

DUNKELD:
Its Straths and Glens
1865

*“Then would we hear of deeds both strange and great-
Deeds that were old a thousand years ago!
How, here, proud monarchs once held regal state,
And dared the vengeance of the Roman foe;
When Romans would be gods, and longed to know
Where ruled a mightier. Here the meek Culdee,
That ancient presbyter, would humbly bow-
Ere heaven had locks to fit St. Peter’s key-
And preached the conquering cross in truth’s simplicity!”*

From “The Tay” by D. Miller.

HISTORICAL

Dunkeld is situated in the county of Perth, and lies fifteen miles to the north of that town, at an elevation of 130 feet above sea level. It is bounded on the east, west and north by hills and on the south by the river Tay with Birnam Hill in the foreground.

With the exception of the Cathedral and a small part of the town, the ground lies within the parish of Carpath. The boundaries of Dunkeld as a parish are not only limited but not easily defined. As Dunkeld was the Bishop’s see, and the services of the Cathedral were performed by his chaplain or some of the beneficed clergy of the diocese, it was not thought necessary to constitute it into a regular parish, and it remains so till the present time.

At one time, Dunkeld appears to have covered with water. The surface of the ground and the rocks present very singular forms which can only be attributed to the action of water. Shells have also been found in the neighbouring hills.

Dunkeld derives its name from three ancient British words, *Dun Kaled in*, signifying “the stronghold of the rough, mountainous country, or Caledonia;” or, according to another authority, from *Dun Chuildich* signifying “the stronghold of the Culdees.” Mr. McLauchlan in his work on the “Early Scottish Church.” Says:- “The town of Dunkeld, said to have been once the capital of ancient Caledonia, is called, in the language of the native Highlander ‘Dunchailen,’ pronounced precisely as a Briton would pronounce his Din ‘Chelyddon.’ ‘the city of the forests.’ ” In the heart of ancient Caledonia stands the celebrated mountain, Schiehallion the ‘hallion,’ pronounced as the ‘challein’ in Dunkeld. Whatever the words are, they are identical in the language of the native; and if ‘celyddon’ be their origin, the one becomes the city, and the other the mountain of the *forests*, or of Caledonia.” Dunkeld was also the abode of royalty in the time of the Picts.

The Caledonians had a stronghold in the neighbourhood of Dunkeld, situated, it is believed, upon a wooded knoll called the King’s Seat at the entrance to the vale of

Athole, and commanding the passes leading thereto. This stronghold was called in Gaelic "Dun-ghael-dhuin Castle." The Southerners called it "Dun-calidon." This castle appears to have been an important feature in the country, for Hollingshed, in speaking of the battle of Monteith, between the Scots and the Picts adds that the field of engagement, although near the county of Stirling, was not far from Calidon Castle, otherwise called Dunkeld. On the summit of the King's Seat are still to be traced the outworks of an ancient fort, most probably that of the Castle of Calidon.

In AD 138, the Romans approached near to Dunkeld, but from its many passes and dangerous defiles, they never successfully invaded it. They had an important camp at Inchtithel, near Spittafield, and another at Gillyburn, both within six miles of Dunkeld. The remains of these camps are still to be seen.

About AD 570, Dunkeld became the abode of the Culdees, or Columbans, a religious body of men, by whose labours the character of the inhabitants of the northern districts of Scotland was materially improved. Conal, king of the Scots, built a monastery for them near to the Castle of Calidon, where Saint Columba resided for some time, teaching and preaching to the people of the district, who came in great numbers to hear his "godlike instructions." It was first presided over by St. Adamanus, a disciple of St. Columba, and afterwards by a succession of Abbots. This monastery was constructed of wattles, the only material then used in the country. In AD 729 it was rebuilt of stone. Mr. McLauchan says that Abernethy was long a famous seat of the Culdees, and that it only gave place latterly to the more prominent and more famous institutions at Dunkeld and St. Andrews.

In AD 834, Brudus, king of the Picts, mustered a large army at Nether Calidon, passed over the Tay, and marched into the Castle of Calidon, or Dunkeld, previous to engaging Alpinus, king of the Scots at Angus. From this and the various attempts of the Danes to plunder Dunkeld show that at this time it was a place of the greatest importance.

