

## The Ayrshire Survey.

1947-1949.

**A commentary on the work of the Ayrshire Survey for the Third Statistical Account, carried out under the direction of the Department of Economic and Social Research, Glasgow University.**

The Scottish local historian starts off with an advantage over his colleagues in any other part of the world. For every parish in Scotland there are published—and easily available—accounts of the place as it was at the end of the 18th century and again in the middle of the 19th century. For this we are indebted to the pioneer work done by Sir John Sinclair (1754-1835) with the co-operation of the ministers of the Church of Scotland. Of Sinclair, James Paterson (the historian of Ayrshire) wrote: "No man laboured with greater zeal, or more disinterestedly, to promote the interests of his country." Among the various original projects which Sinclair conceived was the idea of a great social survey—a Statistical Account of Scotland. He explained: "The idea I annex to the term (statistical) is an inquiry into the state of a country, for the purpose of ascertaining the quantum of happiness enjoyed by its inhabitants, and the means of its future improvement." For seven years, between 1791 and 1798, Sir John begged, cajoled, and harassed the ministers of the 938 parishes in Scotland to send in reports based on 160 questions about geography, natural history, population, farming, manufactures, education, religion, customs, and antiquities. Accounts were eventually obtained from every parish, and published in a series of 21 volumes. Sinclair's work received the praise it merited, at home and also abroad. Congratulations were received from the Czar of Russia on the one hand, and George Washington on the other. Three years before Sinclair's death, a second Statistical Account was initiated, this time carried out under the auspices of a Committee of the Society for the Benefit of the Sons and Daughters of the Clergy. Once again reports for each parish in Scotland were obtained, but lacking Sinclair's drive, the work took thirteen years to accomplish. This second national survey—the New Statistical Account—was published, in 15 volumes, between 1832 and 1845. Whereas in the First Account parish reports were published as they came in, and the accounts of the 46 Ayrshire parishes are scattered throughout 15 of the 21 volumes, on this second occasion the reports were all arranged in shires and Volume 5 of the New Account contains all the Ayrshire reports. These two surveys provide the student of old Scottish life with a wealth of material. They give lively and lifelike glimpses into the habits of our immediate



ancestors. They tell us what our own towns and villages and countryside were like in Burns's time and again in early Victorian days. They are valuable repositories of a mass of information, social, economic, historical, and scientific. It is a pity that the survey was not repeated a third time towards the end of the 19th century, after another fifty years had elapsed. As it is, a century had passed after the Second Account before a Third Account was put under way. At this time of great social and economic change, when Scotland is re-assessing her past record, examining her present state, and looking towards the future, the Third Statistical Account comes as an opportunity to take stock, not only of the state of the nation as a whole, but of all the communities big and small throughout Scotland.

The Third Statistical Account of Scotland was initiated in 1944 when the Scottish Council of Social Service established a Committee to draw up plans for the project. In view of the magnitude of the undertaking, it was decided to begin by preparing the accounts of four selected areas; the Nuffield Foundation generously agreed to finance these pilot surveys; the four Universities undertook to direct the work, and appointed Survey Officers for the areas chosen—St. Andrews (Fife); Glasgow (Ayrshire); Aberdeen (City of Aberdeen); Edinburgh (East Lothian).

These pilot surveys, begun at the beginning of 1947 and completed by the end of 1949, have been experiments. Working within a broad scheme drawn up by the Statistical Account Committee, the Survey Officers in each area have had to determine what things were most worth recording in an Account of Scotland in the 20th century, and to devise appropriate methods of enquiry and presentation. The subsequent paragraphs describe the special features of the Survey of Ayrshire.

While Ayrshire is a much larger and more populous area than any of the other areas being surveyed, it has been possible to conduct here rather more detailed enquiries, since in addition to a full-time Survey Officer, Ayrshire has had the benefit of a Consultant acting as an Associate Survey Officer. Both of these Officers are Ayrshire men, with different background and experience, but together possessing a considerable fund of first-hand knowledge about different aspects of life in their native shire. The Survey was conducted from their places of residence, at Newmilns and Mauchline, each of the Officers calling in the freely-given assistance of a host of fellow Ayrshire folk, to obtain information about the various aspects of the Ayrshire economy, and to get intimate details about life and work throughout the county.

