not recorded. Of this battle Mr Robertson says, " In one of the dryfields of Boquhan some pieces of brass armour and points of spears were found a few years ago by the tenant when digging for limestone. A great quantity of human bones were also discovered at the same spot, the remains probably of the slain at the battle of Ballochleam which was fought in the vicinity and Mr Laurie tells us that Gen. Campbell of Boquhan (the gentleman who did so much to improve the estate) alludes to the battle in a manuscript left by him in which he says, "The ballad that celebrated the battle of Ballochleam was still sung by a lady of our day. Mention is also made of an ancient tower once the stronghold of the Grahams barons of Boquhan which was dug up about 1760 in one of the fields of Old Hall.

Of the passing through the district of Prince Charlie in 1745 both writers are strangely reticent, in fact Mr Robertson doesn't mention it at all and Mr Laurie contents himself by stating, " We are informed that in the year 1745 Prince Charles the pretender passed the Forth at the ford of Frew, breakfasted at Boquhan and slept at Leckie. It is quite obvious by his use of the word "Pretender" that he had no sympathy with the ill-fated Prince. We know also that Prince Charlie slept a night at Touch House.

### **The Village**

The village in 1796 consisted of about 90 houses chiefly of one floor and thatched and each house had a garden attached. There was one Inn which is described as one of the best houses of the kind on the road being kept clean and neat, a circumstance not very common in houses of the same description in these days. In 1841 there were 4 ale-houses in the parish, 3 of these being very probably in the neighbourhood of the village and one in that thriving suburb, Burnton.

The first feu in Gargunnock seems to have been taken up in 1726, a good many in 1733 and at intervals from then onwards. The earlier feus in the lower part of the village were at the rate of 20/- per acre and the later ones in the upper part of the village at 40/- per acre.

### **Church and Schools**

Gargunnock Church must take a place among the oldest parish churches still in use. We have no record of the first building but we are told by Dr Robertson that it was re-built in 1774. He also mentions that on the east gable there is the figure of a cross and on the west that of a crescent and that these were on the gables of the old church and had been replaced when the church was rebuilt.

If he knew how they came to be placed there he makes no mention of the fact. It would be most interesting to know how these ornaments came to be placed on Gargunnock Church. The most commonly accepted theory is that the cross, the symbol of Christianity, occupies a place on the East gable to signify the rising or advance of Christianity, the Crescent or emblem of Mohammedanism on the West to signify the setting or decline of Mohammedanism. It is just possible that the presence of these emblems on the church may denote a greater antiquity than is generally supposed. It has been suggested, without, however, any historical facts whatever to back it up that the presence of the Crescent on the church may connect it with the time of the Crusades and that the original church may have taken the form of a chapel, built by some crusading Knight of the district as a thanksgiving for the safe return from the Holy land or, as was often done in these times as a payment for a vow to a patron saint for some miraculous escape from danger. It is certain that after the time of the Reformation people would not consider Mohammedanism so much a menace to the advance of Christianity as they would a possible return to Catholic rule and it is very doubtful if anyone at or after that period would seriously think of placing or causing to be placed such an ornament as the symbol of Mohammedanism on a church building. I am afraid, however the circumstances of their being placed there must always remain somewhat of a mystery.

Nothing seems to have been done in the way of alterations to the church between 1796 and 1841 as Mr Laurie tells us that the church, which was built in 1774 is in a state of good repair and affords accommodation for 500 sitters. (This is a case of where the latest record might very easily have been misleading had it been the only one as we know from the older record that the church was really re-built in 1774) The church was again considerably altered inside about 1891.

In his 1796 account Mr Robertson does not state the number of communicants but in a list showing the state of the different denominations in the parish puts down as belonging to the Established Church, 808. This, of course, must include all of the families of members of the church as the further record of Episcopalians 3, Seceders 14, and Relief Society 2. ??? 3, accounts for the full population of the parish.