About AD 845, the Danes under their celebrated sea-king, Regner Lodbrog, on their advances to plunder Dunkeld, were successfully engaged and defeated between Clunie and Dunkeld, by Kenneth Mac Alpine who united the Scots and Picts into one kingdom. About AD 905 the Danes advanced a second time when they plundered the town. In the reign of Kenneth III., they meditated a third attack, but were met at Luncarty, where Kenneth fought and routed them. The Scots were at first forced to retreat, but were rallied by a peasant of the name of Hay and his two sons who were ploughing in the neighbourhood. By the aid of these courageous peasants, who were armed only with the yoke, the Scots obtained a complete victory. In commemoration of this circumstance, the crest of the Hays has for many centuries been a peasant carrying a yoke over his shoulder.

For ages subsequent to AD 848, according to Hollingshead, the religious establishment of Dunkeld was the primacy of Scotland, until it was supplanted by St. Andrews. Mr. McLauchlan, in his book already referred to, does not admit that the primacy was ever held by Dunkeld. He says: - "When Dunkeld was founded there is nothing in the notice we have of the event to signify that there was any primacy intended. 'He built Dunkeld.'

is all the annalist relates of this good work of Constantine Mac Fergus. In AD 843, or twenty years later, Kenneth Mac Alpine is said to have brought a portion of the relics of Columba to Dunkeld. From this, most likely, was derived the idea of primacy.”

In AD 848, Kenneth Mac Alpine built a church at Dunkeld, to the memory of St. Columba, who died in AD 597, wherein he deposited the relics of the saint, which had become unsafe at Iona, from the rapacity of the Danes. By this act of Kenneth, St. Columba became patron saint of Dunkeld and its church. Dunkeld thus became the head of the Columban establishments in Scotland, and for a long series of years even Iona was held to belong to the diocese of Dunkeld. The relics, it is believed, were carried away, with all the ancient records, at the Reformation, by the Romish clergy.

In AD 1027 Dunkeld was altogether destroyed by fire, but whether from accident or the work of an enemy, it is not clearly indicated. At this time Crinan was Abbott of Dunkeld. This Crinan was head of the Athole family, this including in his own person both the civil and ecclesiastical authority of the Athole district.

In AD 1127, the Monastery was changed into a Cathedral church, by St. David. King of Scots, who expelled the Culdees and placed Gregory, who had been Abbott of the monastery, to be bishop of the new see. The bishop obtained from Pope Alexander III an apostolical protection and confirmation, both for himself and the new see.

The revenue of the bishops of Dunkeld was very considerable. They had palaces in Edinburgh, Perth, Clunie and Dunkeld; while their diocese extended over great parts of the counties of Perth and Forfar; and detached parts were in East, West, and Midlothian, Fife, Clackmannan, Stirling, Argyle and Berwickshire. The castle in the Loch of Clunie, built by Bishop Brown, is still entire and in a good state of preservation.

Dunkeld was visited by William the Lion, for deer hunting. He took his station on the King’s Seat, and from which it derived its present name.

In AD 1318, Bishop Sinclair built the choir of the Cathedral on the site of part of the monastery. Part of the original building of the monastery can still be traced in the eastern gable of the Cathedral. It is of reddish coloured stone.

In 1406 Bishop Cardney founded the nave of the Cathedral, and raised it as far as the second row of arches.

Bishop Ralston, who assumed the mitre in 1448, finished the nave, and began the aisles of the Cathedral. The Bishop had the work so much at heart that he had one or two people of high rank, who lived with him, had a custom of carrying several burdens of stones every day out of the quarry at Gillyburn. The horses of all the bishop’s visitors were employed for the same purpose. The stones were all of small size, and had to be carried on horseback by means of curcachs, there being neither roads nor carts at that time.

In 1460, Bishop Lauder finished the Cathedral. He built the porch of the south gate and adorned it with several fine images. In 1464, he dedicated the Cathedral to its old patron, St. Columba.

