# THE ROYAL BURGH

## OF

# AYR



Seven Hundred and Fifty Years of History

*Edited by*

## ANNIE I. DUNLOP

### O.B.E., LL.D.,

CHAPTER 3

# HOW AYR HAS GROWN

JOHN STRAWHORN, M.A., PH.D.

FOR long enough Ayr was a small place by modern standards. Over the greater part of its history the population here as elsewhere was sparse, until within the short space of the last two centuries Ayr's size has increased many times. The burgh and its environs have experienced the rapid and considerable growth of numbers that has augmented the population of Ayrshire since 1755 to the present day from 59,000 to 320,000; and of Scotland from 1,250,000 to 5,000,000.

## THE ACTUAL GROWTH[1]

Dr. Pryde has estimated the population of the pre-Reformation burgh of Ayr as somewhere between 1,500 and 2,000. Even as late as 1755 there were fewer than 3,000 people living within Ayr parish and probably not many more than 2,000 of these actually within the burgh. By the end of the eighteenth century, after several generations of considerable growth, Ayr was still a small town with less than 4,000 inhabitants. As compared with the 4,647 in the entire parish of Ayr, Newton and St. Quivox together contained 3,138, a figure very much increased too from a mere thousand of half a century earlier. Taking the entire area of these three parishes, now amalgamated into the modern parish of Ayr, the number of inhabitants which was 4,000 in the middle of the eighteenth century, had doubled by the end of that century, re-doubled within the next twenty years, passed the 20,000 mark by mid-nineteenth

---

[1] The 'numbers of souls' have been taken from the following sources: 1755 from Rev. Alexander Webster's oft-quoted manuscript, *Account of the Number of People in Scotland*, published in extenso by the Scottish History Society in *Scottish Population Statistics*, ed. J. G. Kyd, 1952; 1791 figures are from Sir John Sinclair's *Statistical Account of Scotland*, 21 volumes, 1791-99; 1801 and later figures are from the official *Census Reports*, decennially except 1941 when more urgent matters prevented the customary counting of heads; and a few other figures come from the *New Statistical Account*, vol. v, Ayrshire, 1845

**POPULATION GRAPH**

40,000 —

30,000 —

20,000 —

10,000 —

0 —

1750          1850          1950

A

B

C
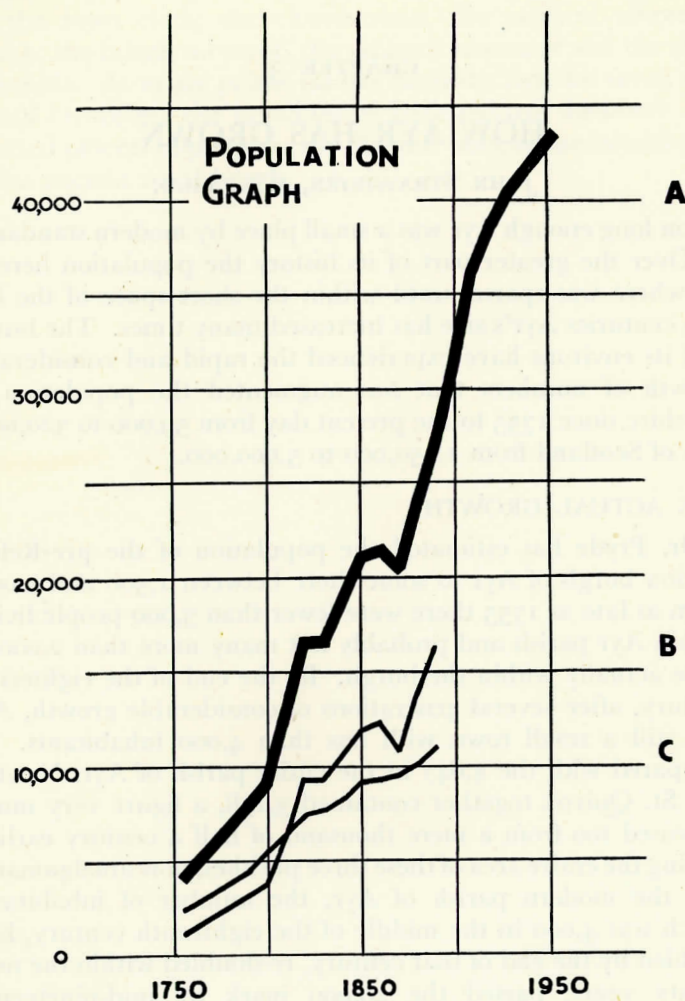
A : Parishes Total
B : Newton & St.Quivox
C : Ayr Parish

century, and has continued to grow till there are now more than 40,000—ten times the number of residents in the area two centuries ago. In the same period the built-up area of Ayr has extended, the adjacent communities in Newton and St. Quivox have been swallowed up, the burgh bounds widened on several occasions, with a concurrent growth from some 2,000 to over 40,000 in the number of 'honest men and bonnie lasses'.

By the end of the eighteenth century the burgh of Ayr comprised only a small built-up area south of the Auld Brig about and around High Street and Sandgate, where rather less than 4,000 people lived.[1] Over the water in Newton[2] there had grown up rapidly on the lands of the Freemen another community with some 1,500 inhabitants, busily engaged in thriving trades like fishing and shipbuilding and in the recently-opened collieries. Nearby in St. Quivox[3] Sir Thomas Wallace of Craigie had established about 1760 the new township of Wallacetown, which by the end of the century had nearly 1,000 residents, working in the Newton and Blackhouse pits and other trades. And to the east another new community grew up at Whitletts.[4] In the rest of the area, from the Doon in the south towards Prestwick in the north, there were another thousand or so rural folk. Throughout the nineteenth century Ayr proper grew steadily but relatively slowly.[5] Better-class residential building extended through the Fort area and by Wellington Square to Barns Park by the middle of the century, but of industrial extensions there were few or none, due principally to the restrictive policies of the burgh's Incorporated Trades. North of the river, however, furth of the burgh, their writ could not apply and here the nineteenth century saw a rapid, considerable, though irregular, growth of population.[6] Shipbuilding and harbour trades, iron and brass founding, handloom weaving of muslins, domestic work in Ayrshire embroidery, and other businesses were expanded; the opening in 1840 of the Glasgow-Ayr Railway with its terminus in Newton acted as a further

[1] Stat. Acct., I, 89-96; II, 577-8; XXI, 31-47; and contemporary maps
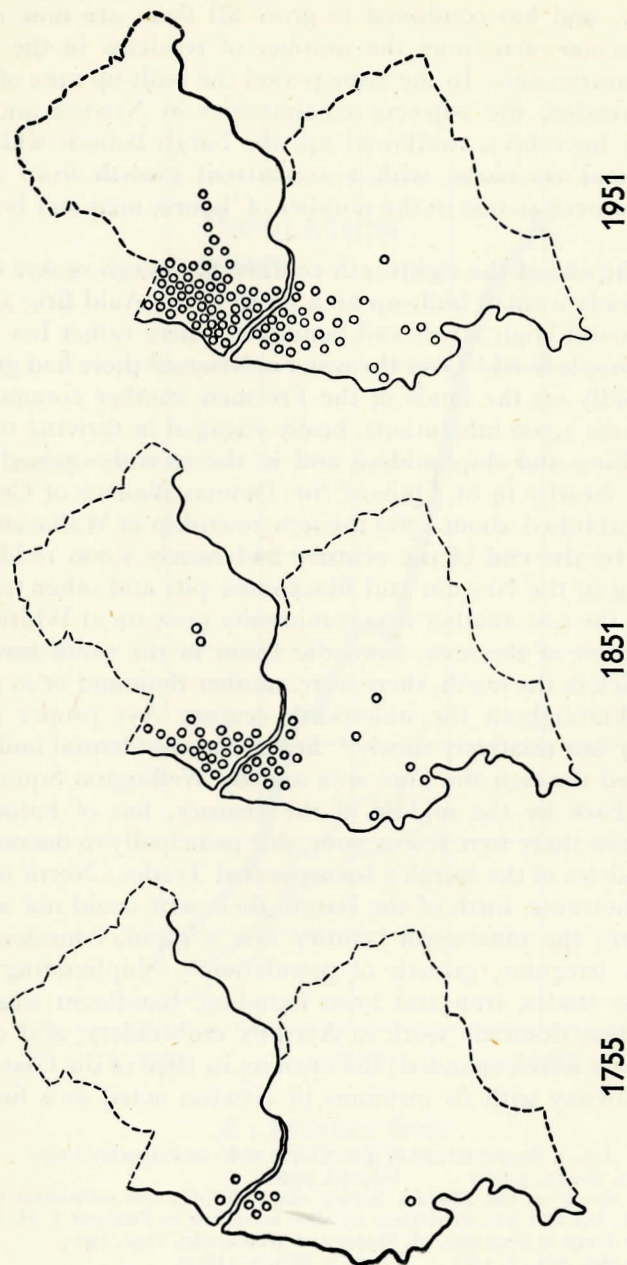[2] ib., II, 262-74, 579-81          [3] ib., VII, 353-60
[4] Not shown on the Military Survey map, 1755-67, nor mentioned in the Stat. Acct., but had 300 inhabitants by 1800 according to Professor J. H. Lebon in London Essays in Geography, ed. Stamp and Wooldridge, 1951, 190
[5] New Stat. Acct., V, 1-85          [6] ib., V, 86-105, 118-25

