

## The Monks' Road to their Lands.

(Some notes on topography chiefly of Tarbolton Parish).

By JAMES P. WILSON.\*

Richard Wallace of Riccarton granted at an early date—13th century—to the Monks of Melrose the lands of "Barmore and Godeneth, with their pertinents." These were the lands of the Monks of Mauchline, acquired after the Reformation by the Earl of Loudoun. To serve these lands was the road, still called the Monks' Road and still, in part, in use: namely that section which runs from the old ford which gives Failford its name to the farm of Red(w)rae, near the ruins of Fail Monastery to the east of the present road from Ayr to Galston.

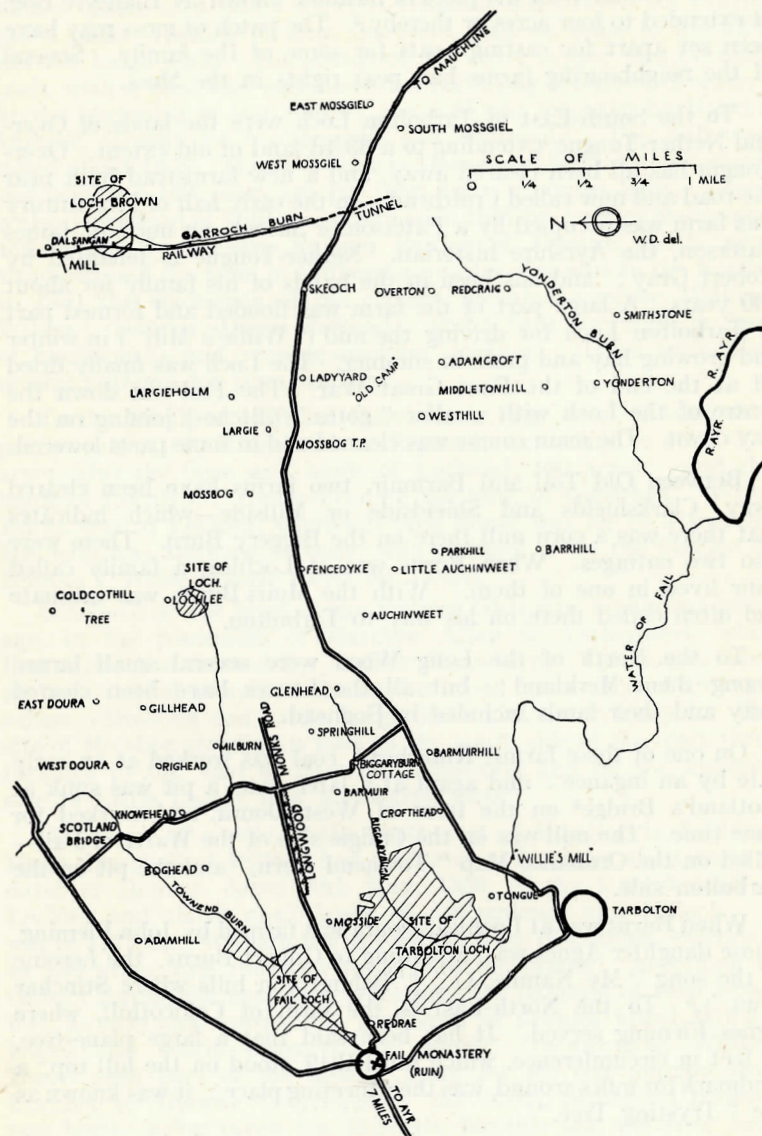
About 150 yards to the west of Redwrae was the old Monks' Mill driven by the water of the Fail Loch. The mill can still be traced, although the foundation is grass covered. A small part of the corn-loft is still standing and the side of the kiln—a round one. The working parts of the mill were removed for operating a small quarry of free-stone, nearby—Fail Mill Quarry, now disused.

The present mill is built nearly 100 yards down the rivulet. Two bridges were built over the Fail Water, and six sluices were put down in front, resting on the bridges, to retain the water of the meadows from October to April, for the driving of the mill. The loch—its site is plainly marked on the 6 in. Ordnance Survey Map—was about three quarters of a mile in length and fully half that in breadth. From April to October good hay was grown in the meadows formed by the drained loch, the only manure being the silt washed down from the neighbouring fields. Where the water had been deepest, the hay was best. The mill was closed a number of years ago and the meadows dried but not tile-drained.