The palace of the bishop stood a little to the south-west of the Cathedral. It consisted of several long houses of two stories, thatched after the manner of the times. For greater security a Castle was erected, in 1408 by Bishop Cardney. This appears to have been absolutely necessary, for, according to Dean Mill, we learn that neither the sacred office of bishop, nor the sanctity of the church, deterred the clans from attacking the prelate in his palace or within the walls of the Cathedral. In the year previous to the erection of the castle, we find that this Bishop had to fly from his palace, from a band of marauders who sought to murder him. Although no vestige of this castle remains, its site is still called "the Castle Close."

In 1420, Bishop Cardney built and dedicated a chapel to St. Ninian. It stood upon the ground on which Athole Street is built. The bishop bought the lands of Mucklarie, and out of the rents he endowed the chaplain. By virtue of a grant, the dues payable to the chaplain have now been conferred on the rector of the Royal School of Dunkeld. The chaplain of St. Ninians collected the bishop's rents, and the party that now collects these is still called the "Chaplain of St. Ninians."

There was another chapel not far from St. Ninians, built on the eminence east of the town, near the Hillhead. It was dedicated to St. Jerome, and was principally intended for the inhabitants of Fungarth. From the name of the saint, the people of Fungarth are called to this day *Jorums*. The ruin of the chapel can still be traced.

In 1469, Bishop Lauder built the Chapter house and the Tower. The Tower is about 99 feet high and was, it is said, at one time mounted with small cannon. It was occupied in 1689 by the Cameronians in the defence of the town.

In 1477, the diocesan synod was held at Dunkeld for the first time, the clergy hitherto having been compelled, by the terror of the Highland Caterans, to meet in the church of the friars of Mount Carmel at Tullielum, under the walls of Perth. But a few years before, an Athole chief burst into the Cathedral on the solemn festival of Pentecost, and the bishop, who was celebrating high mass, only escaped the swords and arrows of Clan Donachie (Robertson) by clambering to the rafters of the choir. "This minister was the scene of violence to the last. When the most illustrious of its prelates, Gavin Douglas, he who

*'In a barbarous age,
Gave to rude Scotland Virgil's page,'*

Came to take possession of his throne in 1516, he was opposed by Andrew Stewart, postulate bishop, but whose appointment Pope Leo X rejected; and although Douglas was accompanied by the armed power of his mighty house from Fife and Angus, he had to be content to be installed in his bishopric in the house of the dean, and that amid a shower of shot from the tower and bishop's palace." These and the Cathedral were in the armed

possession of Stewart. The latter by threat of excommunication, and partly by force and stratagem, was obliged to yield and left Douglas in the peaceful possession of his see, thanks to the intercession of St. Columba, says the Chronicle, without loss of life or limb.

In 1510 Bishop Brown erected St. George's Hospital for the support of seven old men, called "bedmen". In 1689 the hospital was burned. Small cottages were then built, but substantial buildings were afterwards erected on their site. Part of the buildings was sold, and the rents from the remainder are still laid out in meal, which is equally divided among the bedmen. The greater part of the revenue of this hospital was seized about 1825 by the minister of a neighbouring parish, as tiends to augment his stipend,- the Commissary of Dunkeld, guardian of the hospital, being unable to produce the original charter. Bishop Brown divided his diocese into four deaneries-one for Athole and Breadalbane, another for Angus, the third for Fife, and the fourth for the Church lands south of the Forth. He appointed Gaelic preachers for the Highlanders. He erected the parishes of Caputh and Dowally, which formerly were part of Little Dunkeld, and erected churches in these places.

In the early part of the sixteenth century, Dunkeld was visited by James V., and the Queen Mother, on their way to Blair Athole, to enjoy the pleasures of the chase, where the Earl of Athole made great preparations for their reception. In 1563 Queen Mary of Scots passed through Dunkeld for the same locality, and for the same pastime. For the entertainment of this Queen, the Earl of Athole employed 2000 Highlanders to collect the deer of the central Highlands. They succeeded in collecting upwards of 2000. The Queen's hounds were let loose, and after a successful chase, three hundred and sixty deer were killed, five wolves and some roes.

In 1560 the Cathedral and Choir were destroyed by an order of the Privy Council of Scotland; and thus the building which had long witnessed the devotions and responded to the praises of our forefathers, when

*"Through its long drawn aisle and fretted vault,
The pealing anthem swelled their note of praise."*

Was left a roofless ruin, which now only re-echoes the cawing of the jackdaw. After that time, the area of the Cathedral, once the highly prized cemetery of the titled and the great, with a small bit of ground in front, became the last resting place of the inhabitants of Dunkeld. Their place of internment previous to 1560, was the ground between the Cathedral and the river, and now occupied by the cottage and a flower garden.