Mr Laurie tells us that in 1841 the average number of communicants was 340 and the total number of persons of all ages connected with the church 880. For comparison the present membership is ????. At that time there were 8 seceders and 9 Episcopalians.

Communion was dispensed twice a year, the Winter Communion being instituted by Dr Robertson during his Ministry. As there was no stated allowance to defray the expenses of the winter communion, the members cheerfully contributed for this purpose, the collections being taken at the church gate, so the present method of having the plate at the church gate seems to have been in vogue for at least a century.

While Mr Robertson has a grumble about the size of the Manse which, he says, was built for a bachelor and was much too small for a family, he was charmed with its situation. This fault of size, or rather want of size, seems to have been rectified later as Mr Laurie tells us it was built about 1750, enlarged and repaired about 1802 and again enlarged and thoroughly repaired in 1832. It has since again been enlarged and repaired about 1908. Mr Laurie was also charmed with its situation and says, "Few situations are more eligible in point of romantic and beautiful scenery."

A Sabbath School was started in Burnton in 1823 so Burnton has the honour of the first Sunday school in the parish having been started there. In 1827 another was opened in the parish school by the parish schoolmaster and a member of the congregation. These Sabbath schools seem to have been particularly successful as we read that the one in the village was attended in the summer of 1840 by nearly 100 children and the one at Burnton by 36.

In 1796 there seems to have been only one day school in the parish – the parish school. It, we are told, was situated on rising ground at the west end of the village probably in the building now known as Carseview. The building did duty for school and schoolmaster's house, the ground floor being the school and the second floor the schoolmaster's house. The average attendance seems to have been about 50 or 60 scholars. The schoolmaster's salary in 1796 including perquisites as Session Clerk and school fees amounted to the magnificent sum of £16 per annum. No wonder Mr Robertson remarked in evident indignation, "When a man, decently qualified submits to the drudgery of training children in several important branches of education, common sense must revolt at the idea of his being in a worse situation than a day labourer." By 1841 there were three schools in the parish, the parish school and two unendowed schools. The parish school still apparently occupied the same position at the top of the village and one of the unendowed schools, possibly, was held in a building, the walls of which are still standing and still known as the old school near the east end of the bridge at the entrance to the village. The other unendowed school which we are told was two miles distant was very likely at Burnton as it was taught chiefly in winter and was for the accommodation of children in the neighbourhood. An infant school was started in the manse in 1835 and was taught by Mr Laurie. The parochial schoolmaster's salary by this time had risen to £25-13-3<sup>1</sup>/<sub>2</sub> per annum which we are told was the minimum. The present school building together with the school-master's house was built in 1858.

### **Social Services**

What one might call the Social Services in Gargunnock in 1796 were almost entirely conspicuous by their absence. The only road in the parish worthy of the name was the military road from Stirling to Dumbarton which passed through the village. The new line of road which, instead of passing through the village now passes the school would appear to have been made some years later than 1796. Mr Robertson also tells us that there is no kind of trade or manufacture in the village, not even a grocery shop deserving of the name. Supplies of all necessaries were got from Stirling weekly or by carriers from Glasgow or Edinburgh.

Mr Laurie in the 1841 account says that the great road from Stirling to Dumbarton passes through the parish for a distance of 4 miles. This appears to refer to the new, or what we call, the main Dumbarton Road which would seem to have been constructed during the 45 years between the writing of these two accounts, probably not very long before the second was written. No stage-coach travelled on this road save a stage coach from Kippen to Stirling every Friday, returning the same day for the convenience of people going to or returning from the Stirling market. There seems also about this time to have been a proposal to make a new line of road from Fintry, by the foot of the hills above Boquhan and Leckie, passing between the villager and the church and joining the present Dumbarton Road by way of the present Station Road. Had this road been made it would have been at that time the shortest route from Dunblane and the north to Glasgow. It does not seem, however, to have ever got past the proposal stage.

