

THE SAGA OF PENNAN
AND ABERDOUR

The village of New Aberdour from the south, with the long line of the High Street leading to the parish church. The village was founded in 1798 by William Gordon. A tablet on the south wall of the church tells that it was built by John Dingwall of Brucklay, patron and principal inheritor of the parish and Charles Forbes of Auchmedden in 1818.

Saga of Pennan and Aberdour

IN EXACTLY 100 years the population of the parish of Aberdour, which reached 2176 in 1871, has not merely been halved but reduced to a third of its maximum size. In 1961 it stood at 840 and it would not be surprising to find that in 1971 it was under 800. Yet undoubtedly the parish is now better known and visited by larger numbers of folk than ever in the past.

This is due to its superb rock scenery, to the picturesqueness of Pennan as a uniquely handsome fisher haven in a quite unparalleled situation under its soaring cliffs of 300ft. and the attractions of the Broad Shore of Aberdour to picnickers.

The fantastic beauty of the whole area is due to the soft Old Red Sandstone rock of its high cliffs. The cliffs themselves are fretted into an almost endless sequence of caves big and little, while inland the little streams that run to the sea across the Old Red Sandstone have etched for themselves very deep winding and picturesque dens with lush vegetation, encouraged by the friable rock subsoil.

Farther inland still the land rises to well over 730 feet at Windyheads Hill, from which one sees a great panorama embracing practically the whole of Buchan. This high land in the interior has the effect of cutting off the seaward portion of the parish and making it a place apart with its own unique character.

The excavations at Dundarg have shown that a great Iron Age fort stood on the spine of the promontory. The foundations of a chapel-like building have been found, and led to the conjecture that this was indeed the Cathair of Abberdobar of Bede the Pict, mentioned in the famous Book of Deer.

The Book of Deer itself is an illuminated manuscript of St John's Gospel plus parts of the other three Gospels and a service for ministry to the sick in Latin, dating from the seventh or eighth centuries. The references to "Abberdobar" are in eleventh century notation of the Celtic monks of Deer, who used the "Book," and it tells how St Drostan landed at Aberdour and was given land by Bede the Pict.

Drostan's Well

The subsequent history of Dundarg has also been unravelled. It was at first a castle of the Comyn earls of Buchan, destroyed in the Harrying of Buchan by Bruce, then rebuilt by Henry de Beaumont, an English knight, for Edward III, who rebuilt the donjon and constructed a gatehouse. After a siege by the Regent of Scotland, Andrew de Moray, it surrendered and was again laid

of, that unique local institution the New Aberdour Juvenile Friendly Society.

The Friendly Society was founded in 1815 and presumably the Juvenile branch came into being at the same time. Originally open only to boys, girls are now welcome to join. They assemble on New Year's Day and after being invested with sashes by the Grand Master and the other officials they parade through the village led by a sword-bearer and a pipe band. Each member pays a fee of 1/1 (the decimal equivalent has not yet been fixed). The penny is deducted for incidental expenses but the shillings are saved up and presented to each member on attaining the venerable age of 18.

Housing needs

New Aberdour is a popular residential centre, even although its working population must travel to Fraserburgh for employment. Although a few new houses have been built, more could be absorbed by workers anxious to continue to live here rather than move to Fraserburgh to get a council house.

The origins of Pennan are lost in the mists of antiquity but reference is made to it as early as 1616 in the Presbytery records.

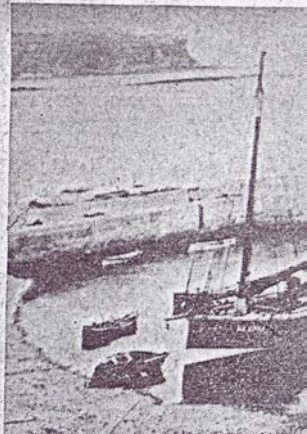
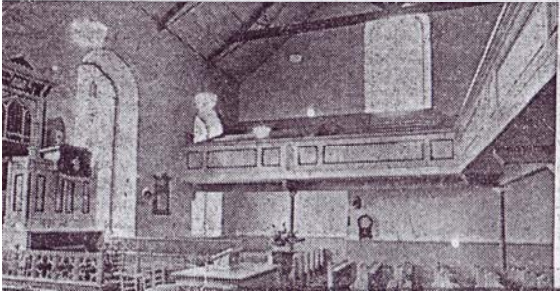
Smuggling was certainly rife in the eighteenth century, although the real smuggling centre was the famous Quayman Cave between the farms of Clinterty and Pennan at the foot of the den that divides them.