## DISTRIBUTION OF POPULATION

1951

1851

1755

The area shown is the modern parish of Ayr.
Each unit represents 500 persons.

stimulus. And though the Newton coal pits were worked out by 1832 there was more than compensating exploitation of the deeper seams in St. Quivox; and when some trades like weaving declined there were others capable of taking their place. The built-up areas of Newton and Wallacetown were extended with working-class dwellings, and the new weaving and mining community eastwards at Whitletts grew up. With all this very considerable development north of the river the population of Newton and St. Quivox parishes, which in 1755 had been only a third of that in Ayr parish, reached parity at the beginning of the nineteenth century and by the end of that century there were just about twice as many north as south of the river. In the twentieth century the built-up area has been further extended in the north-east, but much of it has been for the purpose of replacing the congested areas of old working-class dwellings and re-housing local residents; and the rate of population growth has diminished. South of the river better-class residential building has extended on a considerable scale out by Seafield even as far as Alloway; the population has made substantial increases and perhaps forty per cent of the total numbers now reside in the southern area.

### WHY AYR HAS GROWN

A community may grow by an excess of births over deaths giving a natural increase; by immigration; or a combination of these. Vital statistics of births, marriages, and deaths which are necessary for making an analysis of population growth have been kept by statutory authority only within the last century[1]; the church records which cover earlier periods are incomplete and inadequate. In the century before 1850 natural increase contributed to the growth of Ayr. Abstracts from church records quoted in the first and second *Statistical Accounts* almost invariably indicate more births than deaths in any year. How far this natural increase was due to a rising birth rate and how far to a declining death rate is a matter for conjecture, and the total extent to which natural increase contributed to growth of population can only be guessed. It is clear however that families were increasing in size: the average family in Ayr

[1] Registrar General for Scotland: *Annual Reports on Births, Marriages, and Deaths*, annually since 1855

towards the end of the eighteenth century contained four members; throughout the nineteenth century, five. Immigration played a very considerable part on the growth. The first *Statistical Account* gives the numbers of incomers and natives, which reveal how very considerable was the flood of immigration in the latter part of the eighteenth century. Of those living in Ayr parish in 1791 less than half were natives: 54% were incomers. For Newton the figure was 55% and for St. Quivox the percentage must have been at least as high. Over a generation later the 1841 *Census Report* indicated that the incomers at that date were just as numerous, though in the now-larger community they formed a smaller percentage—in Ayr parish 25%, St. Quivox 25%, Newton 20%. The first and second *Statistical Accounts* could not but note the social effects of the 'accession of foreigners'. Into the burgh and parish of Ayr came 'gentlemen of independent fortune . . . for the sake of education for their children at the Academy, and to enjoy the advantages of the agreeable society of the place. A good many of this class have made fortunes in India, and in other places, both at home and abroad.' Their coming brought some advantages and few problems to the Council who governed the small but ancient burgh. But across the river it was different. Into this area which had no proper administrative or police apparatus poured a polyglot mass of turbulent humanity—sailors, fishermen, miners, weavers, mechanics of all sorts, town and country labourers—people uprooted and transplanted by the contemporary social and economic earthquakes which were transforming Scottish life. From England, Ireland, the Highlands and other parts of Scotland they came, including 'an undue proportion of strangers from Ireland, who have only a precarious means of subsistence, and are induced to take up their temporary abode here, by the cheapness of the lodging, and the liberality of the public of Ayr in supplying their wants'. The douce folk of the old burgh looked across the water with some apprehension to the primitive communities that were rising up, a congested growth of cottages, tenements, and workplaces whose occupiers were stirred with the stress and strain of political, religious, and social passions—the nineteenth century in mid-passage.

Around the middle of the nineteenth century the onward

march of Ayr's population growth was temporarily checked by several decades when there was no significant increase in numbers and one in which there was an actual decrease. Throughout this period the population of Ayr parish continued

### POPULATION CHANGES 1755-1951[1]

|  | Parish of Ayr | Parish of Newton | Parish of St. Quivox | Parishes total | Ayr Burgh |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1755 | 2,964 | 581 | 499 | 4,044 | — |
| 1791 | 4,647 | 1,689 | 1,450 | 7,786 | 3,871 |
| 1801 | 5,492 | 1,724 | 2,070 | 9,286 | — |
| 1811 | 6,291 | 2,809 | 3,615 | 12,805 | — |
| 1821 | 7,455 | 4,027 | 5,392 | 16,874 | — |
| 1831 | 7,606 | 4,020 | 5,289 | 16,915 | (6,240 |
| 1841 | 8,264 | 4,482 | 6,055 | 18,801 | in 1836) |
| 1851 | 9,115 | 4,814 | 7,147 | 21,076 | — |
| 1861 | 9,308 | 5,124 | 7,097 | 21,529 | 8,292 |
| 1871 | 9,589 | 4,877 | 6,069 | 20,535 | 8,371 |
| 1881 | 10,182 | 6,511 | 7,352 | 24,045 | 20,987 |
| 1891 | 11,149 | 8,564 | 7,713 | 27,426 | 24,944 |
| 1901 | 31,537 | — | — | 31,537 | 28,697 |
| 1911 | 36,229 | — | — | 36,229 | 32,986 |
| 1921 | 38,933 | — | — | 38,933 | 35,763 |
| 1931 | 40,411 | — | — | 40,411 | 36,783 |
| 1951 | 44,019 | — | — | 44,019 | 43,011 |

its steady unspectacular rise: the fluctuations were confined to the areas north of the river. That such extreme fluctuations might be due to some sudden violent and inexplicable local variation in the birth and death rates can be ruled out. On

[1] Note must be taken of some intercensal changes of boundary. Before 1779 Newton was part of Monkton and Prestwick parish: *Stat. Acct.* estimates 581 in this area in 1755. Between 1811 and 1821 St. Quivox enlarged at expense of Newton. In 1890s the three parishes amalgamated in the modern greater parish of Ayr. As far as the burgh is concerned, in 1873 its boundaries were extended beyond those of the old royal burgh to include part of the landward area of Ayr parish and parts of Newton and St. Quivox parishes; and in the process the old separate burgh of Newton lost its identity. The municipal burgh boundaries were further extended in 1885 to incorporate the remainder of Newton parish and an additional part of St. Quivox. There was a further extension in 1935, taking Whitletts into the burgh, and a small part of Maybole parish south of the River Doon. Distinct from this municipal burgh (to which the figures in the table refer) was the parliamentary burgh which after the Reform Act of 1832 contained not only the royal burgh but the built-up areas north of the river, inhabited by 15,749 (1841), 17,624 (1851), 18,643 (1861), 17,954 (1871). From 1873 to 1885 it was coterminous with the municipal burgh, but was not extended at the latter date, and contained 23,979 (1891), 26,984 (1901), 30,492 (1911). After 1918, when the parliamentary constituencies were regrouped, the area of the municipal burgh again became equivalent to that of the parliamentary burgh

the contrary a full explanation is afforded by recalling that this was the period of decline of the cotton textile industry as Scotland's staple trade; here as elsewhere the virtual collapse of handloom weaving and embroidery work brought mass unemployment, distress, and emigration. In Newton alone over a thousand persons lost their livelihood and with so many of them leaving the district for pastures new to seek their fortunes elsewhere, it is not surprising that the rate of Ayr's growth was checked. But the check was only temporary, and with economic re-adjustment and further developments population began to grow steadily again.