There is a charter of much of the Estate of Gilmilnsroft, also the whole of the 4 merk, 2 shilling and 4 penny lands of Barmuir, comprehending Barmuirhall or hill, Malliesfield, Mossie, Merkland and Blantyre Bog, and all and whole of the thirteen shilling and 4 penny land of old extent of Redwrae<sup>1</sup> in Barmuir, called Loanhead, lying within the parish of Tarbolton in the Barony of Kylesmuir and Sherrifdom of Ayr. These lands were acquired by Mrs. Ann Chambers of Gadgirth from the deceased Elizabeth Wilson, spouse of Alexander Farquhar of Gilmilnsroft<sup>2</sup> 22nd May, 1773.

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- (1) At one time the land was unfenced and (at night) the cattle were put into enclosures called "Wraes" or "Raes" cf. in "It wasna' his Wight"—"and the hens to hish into the ree"; also "coal-ree." The farm was occupied by a family of Reids, pronounced "Rid" or "Red," hence "Redwrae."
- (2) Farquhar was first married to Agnes, daughter of John Campbell of Whitehaught, without issue; second to the said Elizabeth Wilson, daughter of Joseph Wilson of Barmuir, Tarbolton, and Provost of Ayr.



Sketch Map to illustrate the "The Monks' Road."



Continuing up the Monks' Road about a quarter of a mile, we come to Mosside with the piece of meadow known as Blantyre Bog. It extended to four acres or thereby.<sup>3</sup> The patch of moss may have been set apart for casting peats for some of the family. Several of the neighbouring farms had peat rights in the Moss.

To the South-East of Tarbolton Loch were the lands of Over- and Nether-Tongue, extending to a 33/4d land of old extent. Over-Tongue has all been cleared away, and a new farmstead built near the road and now called Crofthead. In the early half of last century this farm was occupied by a Paterson of Skeoch, an uncle of James Paterson, the Ayrshire historian. Nether-Tongue is tenanted by Robert Gray; and has been in the hands of his family for about 400 years. A large part of the farm was flooded and formed part of Tarbolton Loch for driving the mill ("Willie's Mill") in winter and growing hay and grass in summer. The Loch was finally dried off at the end of the First Great War. The Fail ran down the centre of the Loch with smaller "gotes" (ditches) joining on the way down. The main course was cleaned and in some parts lowered.

Between Old Toll and Barmuir, two farms have been cleared away, Clarkshields and Shieldside or Millside—which indicates that there was a corn mill there on the Biggery Burn. There were also two cottages. When Burns was at Lochlea, a family called Muir lived in one of them. With the Muirs Burns was intimate and often called there on his way to Tarbolton.

To the North of the Long Wood were several small farms, among them Merkland; but all the houses have been cleared away and their lands included in Boghead.

On one of these farms, Knowhead, coal was worked at an early date by an inganee: and again at a later date, a pit was sunk at Scotland's Bridge<sup>4</sup> on the farm of West Doura, and worked for some time. The mill was on the Craigie side of the Water of Fail—called on the Ordnance Map "Townend Burn," and the pit on the Tarbolton side.

When Burns was at Lochlea, Doura was farmed by John Fleming, whose daughter Agnes was, according to Gilbert Burns, the heroine of the song "My Nannie, O" ("Behind yon hills where Stinchar flows").<sup>5</sup> To the North-East is the farm of Coldcothill, where Agnes Fleming served. It has been said that a large plane-tree, 12 feet in circumference, which until 1949, stood on the hill top, a landmark for miles around, was their meeting place: it was known as the "Trysting Tree."

(3) The Dunbars of Barmuir were a branch of the Dunbars of Blantyre. Another branch in Tarbolton Parish held Enterkin, which estate at one time came close up to the Fail at Tarbolton Loch.

(4) There was a mill at the bridge—the miller's name, Scotland.

(5) Burns, ploughing on the slope at Lochlea, could see the winter sun setting behind the hills dividing the Girvan and the Stinchar from the nearer Doon and Ayr.