The Officers found themselves confronted with a number of fundamental problems. As a Third Statistical Account, the Ayrshire Survey had to follow, so far as that could profitably be done, the traditions set by the two previous Accounts. Yet in a world so very different from that of a hundred and fifty years ago or even a hundred years ago, the methods could not be entirely similar. Then it was comparatively easy for a parish minister to write an account of the manifold happenings in his parish. There were few large towns, the people were for the most part living simple lives on the land or engaged in small-scale industries, the parish minister was in touch with most of the folk in their daily lives, he was accustomed to expressing himself, and he had the leisure for writing. Nowadays the picture is changed. Population has grown, towns have spread, large-scale industry has arisen, new means of transport have increased traffic and communication, and in a hundred ways the complexity of life has grown. No one person can hope to know more than a little of what is going on in any one place, without extensive enquiry. It was clear then, that the method of selecting someone—minister or other person—and making that individual entirely responsible for the preparation of a local report was ill-suited for 20th century conditions. A slavish imitation of past methods would indeed have meant asking the impossible of those persons who volunteered to help. Only a limited number of persons have the necessary knowledge and skill to compile an account of their community that is worth printing. Very often the people who know most, indeed, are just those people with little experience of writing or little time for enquiry. In any case, if the Third Statistical Account was to be of any value as a scientific social survey conforming to modern standards of research, it would require to be more than a series of free essays by amateurs, who, however competent, lacked specialist sociological training and in addition were unable to see how their own little pieces fitted into the general picture of Ayrshire.

Because of changes that have taken place in the character of the social units, one other problem revealed itself. Whereas in the previous Accounts it was sufficient to provide reports on individual parishes, it is quite clear that no comprehensive description of 20th century Ayrshire can be obtained by a series of reports from the 44 parishes into which the county is now divided. For one thing, the parish boundaries have in many cases become unreal things and have lost the significance they once had as social units. Growing towns like Kilmarnock, Irvine, Saltcoats, Newmilns, and Glengarnock have expanded over parish boundaries. Parish centres like Dundonald and Sorn have been overshadowed by the rise of new towns within the parishes—Troon and Catrine respectively. Some places have now closer links with places outside the parish than with the old parish centre: Patna is more



closely connected with Dalmellington than with Straiton, though actually within Straiton Parish. While it was necessary in the Survey to retain the parishes as units of treatment, to give a sense of the characteristic features of the different areas, and to allow comparison of the modern local reports with their predecessors in the earlier Accounts, a great deal of thought has been devoted to working out a more realistic grouping of social units. Parishes have been grouped together, usually into County Districts, and the accounts will show not only the individual parishes, but the districts treated as subregions, indicating and treating the various towns, villages, and rural areas, showing the distinctive characteristics of each and the relationships among them all. Take an example. The Irvine Valley, comprising the Parishes of Loudoun and Galston, has been treated as a district. The three towns of Darvel, Newmilns, and Galston are dealt with, their similarities and differences discussed, and then the countryside of the Valley described. Had the traditional method of treatment been adopted there would have had to be two separate and disconnected accounts: that of the Parish of Loudoun dealing with Darvel, part of Newmilns, and the landward area north of the River; and, in another part of the volume perhaps, a separate account of the Parish of Galston dealing with the town of Galston, the other part of Newmilns, and the landward area south of the river.

There are other things about Ayrshire which could not be very well treated if the Third Statistical Account were nothing more than an encyclopedia of local articles. Where, for example, would it be possible to speak of the work of the County Council and the various public services it performs? How could one indicate the general economic picture of Ayrshire if one could talk of mining, transport, and trade unionism only incidentally in the accounts of the Ayrshire tradition, and show Ayrshire's place in Scottish affairs. Clearly, in addition to the reports on the various localities of Ayrshire, the Third Statistical Account required also a series of chapters on various aspects of Ayrshire life and work.

The plan of the Third Statistical Account of Ayrshire was therefore worked out as follows. The first part of the volume, amounting to about a third of the total, would be a "County Section" and deal on the county level with these topics: The Background (Geography and History); Economic Life (Farming, Fishing, Mining, Manufacturing, Transport, Service Industries, County Economy); Public Administration (Local Government, Public Social Services); Social Life (Population, Community Life, Religion). The greater part of the Account, however, follows the pattern of the previous Accounts, presenting intimate pictures of each of the communities in a series of local reports. The

Survey Officer undertook special responsibility for the compiling of the County Section, and the Associate Survey Officer devoted himself mainly to the preparation of the local reports. The Survey, however, has been a joint undertaking, and each of the Officers has had a finger in every pie. Drafts prepared by the one have in every case been scrutinised by the other, material collected for use in one section has been used where more appropriate in others, and throughout there has been a careful crosschecking of references.

The County section has been a big undertaking in itself. Forming a comprehensive factual study of Ayrshire as a region, it bears a similarity to contemporary social surveys carried out elsewhere under different auspices. Indeed the County Section of the Ayrshire Survey covers a good deal of the ground traversed by the Abercrombie Clyde Valley Regional Planning Report, but is treated from a rather different standpoint, and deals with most topics in greater human detail.