In the last hundred years Ayr's population has doubled, partly because of natural increase and partly because of renewed immigration. The natural increase for the greater part of this period it is possible to analyse in some detail. In the middle of the nineteenth century Ayr was experiencing the same high birth rate as is discoverable elsewhere. The general trend was also experienced when towards the end of the century that birth rate began to decline, a decline which has continued, punctuated only by increases after the First World War and since the middle of the Second World War. Associated with this trend is the change in family sizes, the nineteenth century average in Ayr of five persons being reduced to one of four in the twentieth century. But concurrently with the general decline in the birth rate there has been a more or less continuous decline in the death rate, so that an excess of births over deaths has continued and natural increase carried on. The vital statistics make it possible not only to assess natural increase but also, by comparing this with the actual increase as recorded by the Census Reports, to ascertain the net gains or losses by migration, even though the actual individual numbers of outgoers and incomers cannot be known.[1] Such calculations reveal that after heavy losses in the middle years of the nineteenth century, in its last three decades there was once again an inward trend. This slowed down in the early years of the twentieth century till after the First World War there was again an exodus, though natural increase was sufficient to maintain the

[1] The conclusions given are based on calculations but the lack of uniformity in the statistics of births and deaths over the period makes it impossible to give actual figures for net migrations with any confidence.
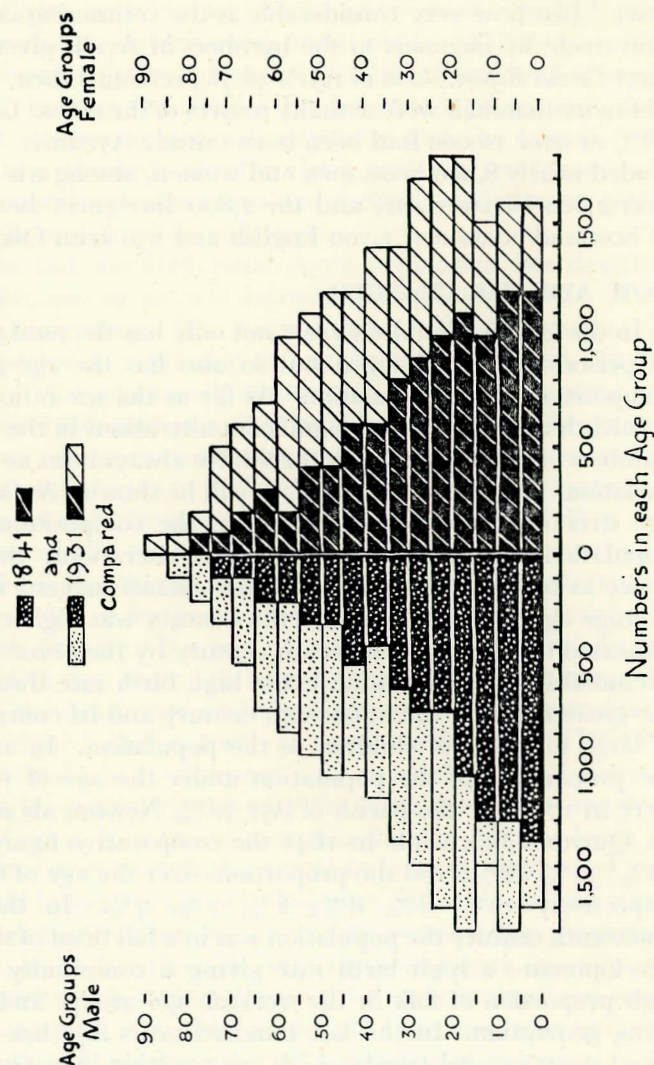
growth of population. During and since the 1930s the inward flow has re-asserted itself and Ayr is gaining once again more than is being lost by the movement of folk into and out of the town. Just how very considerable is the continuing contribution made by incomers to the numbers in Ayr is given in the 1931 *Census Report*. Out of Ayr's 36,783 residents then, possibly not more than half were actually natives of the town. Certainly 28% or over 10,000 had been born outside Ayrshire. This included nearly 8,000 Scots men and women, among whom were over 2,000 Glaswegians; and the 2,800 'foreigners' born furth of Scotland contained 1,700 English and 630 Irish folk.

## HOW AYR HAS CHANGED

In the last two hundred years not only has the total number of persons in Ayr changed but so also has the age and sex composition of the population. As far as the sex ratio is concerned there have been no significant alterations in the relative numbers of the sexes, though there have always been noticeable variations in the different areas, as will be shown. As far as the age structure is concerned, however, the composition of the population has undergone considerable alterations. Such evidence as is given in the first *Statistical Account* suggests that the average age in the later eighteenth century was higher than is indicated for the mid-nineteenth century by the *Census Reports*. Presumably the explanation is the high birth rate throughout the greater part of the nineteenth century and its contribution of large numbers of children to the population. In any case the proportions of the population under the age of 10 years were in 1791, for the parish of Ayr 22%, Newton about 25%, St. Quivox 27%; while in 1841 the comparative figures were 22%, 30%, 28%; and the proportions over the age of 60 were respectively 10%, 8%, 8%; 8%, 7%, 5%. In the mid-nineteenth century the population was in a full flood of vigorous development—a high birth rate giving a community with a high proportion of folk in the working age groups and in the rising generation. In the last hundred years Ayr has experienced these general trends which are resulting in an ageing of the population. The decline in the birth rate has resulted in a decrease in the proportion of children and young people; while in the declining death rate more people are surviving till

AYR'S AGE AND SEX STRUCTURE

Age Groups Female
90 80 70 60 50 40 30 20 10 0

1841 and 1931 Compared

Numbers in each Age Group
1,500 1,000 500 0 500 1,000 1,500

Age Groups Male
90 80 70 60 50 40 30 20 10 0

later ages and the proportion of older people has been growing and is continuing to grow. The average age of the population is rising. There are not very many more children in Ayr now than there were a century ago; but the numbers in the higher age groups have increased very considerably. While this trend is being effected by the processes of natural growth, in Ayr it is being accentuated by the kind of migration Ayr has been experiencing. There has been an influx of older, middle-aged and retired people into the town, as in the case of all the coast residential towns of Ayrshire, and consequently the proportions of old folk in these towns are higher than is normally found in the inland industrial towns. And on the other hand, many of the outgoers are young folk, sons and daughters of the small middle class families, going into business and the professions, outside Ayr.

### AGE AND SEX STRUCTURE 1841 AND 1931

| Percentages in each Age Group | 1841 Parish of Ayr | 1841 Parish of Newton | 1841 Parish of St. Quivox | 1841 Parishes total | 1931 Ayr Burgh |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 65 and over | 5 | 4 | 2 | 4 | 7 |
| 45—64 | 13 | 12 | 12 | 12 | 20 |
| 30—44 | 19 | 17 | 18 | 18 | 20 |
| 15—29 | 31 | 25 | 27 | 28 | 27 |
| 5—14 | 21 | 26 | 26 | 24 | 17 |
| under 5 | 11 | 16 | 15 | 14 | 9 |
| Average age | 26 | 23 | 23 | 25 | 30 |
| Women per hundred men | 121 | 117 | 108 | 115 | 114 |

No figures of age and sex distribution in parishes are available for 1931 to compare with those for 1841. The burgh of Ayr in 1931 comprised only 2,005 acres of the 12,492 acres of the entire parish area, yet with 36,783 out of the 40,411 people, its population in 1931 may be compared with the 18,801 in the parish area in 1841. The population pyramids are based on these figures.

While the more recent population statistics are incomplete in this respect, it is possible from those given at earlier dates to compare the composition of the population in the three parishes of Ayr, Newton, and St. Quivox and discover that there were quite marked differences, differences which are almost certainly still present. As far as the sex ratios are concerned, in the areas north of the river, with their male-employing mining and industrial trades, the proportions of the sexes were more or

less equal, while south of the river women outnumbered men by a quite considerable fraction. As far as the statistics for the burgh wards can be made to tell a story, the position seems to remain more or less the same. In such wards as are completely north of the river the proportions of the sexes are nearly equal; while in that southern ward which covers the main middle-class residential district there are actually just about twice as many women as there are men: that being due presumably to the considerable numbers of landladies, servant girls, and independent and retired old ladies. As far as age structure is concerned there is the same district division between north and south. The working-class areas north of the river with their generally-larger families and less healthy domestic and working conditions have both more children and fewer old people. That at least was true of the nineteenth century and is presumably still true in broad lines. In the southern area the average age is certainly higher, since we can assume that a higher proportion of old people come to live here, a higher proportion of young people leave home, and the birth rate is lower. Indeed, it is probably true to say that there is an excess of deaths over births in this part of Ayr—the middle class community is maintaining its numbers only by immigration. Demographically, the river has divided Ayr into two communities, with different histories and with populations of different composition and character. Both have their respective contributions to make to the Ayr of to-day and to-morrow.

## CHAPTER 4

# TOPOGRAPHY

Miss J. R. Manson, m.a.

### THE SITE OF AYR IN PRE-CHARTER TIMES

THE site chosen for pre-Charter Ayr appears to have been a small sandy triangle, bounded on the north by the river, to the west by the wind-blown dunes along the shore and to the east by the slight rise in land above the raised beach level.

It is so easy to say that Ayr arose round the 'lowest bridge point', yet the earliest bridge (thirteenth century) was for the convenience of an Ayr already well established, and fords crossing the river between the Auld and New Brigs served the early community. In storms and spates these fords must have proved impassable and the lower ones must have been regularly submerged when the equinoctial gales and high tides raised the river level by eight or ten feet. (There seems no geological evidence to show that the course of the river Ayr has altered within the last 1,000 years.) The actual ford used must have often been far up beyond the charter boundary as flood and tide permitted.

A casual glance at a map of Ayr seems to supply a reason for its site—obvious centre of the county's routes. These routes, however, were not even in existence in the seventeenth century according to Timothy Pont. On the other hand the valleys of the Garnock, Irvine, Ayr and Doon do converge towards the centre of the county's low seaboard and could have served as possible routes. Maybe the early inhabitants of Ayr were conscious that their 'Region' in its broad sense looked toward this, the lowland centre of a crescent, rimmed to the east by hills, and had the vision to see that they would look to the sea in future and not to the hills where earlier civilisations had perched in primitive isolation.[1]

The choice of the site for defence is possible as the low

[1] Prehistoric sites were on hill-tops, e.g. Bower Hill or Heads of Ayr Fort

triangle is similar to that chosen by the Romans at the mouth of the river Esk to the east of Edinburgh. But this does seem a likely reason as the town later had its fort and sanctuary well defended by walls, and possibly as a last redoubt in face of invasions such as that staged by the Vikings in the late thirteenth century.

