

*The Parish of Fintray in
Bygone Days.*



Fintray Church built in 1821

FINTRAY & DISTRICT HISTORY BOOK.

The heart of the parish is the village of Hatton of Fintray, which consists of a small number of houses. The original 'hall town' lies just north of the river Don at the meeting of the road from Kinaldie and Blackburn with the leisurely north bank of the river road from Dyce and Parkhill to Keithhall and Inverurie. At first sight the village might be described as an easy going place, but, in reality, it is very busy. Twice a day the school bus passes through taking pupils to Kintore and Inverurie: the service bus from Inverurie to Aberdeen runs a few times a week. Now that the nearby railway station at Kinaldie has been closed, a bus from Aberdeen comes to take scholars and workers to town returning in the evening. A large amount of traffic for the corn grinding mill on the outskirts of the village, passes through Fintray every day.

Fintray lies off the beaten track: although it is only 10 miles north-west of Aberdeen, it is in no sense a suburb of that city. All its modern amenities have been planned to harmonise with its traditional character as a typical old Scots rural community.

According to an old history book, the name of the village, Fintray, comes from the Gaelic words – fion (fair) and traigh (strand or margin)

The parish slopes gently down to the river Don on southward facing terraces. Its full beauty can only be appreciated if one travels by the road from Pitmedden that climbs the northern slopes of the Hill of Marcus and descends towards Kinaldie. From that vantage point can be seen a magnificent panoramic view of the whole parish laid out like a map beyond the wide curving loops and bends of the river Don.

The ' fair strand ' of Fintray owes its present character to the drama of the Ice Age. A great glacier found its way south-eastwards along the valley of the river. Scratches left by the ice in its passage have been found on rock in the vicinity of the village. When the river began to flow again it wound its way among mounds of gravel and sand which littered the bottom of the valley. To the Ice Age therefore, we owe the beautiful meanders of the Don at Boat of Hatton. With this beauty, however, came disadvantages. The haughland in which the river twisted and turned was prone to flooding. It remained so until the beginning of the 19th century. The first flood was in 1768: others were in 1799 and 1829. A great part of the haugh is now protected by embankments. Several hundred pounds were spent in erecting substantial flood banks.

On north and east the boundary is formed by the parish of Newmachar: on the south chiefly by the river Don and the parishes of Dyce and Kinellar: on the west by Kintore burgh and the parish of Keithhall. The greatest length of the parish in a direct line from south to north is 4.1/2 miles: the greatest width also in a direct line along the valley of the Don from east to west is 5.1/2 miles.

The parish is watered by the river Don from which the land rises gradually in successive ridges. Where the Don touches the parish at the south-east corner,

the water is only 116 feet above sea level. After a winding course of over 7 miles it is still under 148 feet above sea level. The first ridge is broken by the Newmill or (Aultlathers) burns on the west and by Red Burn on the east. These burns empty into the Don. Many years ago the water from these two streams was utilised for propelling the machinery of three corn grinding mills and several threshing mills. The gentle knolls and low rounded hills near the river are all either cultivated or planted. In the central parts some intervening flat tracts of exhausted peat moss are partly cultivated. The land along the river side is deep alluvial soil. In the centre of the parish the soil is light and gravelly. In the higher ridge beyond, the land is more of a clay nature. On the higher rounded hills in the northern division the soil is of a yellow loam on beds of clay, gravel and boulder rock is of a more fertile nature.

The rocks which constitute the geological features of the parish consist of granite, greiss and limestone. Greiss appears associated with the granite rocks in the Don valley and granite of a grey colour appears everywhere scattered over the surface in large blocks and boulders. In the central division, a good deal of it appears in a decomposed state resulting in the lighter moorish soils. Veins of limestone traverse the district from south-east to south-west but the openings are small and irregular and the rock is not valuable.

In this parish a large part of the ground is laid out in plantations, chiefly along the valley of the Don and in the north-east division of the parish. Trees, which are for the most part full-grown, consist of Scots Fir partially mixed with Larch and Spruce. In Fintray House grounds some years ago, one could see some fine old Beech trees in clumps and belts and single trees of a very ornamental character. Rhododendron hedges enhance the beauty of the policies. Many Silver Birch trees grow in the mossy, peaty section of the parish. Beech hedges and some Ash trees may be seen at the village. Three new plantations of Fir mixed with Spruce are to be seen in the north, north-east and north-west districts.

Wood Anemones, Lady's Smock, Marsh Horse Tail, Saxifrage, Ragged Robin, Reed Canary Grass, Queen of The Meadow, Stitchwort, Spiraeae, Crimson Vetch, are some of the wild flowers in the parish. As well as the usual animals and birds such as rabbits, hares, weasels, sparrows starlings, blackbirds, crows and pigeons there are roe deer, foxes, badgers, oyster catchers, gulls and pheasants. The river Don is well stocked with brown trout and salmon. During World War1, Pearl fishing was engaged in from a cobble with a glass inserted in the bottom. There is no record of valuable Pearls having been found in the river.

An important landmark in the parish was the opening of the Cothal Mills in 1789. Water from the river Don was used for propelling the machinery at the Mills. At one time over 100 people were employed here. In 1806 the Mills were taken over by the Crombies of Grandholm, who extended the works and raised the products to the highest standard. Then the work was transferred to Grandholm and the big wheel was used for driving a 'flock' mill, which provided work for only two or three 'hands'. The Mill has been discontinued for some time now, but the name 'Cothal' is still used as a trade mark on mattresses and bedding.