The preparation of the County Section has required the tapping of a wide range of sources to obtain documentary and statistical data upon which to build. In Government departments, in the County Buildings, and in offices of various concerns there are masses of information relating to Ayrshire, most of it hitherto inaccessible and uncollated. All such information has been made available for use in the Survey. The Department of Agriculture's June Returns of Crops and Livestock, Ministry of Labour statistics of insured persons in various occupations, the Registrar-General's Vital Statistics, Police Returns of Crimes and Offences . . . these are some of the data which have been used as raw material. Not only has documentary information been supplied, but the various experts have readily provided ideas and suggestions. Medical Officers, ministers, trade unionists, agriculturalists, local authority officials and others with specialist knowledge and experience have answered hosts of enquiries by Survey Officers whose main qualification for dealing with many topics was that they were anxious to find out. When all the information had been gathered, sorted out and digested, and drafts prepared, copies were circulated to these experts for their criticisms, comments, and the correction of the technical errors that non-specialist writers are bound at times to make. And once the various sections had taken form, the ways in which the story could be enlivened and the picture made clearer by the graphic presentation of details in diagrams, maps, and photographic illustrations had to be worked out, and the Education Committee's Supervisor of Art came forward as volunteer-draughtsman.

Most of this work has been going on for the last three years, almost, one might say, incidentally. Concurrently the people of



Ayrshire have known of the Survey principally from the enquiries that have been made for the local reports. Early in 1947, ministers, teachers, doctors, and a great number of other people who seemed likely to be interested began to receive mysterious communications and sheets of questions asking in detail about what was going on in their own communities. In the burghs, the Town Councils were asked to form committees of persons willing to conduct detailed surveys of their towns; in some of the smaller places, people like ministers and headmasters undertook to form local groups or to secure local help in other ways. Acting on the belief that in this complex world it was no longer possible to get any single person to provide a complete picture of his own locality, the question sheets were devised for circulation to as wide a range of persons as possible. There were sheets relating to: the General Character of Town or Village; Work in Town or Village; Recreations; Holidays; Social Relations; Children and Young People; Religion; Country Life and Work; Old Customs and Beliefs. All sorts of folks joined in—Town and County Councillors, business men, trade unionists, farmers, housewives, ministers, doctors, teachers, and even school-children. Where correspondents could not themselves supply information, they were usually able to call in the help of someone who could. It is really quite impossible even to estimate how many folk altogether have had a hand in the gathering of information, but it is a representative company of several hundred Ayrshire men and women.

There has been collected an enormous bundle of reports on life and conditions in Ayrshire. It would have been much easier to get one person to write a local report and let it go at that. The method of question sheet direction and the co-operative collection of material has brought with it many complications and added enormously to the already heavy burden of the Officers. But it has been well worth while. The reports received, coming as they do from a number of persons, often of conflicting political and religious viewpoints, sometimes contain contradictory opinions. The previous Statistical Accounts portray Scotland through the eyes of the parish ministers, good capable men, but with the special outlook of their profession and their class. The picture of Ayrshire in the Third Statistical Account will be a composite one, containing contributions from folk with a wide range of knowledge and experience.

The fact that there have generally been received from each place several reports, which must be compared and collated, means that in very few cases can anything be published in the form received. This has its disadvantages. Not only does it mean much labour for the Officers, but it loses much of the intimacy of the earlier Accounts which were given in the exact words of the local authors. In this

case a good deal of editing has been unavoidable, and on occasion the Officers have supplemented local reports with information which could not be known to the local correspondents: for example, the burgh with the lowest infantile mortality, or the burgh with the highest illegitimacy rate. But while the Survey Officers have had to supplement and edit, the words of the local reporters have been retained as far as possible and the spirit of the original contributions preserved. And to ensure that in no cases shall the Officers misinterpret or misrepresent or blunder in local details, drafts have been circulated to contributors and others with special knowledge, for criticism and improvement. In some cases the articles have been rewritten by local people, and sometimes meetings held for the adjustment of conflicting points of view.

As a result of all this labour there has been gathered together a unique collection of facts about life in contemporary Ayrshire. It has not always been possible to find out as much as might have been desired about particular places and particular topics, because in some instances there just has not been anyone on the spot with the time or the enthusiasm to provide the information wanted. Yet, by and large, enough has been gathered on all the different aspects of Ayrshire life to provide material in abundance for the Statistical Account. All this must be digested and compressed into the confines of one book—and quite a bit of material of considerable interest but limited relevance will have to be put aside. But it will all be preserved for use in future research.

The Ayrshire Survey for the Third Statistical Account has taken three years of constant labour to accomplish. By the end of 1949 it will be in the hands of the printer, to appear later as a volume of some 300,000 words, illustrated by maps, diagrams, and photographs. Whether this work will reach the high standards set by its predecessors remains to be seen. At any rate it is an honest attempt by Ayrshire folk to record the way of life in our county in the middle of the 20th century—an Ayrshire job whose real authors are the hundreds of people in all walks of life who have contributed in one way or another to a great historical and sociological experiment.

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