This cave has a natural dock and quay wall and, says the Rev. A. M. Adams in the Third Statistical Account, the staple which held the lamp which gave light to the smugglers landing their silks and spirits, can still be seen firmly embedded in the roof.

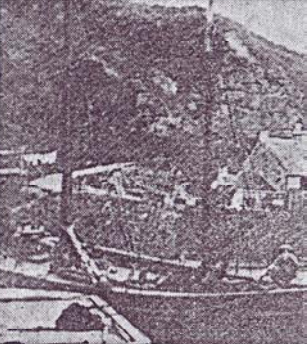
Nearby at Nethermill is the famous Piper's Cave. The legend says that a piper marched into its depths playing his pipes—and never returned, though the skirl of his pipes is forever heard in the murky depths on nights of storm.



Gavin McCallum, minister of Tyrie and Aberdour, with the splendid or of Auchmedden Church and the cliffs of Pennan behind. The Pennan ed most of the money for their own church at the end of last century.



Three Pennan herring drifters in t 1904, when the harbour had just b these drifters, the Smiling Morn B Walter West (80), be

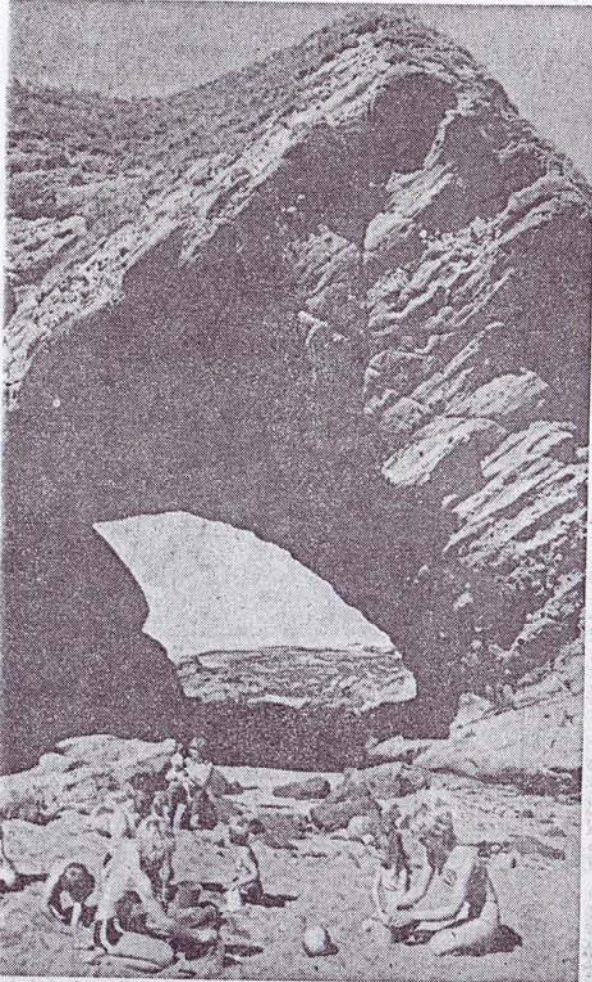


Pennan once had its own boatbuilding built there, the smack The Wat's, I taken to Canada where it





Interior of Aberdour Church, still arranged on the traditional pattern with three galleries and the pulpit in the centre of the south wall.



Families on the sands at Aberdour Bay underneath the great arch of rock which is one of the attractions close by the Broad Shore.

ing in the sixteenth century.

The well known as Drostan's Well on the Broad Shore to the west of Dundarg was re-housed in a stone fountain on the initiative of Andrew Findlater (1810-82) who was headmaster of Gordon's College in Aberdeen (1842-9) and editor of Chambers' Encyclopaedia (1861-8) and now stands as a memorial to him as well as to St Drostan.

Whether the old kirk of Aberdour was on the very site hallowed by Drostan is uncertain, but certainly it has been the site of the parish church from the middle ages down to 1818, when it was abandoned in favour of the present Aberdour Church in the village of New Aberdour.

The oldest gravestones in old kirkyard date from 1593, one a flat stone being the tombstone of Whyte of Ardlawhill and the other a mural tablet in the Baird aisle commemorating George Baird of Auchmedden, a famous mathematician who pioneered logarithms.

John Whyte of Ardlawhill, a descendant of the Whyte of 1593, gave his name to Mess John's Well which lies 400 yards west of the mouth of the Dour Burn.

At a time when neither Episcopalians nor Presbyterians were able to worship regularly in the parish kirk owing to the violent contest between them, John led the people down past the kirk to worship in the shelter of the cliff and thus earned the nickname Mess John.

Planned village

Until the end of the eighteenth century the parish centre was the Kirkton of Aberdour clustered round the old kirk. Then in 1798 William Gordon of Aberdour founded the village of New Aberdour inviting "industrious tradesmen and labourers to the place where Encouragement will be given."