The opening of the Forth & Clyde railway round about the year 1860 proved a great benefit to the parish and to the district generally.

There was no Post Office in Gargunnoch in 1841. A postman from Stirling passed through the village about 10 o'clock in the forenoon on his way to Kippen, returning about three in the afternoon. Gargunnoch did not have a P.O. of its own for a good many years later. I am sorry I have not been able to find an exact date. For many years even after the P.O. was installed the postman still came from Stirling on foot, delivering letters in the village and as far as Leckie House. An old lady who may be remembered and recognised by some of my hearers went round the country districts and each person had to pick out their own letters from the bundle she carried, her pay being 1d for each letter, paid by the addressee. She was not very regular in her delivery and very much pleased herself whether she went round with her letters each day or not. The telegraph office was opened in the year 1882 and there is rather a good story of the old Gargunnoch in connection with this. The Post Mistress at that time was a Mrs Binnie and she was assisted in her duties by her niece. The P.O. at that time was two houses farther down the street than at present and the pole leading the wires into the office was placed in the corner. After it had been erected, Jenny Connal, another old Gargunnoch lady who may be remembered stood looking at it one day and was heard to remark, "Weel, Annie (meaning the Post Mistresses niece) "Weel, Annie, I'll maybe manage it but I'm gey sure Mrs Binnie'll never be able tae sclim that pole tae send away a telegram.

I'm afraid we have wandered into comparatively modern times and must now get bacl to 1796.

### **Population**

Figures are tiresome things and I have tried as far as possible tonight to avoid them. However for comparison I would like to give some figures concerning the past and present population of the parish but I'll try to be as brief as possible. From 1755 to 1793 the population seems to have declined. In 1755 the population was 956. By 1793 it had gone down to 830. From 1793 to till 1831 it gradually rose until in the latter year it reached the peak 1006. From 1831 'till 1931 there has again been a steady decline, the population at the 1931 census being 570. The reason for the decline at the end of the 18<sup>th</sup> century is given as partly due to the enlargement of farms. Farms in those days we are told were small, some 20 and few more than 40 acres and emigration to towns and other parishes in search of work.

The population was almost equally divided between the village and the landward area of the parish in these days , the village containing over 400 persons. The people found employment as follows:- Heritors 8, Clergyman 1, Schoolmaster 1, Students 2, Farmers 55, Weavers 10, Shoemakers 2, Tailors 7, Masons 3, joiners 4, Baker 1, Innkeepers 32, Blacksmiths 4, Cooper 1, Carriers 2, Day labourers 28, Men Servants 94, Maid Servants 62.

Now here is rather a surprising piece of information given by Mrs Robertson. In 1796 the unmarried ladies in the parish over 40 years of age numbered 8 and the bachelors over 40 numbered 9, that out of a population of 830. What a paradise Gargunnoch must have been for the lassies!

By 1841 the number of unmarried ladies over 45 had risen to 47 while the bachelors and widowers over 45 numbered 16. One wonders just how many unmarried ladies over 40 the minister would be successful in placing on record today in the parish if he had to make a count.

It is rather surprising to learn however that there were only 2 persons over the age of 80 and 9 between 70 & 80 in the parish in 1796.

### **Wages**

Labour was cheap in 1796 though the minister seems to have thought it was rising alarmingly. I will quote his remarks on the subject. "A few years ago a man-servant for the farm who lived with the farmer could have been found for £5 or £6 sterling per year but now £10 or £12 are given. Women servants who lately were engaged at £2-10/- are now scarcely satisfied with £4. Their purse is just as empty as before but there is a material change in the article of dress. The day labourer who once wrought at 6d or 8d a day now receives a shilling and in seed-time and at harvest his food beside. Last harvest 1794 the wages rose to 16 and 19 pence per day besides food which is by far the highest rate of wages remembered in this country. In 1841 the rate of labour summer & winter for different kinds of farm work was from 9/- to 10/- per week for male farm servants (presumably including food) was some £12 to £18 per year and for female servants from £5 to £7 per year. Tradesmen such as carpenters and masons were paid 14/- per week."

