

“HATS ARE MADE HERE”

JOHN FELTHAM IN BALLAUGH

(1797) *



BALLAUGH

[187] Is bounded by the sea, Jurby, Lezayre, and Kirk-Michael, and a small portion of Braddan. There are two principal streams in this parish, one of which is crossed by a bridge of one arch at the village of Ballaugh.

It has a public brewery, and several hat manufactories, but these are not made of any degree of fineness. It furnishes from fifteen to twenty herring boats, and has a creek called Ballakeage.

Marle being scarce, lime for manure is made from the pebbles on the shore. It has two corn mills. Flax is grown in small quantities; and I observe here and in Jurby, rye, and that sort of barley called Bear.

Its population has increased above 200 in number, from the return made in 1726 to the last in 1792, which then was 1,015 souls.

[188] These accounts are made up with regularity and exactness—in general, though Governor Shaw conceives that, from some superstitious motive, the people do not like to give in the whole amount of their families. The returns run in this style: “To his Excellency Governor in Chief, Capt.-General, Chancellor and Guardian of the Spiritualities of and within the said Isle, &c.”

Ballaugh is a rectory, and there is only one other, viz. Bride. The glebe is extensive. Nearly 500*l.* has been laid out in the purchase of land for the poor. The mountains of Slieu-volley, part of Slieu curn, Crongan, and Slieudoo, are in this parish.

For a rural retired scene, the Gill, and Carmiddle estate, may be explored; the little spot of Carlene mill, with its winding rivulet and circular recess, was shewn me by the agreeable Mrs L—ll—n, and the lively Miss G—. Thus accompanied, “meditation here might think down hours to moments.”

The church dedicated to St Mary is seventy-nine feet long, and nineteen broad, covered, as most are, with slate, of which there is plenty on the island. A stone pillar in the shape of a cross, with a cross cut thereon in relief, is without the churchyard on a mount.

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In 1717 Bishop Wilson laid the foundation of an additional twenty-one feet to the church. Dr Walker, the [189] then rector, and the Bishop, engaging to finish it; the parish subscribed 12*l.* towards it. The steeple, which is the most ornamental of any, they were at the sole expense of. The Bishop gave 5*l.* towards the petty school and house for the master. The inscription on Dr Walker's tomb in the chancel is worn out. The desk and pulpit were the gift of the Rev. Mr Wilks and the Bishop, in 1772. The side galleries were the benefaction of Mrs Esther Hyldesley, the bishop's sister.

The register begins in 1598; the former rectors were the Rev. Mr Logie, Dr Walker, and Mr Brideson, who was twenty one years rector, died in 1700, aged 78, and was buried in the chancel; Rev. P. Moore, inducted July 1751. M. Curghey, 1771. Rev. James Wilks, who was succeeded in 1777 by the present rector, the Rev. D. Gelling.

The rectory is pleasantly situated near the church, and was built in Dr Walker's time, as appears by an inscription over the door.

In the churchyard are tombs to the memory of the Rev. James Wilks, rector of this parish, who was buried June 1, 1777, aged 58. To the Rev. Matthias Curghey, vicar-general, and rector of this parish, "An humble, meek, pacific man; a sound divine, learned and exemplary; with the Rev. P. Moore, associate reviser of the Manks scriptures, translated by the clergy of this isle, a great, arduous, and original work." Daniel Mylrea, Esq., deemster, Feb. 20, 1770, aged 58. There is also a flat stone to the memory of Thomas Corlett, mariner, son of Wm Corlett, and Ellin Cry, who died in Jamaica, and left the interest of 300*l.* to the poor of this parish for ever.

Other inscriptions denote the burial of nine persons between 72 and 80; and three persons between 82 and 89 years of age.

[190] Whilst contemplating in the churchyard, the following sentiments of the pious Harvey occupied my mind.

"Among these confused relics of humanity, there are, without doubt, persons of contrary interests and contradictory sentiments. But death has laid his hand on the contending parties, and brought all their differences to an amicable conclusion. Her enemies, sworn enemies, dwell together in unity. They drop every embittered thought, and forget that they once were foes. Perhaps those who, while they lived, stood in irreconcilable variance, here fall into mutual embraces, and even incorporate with each other in the grave. O! that we may learn from these-friendly ashes, not to perpetuate the memory of injuries; not to foment the fever of resentment; nor cherish the turbulence of passion. That there may be as little animosity in the land of the living as there is in the congregation of the dead!"

I was aroused from these reflections by the appearance of the worthy rector and his amiable daughter, who kindly invited me to partake of an elegant repast prepared to celebrate the nuptials of Miss K.B. — and Mr P— of Whitehaven, whose happiness I have since witnessed in England—to employ the language of a friend

"O ever blest and happy pair

Amidst an infant beauteous race;

Long may you live devoid of care,
And every virtue in them trace.”

Here I met with my earliest Manks friend, Mr J. Gelling, with whom, and Mr Haskins, I had made, in 1796, a tour on foot from London to Richmond, Windsor, Oxford, Blenheim, and Stowe.

[191] The parochial school has upwards of one hundred scholars. There is a respectable inn in this parish, on the great road between Kirk-Michael and Ramsey: Ballaugh is eight miles from Ramsey, two from Jurby, and two from Bishop’s-court.

Hats are made here, the wool being admirably adapted for that purpose. Some thousands of rabbit-skins used to be exported annually.

I have stated the population of this parish in page 69; at a general muster of the whole island in 1667, there appeared to be only 2,531 men.

In so small a district as this island, divided into so many parishes, it can hardly be expected that each division should take a different or a very peculiar cast, as to soil and general produce; wherefore observation once made, need not be particularly repeated. On the south side of the island there is some good pasture land, but not to be compared with the quantity and quality of that to be met with in the very extensive range of grass grounds in Ballaugh, Jurby, Kirk-Bride, Andreas, and Lezayre, on the north side.

In strolling over the fields I found the common liquorice root of some flavour.

Pensively wandering on its sandy beach, my eyes were directed towards Ireland, by the sinking of the golden sun in the western waves; the horizon was most delightfully illuminated its splendid rays rather solicited than repelled the tender organs of vision, and harmonized with all nature around me.

“If, however, (says Mr Gilpin), the admirer of nature can turn his amusements to a higher purpose; if its great scenes can inspire him with religious awe; or its tranquil scenes with that complacency of mind which is so nearly allied to benevolence, it is so much the better.”

Taken from John Feltham, *A Tour through the Isle of Mann, in 1797 and 1798* (Bath: 1798).

STEPHEN MILLER, 2016

