

XI.

QUARRY TO ABBEY: AN ANCIENT FIFE ROUTE. By R. FYFE SMITH, F.S.A.SCOT., AND THE LATE REV. NORMAN M. JOHNSON, B.Sc., F.R.S.E., F.S.A.SCOT.

In the Chartulary of the Abbey of Balmerino,¹ which was founded in 1227, four interesting charters are to be found,² dealing with certain grants of quarrying rights, rights-of-way, and other matters ancillary to the supply of stones for the construction of parts of the Abbey and its surrounding buildings.

None of these particular charters bears a date, and it is only by indirect evidence that one can estimate the approximate period of these documents. A careful study of various other (dated) charters where the same principals or witnesses appear to be concerned suggests that the whole series were executed some time over a range of years between 1227 and 1250. Much helpful information in this direction has been obtained from the publications of the Scottish History Society, particularly those edited by Dr Easson.

What is most probably the first of the four shows that the Cistercian monks of Balmerino received from one Hugo of Nydie (a piece of land near Strathkinness, Fife) a grant of his "whole quarry of Nydie." The monks were entitled to "break and carry away stones from it at their pleasure." Nor was this all: they had the free use of a road through Hugo's land leading to a ford across the River Eden at Bruckly, "a toft in the town of Nydie"³ and pasture rights for 24 oxen. There was also an auxiliary grant of pasture rights, from a neighbouring laird, on the north side of the Eden, in case of a delay at the ford at Bruckly. The Eden is, at this point, tidal, so that delays could be frequent. A later laird of Nydie granted further land and also "grass for two cows, one horse and sixty sheep on the common pasture of Nydie." It is interesting to note that this particular charter was witnessed by, *inter alios*, a neighbour of the monks, John de Haya, the laird of Naughton, in Balmerino parish.

A geological examination of some of the stones in the Abbey ruins shows them to be calciferous sandstone of identical structure with the calciferous sandstone found in Nydie quarry and several other near-by quarries. It is interesting to note that no examples of this type of stone are known to be found anywhere within twelve miles of the Abbey, except south of the

¹ *Balmerino and its Abbey*, by James Campbell; *Pre-Reformation Churches in Fifeshire*, by J. R. Mackie.

² *The Chartulary of the Abbeys of Balmerino and Lindores*, Abbotsford Club, 1841.

³ A "toft" is a messuage, otherwise a dwelling and offices, together with the adjoining lands appropriate to the household, with a right to common pasture in some cases.

River Eden. On the other hand there are thought to be at least two other types of stone represented in the ruined Abbey, one of which is of an Old Red Sandstone type. This rather suggests that there might be scope for some interesting research into the type and source of the various building stones used at the various periods of construction.

Starting from the facts mentioned above, and considering also various other fragments of evidence, both visual and written, and taking topo-

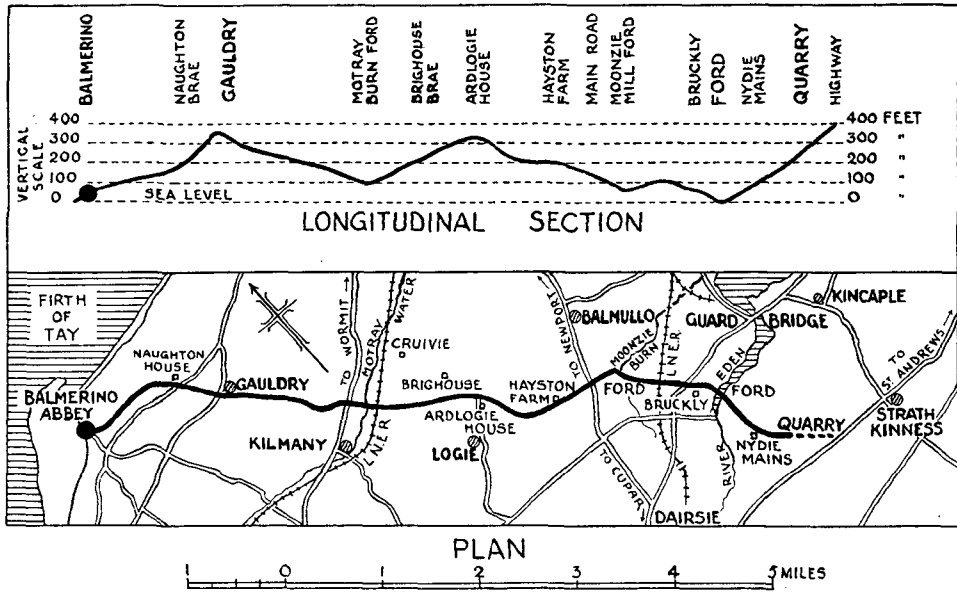


Fig. 1. Line of old road from Quarry to Balmerino Abbey.