The last and most likely reason for choice of site seems to be that along the whole coast of central Ayrshire there is not a single natural harbour except the estuary of the Ayr. The Doon was shallow, sandy and shifty; the Garnock and Irvine so sand-blocked that they were useless, and a coast of alternating dunes and cliffs provided no alternatives even to shelter ships seeking refuge from south-westerly gales. The bay lies to the leeward of the Heads of Ayr so that ships could be anchored there until time and tide made entry to the estuary possible.

Strangely enough the old site and the charter burgh did not extend north of the river at all and the Newton community grew up independently of Ayr. This fact seems to bear out the above belief in the early importance of port facilities and a sea lane rather than a crossing point with settlement at both ends of the bridge, as at Stirling and other well-known bridge towns.

### THE PHYSICAL STRUCTURE AND DRAINAGE OF THE CHARTER BURGH

The north boundary of the burgh being the river Ayr, there seems little doubt that present geological data have remained unchanged since the Charter. The river cuts a deep cleft in carboniferous sandstones just below the New Bridge and probably that same rock below the sandy surface gave a solid foundation to early buildings and bridges.

There are three well-marked raised beaches in Ayrshire showing three successive falls in the local sea level. The first is at 80 feet above present sea level and is locally represented at Monkton Hill, south-west of the Heads of Ayr and on the left bank of the Doon above the present bridge. The second provided practically all of the original site of the town from the Ayr to the mouth of the Doon at a point about one mile north of its present exit.[1]

[1] The mouth of the Doon has provided controversy but the evidence of the 1949 *Geology Memoir* and the opinion of its author, support the above statement. Also Geikie's original geological map of central Ayrshire made up at a time when

The town site seems to have been confined to the 40 feet raised beach, but the burgh extended inland on the carboniferous sandstones and limestones.[1] The geology had little effect on the charter burgh but the growth of the town of to-day has been greatly influenced by the coal and iron of the district, and the buildings of modern Ayr still show local grey and red sandstones.

The burgh is drained by the Ayr in the north and the Doon in the south. Both rivers have similar courses between high, steep banks till they reach the raised beach in the case of the Doon and Gibsyard in the case of the Ayr. The rich alluvial clay along the lower Ayr has provided good agricultural land for the Mainholm farms, and the Doon alluvium has, to a lesser extent, provided arable land.

The sandy nature of the old town site made the digging of wells fairly simple and as many as 20 old wells served the town up to the nineteenth century, after which they were gradually replaced by modern water mains and deep wells such as the artesian bore at Turner's.

housing had not altered the land to the north of the Doon shows 'old alluvium of the former course of the river Doon' (1868). While this is not completely conclusive it seems unlikely that the river would reach its present channel suddenly. A gradual southern migration of the mouth occupying several centuries would be in accordance with geological findings elsewhere in Scotland.

[1] *v.* Map of Geology simplified from 1 inch Geological Map

## CHAPTER 5

# THE STREETS IN EARLY TIMES

### WILLIAM J. DILLON, M.A.

THE earliest routes in Ayr were footworn tracks leading to the fords across the river. Had there been but one single ford Ayr would have assumed the common burghal pattern of a cross formed by the intersection of the north-south and east-west lines of traffic. But near the mouth of the river Ayr were several fords, so that the early pattern of the town would not be simple.

There is evidence of at least four fords:

(a) From the Quay to Newton Green; probably of limited use.

(b) From the Water Vennel (or New Bridge Street) to the foot of Newton; at the narrowest part of the river.

(c) From the vennel at Fish Cross; near to the site of the Auld Brig.

(d) Across the river where Turner's Bridge now stands. It was the Dukit Stream ford, at the Friars' Mill.[1] Across the river-bed a band of rock is still clearly defined.

Further up the river, at the Overmill, was Stobacre Ford, which was too far upstream to affect the early town-plan.

Long after the building of the Auld Brig, these crossing-places were still in use. Those that could afford passage for heavy traffic constituted a financial loss to the burgh at times when an impost was levied on goods passing across the town's bridge, because heavy loads could be carted over such fords to avoid the levy. Consequently, in 1697, when burgh finances were low, the magistrates sought to have the fords destroyed by deepening the river bed.[2]

Similarly, the Act of 1785 giving powers to build the New

[1] D. M. Lyon, *Ayr in the Olden Times*, p. 40
[2] J. Crighton, *Contributions to Scottish Maritime History*, p. 19

68

---

THE STREETS IN EARLY TIMES 69

Bridge also gave authority to deepen all the fords in the river, from the mill-dam down to the harbour.[1]

From such causes, aided by the deepening of the river when the banks were 'contained', the fords have now disappeared leaving but little trace. The town records prove their existence, and in an old view of Ayr, the southern approach to the mill-ford is plainly visible.[2]

These vanished fords decided the early town-plan of Ayr, which burgh grew up along the routes of approach. The main arteries of traffic would not differ greatly, in general direction, from those of to-day, but would not be completely identical. One major track would come from the south, from fords across the Doon and the Curtecan, aiming at the crossing where the New Bridge stands to-day. A second great route would emerge from the Dalmellington area, keep north of the Doon, and terminate at the Auld Brig. A third road would come down the river-bank, keeping as close to the water as it could, and cutting across the other two principal routes. On the north side of the river, a similar pattern of routes would converge on the fords, but there is little evidence of what the exact pattern was. Interconnecting these main roadways would be a maze of vennels and small pathways.

We cannot be sure that to-day's streets almost coincide with the earliest tracks, but, allowing for minor deviations, the original plan is to-day well represented by the Sandgate, the High Street and Mill Street on one side; Main Street, Wallace Street and George Street on the other.

The early streets were very short for medieval Ayr was extremely small. Along the sides of the thoroughfares houses were built, keeping upstream away from the agriculturally useless sands which lay in barren hillocks west of the Sandgate. The built-up areas were limited by the town's 'ports' (or gates) for reasons of safety and taxation. So we must not visualise the long streets which we traverse nowadays.

Very early records reveal that, by 1348, the principal thoroughfares in Ayr were the Woodgait, the Cambergait, the Seagait, the Doongait and the Quarrygait.[3] Early street-

[1] D. M. Lyon, *Ayr in the Olden Times*, p. 103
[2] *Contributions to Scottish Maritime History*, opposite p. 19
[3] *Charters of the Friars Preachers of Ayr*, no. 12

naming was completely practical, the name having to show where the street was leading. Since 'gait' was simply 'the way to', then in Ayr there were the way to the wood, the way to the chamber, the way to the sea, the way to the Doon, and the way to the Quarry. In later days, Doongait became the Sandgate, Seagait changed to Boat Vennal, and—if the Chamber was the Tolbooth—the Cambergait became merely the lower end of High Street.

Soon after this the names of other highways are recorded. The directional naming is continued in some, but a new idea appears in Gadgirth Vennel and Carnell Vennel, where the names are obviously not based on direction.

The main route through the town was the king's highway and became ultimately the High Street. This principal way came from the north through Newton, passed over the Auld Brig, and entered Ayr through the short Brig Vennel. Once inside the royal burgh it became the High Street of Ayr. Near the Brig it contained the marketing area, with the Fish Cross, the Meal Market and the Tolbooth. Further along stood the old tower known variously as the Auld Toor, Cathcart's Tower, and the Wallace Tower. Officially the High Street came to an end at the Kyle Port which was the south gate of the burgh, built somewhere near the entrance of Carrick Vennel. The exact site of this old gateway is doubtful, for, although the street ended, the route continued along the Townhead and out into the burgh-field.

Of almost equal importance was the Sandgate which also headed south. It started from the ford lowest down the river and led out to the Sandhills between the burgh and the river Doon. The Sandgate Port terminated the burghal part of the street but the track continued south from the Sandgaithead, to the burgh common and the Katy Lake.[1] This part of Ayr was completely transformed when Captain Nugent and the Hon. Charles Cathcart got permission to level it out in 1724. Near the commencement of the Sandgate stood the Malt Cross, and the Tolbooth which Burns referred to as the old Jail.

The fact that Ayr had two important south-going streets caused duplication of crosses and Tolbooths, and so led to subsequent historical confusion.

[1] *Ayr in the Olden Times*, p. 53

The lesser streets and vennels can now be set out in alphabetical order.

BOAT VENNAL. Part of this old street still exists and contains Loudoun Hall. Civic improvements cut away much of its length, and formerly it led from the Sandgate to the quay. In 1852 it still had many houses and the Hope Tavern was located at number 17.[1]

BRIG VENNAL. This was the passage connecting the High Street with the Auld Brig. It still exists.