### **Cost of Living**

While wages were low happily living was also cheap in those days. The following are the prices of provisions given by Mr Robertson as ruling in 1796. Oat meal 15/- to 17/- per boll, Barley Meal 10/- per boll, butter 12/- per stone, Common cheese 4/- per stone and for a better kind made on Saturday evenings (why it should be better made on Saturday evenings he doesn't explain) 5/6 per stone. A good fowl 1/-, Eggs 4d per dozen. A fuller list given in a similar account of St Ninians parish of the same year where the conditions would be very much the same gives the prices of the following additional items. Beef 4½d per pound, Mutton 4d per pound, Veal 4d per pound, Pork 3d per pound, Salmon 4d to 1/- per pound, a duck 10d, Milk per scotch pint 2d and potatoes 4d per ?.

We are not told what fuel was used in 1796 but wood and peats were almost certain to have been the only fuel. By 1841 it was chiefly coal. This was brought from Bannockburn and the price of a load of 15 cwts including cartage was 11/6. Peats from Blairdrummond Moss could be had for 3/6 a cart load.

Teas, Mr Robertson tells us was universally used in 1796. "Even the poorest families have it occasionally," he says, "and the last cup is qualified with little whisky which is supposed to correct all the bad effects of the tea." You will note that the minister neither condones nor condemns the practice and one wonders if, in the manse in these days the last cup of tea was "qualified with a "wee drap" to prevent it leaving any ill-effects.

### **Dress**

The complaint that things are not what they used to be seems to have been quite as common in the old days as it is today for talking about food and dress we are told by Mr Robertson that, "The aged inhabitants of Gargunock are surprised at the change in the article of living and what is evidently a proof of the increasing wealth of the country is unreasonably the subject of their lamentations. Talking of the people he says, "They all assemble at the church on Sabbath clean and in decent attire. Many of the women in black cloaks and bonnets and the younger sort adorned with ribbons." I think his next sentence is delightful. He says, "It gives general disgust however when the dress is unsuitable to the station and there is sometimes a contention for pre-eminence in gaudy show which is scarcely censored especially when the maid-servant cannot be distinguished from the

mistress." I am quite sure that when the minister wrote these words he had in his mind's eye some special little servant-lassie whom he considered was spending too great apportion of her increased fee of £2 or £3 a year in lace and ribbons for her personal adornment on Sundays. All the men he says wear hats and what may be thought remarkable at that time there was only one wig in the parish, but he does not tell us who owned it!

### **Poor Relief**

There was no assessment for the maintenance of the poor of the parish in 1796. A capital sum of £365 in the hands of the kirk session, the gift of 100 guineas from the Laird of Leckie together with the collections, mort-cloth money and fees paid at marriages and baptisms making ample provision for the necessities of the poor of the parish. There were 16 persons in the parish who received a monthly allowance from the parochial fund, this allowance was from 2/6 to 10/- per month according to the necessity of the case into which a committee of the Kirk Session was appointed to enquire before relief was granted. Meal and coals were also given to families in difficult circumstances who were not on the poors

By 1841 the average number on the poors roll had fallen to 7 or 8, who received sums averaging 4/6 monthly. There was still no assessment, the interest from capital sums invested, the liberality of the Heritors and the church collections making this unnecessary.

### **Customs**

Marriages and funerals seem to have been regarded as important affairs 140 years ago. Marriages usually happened in April and November, the month of May being cautiously avoided. Mr Robertson tells us that the entertainment usually lasted for 2 days, the guests at large paying for the music. Funerals appear to have been the occasions for almost as much entertainment as weddings. We are told that "from the death to the interment the house of mourning is thronged by day and by night and the conversation is often most unsuitable to the occasion. The whole parish is invited at 10 o'clock in the forenoon of the day of the funeral but it is soon enough to attend at 3 o'clock in the afternoon. Everyone is entertained with a variety of meats and drinks. Not a few return to the dirge and sometimes forget what they have been doing and where they are.