[Errata: in Section, line should rise at Ardlogie to 406'; in Plan, Ardlogie House should be above the line.]

graphical details into account, it has been found possible to trace out the major part of this very early route, which undoubtedly would be used not only as a quarry road, but also as the highway between the Abbey and the cathedral town of St Andrews, until such time as the bridges over the Eden were built—that at Guardbridge in 1419, and that at Dairsie some time between 1522 and 1539. It is just possible, however, that there may have been a ford at or near the Dairsie Bridge site prior to the building of the bridge. Even after the construction of these bridges the old road continued in use, for part of its length, as the highway between Balmerino or Gauldry on the one hand, and Cupar and the south and south-west on the other; in fact it was thus in use to some extent until the beginning of the nineteenth century. No part of the road, however, apparently achieved the honour of being designated a turnpike road, and no doubt that is why so little of the route survives to-day as a road in current use for modern traffic.

The description of the route, which follows, starts at the Balmerino end and proceeds, generally speaking, in a south-easterly direction towards the Quarry (fig. 1).

The exact point from which it left the Abbey precincts is not known for certain, but it would most likely start near the Abbey Barn or Granary, just north of the Abbey itself, and it would cross the old mill lade to the south of the Monk's Well (which still exists). The first point where we have positive identification is where it enters the rough vegetation of the small wood (now cut down), about 500 feet east of the Abbey—National Grid Reference 37/360247—from which point it follows the small burn that flows from Bottomcraig, crossing the Kirkton Loan at 363247, proceeding eastwards until it passes close by the cottage, once the Bottomcraig School, at 366247. At the road near this point an old boundary wall of very large stones still exists, and out of this grows a fine old gean or wild cherry tree. Again to the east the road can be followed until it reaches 372246, a point just west of Naughton Home Farm.

From here it swung through the Park of Naughton,¹ the exact line being unknown, until it reached the present Wormit-Balmerino road at approximately 374245, leaving this line almost immediately to proceed roughly south, up the "Naughton Brae" (Pl. XXXII, 1) towards Gauldry,² following the present somewhat rough track which can still be used for cart traffic. The main road running east-west through Gauldry, and formerly known as the "Ferrygait," is reached and crossed at 377238. For the next furlong the road may have followed any one of several alternative routes, *via* one or other of the "back roads" in the village, and we next pick it up definitely at 380237, near the parish boundary. Adjacent to this point is a house once used as an inn. A fine but grass-grown straight stretch is now seen to run south-east, on the west side of Dandie's Wood. Here the road is of very considerable width, and old trees, mainly beech, on each side form a fine avenue for half a mile at least (Pl. XXXII, 2). Shortly afterwards, at 387227, after emerging from the trees it passes the foot of a typical small Fifeshire den, known as Gowl's Den.³ At this point the track, as it now becomes, turns south-west to Kilmany, but this is a more modern part; our road, now only a footpath, follows the Pitedie Burn to the St Fort-Kilmany road at 393223.

From this point, having crossed the highway, our route forms part of a road in current use, being the road climbing south-east towards Logie village, and known as the Brighthouse Brae (it runs through the lands of the

¹ Naughton—formerly Ardnechtan—the site of an old castle, meaning Nechtan's Height, possibly named after a Pictish king or chief.

² Gauldry—formerly Gallery or Galluran—from Old Norse "galder"—a windy place.

³ Gowl's Den—"Gowl" is a word used to denote a small gash or ravine (*cf.* Windy Gowl in the Pentlands).

small estate of Brighthouse). As it crosses the Motray Water at 395220, an older and smaller bridge can be seen underneath the modern concrete bridge, but it is almost certain that the stream was originally forded at this point. From here, at about 60 feet above sea-level at the Motray, the road rises to some 400 feet in approximately one mile (at 409210). Then, just beyond Ardlogie House, our route leaves the highway again, carrying almost straight on, while the present highway swings west towards Logie village.¹

From this point it degenerates into little more than a cart-track, heading roughly south-east for almost half a mile, to 412204, where a road of sorts goes off east-north-east to Cuplahills Farm. Our route, however, continues on the same line as before, but it shortly becomes almost impassable even for a pedestrian, owing to the profuse growth of vegetation. The old boundary dykes, however, remain in fairly good condition, and many trees mark the sites of former hedges. After just about a furlong of this "jungle" a very interesting point is reached at 414201, a point immediately east of the site of Airdit Castle. The road forked here, the straight-on part ultimately leading to Dairsie Bridge and/or Cupar, whereas our road branched almost east towards Hayston Farm; it can still be roughly traced at certain times of the year even over cultivated ground. The exact line through or past Hayston Farm has not been definitely traced, but it apparently reached and crossed the main present Newport-Cupar road at 425199, approximately half-way between the fourth and fifth milestone out of Cupar.