This "encouragement" consisted in feu-ing out ground free of feu duty for some years. Along with each feu, he announced, "there will be a certain extent of Intown and Outfield land at a reasonable rent upon lease, commodious to the feu, which will have the advantage of a Moss in Abundance within a Mile."

The village grew slowly, but in 1840 there were already 302 inhabitants, only 25 less than there are today. Underneath the sundial on the south wall of the present church a tablet announces: "This Church was erected by John Dingwall, Esq., of Brucklay, Patron and Principal Heritor of the parish, and Charles Forbes, Esq., Proprietor of Auchmedden, MDCCCXVIII." Apart from the porch erected in 1885, the kirk has been little changed. It is large and spacious and could hold more than the entire population of the village. It still retains the three galleries of the original plan.

New Aberdour has a splendid parish hall with a tower. In recent years it was re-floored and later had a new kitchen added. In the hall are stored the sashes, flags and regalia

of the brae leading down to Pennan has a fascinating story told by Duncan Macpherson in his book "Where I Belong." It was built as a Chapel of Ease at the end of last century.

The Church of Aberdour is four miles distant by road from Pennan. In those days some of the farmers drove to church in dog-carts but most of the congregation had to walk. The elder people found it a strain, especially in bad weather. So the folk of Pennan and district raised what funds they could, got the promise of a grant and appealed to Mr Sleigh, the Auchmedden estate factor. He provided the site and guided them with regard to design.

Redemption hymns

Church and vestry with a heating chamber below were then built, the church having a great west door in finely-chiselled grey granite. The Chapel of Ease at Auchmedden had at first a missionary preacher, the Rev. Thomas Campbell. Today services are held here by Mr McCallum twice a month, in addition to the weekly services at Auchmedden and Tyrie. No churchgoers in the whole parish are so enthusiastic as the Pennan folk, who are highly musical and like all fishing folk dearly love the Redemption hymns.

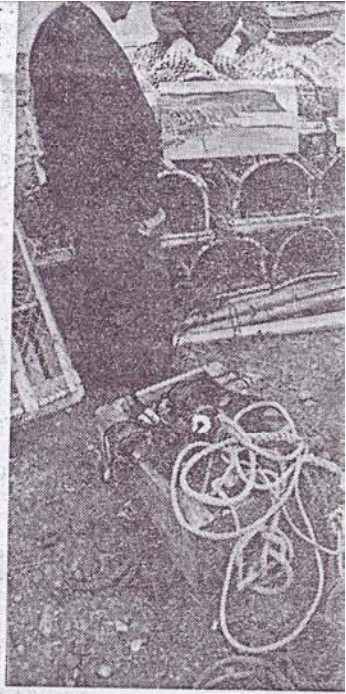
A little harbour of two small piers was first built at Pennan in 1845. This was altered and extended down the years. A virtually new harbour was built in 1904. Pennan also had a boatyard. The last vessel to be built there, a smack called The Watts, had an adventurous career. Originally a sailing smack, it was, after war service, sent to Stonehaven and equipped with a Kelvin engine. Then it crossed the Atlantic and went into service in the north of Canada.

Eventually it was wrecked in Hudson's Bay at a spot remote from any Eskimo settlement. The crew managed to survive by fishing out tins of foodstuffs from the wreck until at length they managed to contact a roving party of Eskimo trappers and return with them to civilisation.

Today Pennan's fishermen fish out of many ports remote from their home village, occasionally spending a season at home and, when the weather is favourable, fishing for lobsters.

Well within living memory there was a population of 300 in Pennan. As late as 1929 there were five boats still left fishing all the year round with small lines for haddock and plaice. Those days are past, but so well is Pennan loved that it will continue to be inhabited by devoted natives and incomers for as long as one can foresee.

Indeed the Pennan Inn and the local shops and the now white-painted old cottages, gable ends to the shore, so beautifully restored and in spotless condition, are an earnest of the zeal with which the peerless fisher haven will be cherished in times to come.



Mr Alex Downie, Pennan, shows some of the fine local scenes he has painted to friends at the harbour. Left to right are Mr Alex Gatt, Mr James Barron Forbes—returned "exile" from Detroit—Mr Joseph Watt. Mr Downie took up painting on his doctor's advice after he retired and now has a wonderful collection of works. Mr Forbes migrated to America with his wife in 1923. Now he spends from five to six months of the year in Pennan, returning to his home in Detroit in winter. On right—Moirna, Michael and Graham Duguid of Fyvie at St Drostan's Well on the Broad Shore of Aberdour.