CARNELL VENNEL. This lane cut off from Boat Vennal and ran north to the river. Probably it crossed Boat Vennal and proceeded south following a line represented by Fort Street. It received its name from Wallace of Carnell who had a tenement in it.[2]

CARRICK VENNEL. Near the Kyle Port and almost opposite the old tower in High Street, Carrick Vennel branched off into the burgh moor and so through Alloway, leading to the Old Bridge of Doon. It would be the quickest route, from the market into Carrick. Part of it exists as Carrick Street. Some say it also bore the name of the Foul Vennel.[3]

COW VENNEL (or COWGAIT). The Cow Vennel also led off the High Street into the burgh moor. The built-up part of it is now appropriately named Alloway Street, for the original path led through Alloway to Maybole. The old name shows the reason for the route because it was the Cow Road along which cattle were herded to the communal pasture. Along this vennel were located the cattle markets known as the Fauldbacks.[4]

FOUL VENNEL (or FOUL CALSAY). The burgh moor was also approached through the Foul Vennel. There is much perplexity as to the location of this lane and much conjecture as to the meaning of its title. Some authorities aver that Foul Calsay led from the Sandgate to the Kirk of St. John the Baptist. Others maintain that it is the Carrick Vennel under an alternative name.[5] There is mention of a vennel leading from the Foul Vennel to St. John's[6] and the map of 1775 shows a lane from the Carrick Vennel to the Sandgaithead, and

[1] *Directory for Ayr*, 1852     [2] *R.M.S.* (1546/1580), no. 221
[3] *Annals of Ayr*, p. 55     [4] *Directory* for 1852, see under Alloway Street
[5] *Annals of Ayr*, p. 55     [6] *Protocol Book* of John Mason, no. 170

perhaps across to the church.[1] Perhaps the name may help to solve the difficulty. The popular belief is that the name is brutally apt, and that the Foul Vennel led to the Foul Moor where plague-stricken persons were kept in compulsory isolation because of the foulness of their condition.[2] But if the name is directional—and it should be—the word 'foul' may be a corruption of the noun 'fauld' meaning a fold. If so, any vennel leading to the faulds could bear the name, Foul Vennel. The cattle market's appellation of 'Fauldbacks' seems to add some support for the suggestion.

GADGIRTH VENNEL. This led from the Fish Cross to the river. It still exists as a 'close'. It got its name from the townhouse of Chalmers of Gadgirth.

GILIS VENNEL. See Trinity Vennel.

KIRK VENNEL. See Trinity Vennel.

KIRK PORT VENNEL (or FRIARS VENNEL). This led from the High Street to the Auld Kirk. Previously it had given access to the friaries and to the River Ayr. In 1654 an archway was erected across it[3] but, in 1723, it had to be widened to allow funerals to pass through. To-day it is referred to locally as the Kirk Port.

MILL VENNEL. At the Wallace Tower, Mill Vennel joined the High Street. It is said to be part of the old Roman road that came from Kirkcudbright and, near Ayr, followed the river to the sea.[4] Be that as it may, the street passed the mills, the quarry and the barns. Such buildings as the Dominican Friary and, later, the Auld Kirk, probably altered the original line of this vennel, causing it to take a sharp west bend to meet the High Street. As a primitive track it may have kept to the river bank until it met the main road in the vicinity of the Auld Brig where the market cross and the Tolbooth stood in early times.

QUARRY VENNEL. From the Overport in the Townhead a small vennel passed the Quarry and connected up with the 'Hospital' in Mill Vennel.[5] In one document it has been wrongly transcribed as the Quarter Vennel.[6]

SCHOOL VENNEL. Any lane leading to the burgh school

[1] Armstrong's Map, 1775     [2] Ayr in the olden Times, p. 24
[3] Annals of Ayr, p. 60      [4] Obit Book of Ayr, p. 72
[5] See plan of Ayr in Ayr Burgh Accounts     [6] R.M.S. (1546/1580), no. 221

west of the Sandgate could be called School Vennel. After the Academy was built the ways leading to it became Academy Street and Academy Lane.

TRINITY VENNEL. This is another problem street. It led to St. John's[1] and it also bore the title of the Kirk Vennel.[2] Another—or was it the same?—vennel led to St. John's and was called Gilis Vennel.[3] It is known that one vennel to the church started at the end of the Tolbooth, but it is not certain which Tolbooth is referred to.[4] A long, east-west vennel might provide a solution. A lane, starting at the Butter Market Close, crossing the High Street next to the Tolbooth, passing on into the Sandgate, crossing it, and continuing onwards to St. John's, probably existed prior to our modern streets. It is impossible to be precise, but the line may be best represented by Butter Market Close, Newmarket Street, and St. John Street, for, indeed Newmarket Street was built about 1767 to give access from the Sandgate to the new Butter Market.[5] Such a long vennel would be subdivided, and the parts of it may have been called Trinity Vennel, Kirk Vennel and Gilis Vennel.

WATER VENNEL. This was a small lane leading from the river to the end of the Sandgate where the Malt Cross stood. It connected the Sandgate with Newton, via the ford. Here, at this point in the river, the New Bridge was built, which necessitated the widening of Water Vennel. So with the change came the replacement of the old street name with the New Bridge Street of to-day.

THE WOODGAIT. This was the way to the wood. The venerable old name disappeared early from the records, and we can not be sure of the wood or the street. Certainly the Woodgait was above the old tower at the Townhead Port, on the east side of the King's Street,[6] so that it could have been Mill Street, or a branch of the High Street, perhaps the one blocked by the Overport. The High Street in the Townhead district fishtailed out into two portions, one of which was the Cow Vennel. A man called David Reid had a tenement in

[1] This can be proved by inference from Ayr Burgh Accounts, p. 38, and Mason's Protocol Book, no. 71, where Ardmillan is the common factor
[2] As note 1     [3] Obit Book, p. 45
[4] The Obit probably refers to the old Tolbooth
[5] Paterson, History of Ayrshire, vol. 1, p. 58
[6] Charters of the Friars Preachers of Ayr, no. 67

the Woodgait, between another tenement and the Cow Vennel,[1] so that it does look as if the Woodgait was the other division of High Street, leading to Maybole. Perhaps the wood was Carcluy Wood which belonged to the town, is referred to in old records, and is situated along this route.

The above completes an account of the early streets of Ayr. No attempt has been made to include the streets of Newton in this survey, for information on medieval Newton is scanty and unreliable, and the records of the old burgh are not available.

The medieval streets of Ayr were very much shorter than those of to-day. In normal times people could pass along these streets without let or hindrance, but when the town was troubled by visitations of the plague, or by aggressive incursions of neighbouring lairds, or when toll had to be levied upon merchants attending fair or market in the burgh, it was essential that entrances into the town be blocked up. Accordingly, at the ends of the main thoroughfares, were erected gateways called 'ports'. These were permanent structures built with composite masses of stone, timber, iron, stakes, wattles and turf. To the uprights of such gateways could be attached gates ('barres yetts') which were kept in the Tolbooth ready for emergencies. These double gates were reinforced with iron bands, huge nails, and other metallic adjuncts, and fastened by crooks and slots, cleeks and staples. During periods of stress the ports and yetts were repaired and re-erected, thus sealing off the main entrances of the burgh.

Ayr had ports at each of the wide streets or vennels. Near the meeting of High Street and Carrick Vennel stood the south gate of the burgh, called the Kyle Port because it controlled the road to Kyle. About a hundred years ago its site was marked by a house projecting out of the footway, but no trace of it now remains.[2]

At the termination of the Sandgate, at a point near St. John Street, was the Sandgate Port. This gateway could bear the alternative title of the Carrick Port, or perhaps Carrick Vennel was blocked by its own Carrick Port. The Sandgate Port was still in existence towards the end of the eighteenth century.[3]

[1] Mason's *Protocol Book*, no. 53
[2] Kyle, p. 7; *Ayr Burgh Accounts*, p. cxxiv; *Obit Book*, p. 73
[3] *Dr. Auld v. the Magistrates of Ayr*, 1821, p. 18

The lane from the sea into the burgh was controlled by the Sea-port or Boat Vennel Port. It stood at the west end of the vennel, and being ruinous was taken down—perhaps not finally —in 1610.[1]

Alloway Street had a barrier at Cow-port, or Cow Vennel Port.[2] There is no indication of its exact site, but it lay beyond the Kyle Port, as an outlier when the burgh had gone past this southern limit.

In 1597 there is mention of a port in the Kirk Vennel, called the Kirk Vennel Port or the Kirk Port.[3] It lay somewhere along St. John Street, and must not be confused with to-day's Kirk Port leading to the Old Church.

