

THE HISTORY OF PAISLEY

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JOHN PARKHILL

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OF PAISLEY**

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BY
JOHN PARKHILL.

PAISLEY:
ROBERT STEWART, 4, CROSS.
1857.

DEDICATION.

IN the age of chivalry, it would appear that the youthful aspirants after fame did not consider they had any other thing to do in the world but to fight; and when they started on the path of life, they were surrounded by gay ladies, who presented them with spurs, and otherwise decorated them for personal warfare. Commerce, however, produced civilisation, and the use of the precious metals has extinguished this warrior tribe; and, in accordance with the happy change, the Author begs leave to return, most emphatically, his grateful and heartfelt thanks to his numerous Subscribers for the warm interest they have manifested towards him by their generous patronage, which, by him, will be held in ever honoured remembrance.



HISTORY OF PAISLEY.

CHAPTER I.

THE TOWN AT PRESENT—1857.

PRELIMINARY to the history, there is an obvious necessity to give a description of the Town and Neighbourhood, and of its general features. Paisley, including its suburbs, is spread over a tract of ground comprising an area of about two and a half miles, but the boundary embraced by the Parliamentary Burgh embraces an area of fully six square miles. Its main street runs from east to west nearly two miles, and forms part of the road from Glasgow to Beith and the towns on the coast of Ayrshire. Another long line of road (with some deflections) passes through it from north to south. The ancient Town, or Burgh, as it is called, is chiefly built on and around a fine terrace-like eminence which runs westward from the river Cart, and partly on the north side of a similar eminence running parallel on the south of the terrace already noticed.

On the east side of the river, the ground is level, and is occupied by the New Town, which is connected with the Burgh by three elegant stone bridges. The New Town was commenced in 1779, having been planned and feued by the Earl of Abercorn, of the lands

of the garden of the Abbey. Contiguous to, but forming no part of the plan, are Croft, Wallneuk, Smith-hills, and other streets, which were begun at a much earlier period. The suburb called Seedhills is of a very old date, and is the only part on the east side of the river, which belonged to the original Burgh.

Although pleasantly situated, having the fine range of the Gleniffer Braes on the south side—rendered classic by the poetry of one of her gifted sons—whilst to the north, and quite contiguous to the town, stretches for many miles one of the finest valleys in Scotland, beyond which rises the majestic mountains of Argyshire. To the south is seen the peak of Goatfell, in the island of Arran; whilst to the east, Tintock rises prominently to the eye.

Although thus situated, and containing many good buildings, and several regularly formed streets, Paisley is not so handsome as some of the larger Scottish towns. Of late years, however, its appearance has been very much improved by the substitution of numerous substantial and elegant edifices, in place of low thatched cottages; but there is still a singular alternation of handsome with mean edifices. The streets are generally well paved, and lighted with gas; and the gas works, by a late Act of Parliament, are vested in the community. The town is also plentifully supplied with water of a most superior quality, brought from the Braes of Gleniffer, a distance of three miles, by means of reservoirs, erected under an Act of Parliament passed in favour of a joint stock company in 1836, at a cost of £60,000. Since then, these works have been purchased by the community, and are now vested, by an Act of Parliament, in the Town Council; and

wheress formerly only those who paid for the use of the water were supplied, now every householder is obliged to take it.

In the neighbourhood are many elegant villas and baronial seats. The most important of the public edifices of the town is the Court Houses and Prison, including offices for the civil and criminal business of the town and county. It was erected in 1820, at a cost of £28,000. An addition has lately been made, at a cost of £10,000. It is a quadrangular building in the castellated style.

The nave of the Monastery, now the Abbey Church of Paisley, forms a most interesting surviving specimen of Gothic architecture. It is the only part which now remains entire of this once splendid and extensive building. The ruins, however, and particularly the north transept, with its large and well-proportioned window, are still interesting relics of architectural grandeur.* The other public buildings deserving notice are the High Church, with its elegant spire, 165 feet high, in the Italian style. The Free High Church, in the Norman Gothic, with a square tower 100 feet high; St. George's Church, and one of the Secession Churches, both chaste Grecian structures; and the Episcopal Church, a neat Gothic building. The Coffee-Room, also, is a very elegant structure, in the Ionic style.

About 12 years ago, Mr. JOHN NEILSON, a retired merchant of the town, bequeathed the residus of his estate, amounting, with accumulations, to £24,000, for the purpose of founding an institution to be called the John Neilson Endowment, for educating, clothing,

* See Appendix, No. 1.

and outfitting young persons who have acquired a three years' residence in town, and whose parents have died either without leaving sufficient funds for that purpose, or who, from misfortune, have been reduced, or from want of means are unable to give a suitable education to their children.

This educational institution has been in full operation for five years. The building is one of the greatest architectural embellishments of the place. It is erected on the highest point of ground in the town, and is altogether a splendid edifice, of Italian architecture. It has four fronts, each about 120 feet in length, surmounted by a central dome 90 feet high, from the balcony of which no fewer than 10 counties can be seen.

A few years ago a public cemetery was formed. It is beautifully situated, on a rising ground, to the west of the town, is tastefully ornamented; and here the inhabitants intend to erect a monument to the memory of ALEXANDER WILSON, poet and ornithologist, who was a native of Paisley.

The original parish of Paisley has been divided into four distinct parishes, and the Abbey—the original church—is a collegiate charge. There are also belonging to the Establishment four *Quoad Sacra* churches, one of which is a Gaelic charge. The Free Church has six churches. Three of them are elegant edifices; and the Free St. George's is perhaps the most elegantly decorated church in the West of Scotland. One of these churches is Gaelic parochial. There are also six United Presbyterian Churches; two Methodist; two Independent; two Baptists; and one each belonging to the Reformed Presbyterians, Evangelical Union, Roman