The clachan of Millburn is within a quarter of a mile of the Monks' Road, at a point where it remains undestroyed for nearly half a mile. Turning in from the main road we come to the mill and the Laigh Dam. The source of the water supply was Lochlea Loch, with a dam half-way down for collecting a reserve of water. At the beginning of last century the mill was tenanted by Robert Andrew, famous for his strength and endurance. The mill was closed about 1858. The next farm is Townend of Millburn, possessed and occupied 100 years ago by John Lees, a bonnet-laird. There is also Townhead of Millburn, occupied in 1867 by Andrew Macgregor and owned by William Ralston Patrick of Trearne, Beith, who also possessed the farm of Gillhead a quarter of a mile to the North. In 1851 the tradesmen of the clachan included a joiner, William Wilson; a tailor, David Borland; and a firm, Cairnduff & Son, of blacksmiths and reaping-machine makers. There were also several cottages for farm workers.

To the North of Millburn there was a large tract of land only partly cultivated, Ridgehead or Righead, extending to fully 170 acres, also the farm and lands of Lochend, 100 acres: and the lands of Lochlyhill, comprehending the land of Gigriehill. When Burns was in Lochlea, Gigriehill farm-house was let to a weaver. His wife was Barbara Tweedy, who claimed to be the heroine of Burns's "Willie Wastle dwelt on Tweed."

Glenhead at the head of the Biggery Glen was, a hundred years ago, in the possession of Matthew Allan of Auchenweat, while Fencedyke was farmed by Andrew Strawhorn. The houses have all been cleared away and the land of these farms divided amongst others. Mossbog and Little Largie have also been changed. The site of Mossbog steading is now on the south side of the road, three furlongs to the east of its original position and on the opposite side to Little Largie, now all cleared away.

A quarter of a mile to the north-west of Mossbog is Lochlea. Hugh Campbell of Killoch had a charter of feu from the Commendator of Melrose, dated 20th May, 1556, of the 4 merk land of Lochlea and the 3 merk lands of Auchenbrain and Killoch. It was in 1777 that William Burns took the farm of Lochlea, extending to 130 acres, and removed there with his family. According to Gilbert Burns, the next four years were the happiest of their lives; but, as everyone knows, the sour land of Lochlea killed William Burns and nearly beggared his family. Incidentally, William Burns used part of the Monks' Road for his last journey from Lochlea to Alloway Churchyard; the coffin, suspended between two horses, being taken via Millburn, Mosside and the New Ford near the ruined Abbey of Fail, to reach the Ayr road.<sup>6</sup>

(6) The family of Lochlea could produce but one horse; the other was supplied by John Tennant of Glenconner, the "Gude Auld Glen" who comes into practically the whole length of the Burns Saga. A witness to the poet's baptism, near the beginning, his advice was responsible for the leasing of Ellisland, near the end of the poet's pilgrimage.



A short distance from the farm was a small loch of about 20 acres. It was first drained in 1838 and finally in 1878-9 when a rich crannog was found.<sup>7</sup>

William, 4th Duke of Portland, b. 24th June, 1768, married in 1795 Henrietta, eldest daughter and co-heir of General John Scott of Balconie in Fife. The first child was William Henry, Marquis of Tichfield, b. 1796. The Duke decided to buy an estate in Ayrshire for his son and so, from the several proprietors, he bought all the land we have been over with the exception of Redwrae, Townend of Millburn, Townhead of Millburn and Gilhead. He at once started to lift the Monks' Road from near Largie, past Mossbog and Gigriehill on to the top of Millburn hill. Here he was brought to a stand by Laird Lees of Millburn, who had the right to cart his manure up and his crop down this part of the road, a distance of about half-a-mile. The Duke then started at the eastend of the Long Wood. The road ran at an angle through the fields, so he continued to lift it down to Mossie, then squared up the fields and planted thorn hedges. The rest of the Monks' Road was not lifted till about 50 years later.

At Largie we are on the estate of Failford, which was in the possession of the Wallaces of Craigie after the Reformation. The regality of Smithston(e) or Failford extended from the Parish of Stair to the march of Craigie. The lands included were originally part of the Barony of Tarbolton and Regality of Darnley. Part was contained in a Charter to John Wallace of Craigie, dated 18th November, 1557. William Wallace of Failford is "retoured" on 23rd December, 1630, as heir to his father in the lands of Smithstone, Ladyyard, Adamscroft, Little Auchinweat. These, with the 4 merk land of Middleton, Yonderton, Redcraig, Outland, Newland and Largieside were erected into a regality in favour of Sir Thomas Wallace of Craigie, dated 12th August, 1706. In 1776 Sir Thomas Wallace Dunlop sold the regality, later acquired by William Cooper, who built the mansion-house. The estate was held by several generations of Coopers, until, recently, it was broken up and sold, mostly to the tenants.