There is dubiety about a gate referred to as the Carrick Port. Some say it was the Sandgate Port under a different title.[4] Others contest that it was a gate in Carrick Vennel.[5] Tessin's map of 1654 does not reveal any such barrier in this lane but the name, Carrick Port, appears before this date.[6] If Carrick Vennel was an open route into the burgh, surely it needed a barrier, and this would be the Carrick Port. Tessin's map indicates a blockade in Kyle Street, and Dr. Pryde adjudges this to be the Over Port. A reference of 1546 gives the cost of 'carrying the Over Port and the vennel yetts to the Tolbooth'[7] but the phraseology is ambiguous. Another reference of the same year speaks of the 'umest yett', and of the thorns piled there.[8] If so, this outmost gate may be the Over Port, but it suggests that the gateway was not important. A port at the Auld Toor has escaped the notice of the experts. In 1543 a sum of money is paid 'to build the port at the Auld Toor'.[9] It could not be the Kyle Port, for it is mentioned in a list which includes the Kyle Port.[10] Surely a port was necessary to control the Mill Vennel, and this was it.

Most important of all the ports was the Brig Port which bestrode the Auld Brig route into Ayr. This essential entrance was manned permanently by the burgesses. Originally, as at all the other ports, the watch was kept by the burgh's menfolks in strict rota, but this irksome duty was removed in 1588 when

[1] *Ayr Burgh Accounts*, p. 248
[2] *ib.*, p. 220, p. cxxiv     [3] *ib.*, p. 195     [4] *ib.*, p. cxxiv
[5] *Ayr in the Olden Times*, p. 39
[6] *Ayr Burgh Accounts*, p. 102. The year is 1545.     [7] *ib.*, p. 101     [8] *ib.*, p. 101
[9] *ib.*, p. 94     [10] *Reminiscences of Auld Ayr*, p. 15

it was resolved to fee a man for each port at a wage of two shillings per day.[1] The hours of watch, 4 a.m. until 8 p.m., were exhausting. At the Brig Port were stationed four wardens, and, in 1604, was 'biggit' a little watch-house to protect them from 'weitt and rayne',[2] although already, in 1546, there existed a Brig Lodge, perhaps for a different purpose.[3] The Brig Port was finally demolished in 1777 when the need for such erections had passed away.[4] About 1909, when the Auld Brig was being thoroughly repaired, 'the lower walls of the old triangular toll —or guardhouse—were also exposed' on the north side of the bridge.[5]

Nine ports have thus been enumerated in Ayr, and, on the other side of the river, Newton also had similar structures. The names, the Upgait Port, the Doongait Port, the West-Side Port, and the East-Side Port, are known, but there is no indication of their sites.

Not only had the main thoroughfares to be sealed, but also all the vennels and pathways into the town. These unprotected entrances were barricaded with carpolls (tree trunks) and masses of thorns.[6]

Finally, all burgesses, who had gardens on the perimeter of the town, were exhorted to build up their back dykes, and deny access via their properties.[7]

It is impossible to study these ancient anti-invasion precautions without calling to mind our modern devices of road-blocks, barbed-wire entanglements, firewatching rotas, and similar aspects of 'civil defence'.

To-day we can have but a faint conception of how the medieval burgh looked. Irregularity was the keynote of the times. The streets were narrow, twisting, asymmetrical; the houses, a medley of castellated mansions and mean heather-thatched cottages. The statutory width of a road was but twenty feet, and only a central track—'the crown of the cause-way'—in each roadway, was laid with cobblestones. The early upkeep was undertaken by the burgesses, but in 1599 a professional calsay-maker was brought from Glasgow and large sums were expended on street-surfacing.[8]

[1] *Ayr in the Olden Times*, p. 19    [2] *ib.*, p. 41
[3] *Ayr Burgh Accounts*, p. 102    [4] *Ayr in the Olden Times*, p. 41
[5] J. A. Morris, *The Brig of Ayr*, p. 76    [6] *Ayr Burgh Accounts*, pp. 96, 211
[7] *Ayr in the Olden Times*, p. 22    [8] *Ayr Burgh Accounts*, pp. 201, 205

Theoretically the High Street was the king's property, but the burgesses treated it as common ground, dumping upon it heaps of offal and filth, storing on it barrels and bulky goods, and employing the length of it as a public market, for stances on which the town drew causeway custom.

Only on special occasions were the streets cleaned, although the burgesses were constantly enjoined to clear the gutters in front of their dwellings. Thus the main thoroughfares bore odoriferous masses of ordure, entrails and fish-guts, which were removed only when the position became impossible. The Barony horses from Alloway were intermittently employed to cart away the filth and spread it over the sandhills, as in 1585, when fifteen horses were needed to remove the gravel and rubbish off the High Street.[1] Occasionally the burgh hired a 'clenger' to clear away dead carrion, or to render passable the highway for the *Corpus Christi* procession.[2] However, in 1616, a street cleaner was enrolled on the permanent staff of the burgh at a wage of ten pounds per annum, or twice as much as the Provost received as his fee.[3] The appointment of this official must have afforded much relief to Ayr's pedestrians, especially on 'myrk nichts' when the darkness of the narrow vennels was defeated but little by the guttering tow-lights of 'bowats' set up on wooden posts at a few chosen corners.

The medieval aspect of Ayr remained comparatively undisturbed until the upsurge of progress near the beginning of the nineteenth century. Then came a demand for wider thoroughfares and securer road-surfaces, causing a re-planning of the streets. And so the old town as seen in the first illustrations available[4] vanished under the impact of new ideas, leaving scarcely even a street-name to perpetuate the 'auld Ayr' of our forefathers.

[1] *Ayr Burgh Accounts*, p. 155    [2] *ib.*, p. 20    [3] *ib.*, p. 265
[4] *cf.* Illustrations in Professor Wilson's *The Land of Burns*, division 1

# CHAPTER 6

# STREET NAMES

### JOHN M. SHORT, M.A.

'Small have continual plodders ever won
Save base authority from others' books'

[THE interested reader is referred to Burrow's *Pointer Map of Ayr*, 'published with the approval of the Town Council', or the relevant sheets of the Ordnance Survey, 6 inch issue.]

WHEN men make anything they straightway give it a name; which name, telling much of the thing, often tells more of the maker and of the circumstances of the making. So it comes that the street names of a town often carry a rich and illuminating connotation, blazing the trail of the town's history, telling of how its inhabitants thought and what its citizens deemed worthy of remembrance.

Yet, as we begin this short study, we had better 'tak' tent' and walk like Agag, for the way is as difficult and dangerous as the cobbles of the town of Ayr in the darkness of a medieval night. One has only to recall the argument of yester-year in the local press over the naming of Tam's Brig. Here was a name given, in the nature of things, less than a century ago—for it is a railway bridge made some time after the original coming of the railway to the Newton shore; yet at least five champions were brought forward, quadruped as well as biped, to claim the 'Tamship', all with substantive and substantial backing—and the matter is still *sub judice*.

Fullarton Street is another example of these headaches. Howie assures us it was called 'after a provost of the town'.[1] A check of the provosts discovered William Fullarton of Skeldon, 1827-28 and 1834-35, which seemed to fit very nicely. Unfortunately a perusal of Wood's Map (1818) showed Fullarton Street so named. This seems to put paid to Provost

[1] James Howie, *Historical Account of the Town of Ayr*, p. 15, Kilmarnock 1861

Fullarton and, so far as the writer can find, leaves two claimants —Colonel Fullarton of Fullarton, 'Brydone's brave ward' of Burns, distinguished soldier and legislator and author of *General View of the Agriculture of the County of Ayr* (1793), who died in 1808; whom failing, Mr. William Fullarton of Rosemount, who, according to Paterson,[1] seems, round about 1784, to have interested himself financially and successfully in the preservation of the tower of Old St. John's. Which, if any, is right?

It must follow then that not all the statements made in the ensuing pages are to be accepted as *ex cathedra* pronouncements: many of them are put forward with diffidence as, at best, more or less intelligent guesses.

Further, streets have a habit of changing their name, providing the local historian with many a poser; and of these Ayr has several examples. High Street, itself, was known for a time as King's Street—a common appellation of the chief street of a royal burgh, the street where stands its market cross. Oddly enough, Newton has in this respect, as in others, shown its antagonism to its quondam rival across the water by changing its Cross Street, as shown in the 1860 Ordnance Survey Map, into the King Street of to-day, due no doubt to the shifting of its Market Cross from its original stance beside Newton Old Kirk to its present position near the New Bridge.

