

## ST MARY'S CHURCH, ABERFOYLE

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The name Aberfoyle is derived from the two Gaelic words *Aber* which means confluence or the uniting of two rivers and *Phuille*, a small river or burn which runs just south of the village cemetery into the Forth. Over the years the name *Phuille* has been anglicised and it is now called *The Pow* (pronounced *Pooh*).

Aberfoyle is known for many things, the principal industries now being farming, forestry and tourism. In 1765, however, a narrow bed of clay slate (which starts in the Isle of Bute and runs north-east throughout the breadth of Scotland) was discovered in Aberfoyle entering the Parish just behind Couligarten and leaving it at Brig of Turk.

The Kirk Minister of the time declared that "*slate of grand quality is wrought wherever there is a demand for it*". Whilst his knowledge of minerals may have been without fault, his command of Gaelic was non-existent with the result that the local populace complained to the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland that "*they could not have a Minister who spoke to them in an unknown tongue*" and he was duly sacked from the Parish.

However the Minister was right about the good quality of Aberfoyle slates. They were heavier than the Welsh variety, strong and durable with a range of blue, purple and green colours, the latter being the most popular as green slates were only available at the Aberfoyle and Luss quarries in Scotland and were consequently much in demand.

Over the years production increased and, by 1800, 80 tons of slate were wrought per annum employing three men. Demand continued to soar and in about 1850 families and workers were recruited from Ballachulish and the Wester Isles to work in the quarry. A quarry village was built complete with Church and School catering for approximately eighty people. Only one house remains today of the village, which was situated adjacent to what is now called the Trossachs Road.

To extract slate the rock face was bored by air compressors and blasted by gunpowder. Work was carried out in "family units" (squads of four), two at the quarry face selecting the slate and two further down dressing them. There were two sizes of slate: full size – 14" x 18" and under size 10" x 5". Initially the slates were taken from the face by horse and cart and conveyed to the Port of Menteith where they were loaded onto a boat. Thereafter they were taken down the Goodie River and then the Forth to Stirling, and put on a train. The Goodie River was then much larger than it is now.

When the Strathendrick railway was extended from Buchlyvie to Aberfoyle in 1885, the transport of slates became very much easier. To get the slates to the station yard, a form of tramway was constructed. Trucks full of slates were

drawn by horse power from the quarry to a point well above the wood behind the School from whence a double track ran down a very steep decline to the School House. Here the laden trucks were attached to an endless wire and the weight of the descending trucks drew up the empty ones on the other line. Just behind the School House another horse was waiting to draw the full trucks to the railway yard along the tramway which, after crossing the main road by the Police Station, ran alongside the main road. The tramway remained in use until 1931 when the new Trossachs Road was opened and allowed transport lorries to reach the quarry face.

In 1900 the quarry was the third largest in Scotland producing 1.4 million slates.

Curiously almost all the quarry workers who had come down from the North and West were devout Episcopalians, a much older faith than the Church of Scotland. Their ancestors must have been considered Jacobites although they were in the anomalous position of adhering to a Roman Catholic Pretender whilst refusing allegiance to a Protestant Monarch.

Although there was a Church within the quarry village it was considered to be too small and the quarrymen decided to build another one in Aberfoyle. An approach was made to the Duke of Montrose for a suitable site and he gave them a piece of land near Lime Craig just above the east end of the village.

Work on the new Church was started in 1892, the quarrymen giving their labour free of charge and working in their spare time. They could probably afford to do this as they were much better paid than other workers in the district earning, per family, an average of £2.50 per week calculated on a kind of a piece rate basis.

The building stone for the Church was acquired at very little cost due to an entrepreneurial builder named Hugh Kennedy from Ayrshire who made a bargain with the railway company to bring in stone from Ailsa Craig free of charge, in order to test the weight capacity of the company's new railway line being extended across Gartmore Moss. In addition to providing building materials for the Church the builder also erected Craighuchty Terrace, the Station Buildings and – for himself – Corrienessan.

It is likely that additional assistance came from local people, and I know that my great uncle Richard Joynson gave £500 towards the project. The family thereafter called the Church Uncle Richard's Kirk.

The work was completed in 1893 and the Church named St Mary's. The first priest in charge was the Reverend Henry Lawrence Williamson.

There does not appear to be anything in the Church to commemorate the work of the quarrymen except for a builder's trowel which hangs on the wall by the main door.

Perhaps we should do something to rectify matters?