

Dalserf, Stonehouse and Lesmahagow

Dalserf

Dalserf is both village and parish. The current village has a population of about 55 but the wider parish covers the areas of Larkhall, Rosebank and Netherburn. The Rynn family who are tied into the O'Hara's were of this area.

Most of the information of the parish centres around Larkhall (see other link on Places page). Dalserf is a Gaelic name derived from Dal = field and Serf, a saint who lived in the area.

The village kirk, built in 1655, is dedicated to Saint Serf, and may be built on the site of an early church founded by him. The church dates from The Killing Time, when the rebel Covenanters were persecuted for their faith, and was a centre of Covenanter activity. John McMillan, reformist preacher and first minister of the Reformed Presbyterian Church, is buried in the kirkyard.



Dalserf Kirk

In the late Middle Ages, what is now the village of Dalserf and its surrounding farms was a part of the much larger Cadzow Estate. In around 1300, King Robert the Bruce granted the Cadzow Estate to Sir Walter de Hamilton (Walter Fitzgilbert). Through the centuries, a great deal of the Cadzow Estate passed through one line of the Hamilton family to the Dukes of Hamilton. But various parts of the estate were granted to many other members of the Hamilton family as well. In around 1400, when Sir John de Hamilton was Lord of Cadzow, his eldest son, Sir James, had a charter to Dalserf and the outlying areas. We do not know the reason but, with the King's permission, Sir James conveyed those particular lands to his younger brother Sir David, the second son. Thus separated from the Cadzow Estate, the newly created Dalserf Estate descended through successive generations of Sir David's branch of the Hamilton family. At times the land descended through the female line, with the occasional addition of extra Hamilton blood from other branches of the family.

In the early 1700s, the Hamiltons of Dalserf built a grand manor house on Dalserf Estate. The new family seat, called Dalserf House, stood on the banks of the River Clyde. It was within easy walking distance of Dalserf village, which was built in the 1650s or earlier, and Dalserf Parish Church. Beginning around 1828, the laird of Dalserf was James Campbell Hamilton, the youngest son of

Elizabeth and Robert Campbell Hamilton. Born in 1807, his mother died less than four months later, in 1808, and he inherited the estate when he came of age. When he was forty-four, James Campbell Hamilton married Mary Rorison. They had five children together, all of whom were baptised by their uncle the Reverend William Peebles Rorison. During his lifetime, the laird rose to the rank of commander in the Royal Navy. When he died at Dalserf House, in 1869, his third child and only son, also named James Campbell Hamilton, inherited the estate.

Diary of a Laird's Son, 1904

James Campbell's diary of 1904 gives a fascinating insight into the lives of the landed gentry at the turn of the twentieth century. Perhaps the most interesting page from our point of view must be 1 January:

Friday 1

Lovely day, not quite so cold. Heard from G[race Cawthra]. P & M [pater/father; mater/mother] went and called at Carfin and Milton Lockhart. Off in Shaw's trap to Corehouse. [All were local family houses.] Got there 4.30. All there, also Miss Smith Cunninghame and Mr & Mrs Gower. Played a violent game called Puff Billiards before dinner. After dinner we had a sort of impromptu dance in the Hall. Had reels, lancers &c. I got a severe blow on the beak from George's elbow which was most painful. Mrs Cranstone looking almost well again.

Saturday 2

Frost again. It got cloudy from 11 to 1 but cleared up and was a lovely evening. Tried curling in the lake in the morning but did not learn much. Left at 2.30. Found Kate Hozier just leaving Dalserf and so walked as far as the bridge at Mauldslie.

Sunday 3

Thaw. Dull windy day. Drove to Church at Hamilton in the Brougham [carriage]. Walked around Clyde with the dog in the afternoon. Wrote to G[race].

In the diary there are many references to the use of horse-drawn transport, including an alarming episode related to James by Katie Hozier, daughter of Lord and Lady Newlands. Apparently, the carriage team ran away with the family on board. Although no one was hurt, he reports that at least one of the more delicate members of the Hozier family, **Mrs O'Hara**, was still in shock two days later.

Stonehouse

Stonehouse is a parish, in the Middle ward of the county of Lanark; 7 miles (S. S. E.) from Hamilton. This place is said to have derived its name from the residence of the principal proprietor, a mansion of stone and lime, situated near the site of the present village, and which, being at that time a kind of building of rare occurrence in this part of the country, was considered of sufficient interest to give name to the parish. The parish is bounded on the east by the Cander stream, on the west and on the north by the river Avon, and on the south by the Kype. The church, a handsome modern structure, surmounted by a well-proportioned spire, is situated in the centre of the village, and is adapted for a congregation of 900 persons. There are places of worship for members of the Free Church, and a congregation of the United Secession.



Stonehouse prospered and developed as a weaving community during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, latterly in the manufacturing of silk garments. Working closely with Strathaven the Stonehouse weavers produced silk scarfs, handkerchiefs and assorted garments for export to Indian, as well as the home market.

When weaving was at its peak in the early nineteenth century, the weavers were prosperous enough to own their own property. Streets of privately owned cottages were built such as those of Hill Road, Cannethan Street and Queen Street. These Streets form part of the conservation area and still retain the character and beauty of their former existence as working homes.



In 1841 there was talk of decline, despite the fact that there were 400 weavers working in Stonehouse rising to 500 in 1891. With the introduction of the power loom, hand loom weavers were unable to compete. However Stonehouse weavers were able to adapt better than others, specialising in fine silks, woven on the intricate patterns of the Jacquard loom. As work became scarce towards the end of the nineteenth century the weavers sought employment in agriculture or in the mines to supplement their income.

The two last weavers in Lanarkshire were the Hamilton brothers, Robert and James, of Camnethan Street. James died at the age of 84 in 1959 and completed his last “wab” in 1939. The silk loom belonging to the Hamilton Brothers now rests in the Royal Scottish Museum, Edinburgh

Lesmahagow

There is great dispute over the definite meaning of Lesmahagow's name but it is certainly derived from its patron saint St Machutus, a sixth century Welsh monk.

The area grew with the founding of a priory in 1144 and its monks were responsible for planting fruit trees in the Clyde Valley. Although the priory was destroyed in the Reformation there are remains near the present parish church which was built in 1803 which are worth exploring.

As was common in the area in the 17th century, the inhabitants of Lesmahagow and its environs were fervent Covenanters. Many were imprisoned for their beliefs. The Covenanter David Steele fought at Bothwell Bridge but was later hunted down and shot in front of his wife and child. He was buried in Lesmahagow churchyard where his gravestone can still be read and a small memorial was erected in Skellyhill where he fell.

Lesmahagow was always a busy coaching stop on the main road south but it really came into its own with the arrival of the railway and the discovery of coal seams.

The latter information sits well with the O'Hara family and their history of coal mining throughout the South Lanarkshire area.