On the farm of Adamscroft there were several tumuli, the largest 30 feet by 18. One was opened in the first-half of last century by Alexander Cooper, and was found to contain urns of baked clay full of calcined bones.<sup>8</sup>

A quarter of a mile to the north is the "Old Camp" of Johnston's Map. Some call it the "Roman Camp" but it is round and probably British. The well was used at one time for steeping lint.

(7) "Collections of Ayr and Wigtown Arch. Ass." 2, 30-38; and "Proc. Soc. Antiqs. Scot.," 1879, p. 175.

(8) Paterson, "History of Tarbolton."

To the east is Overton clachan. There were two Overtons half a mile apart, besides Townhead of Overton. In 1684 four covenanters from Overton were proscribed by Charles II. :—John and Alexander Harvey, Willam and Thomas Speir. When Burns was living in the district, David Wilson was blacksmith and James Humphrey mason at Overton. A very strong spring would be the reason for the first building there.

About half-a-mile up on the Skeoch road is Ladyyard, tenanted a hundred years ago by Allan Stevenson. Half-a-mile to the east is Skeoch farm. John Crawford of Drongan married a lady of the name of Kennedy. In 1552 he granted a charter of the Mains of Drongan and of the 4 merk land of Smithstone and lands of Skeochhill on a life-rent in favour of his spouse, Margaret Kennedy. James Paterson, great-grandfather of the Ayrshire historian, was the first Paterson to hold the farm of Skeoch. He was succeeded by several generations of his family, and many of his descendants were farming in the locality.

A short distance north-east of Skeoch was Loch Brown, a loch of over 60 acres. Only a small part of it was in Tarbolton Parish, Mauchline and Craigie sharing the rest in about equal proportions. About the middle of last century a railway was surveyed between Kilmarnock and Dumfries. In the first plan it was to pass close to the loch; but that was abandoned and the railway, as laid, runs down what was the middle of the loch, from the tunnel at Mossiel. The loch site, as shown in the 6 inch Ordnance Map, is not quite accurate: it should be, in part, west of the Railway. The loch stored the power for Dalsangan Mill, which had been carried on by at least two generations of a family called Morton but was closed of necessity when the loch was drained. There is a charter from Peter de Curry to the Abbey of Melrose, dated 1205, of the lands of Dalsangan and Bargour, lying between the Loch Brown rivulet and the Cessnock.

Alexander Farquhar of Gillmilnscoft had a crown charter, 11th May, 1583, of the mill of Dalsangan. Agnes, only daughter of Robert Mitchell of Burnhead, had a crown charter of the lands of Dalsangan, as had Wallace of Brighthouse, and others. Some of them retained their superiorities till 1700 when they "retoured in" the land amounting to 50 shillings of old extent in Over Bargour and Dalsangan.

Loch Brown and the surrounding fields were favourite haunts of Tam Samson, and Robert Burns is said to have joined him more than once for a day's shooting, so, no doubt, getting the idea for the famous if apocryphal demise of his friend.

"But Oh! he gaed and ne'er returned!  
Tam Samson's dead!"

Leaving Loch Brown we reach the Skeoch Road at the tunnel and turn east towards Mauchline. There were three Mossgiels on this road: two alone remain now:—West Mossgiel, tenanted a hundred years ago by Thomas Brownlie and still in the possession of his descendants; East Mossgiel, tenanted for a hundred years by James Wyllie and his descendants. This was the Mossgiel of Robert Burns.

Passing the Burns Memorial we are now on the New Road and most easily approach the Castle or Priory by Loudoun Street and the Avenue. The priory of Mauchline with its tithes and pertinents belonged to the Monks of Melrose who also held the extensive barony of Kylesmuir and Barmure in that parish.<sup>9</sup>

Here at this building, the headquarters of the Monks of Melrose in this place, we find a fitting terminus to our journey along the old Monks' Road.

(9) Chalmers, "*Caledonia*," Barmuir is in the parish of Tarbolton and extended down to the water of Fall close to the site of the old Monastery of Fallford.