At the Reformation, the revenue of the Church of Dunkeld was £1600, but the benefice afterwards became so poor, that the king in 1685, had to make a gift of £100 to the incumbent.

In 1567, King James VI made a grant for the erection of a Grammar School at Dunkeld, and which is designated in the Charter "The Royal School of Dunkeld." On the front of the present School-house are to be seen the arms of the Douglases, being the only memorial here of Bishop Gavin Douglas's connection with Dunkeld. This stone was

found among some rubbish, and placed in its present position by the good taste of Dr. Niven, a former minister.

In 1571, the see of Dunkeld was declared to be void, through the process of forfeiture led against Robert Crichton, sometime bishop thereof, being the last Roman Catholic Bishop of Dunkeld.

By the Acts of Assembly, 1586 and 1593, Dunkeld was appointed as the seat of Presbyterial meetings.

In 1647, Sir James Galloway, Master of Bequests, was created Lord Dunkeld. This title became extinct in 1700.

In 1689, the Jacobite troops, after the battle of Killiecrankie, marched down and attacked the town of Dunkeld. It was garrisoned by Cameronians, now the 26th regiment, then a body of raw recruits. On the morning of the 21st of August, all the hills round Dunkeld were alive with bonnets and plaids. The army, now under General Cannon was much larger than that which Viscount Dundee (Claverhouse) commanded. More than a thousand horses laden with baggage accompanied his march. Both the horses and baggage were probably part of the booty of Killiecrankie. The whole number of Highlanders was estimated at from four to five thousand men. They came furiously on. The outposts of the Cameronians were speedily driven in. The assailants came pouring on every side into the streets. The church, however, held out obstinately. The greater part of the Cameronians took their stand behind a wall which surrounded a house belonging to the Marquis of Athole. Meanwhile, all the neighbouring houses were crowded from bottom to top by the Highlanders, who kept up a galling fire from the windows. A party of the Cameronians sallied forth and set fire to these houses, turned the keys in the doors, and in which a good many men perished. It was a terrible sight. Half the town was a blaze; while with the incessant roar of the guns was mingled the piercing shrieks of the wretches perishing in the flames. The struggle lasted for four hours. Soon after this the Highlanders began to fall back; disorder visibly spread among them; and whole bands began to march off to the hills. It was in vain that the General ordered them to return to the attack. In a short time the whole Highland army was in full retreat to Blair Athole. The town, with the exception of the Cathedral and three houses was burned to ashes. The inhabitants found shelter in the Church. After the clans retired, the seats of the church were taken out to repair the defences, in case of a second attack. The loss on the side of the Cameronians was severe. They lost several officers, among whom were their commanding officer, Lieutenant-Colonel Cleland, and their Major.

This action at Dunkeld finished the war in Britain. On the 24th. of August, exactly four weeks after the battle of Killiecrankie had been won by the Gaelic army, that army ceased to exist. All the fruits of that victory were gathered by the vanquished. The Castle of Blair, which had been the immediate cause of the contest, opened its gates to the army of King William, under General Mackay.

About 1691, the Athole family repaired the choir for worship at their own private expense. In 1762 Government contributed £300 towards a first repair; and in 1815 £1000 towards a second repair, to which the Duke of Athole added £5000, and restored the choir, with some slight variations, to its original state.

It is traditionally reported that Queen Anne, who raised the Marquis of Athole to ducal dignity in 1703, visited Blair Castle, and subsequently Dunkeld House. A state room in Blair Castle is still shewn as Queen Anne's bedchamber. This visit, however, must have been previous to her ascending the throne, for we cannot find that as *Queen Anne* she ever visited Scotland at all.