Traces of superstition seem still to have found a place in the parish in these old days. Some of the old women were even suspected of something like witchcraft. If a cow was suddenly taken ill the cause was often subscribed to someone having put the evil eye on it and when calling to see one if the (visitor) did not say, "I wish her luck," that was a suspicion of evil design.

Mr Robertson pays a high complement to the conduct and honesty of the people. After stating that there had been no cases of serious crime for a long course of years he goes on to say "that the minister's garden is situated near the high road and might easily be plundered and yet he cannot say that he has been robbed of a single apple since he came to the parish seven years before." I'm afraid the minister must have had a bigger "daur" on the boys of the parish in these days as I wouldn't like to say for certain that the minister's garden has not been plundered during the last seven years.

An ancient and curious custom prevailed in the village for many years the origin of which seems to have been lost in the mists of time. For many years (and I believe still within the memory of some old Gargunnock folks) the people of the village were called in the mornings by the sound of horn and

drum according to whether the morning was wet or fine. If the morning was fine the person appointed to the position which seems to have been equivalent to the commoner post of bellman, marched up and down the street at 5 o'clock in the morning beating the drum. If the morning was wet the horn was blown instead.

One explanation I have heard given of this curious old custom was the fact that at one time there was only one clock in the village. This clock, a "wag at the wa" was the property of the community and in the custody of the drummer for the time being. From it he took the time each morning for rousing the people otherwise there would have been no means of knowing when it was time to get up.

The drummer and his drum were made use of in other ways much the same way as the bell and the bellman common in many places. If anyone wished a proclamation or protest made or if anything was lost and the user wished to advertise the loss the drummer was engaged and for a fee of 6d drummed and cried the matter through the village. One very common proclamation made about this time or a little later each year when work in the gardens was about to commence was, " all cocks and hens now at liberty must be closed up after such and such a date by order of the Provost of Gargunnoch.

The last person to hold the title of Provost of Gargunnoch was Provost Draper and the last drummer was, I think, a man called Willie Robb.

Another curious custom or ceremony very much like Riding of the Marches still held in many places used to take place each year in Gargunnoch. When the original feus were granted, in many of the feu charters was incorporated the right to cut feal and fuel on Gargunnoch estate, the feal or turf being used in thatching houses and fuel of course being peats. With the introduction of tiles and slates for roofing and coals for fuel, turf and peats were no longer required, but in order that they might still hold their rights the feuers made an annual expedition from the village to the hill, A procession was formed and headed by the village flag, the Provost, the horn and drum and music of some description they marched from the village to the hill where with due ceremony turf was cut and carried back to the village. This ceremony was carried out as far as I have been able to determine at about the same time as the Gargunnoch Fair was held. This took place about the first Tuesday in June and the fair was held just at the top of the brae of the village where a stone can still be seen bored to hold the flag. At one time there was undoubtedly a cattle fair but latterly it was made the occasion for a general holiday, races for small prizes being run up and down the street.

Newspapers were luxuries in these old days and as the number of those able to read was limited they were usually read aloud from cover to cover to different groups of people, the paper passing from hand to hand 'till it was almost ready to fall to pieces. The Stirling Journal, now in the 115<sup>th</sup> year of its issue was for a long time the only local newspaper. A Parish Library was established in 1831 and there was also a library in existence for Sunday School in 1841. Evening papers were introduced in 1900 during the Boer war, the Edinburgh Evening dispatch being the first evening paper to come to the village. There were no wireless weather reports in 1796 but Gargunnoch people had their own ways of predicting the weather for we are told, "The inhabitants of of this parish look to the hills for signs of the weather and are seldom disappointed. The setting sun shining on the face of the mountain indicates fair weather while the sudden falling of mist on the top of it after the sun has arisen bright is considered the sure sigh of a rainy day.