Russell Street, also in the Newton, is an interesting example of this chameleon nomenclature. In one old map[2] it is shown as Quarry Street, probably as leading to the quarry at Allison's Parks (hence, incidentally, Allison Street). Then in the 1860 Ordnance Map it has the appropriate name of Burnside; for the map clearly shows the burn, coming from the present Lochside area, which, within living memory, ran down the side of the street to Main Street, and down the middle thereof to drive Newton Mill beside the present New Bridge, before losing itself in the Ayr.[3]

[1] *History of Ayrshire*, vol. 1, p. 24. Really 'Dr Fullarton', and a relative of the colonel.
[2] Wood, 1818
[3] The map shows the burn as coming from the pumping station of a coal pit, but it must originally have helped to drain the Newton Loch, also drained by the Half-mile Burn, which still enters the sea at Newton Esplanade and which was for a time the north boundary of the Parliamentary Burgh. It is from this loch we get Lochside Road and the general name of this now populous area. From

To get a sufficient head of water for the job, the burn was sluiced up into a dam where stands the present Turner's Brewery; hence the name, Damside, still given to that part of Russell Street between Wallace and Main Streets.[1]

The present name, Russell Street, in contrast to Fullarton Street, above, provides a warning against too implicit a trust in a map. The usual attribution of this street name to Lord John Russell of Reform Bill fame—and there was a strong radical tradition in the Newton—seemed to the present writer unlikely in view of the persistence of 'Burnside' in the 1860 map already referred to. Moreover, an old Ayr resident, now dead, informed him, what he would fain believe, that the name came from a schoolmaster long before the day of the present Russell Street School. But a perusal of old Ayr directories discovered the use of 'Russell Street' as far back as 1845. So the map is demonstrably wrong as at 1860 and Lord John must, beyond a peradventure, be the eponym of the street; and Clio, Muse of History, must smile somewhat ironically to see a Wellington Street running off from it.

Many other streets tell of the march of history, for Ayr has not been behind hand in proclaiming its hero-worship. We get echoes of the Napoleonic wars in Wellington Street and Wellington Square, Nelson Street, Elba Street. Taylor Street recalls the post-Waterloo struggles in social history in the person of the Chartist doctor whose statue dominates Wallace-town cemetery at the head of George Street. George Street

the adjacent Sanquhar Moss, for the loch was partly in St. Quivox parish, we get names like West Sanquhar Road and Mosside Road. The latter also recalls the elaborate land-sharing system of the Newton freemen; two of the five dails or groupings of the Newton fields being the Moss Dails and the Second Moss Dails. This was the real Newton Loch. The loch shown under that name in Pyle's map of 1750 on the Newton Green (hence Green Street) must not be confused with it. This was merely a glorified puddle, used when possible for skating and making much of the Newton Green boggy. It was in making a decent road from this part of the Green and the camp of his soldiers to his residence at Lottery Ha' (beside the present Railway Goods Depot) that the commander, Lord Darlington, provided a name for Darlington Road.

[1] The lade, running en plein air down Newton Main Street (v. Bryden's *Etchings of Auld Ayr*) must have been a serious impediment to traffic, a source of peril to the nocturnal inebriate and an only too handy receptacle for domestic throw-outs. The Newton Burgh Court enacted in 1641 'That na personne or personnis sall wash at ye leid betwixt ye dam and ye mylne any foul claithis, puddings, lynnt, hydis or any other fulzie or pollutit thyngis qrby ye watter may be pollutit or fyillit be night or be day'. The old mill, though not shown on Wood's map of 1818, was used as a shelter by the mob in the riots at the first reform election of 1832 (Howie, *op. cit.*, p. 104), so must have been still standing then.

itself and its neighbour, James Street, very probably recall these same two sons of George III, vaguely immortalised in the name of the most famous street in Scotland. The good town of Edinburgh had wished to call this, the first big adventure in its new town building, after St. Giles, its patron saint, and his cathedral church. King George, knowing only the very insalubrious district of St. Giles in London, objected and suggested it be called Princes Street after his sons. It is a pleasing thought that these two boys possibly thus gave their names to the new town of Wallace, as they undoubtedly became the tutelary deities of the new town of 'Scotia's darling seat'.

Lothian Road, Goschen Terrace, recall more modern days, as do Alexandra Terrace, Queen Street, Victoria Street. Charlotte Street is named after Princess Charlotte, child of George IV and Princess Caroline. Ayr was fiercely partisan over the *cause célèbre* of the Caroline Trial. For a description of the high jinks in Ayr at her acquittal v. Howie, ch. x.

The area round Ayr Academy has most of its history delineated in its street names. Hereabouts was probably the site of 'meum novum castellum de Air' of the charter: here certainly stood the fort of Oliver Cromwell, the rampart of which is still in part open to the view. Hence Fort Street—part of it once, for obvious reasons, Academy Brae—and Citadel Place. The tower, known to many, wrongly, as the 'Old Fort' is all that is left standing of the original Church of St. John the Baptist,[1] who gave his name and his protection to our old town even as he did to its namesake on Tay; though refusing, in our case, his patronage to the premier football club of the district. Naturally a road leading towards the tower from the centre of the town is called St. John Street. Within that church in 1315, after the Battle of Bannockburn, was convened the meeting of the Scots nobility and parliament, when the crown of Scotland was officially given to Robert the Bruce and his posterity; hence the tower is partly circled by Bruce Crescent. This tower is literally 'one of the ruins that Cromwell knocked

[1] It is good to see that the name of Ayr's patron saint is to be continued in the title of the new 'Auld Kirk of Ayr': but it is queer that the lane leading to that church should be called 'Kirk Port', the only place where 'Port', once common, remains; and here in the sense of drawing men in, whereas elsewhere, as in Kyle Port, Brig Port, it was used for keeping folk out!

about a bit'—hence the conscience money provided for the building of the new 'Auld Kirk of St. John'. The tower was incorporated by Cromwell's engineers into the layout of the Fort—as an armoury, we believe, so carrying on the militant tradition of Scottish theology. The plan of that fort or citadel, produced by his Dutch engineer, Tessin, is indeed the first authentic map of Ayr. It is right then that there should be here a Cromwell Road and a Citadel Place.

Later, in the time of Charles II, the property was handed over to the earl of Eglinton to compensate him for losses in the king's service. Indeed, in spite of strenuous opposition by the magistrates of the town, the area was turned into a burgh of regality under the name of Montgomeriestoun, Montgomerie being the family name of the Eglintons. All this is commemorated in names like Eglinton, and Montgomerie, Terrace. Here a countess of Eglinton, confounding the spiritual with the spirituous, installed a brewery. Later the place was handed over to the Kennedy family in part payment of a debt, and the brewery functioned 'under new management', as is hinted in Cassillis Street and Ailsa Place. The latter must have a genealogical rather than a geographical connotation, for from that point the Craig cannot be seen, as can the larger island which gives its name to the neighbouring Arran Terrace.

In a similar way Newton Castle and the family of the Wallaces impressed their influence on the street names to the north of the river. The castle,[1] clearly seen in Slesser's picture and largely demolished by a storm in 1701, was really in Wallacetown, for it stood well east of what is now Garden Street, so called from the Castle Garden. This was extensive and had a considerable orchard and stretch of water. In 1630 William Wallace of Craigie is retoured, amongst other possessions, in the 'Castro etc. de Newtoune cum pomario et stagnis'. It was a later Wallace, Sir Thomas, father of Burns's friend and correspondent, Mrs. Dunlop, who, about 1760, while inhabiting the new family house of Craigie on the Ayr, began the feuing of the north bank near the Auld Brig, which was the nucleus of Wallacetown. So to this family we owe Wallace Street,[2] Craigie Avenue, Garden Street, and, from the hamlet

[1] Some think it was the 'new castle' mentioned in the charter
[2] Wallace Street was possibly made as a result of an attempt in 1668 by the

which nestled beside Content House in the shelter of their name, Content Street.

Besides the old church of St. John there were other religious houses whose names live in our streets. The friaries of the Dominicans and Franciscans by the side of the Ayr have left nothing in this sort unless we include the once famous [water] road or ford of the Ducat Stream, about the line of Turner's Brig, known to Burns (v. 'The Brigs of Ayr'), and said to have got its name from the dovecot in the Dominican grounds. But the chapel of St. Leonard, scene of deeds not always edifying,[1] has given us St. Leonard's Road and, from its position near the site of the chapel, possibly Chapelpark Road.[2] The building has long disappeared, but the ruins were still extant when Pont made his survey in the reign of James VI (Chalmers' *Caledonia*). The stones are said to be part of the wall of the old racecourse, as some of the stones of St. John's, at second remove, now form part of the Blackburn or west side of Racecourse Road—the good folk of Ayr were always frugal!

Further out of the old town, to the east of the present racecourse, stood Dalmulin, the vale of the mill, granted to the Gilbertines of Sempringham by Walter the Stewart, in 1229. On their return to Yorkshire in 1238—no compliment to the climate of Ayr—it became a possession of Paisley Abbey and so remained to the Reformation. Nothing is left of its buildings, but Dalmulin has come alive again in the Dalmilling Crescent, etc., of this rapidly expanding suburb.

