

Aberdour

ABERDOUR, a parish, in the district of Deer, county of Aberdeen; comprising the village of Pennan, and containing 1645 inhabitants, of whom 376 are in the village of New Aberdour, 8 miles (W. by S.) from Fraserburgh. The name of this place is supposed to have been derived from a Gaelic term Aber, signifying "mouth" or "opening," in reference to the rivulet Dour, which finds an entrance into the sea, a short distance below the manse. There are numerous cairns and tumuli, containing stone coffins with the ashes and bones of human bodies, indicating the parish to have been originally the theatre of military conflicts; and the castle of Dundargue, also, stands here, which Sir Thomas Beaumont fortified and garrisoned, in right of his wife, who was daughter to the Earl of Buchan, when he accompanied Edward Baliol, who came to claim the kingdom of Scotland. This castle was of great importance in the feudal times, and is famed for a long siege in 1336, when Henry de Beaumont, the English Earl of Buchan, capitulated to Murray, Regent of Scotland, during the captivity of David Bruce. On the coast is a cave called Cowshaven, which is celebrated as the hidingplace of Lord Pitsligo, after the battle of Culloden; but this retreat, from which he was obliged to fly, was at last discovered by the impressions on the snow, of the footsteps of a woman, who regularly supplied him with food.

The parish contains 15,165 imperial acres, of which 5873 are cultivated, 5608 are moor or green pasture, 3496 moss, 88 wood, and 101 roads, &c.; its form is altogether irregular, consisting of a kind of zig-zag boundary, some parts of which dart off to a considerable extent. The northern boundary runs for about seven miles along the shore of the Moray Frith, which is broken by numerous openings and caves, some of which penetrate for a long distance into the land. The coast in general is bold and rocky, and on the estate of Auchmedden stands the colossal Pitjossie, an immense natural arch, which strikes the beholder with astonishment, when viewed from the summit of the adjoining cliff, and is said to rival the celebrated Bullers of Buchan. On the coast are also the three small bays of Aberdour, Pennan, and Nethermill, the beaches of which consist of large quantities of stones washed down the Dour burn and other streams, and thrown back by the violence of the sea, on the occurrence of a storm. The surface, generally, is unequal, the eastern division being flat and low, while the estate of Auchmedden, on the western side, rises about 200 or 300 feet above the level of the sea; on that property are several deep ravines and dens, which, with the

numerous plants and adjacent scenery, present a striking and romantic appearance. In the south-eastern extremity are three farms, entirely cut off from the rest of the parish by the lands of Tyrie, and which some suppose to have been originally grazing land for the cattle belonging to the tenants on the sea-coast; but others think that, at the time the parish was erected, they formed a separate estate belonging to the proprietor, who, wishing to have all his property in one parish, included them within the bounds of Aberdour. In the south-west of the parish, on the farm of Kinbeam, is a fresh-water loch, called Monwig, situated in a large and deep moss; it is 200 yards long, and 22 broad, and in some parts very deep; and the dark mossy water, of which it consists, is covered, in the season, with flocks of wild geese and ducks. There are also several small streams, all of which run into the Moray Frith; and near Pitjossie, in the glen of Dardar, is a cascade, the water of which, after dashing from the top of a rock into three successive basins, glides gently for 100 yards, until it falls into the Frith.

The soil near the coast is a strong loamy clay, which, with good husbandry, yields fine crops, but in many other parts it is cold and mossy, exhibiting merely cultivated patches of land; the produce raised chiefly comprises oats, turnips, potatoes, barley, bear, and hay. Great improvements have taken place in agriculture within the last thirty years, especially upon the estate of Aberdour, where a regular and scientific system of drainage has been adopted. The bog, moss, and moor, with which the arable land was mixed, have been removed; bridges and roads have been constructed, and a proper rotation of crops introduced and observed; which, together with the application of the most approved methods of cultivation, have entirely altered the character of the parish. In other parts, however, there is a deficiency of good inclosures, arising from the scarcity of stones for building dykes; but the farmsteadings are in decent condition, and generally covered with tiles or thatch. The rocks on the shore, which are lofty and precipitous, are a coarse sandstone, passing frequently into conglomerate, and greywacke slate; the loose blocks are primary trap or granite, and in some parts are seen convolved masses of clay and limestone, in which have been found the fossil remains of fish. There are several quarries of granite and sandstone, and two of millstone, one of which, in the rocks of Pennan, though now but little worked, is said to contain some of the best stones in Britain; the stones from this quarry were formerly in great repute, and sent to the

south and west of Scotland, but the high price set upon them, has greatly lowered the demand. The chief mansion is Aberdour House, an old building, occupying a very bleak situation; and there are several other residences, particularly one on the estate of Auchmedden, the glens of which, justly celebrated as the beds of the finest collection of plants to be found in Scotland, include some scarce specimens of botanical treasure.

The parish contains the villages of New Aberdour and Pennan, the former erected in 1798; the inhabitants are employed in agricultural pursuits, with the exception of a few engaged in fishing, at Pennan. The manufacture of kelp was formerly carried on to a considerable extent, but has been greatly reduced, in consequence of the repeal of the duty upon Spanish barilla, which is now generally used in its stead. The white-fishing at Pennan, on the estate of Auchmedden, employs six boats, with four men each, who pay a rent to the proprietor of £20 sterling, and some dried fish; and several long boats annually proceed to the herring-fishing in the Moray Frith, which abounds with the best fish of almost every description, excepting salmon, very few of which are to be obtained. There are two meal-mills in the parish, the one at Aberdour, and the other at Nethermill, both built partly of granite, and partly of red sandstone. Four annual fairs are held at New Aberdour, for cattle, merchandise, and hiring servants, of which two take place at Whitsuntide and Martinmas, one in the middle of April, and the other in the middle of August; and there is also a fair called Byth Market, occurring twice in the year, in May and October, upon a moor in the south of the parish, where cattle are sold. The turnpike-road from Fraserburgh to Banff touches the parish, at the two points of Bridgend in the east, and Cowbog in the west, and is rendered available to the parishioners by an excellent junction road, constructed some years since by one of the heritors. The ecclesiastical affairs are subject to the presbytery of Deer and synod of Aberdeen; the patron is A. D. Fordyce, Esq.; the minister's stipend is above £200, with a manse, built in 1822, and a glebe of about 7 acres, valued at £14 a year. The church, which is conveniently situated at the northern extremity of the village of New Aberdour, was erected in 1818, and contains about 900 sittings. There is a parochial school, where Latin is taught, with all the ordinary branches of education, and of which the master has a salary of £32, and about £15 fees, with a house. The chief relic of antiquity is the castle of Dundargue, situated upon a lofty precipice overhanging the sea; and

at a place called Chapelden, are the ruins of a Roman Catholic chapel, on a hill opposite the Toar of Troup. Mineral springs are found in every direction, the most famed of which is one named Mess John's Well, a strong chalybeate, celebrated for its medicinal virtue; it issues from a rock about 200 yards west of the burn of Aberdour, and has a small basin, like a cup, to receive the water that drops, which basin is commonly said to have been formed by John White, laird of Ardlaw-hill, during the contest of religious parties.

From: 'Aberdour - Anderston', A Topographical Dictionary of Scotland (1846), pp. 23-45. URL: <http://www.british-history.ac.uk/report.asp?compid=43416>. Date accessed: 04 February 2007.