During the reign of Charles II, an offer was made to erect the city of Dunkeld into a royal burgh, but the offer was declined. It was afterwards renewed by Queen Anne, in 1704, and then accepted. The charter confirmed on the town the right of having "three bailies, a dean of guild, a treasurer, and ten common council-men;" and fully empowering it "to have freemen, merchants, guild brothers, municipal courts, or dean of guild, with the council and other members, liberties, and emoluments thereto belonging, as also burgess-brothers of the fraternity or guildry, and to be appointed and created with such liberties and privileges as belongs to them, or are usual within any other burgh-royal within the kingdom; with the full power and liberty to use, trafique, and merchandise, as well within the said kingdom as without it, in foreign countries, and of exporting and importing all lawful effects and commodities whatsoever." This charter, although prepared and ready for the royal signature, was never carried into effect-the inhabitants it is said, having refused to pay the necessary expenses. It was dated 17th April, and sealed 20th September, 1704. The town continues to be a burgh-in-barony under the Duke of Athole; the jurisdiction of which is conducted by ordinary baron-bailie, who is appointed during the pleasure of the superior. He holds no regular courts, and only trifling cases are settled by him.

In 1745, the Marquis of Tullibardine on his way from the north with the Highland clans, entertained Prince Charles at Blair Castle and Dunkeld House, having taken possession of the ducal residences of the Athole family; and which, but for his loyalty to the house of Stuart, were his own inheritance. On arriving at Blair Castle, Lord Nairn and Lochiel were sent forward to proclaim the Prince at Dunkeld. This they did at the Old Cross. On passing through Dunkeld, the Prince was joined by a considerable number of followers, not only from the town and neighbouring country, but from Strathardle. A few of these, after the dispersion at the battle of Culloden, returned to *skulk* in the fastness of their native mountains. Some died the soldier's death in the heat of battle. Others, after years of expatriation in the Plantations and elsewhere, returned to find themselves alone and desolate in the country of their birth; while many left their bones in the land of the stranger, far from the graves of their forefathers, and of the hills which they loved so well. Thus their attachment and loyalty to the Stuarts entailed upon them fearful sufferings. This attachment did not cease when misfortune drove Prince Charles from the country, but it long lingered in the breast of the Highlanders; and that even till after he and his brother had ceased to exist, leaving no other claimant to the hereditary rights.

In 1746, the Duke of Cumberland made Dunkeld and Blair Athole his advanced posts. On the departure of his troops, these stations were occupied by Hessians, but being ignorant of the country, and of the Highland mode of warfare, they were daily harassed by the Athole men. Many well fought skirmishes took place between them near Dunkeld.

In 1805, the building of Dunkeld Bridge was commenced. It was opened in 1808. For ages previous to that time there was no communication but by ferry-boats. It is a singularly elegant structure, on which no expense has been spared to unite taste and magnificence with convenience. This place and the country in general are indebted for it principally to the spirit and liberality of John, fourth duke of Athole. The total expense was considerable, but towards which the Government advanced £5000. The tolls granted for the remainder yield but a small interest on the sums advanced by the Athole family. The length of the bridge is 685 feet, its breadth 27, and its greatest height from the foundation, 54. There are five principal and two land arches; the span of the central one being 90 feet, and the others, in succession, 85, 75, and 26.

The city of Dunkeld previous to 1690 formed but one street, stretching from the Cathedral to the top of the hill eastward. After the erection of the bridge, the town completely changed its ancient form and appearance. The great north road was made to intersect the town, and a new street of handsome buildings was formed, at either end of which are placed two large and elegant hotels-the "Athole Arms" facing the river, while the "Royal" is at the further end. This new street is built in line with the bridge. The town is now all situated to the east of the Cathedral but in olden times a great part of it was to the westward.

In 1822, the Dunkeld Highland Gathering was established, principally through the exertions of the late General David Stewart of Garth, and Dr. Stewart of Bonskeid, for the preserving of the music, the games and the garb of the ancient Gael. It also combines the advantages of a friendly society. The Gathering was formerly held on the 24th June, being the anniversary of the battle of Bannockburn; but it having been found to be too early in the season, it is now held on the last Wednesday of July. It is under the patronage of his Grace the Duke of Athole. The number of spectators that attend the Gathering is very great. Since the opening of the Dunkeld Railway in 1856, the number has ranged from three to five thousand.

