



Before 1840 The Place

THE charter granting a coat of arms to Milngavie states categorically that " the burgh takes its name from the old meal mill of Gavie by the banks of the Allander stream." This confidence is not shared by the authorities, most of whom prefer to find a Gaelic derivation for the name and say it means either " Mill of Davie " (King David I?) or " Windy Hill."

What seems certain is that there has been a mill here from very early times: one record says it was already long in use by the reign of James IV (1488-1513). A 15th century well discovered in 1962 at the Black Bull Hotel, not far from the mill, confirms that there were dwellings in the vicinity by that time.

The first mention of the place by name, however, is in a map by the Dutch cartographer Timothy Pont, published by Blaeu at Amsterdam in 1654, which shows " Milgay " along with a bridge spanning the Allander nearby.

But people lived in the area around Milngavie for many hundreds of years before that. Several definite Bronze Age finds—one is a cist discovered near the north end of Barloch Housing Estate, and now in the Kelvingrove Museum and Art Gallery—would take us back into pre-history. When the Romans arrived in 80 A.D. and built a line of forts (Agricolas's) just to the south, along the line Bearsden, Hillfoot, Summerston, the local inhabitants were the Damnonji

tribe of Britons. They and their cousins to the north were not easily subdued, for on at least two occasions they were able to raid and partly destroy even the much stronger Antonine Wall, built in 142 A.D. to be the northern boundary of the Roman Empire. After the Roman withdrawal around the year 200 there is no further information for a thousand years, apart, that is, from uncertain reports of a big battle fought near Mugdock circa 750 between Britons and Picts.

The local place names in which the Milngavie district is so rich belonged to the estates of landed gentry, of whom there are records extending from the 13th century onwards. Thus the Galbraith family were resident at **Balvie** by that early date, and the Douglasses of **Mains** were but slightly later and continued there for over 500 years until only a decade ago. But the chief heritors were the Grahams of **Mugdock**, the Montrose family so prominent in Scottish history, though for part of the lifetime of the "Great Marquis" (1612-1650) the Mugdock lands were held by his rival, Argyll. Dougalston was occupied by a branch of the Graham family until 1767, when it was purchased by John Glassford, one of the Glasgow "tobacco lords" and perhaps the greatest merchant in Europe.

There were Grahams too in **Clober** until it was acquired by another Glasgow merchant, James MacGregor, the father-in-law of the inventor, James Watt.

A strong local tradition suggests that Prince Charlie and his men, on their ill-fated retreat to Culloden in January, 1746, camped on the fringe of Milngavie near what later became Mill Sq. A generation earlier, it is claimed, the great Rob Roy himself was a not infrequent visitor to the local hostelry —



Mains

a likely enough story! By 1793 the little village beside the mill by the Allander had some 200 inhabitants, which made it the most considerable place between Old Kilpatrick and Kirkintilloch. Most

of the people would work on the land, with perhaps some small cottage industries to supplement their meagre income. There was a school too, though without any fixed provision for payment of the schoolmaster.

But change was at hand. With the Industrial Revolution came the textile trade, drawn by the excellence of Allander's water — mills for cotton spinning and printing, and bleachfields. When the spinning industry collapsed in the 1830's, a paper mill took the place of the cotton mill. The bleachfields lasted longer — down to living memory in fact. There was one at Clober, laid out by

none other than the great James Watt.¹ Another, sited in the area behind the present-day Masonic Hall, supplied the name by which our bridge over the Allander is still known, "the 'field brig.'" Employment was also given by the opening of a distillery and a dyeworks (at Burnbrae), so that by 1839 the population had risen to 1,312.

At this period Milngavie was served by stage coaches from Glasgow. They left Mrs. Munro's Inn, next Hutcheson's Hospital in Ingram Street, and some of them continued to Drymen and Balfron. Until 1830 there was an annual fair or market held at the "Cross Trees," where it was said that wives as well as cattle were sold. There were three public houses in 1805; the number had grown to 16 (one for every 31.5 families) by 1835! Two surgeons were resident in the village in 1834. For the "dissemination of useful knowledge" (adult education!) a Mechanics Institute was established in 1836, and a library was added in the following year. Thus around the old mill clachan there arose a sizeable and vigorous village community having something of the distinctive character and ethos we know today.

¹ (Note)—The date 1763 has been given for the founding of the bleachworks at Clober. This seems very early, but in 1787 MacGregor, at the instance of Watt, was the first in Britain, perhaps in the world, to use the new chlorine process which revolutionised the industry. Blackwood is said to have begun bleaching work at Craiggallion (later at Craigton) around 1782.



Dougalston