I have been rather in doubt as to the advisability of including the next part in tonight's paper for obvious reasons but I think that any account of old Gargunnoch would be incomplete without reference to the characters who have gone to make up the parish life in the last 50 or 60 years. They have long ago gone to their rest and as this is quite an informal gathering of Gargunnoch folks I think I can refer to them by name, without causing any offence. I have already mentioned one or two of them, the McLeods and Jock Rae. There were many others and I only have time to refer briefly to some of them. There was Sandy Connal the poet laureate of Gargunnoch, some of whose political effusions could still I am sure be found among the papers in many houses in the parish. Sandy took any burning question of the time and ? for the subject of many of his poems and some of his poetic efforts were more sarcastic than complementary.

Another well know figure in the parish 50 or 60 years ago was Johnny McGlashan. Johnny, though a harmless body, was what is known as being "no a' there." The Laird of Meiklewood the late Mr Connal Rowan was very good to Johnny and a good deal of his time was spent about Meiklewood where he was employed in running such errands as could be entrusted to his limited intelligence. Johnnie had a great penchant for funerals and never if he could possibly help it missed attending one in the parish. While at Meiklewood one of his duties was to convey the supply of bread in a wheelbarrow from the end of Meiklewood road to Meiklewood House. One day however this duty interfered with Johnnie's possible attendance at a funeral. Realising that he had not time to return to Meiklewood with the bread and attend the funeral at the same time Johnnie wheeled his barrow of bread into the hen-house at the railway crossing and proceeded merrily to the funeral. One can imagine what would have been the Laird of Meiklewood's feelings had he known that the daily bread had found a temporary resting place in a dirty hen-house.

Returning from a visit to the south of France Mr Connal Rowan brought back with him a sun umbrella, a huge affair like a small tent with very gaudy colouring. This he presented to Johnnie and it became his most prized possession. For many a day wet or dry Johnnie marched proudly down the street to church on Sunday with his umbrella always up! Poor Johnnie! He was finally conveyed to Larbert asylum where he lived, let us hope, happily for a good many years after his admission.

Another old Gargunnoch figure of whom a good story is told was John McDonald, known as Jock the Razor. Jock was the possessor of a particularly nippy tongue and one day walking down the village he met a tramp. The tramp, thinking he had met one of his own fraternity said, "They are a gey hard up lot o' folk about this place." "Aye", Jock replied, "But they're a gey sicht harder up lot that come into it."

Another figure well known in this end of the parish and of whom I myself have many pleasant memories was Willie McLauchlan, game keeper for many years on Gargunnoch Estate. "Wee Clackie" as he was known was a very small man not much over 5ft in height and the possessor of a long beard. Despite his lack of inches he could inspire terror into the hearts of the small boys who dared to venture into the woods on bird nesting expeditions. Willie was a very decent little soul but his great failing was a fondness for a dram. He was a great favourite with the younger members of the Stirling family and they did much to hide his peccadilloes from their father. At last, however, after a particularly bad bout it did come to Colonel Stirling's ears and being very reluctant to put away such a faithful servant as Willie he came to my father and asked him to talk to Willie and endeavour to get him to sign the pledge. My father did so and after listening to him patiently Willie

said, "Man McNeill I'd (fine be?) tee-total the morn but I'll have to have a spree when the nigger dees. Nigger was a particularly clever spaniel and Willie's faithful companion.

There were also in these old days a number of men who took a prominent part in the conduct of the public affairs of the parish and the county. Col Stirling, father of the late Laird of Gargunnoch was one of these. He was a J.P., Chairman of the School Board and Parish Council and for many years represented Gargunnoch on the County Council. His advice and help was often sought and was always at the disposal of any one who asked for it.