Many streets naturally take their names from direction finding. No one can doubt the accuracy and appropriateness of Doonfoot Road or Monument Road or Prestwick Road, and old inhabitants of Ayr will guarantee the quondam veracity of

then Sir Thomas Wallace to close the highway north from the bridge end, as running past his front door (v. Tessin's map of Ayr Citadel, 1654). Ayr protested. Sir Thomas argued that there was a perfectly good road leading through the Newton and by the bank of the Ayr at the present River Street. The point was made by Ayr that in winter the high tides made this road impassable, and in any case the Newton Main Street, especially by reason of its mill lade down the middle, was a very poor road. An *ad hoc* commission found in 1669 that the 'old way' should be granted till April next, when a road was to be made on the east or west side of the castle, as most convenient. Wallace Street was probably the result, considerably to the east of the castle site (v. Paterson, *op. cit.*, 1, p. 25).
[1] *e.g.* the so-called Auchendrane Tragedy
[2] This road may be called from the Chapelfauld, which was certainly in the vicinity and belonged once to the Holy Rood Chapel in St. John's (v. Mason's *Protocol Book*, no. 140)

Racecourse Road, though no longer leading to the sport of kings. Mill Street, site of one of Ayr's municipal enterprises —in the hunt for coal—as notorious a failure in its day as the 'ground-nuts' of yesterday, naturally led to the town's mill, the nether-mill, near the present Victoria Bridge; similarly Overmill Road is, not 'the road over the mill', but 'the road to the over or upper mill' of the town, beside Holmston stepping-stones.

Alloway Street, the old Cow Vennel,[1] leads to Alloway all right but Alloway Place and Alloway Park have a different origin. Shortly after Wellington Square took shape, the field to the south of it was feued. It was popularly known as Provost Shaw's Park but in reality belonged to Lord Alloway, hence the names.[2]

Carrick Street, the old Carrick Vennel, did indeed lead to Carrick, as Tam o' Shanter knew, for it continued beyond the top of what is now Barns Street, striking Racecourse Road near the foot of the present Miller Road. Indeed, when the proprietor of the Barns Estate closed this part of Carrick Vennel, it was felt as a serious inconvenience by the farmers on the Carrick shore.[3]

Similarly the Sandgate (Sandgait) was the road to the sands. Its other name, Doonisgait, which some interpret to mean the road to the Doon, seems to the writer more likely to be a variant of the usual name, meaning the road to the (sand) dunes, which, before the control by building, etc., were a constant menace to the existence of the town. We all know that the sand along parts of the esplanade is still a worry to the city fathers and the burgh engineers. Earlier, things were much worse; in fact, Ayr was threatened with disaster comparable to that at the Culbin Sands. In the reign of Robert II a charter of 1380 granted the right of property in any land reclaimed from the dunes, 'dum burgus noster de Air per motionem et agitationem arenae sit quasi annihilatus et destructus' (Grose, *Antiquities* II, 195). In 1425 the regent Albany granted warrant to the community to straiten, i.e. narrow, the

[1] It is a pity that the fine old Scots word 'Vennal' or 'Vennel', once so common in Ayr, should have practically disappeared. The first example that occurs to mind is the Boat Vennal [sic] leading from New Bridge Street, via Loudoun Hall, to the port of Ayr. The 'el' form is the one commonly appearing in the old burgh accounts.          [2] Howie, *op. cit.*, p. 88          [3] *ib.*, p. 37

Sandgate. This seems to have been no cure, for in 1573 a complaint goes to the Privy Council by the 'maist pairt' of the inhabitants and especially by the 'indwellaris of the Sand Gait' that 'the said Sand Gait with the haill venallis of the said toun except the brig' are 'overblawin and almaist wrakit' with sand. They go on to blame the Town Council, for there is nothing new under the sun.[1]

The builders of Cromwell's fort found a like trouble: 'After we get the foundation laid, we are much troubled with water, and have no earth but a shattering sand that, as we dig in one place, another place falls upon us.'[2] The town owes a debt to Oliver for, in the control by his fort of much of the sand dunes, he was indeed its Lord Protector. His work was continued, particularly in 1725, when the 'pasturage of the hills' was given in long lease to Colonel Cathcart, afterwards eighth Lord Cathcart, and Captain Lawrence Nugent. The tacksmen were allowed the dung and other refuse of the streets of Ayr, uplifted at their expense, to help to consolidate the sand, for there was 'not only the danger of losing the ground aforesaid but also of incommoding the town and harbour by the excessive blowing of the sand'. These two men were real friends of Ayr. It is right then, that one of the roads leading out from the Sandgate in the direction of these old dunes should be Cathcart Street, even though the real reason for the name was probably the close proximity of Lady Cathcart's town house. Captain Nugent is numbered among those that have left no memorial: *si monumentum requiris, circumspice*.

Joining the fort area or rather the church of St. John to the Cross of Ayr, the so-called Fish Cross, went Trinity Vennel, later called the New Yard. When a market was built to contain the merchanting of butter, etc., in place of the old site on the river side of High Street beside the King's Arms, the Council in 1767 agreed to make a road from Sandgate to the markets, church, etc., roughly along the line of New Yard, as soon as permission could be obtained from Lady Dunduff—so helping to place the demesne of that lady. This street, inevitably, came by the name of Newmarket Street, which it still holds though the reason is long since gone. Similarly remembering condi-

[1] Register of the Privy Council, II, 278
[2] *v.* Frith's *Scotland and the Protectorate*, p. xlvii

tions no longer existent, Newton's Waggon Road recalls the time when Ayr and district raised the coal they exported and railways were not steam-powered.

Many streets naturally recall the big houses, estates and farms which encircled the then little town. Dalblair Road remembers Dalblair estate and its house, now the Dalblair Hotel, as Limond's Wynd across the water no doubt reminds us of Dalblair's owner, once provost of Ayr. Barns Terrace comes from the house of Barns beside the present county council garage. Boswell Park owes its name to the family that once lived in Sandgate House, which now stands somewhat forlornly at the corner, a dishevelled sleeping princess waiting for her Prince Charming, the Postmaster-General, to come and wake her to renewed fullness of life.[1] And there are many others.[2]

Ayr, as already noted, has seen fit to give lasting memory to men and events of historical significance: she has also, like most towns, desired to recall some of her own notable personalities. To mention only three, we have Miller Road called after Provost Hugh Miller, who still looks down on the labours of his successors in the Council Chamber; James Brown Avenue in Whitletts, called after the distinguished ex-miner, who, if he had not the honour of being born in Ayr, made south Ayrshire famous as far as Holyrood Palace and highest court of the church[3]; and Arrol Drive commemorating Sir William Arrol, sometime proprietor of Seafield, and builder of the Forth Bridge.

To the north of the river, in the new housing areas, there are many streets which it would be invidious to name, as some of

---

[1] The family is a cadet branch of the Boswells of Auchinleck, to which Ayr, through Burns, posthumously, is considerably indebted. Burns was a contemporary of, though he never, we believe, actually met, the immortal biographer—

> Him who led o'er Scotland a'
> the meikle Ursa Major

—but Alexander Boswell, Bozzy's son, was largely instrumental in the raising of the Burns Monument by the banks o' Doon, and did, in fact, lay its foundation stone on 25th January 1820. (Since the above was written, Sandgate House has been demolished: its stones, in the form of a fine wall, now [December 1952] contain and partially conceal the desolation of its site. Ichabod!)

[2] Houses like Castlehill, Ewenfield, Belmont, Bellevue, Corsehill, Broomfield, Robsland, Wheatfield, Parkhouse, Blackburn, Seafield, Woodfield; farms like Viewfield, Noltmire, Hawkhill, have each added a name, some several names, to the street plan of Ayr; some like Falkland House and Hawkhill Farm, giving names to the 'iron road' as well

[3] Incidentally, the old map shows the spelling 'Whitelets', proving that, as is so often the case, local pronunciation is historically accurate

---

the 'onlie begetters' are still with us. In these streets the city fathers[1] of a comparatively modern day have been given a spot of eponymous immortality.

To its most famous son Ayr has been slow to render this form of homage. There is, it is true, Burns Statue Square, where the poet glooms, not unjustifiably, at the architectural atrocities which interrupt his view of beloved Alloway; but this is hardly 'Burns Street'. Street memorials of his acquaintances are about. There is Ballantyne Drive after the provost who was his patron and friend and to whom he dedicated 'The Brigs of Ayr'; possibly, also, if not very probably, Chalmers Road.[2] If so, it is well placed at right angles to Ballantyne Drive, emphasising the poet's connexion with the law, as the other with banking. There is also Peebles Street in the Newton, recalling 'Poet Willie', 'Peebles frae the Water-fit', the first minister of Newton Parish and author of its first *Statistical Account*. Though the butt of Burns's satire, he was a man of parts, by no means unworthy to head the list of the ministers of Newton Old, which can probably show more distinguished names than any other Kirk in Ayr. His manse stood at the end of Main Street, now called after him; hence, also, Glebe Crescent, in the immediate vicinity.

Now, at long last, in the new housing scheme at Forehill, the town is remembering adequately him who praised the surpassing integrity and comeliness of its citizens; and Mount Oliphant Crescent, Lochlea Drive, and Mossgiel Avenue mark out the milestones in the agricultural pilgrimage of Ayrshire's bard. Perhaps we may some day cease to be merely parochial, may remember that Burns belongs to Scotland, and complete the list with an Ellisland Square!

---

[1] And others, *e.g.* White Street, called after the late Dr. White

[2] Probably it is named from the Chalmers family of Gadgirth, who owned as their town residence the house in High Street beside the old Ford Gait, which ran to the river above the old bridge and was sometimes called Gadgirth's Vennel