On the 7th September, 1842, Queen Victoria and Prince Albert visited the late Duke of Athole, then Lord Glenlyon, at Dunkeld, being the first occasion, since the visit of the unfortunate Mary, that a sovereign of Scotland, or of the United Kingdom, was entertained in the Highlands. The Queen was received at the boundary of the Dunkeld property by a guard of Athole-men, and conducted to the marquee on the lawn at Dunkeld House, where eight hundred Athole Highlanders were there to do honour to her visit. The royal party sat down to a princely *dejeuner*. "Athole brose" was served to the Queen in Neil Gow's glass, which is preserved in the family. It holds nearly a quart; its form is ancient, and it has the initials 'N.G.' cut on the side. After lunch her Majesty desired to see the sword dance, a Highland reel, and Hoolachan, which was compiled with in the right Scotch style. Her Majesty expressed herself highly gratified with her

reception. The royal party then entered their carriages, and proceeded on their way to Taymouth, amid the roar of cannon, the pealing of bells, and the acclamations of the thousands who had poured into Dunkeld to welcome their beloved sovereign to her Highland straths and glens.

On the 11th September, 1844, Queen Victoria again entered Dunkeld, on her way to Blair Castle. On this occasion the royal party partook of some refreshment in the Athole Arms Hotel, being, we believe, the first instance in which her Majesty had occasion to enter a place of public entertainment. After remaining several weeks at Blair Athole, the royal party again passed through Dunkeld, on their way home.

On the 23rd December, 1851, the town was lighted with gas for the first time. This undertaking cost about £1000.

In 1853, the Duchess of Athole built and established an Industrial School at Dunkeld, for the education of girls. It is an elegant structure at the market-place, and, besides the schoolrooms, contains accommodation for the teacher. The fees are merely nominal.

On 7th April 1856, the Dunkeld Railway was opened for traffic. Previous to that time the passenger communication with the south was kept up by a number of stage coaches. Since the opening of the line, a considerable number more excursionists have visited our city; but a good many of these are from among the working classes. On some excursion days as many as four or five thousand have entered the town, but latterly these excursion trains have very much fallen off.

In 1863, the line of railway (Inverness and Perth Junction) was opened under the presidentship of George Carphin, Esq.

In the present day, Dunkeld is not of so much importance as it was in times gone by. Formerly it supplied many of the necessaries and luxuries of life, not only to the neighbouring country, but to Strath-tay, Athole, Rannoch, and Badenoch; but who, in consequence of the opening of the roads, and the improvement of the villages, now supply themselves at home. From an old record, we find that in 1729, there were in Dunkeld

35 Victuallers, nearly the whole of whom were brewers.
3 Distillers.
4 Maltsters.
10 Tanners, all of whom were shoemakers.
3 Tawers, or dressers of alum skin (also glovers)
1 Chamois or oil skin dresser (also glover)
2 Candlemakers

At present there are only four licensed houses, and none of all the other licensed trades. At no distant day, it had no less than eight annual fairs, viz., Candlemas, Fasten's Eve, Lady-day (or Annunciation of the Virgin Mary), St. Colme's, Martinmas, Lady-day (or

the Conception), Christmas Eve and New Year's Eve. Of these, only Lady-day the Annunciation and Martinmas retain their former importance. Candlemas and St. Colme's are a mere shadow of their former selves, while all the rest have been entirely forgotten. Another deduction from the dignity of our ancient city was the merging of the office of commissary with that of the sheriff. Previous to this, the Commissary Court sat regularly at Dunkeld, and added not a little to its importance. Dunkeld, however, from having formerly been the seat of a bishop, still considers itself entitled to be called a *city*.

The extension of the railway to the north has also considerably affected the trade of Dunkeld. It then ceased to be the terminus of the railway, and has consequently lost a great part of its Highland trade. From there being no public works and little trade, the population of the town has been going down for a number of years, having been in

1831,- - - 1471
1841,- - - 1094
1851,- - - 1104
1861,- - - 929

From its natural beauties, its position as the centre of many interesting and picturesque tours, and from the facilities of approaching it from both the north and the south, Dunkeld will, no doubt, still keep its position as a place of resort for tourists and summer visitors.

Acknowledgement: This information was sourced from the 1865 publication: 'Dunkeld: Its Straths and Glens' published by A. M'Lean and Son.