Another well-known figure in his day in the public life of the parish was the late Mr John Patterson. Mr Patterson was in business in Gargunnoch as a shoemaker and employed several men and it was this circumstance that earned for him the name of "Cork" or "Corky" by which he was known all his days, the word Cork being the equivalent of the present day "gaffer" or "boss". Mr Patterson was for many years Clerk to the Kirk Session, School Board and Heritors of the parish.

There was also Mr J Jamieson who was schoolmaster in the parish for many years. Mr Jamieson formed a link between the old Parochial School and the later School Board. He was a very capable teacher of his time and one day after his retirement he was discussing in a company some of the scholars he had turned out. One of the company, an old pupil remarked, "Well Mr Jamieson, you did not make a great job of me." Like a flash came the reply, "You can't put a half mutchkin into a gill bottle."

Besides being schoolmaster Mr Jamieson in his time filled the positions of Inspector of Poor, Registrar and later Clerk to the Parish Council many of which posts after his death were held by his daughter the late Miss Margaret Jamieson.

Mr Jamieson was succeeded as schoolmaster by the late Mr A. S. Davidson of whom those of us of a later generation have many memories. Big Davidson as I'm afraid many of us called him, though not to his face, was a fine figure of a man, standing over 6ft in height and built in proportion. He was of a quiet and unassuming disposition and did not take a prominent part in the public life of the parish, though I think he was for some years secretary of the Curling Club. He was an excellent teacher and though I'm afraid that boy-like we did not appreciate him at his true value while under his care those of us who were his pupils will always remember him with affection and gratitude. It was a great pity that he lived such a short time to enjoy the retirement in his native place which he so richly earned.

Perhaps however the most prominent and best remembered man in the parish in the last half century was the late Mr Charles Kay. Charlie Kay as he was familiarly called took a great interest in all that stood for the welfare of the parish and though afflicted with deafness was a prominent and useful member of the public bodies which looked after the affairs of the district. A particularly well-read and well informed man Mr Kay could and did when the occasion demanded wield a caustic tongue or pen and a despairing and apparently hopeless cause found in him a ready champion. He was a good judge and a keen breeder of and exhibitor of Ayrshire cattle.

However I believe that not so much even for these qualities as for his great passion (and passion it can only be called) for pansies that Mr Kay is best remembered in the district. Mr Kay in his lifetime raised and cultivated more new varieties of pansies and violas than any other man and these he exhibited through the length and breadth of the land, at all the prominent flower shows in England

and Scotland. Each new successful pansy or viola was named after some person in the locality and to look over the pansy section of Dobbie the Nurseryman's catalogue was like reading a roll of the inhabitants of Gargunnoch. He himself always referred to his pansies by name, sometimes with amusing results. He would gravely tell you that Mary so & so had a lovely blotch on the bottom petals or that James such and such had too deep an eye ever to be of any use. He died in 1913 and his passing left a blank in the life of the parish that has never been filled. We could do well with another Charlie Kay in our midst today.

A well-remembered and well beloved figure in the parish was the Rev. John Stark, for 44 years Parish minister of Gargunnoch. Mr Stark's ministry was a record of patient and faithful service. His end was tragic. He collapsed and died at Gargunnoch Station while on his way to a Presbytery meeting after having made his way through one of the worst snow storms of the century – a storm that is still remembered and talked of in the parish as the March snow-storm of the year Mr Stark died.

We have now come to the end of our paper and I hope that what I have been able to tell about these old people and old times has been of interest. It is a far cry to 1796 and I don't think many of us would care to go back to live in these old days. The years have brought many changes but in one respect I do not think Gargunnoch has changed in the last 140 years and I think I cannot end this paper better than by quoting what are almost Mr Robertson's last words in his account of Gargunnoch.

"The people of Gargunnoch," he says, "Are characterised by a disposition to virtue, industry, loyalty and peace."

Duncan McNeil

1947