From this point our road now forms an existing farm road, running almost east for just a furlong or thereby to Moonzie Mill² at 429198. Here it swings sharply south for a short distance as it passes the old Mill, in order to ford the Moonzie Burn, a small stream which, rising in the parish of Moonzie, eventually falls into the Motray near its mouth. It is of interest to note that this ford is still in use for farm traffic. From the ford, which is at 429197, the road again turns south-east and continues as a farm-track, passing between the now derelict Williamstead Farm and the Farm of Seggiehill in a straight line until it crosses the railway line between Cupar and Leuchars Junction at 434191, a point about $1\frac{3}{8}$ miles south-west of Leuchars Junction. From this point, as it passes through the lands of Bruckly,³ the line of the old road is not definitely known, but it is next identified where it is marked by an old boundary hedge and dyke as it approaches the site of the ford over the Eden. This line of the road commences at 440185, and it runs south-south-east for about 400 feet until it reaches the north bank of the Eden at the ford—at 441184—a point two-thirds of a mile south-west of the centre of the Old Road Bridge at

¹ Logie—a name meaning "at the hollow," and very appropriate in this case.

² Moonzie is considered to be derived from the Gaelic "monie," meaning a bog.

³ Bruckly may be the same name as Brockley, which, according to Macbean, means "the badgers' haunt" ("Ancient Fife: Seen through the Place-names," *Scot. Geog. Mag.*, Jan. 1903).

Guardbridge and 1900 feet south-east of the mansion house at Bruckly Farm (Pl. XXXII, 3).

The present width of the river between banks is about 100 feet at the ford, but at low tide the breadth of the water is not much more than half of this. It is interesting to note that the river used to be forded several years ago by a farm cart, at a point about half a mile upstream, where the approaches are actually much steeper.

Having crossed the ford, the line again becomes a little vague, but it most probably followed the natural lie of the land by swinging round roughly south-west, until it reached the farm of Nydie Mains, at 439175. From this point it would only have some 700 yards to go in a southerly direction to reach its destination at Nydie Quarry. It probably followed the line of the present farm road for most of the way in this area. The continuation of the road from the entrance to the Quarry (at 440168) for a mere 350 yards brings it out on to the "King's Highway to St Andrews," as it is described in one of the later grants of land to the Abbey. Until about 1800 this road was the main route between St Andrews and Cupar, going through Strathkinness and passing to the south of Nydie, then crossing the Eden at Dairsie Bridge. Many famous kings and commoners have passed this way, and we find numerous references to it in travel and historic literature.

It is extremely doubtful if any part of the surface of the old road remains in its original condition—those traceable parts which are not incorporated into modern roads or tracks are well overgrown with turf or other vegetation. Without expert excavation it is impossible at this stage to say what type of surface or bottoming was used in the making of the original road. In passing, however, it should be noted that in some parts of the route the road appears to have been surprisingly wide.

It has been suggested to the writers that a type of sled may have been used, but it would have been impossible to ford the River Eden with such a vehicle. It is apparent from the actual Latin words used in the charters that wheeled vehicles were referred to by those who drew them up.

The total length of the road to the Abbey from the Quarry was approximately eight miles. Starting from 260 feet at the Quarry, it soon descended to sea-level to cross the ford over the Eden; then rising gently to 75 feet it again fell to 50 feet to cross the Moonzie Burn; thereafter a long steady climb to the highest point touched—406 feet—near Ardlogie House, from where it descended steadily for about a mile to cross the Motray Water at a 55-foot level. Thereafter it climbs, including one rather short steep section, to 346 feet at Gauldry, whence it descends, rather steeply at first, then more gradually, until it reaches the Abbey. One cannot help feeling sorry for the unfortunate ecclesiastical oxen! The steepest gradient was, fortunately, on the outward journey to the Quarry, and was on that part of the road which is still in use as the road to Logie from the north, and, as



1. Naughton Brae, looking south.



2. South of Gaudry, looking S.E.



3. Ford over R. Eden at Bruckly.

a matter of fact, this hill can try the strength of even the modern motor-car.

In conclusion, it should be stated that about three-quarters of this ancient route can still be traversed on foot by a modern pilgrim.

NOTE.—The modern spelling has been used for all place-names, and the reference figures are those for the National Grid, Sheet No. 37. The whole of the route comes within Sheet No. 64 (Dundee and St Andrews) of the 1-inch Ordnance Survey Series for Scotland.