The ruined Church and churchyard of St. Medan's can be seen quite near to the site of the Cothal Mills. During the reign of King David 1st about 1150 when parishes were first formed, St. Medan's Chapel became the Parish Church of Fintray, although it stood, not in the centre of the parish, but at the south-east tip of it. An interesting legend survives in the Fintray district about St. Medan. It tells of a silver statue of the Saint, which in times of drought was carried through the parish in solemn procession;

A ceremony which never failed to produce the desired quantity of rain. It is said, that, at the time of the Reformation, St. Medan's statue was broken up by order of the Reformed Clergy who melted down the 'offensive' figure. However, the metal was recast as a Communion Cup (surely a worthy example of Aberdeenshire's traditional thrift outflanking religious scruples). Tradition has it that this Cup, which is dated 1633 was kept in the Pre-Reformation aumbry (surmounted by a carving of the crucifixion) in the wall at St. Medan's Church. It so happens that the cup, which still appears on the Communion table, fits perfectly into this recess. The churchyard is a trimly kept place with its clipped Yew trees. Part of the churchyard is set apart as the private burial ground of some of the Forbes-Sempill family. A short time ago, the churchyard was used as a background for an Easter T.V. feature. The old manse is now a modern residence – the owner being Miss Adair, the radio personality.

The lands of Fintray formed part of the Earldom of the Garioch which had been conferred on David, Earl of Huntingdon. In the 12th century, David founded a monastery at Lindores, near Newburgh in Fife. He endowed it lavishly from his wide domains in the north of Scotland, including the lands of Fintray and the teinds of Fintray Church, which he purchased for this purpose from Bishop Matthew of Aberdeen. So for the next 350 years, Fintray's Church and lands belonged to the Abbot of Lindores in Fife. It is surmised that the people of Fintray would have been quite pleased with this arrangement. It meant, of course, that they would be left in peace to get on with their work and would not be the pawns of rival secular lairds

Even as early as the 12th century St. Medan's was not the only church in the parish. By this time a chapel in the neighbourhood of the present Chaple-yards graveyard had been erected. The chapel was dedicated to St. Giles; so two patron saints are spoken of as connected with this parish – St Medan and St Giles. No trace of the building now remains except the graveyard of St. Giles which is now one of the three churchyards in Fintray parish, the others being, the parish church graveyard (dating from 1703)and the ancient St. Medan's churchyard.

When the Abbey of Lindores had such interest in Fintray, Inverurie, Premnay and other parishes, it was only natural that the Abbot should take a look round his property and visit his vicars who were doing work among the people. However it was in Fintray that he chose to stay, and there he built a country house for himself. A stone bearing the date 1386 found in Fintray, is thought to have been part of this manor. In 1505 the Abbot had a Royal visitor when King James IV of Scotland made a halt in the course of his annual pilgrimages to the shrine of St. Duthac at Tain. He spent several days at sport with the local falconers and was entertained at nightfall to song and dance with the aid of his travelling organ. The expense connected with the organ which were incurred on the way make it quite clear that the organ was taken with the King to Tain and back for the celebration of divine worship. One writer Dr. James Cruickshank says 'these must have been red letter days for the youth of Fintray'. Another writer Rev. John Catto in his 'Jottings on the Parish of Fintray' A bazaar book written and sold in 1901 to raise funds for a kirk organ in Fintray, remarks 'it is interesting when these pages are being written to assist in procuring an organ for the Parish Church that in 1505 the Kings organ discoursed music for divine worship in the presence of the King, the Abbot of Lindores and the people of Fintray These were halcyon days: the days before the Reformation. The Church, foreseeing that a storm was brewing thought it advisable to get rid of its possessions to the best advantage possible. Disblair estate was disposed of in 1540. In 1552 the Mill and Milltown of Fintray and the lands of Logy Fintray and Froster Seittes (Foresterseat) were sold. Thus the Church prepared itself for the Reformation by selling its interests at what it could procure. Mention of vicars before the Reformation brings to light the

names of John Scott in 1484 and Alexander Forbes, vicar of Fintray in 1541. The later is mentioned in connection with the sale of Wester Disblair by the Abbey in 1541.

The session records for the first 100 years after the Reformation from 1560 to 1622 were taken away by the minister who refused to give them up, so much parish history has been lost. The oldest register belonging to the Kirk session begins on 25th May 1662 but only fragments have been preserved all in loose sheets. A register of baptisms appears to be complete since 1728 otherwise it is defective. Minutes have been kept but seldom entered into a book previous to 1795 since which time regular records have been kept. A record of the year 1597 tells of the accusations made against Fintray's witch Isabell Straquan (or Scudder). Among other things she was accused of gathering the bones of dead bodies from Dyce Kirk and washing William Syme, Hatton of Fintray with water in which the bones had been dipped. This was done to cure the man's sickness. William's grandmother threw the bones into the river Don ' and quhen they war cassin in the watter, the watter rummlit as if all the hills had fallen therein '. She was accused of many other acts of witchcraft: this can be seen in the record which was preserved because it was so serious as to be put before Commission by James VI in favour of the Provost and Baillies of the Burgh of Aberdeen. It is not recorded what happened to Fintray's witch, but many women about this time were burned as witches.

After an era of many changes the estate of Fintray was bought in 1610 by William Forbes of Cragievar and Menie who had made a fortune in foreign trade. He was known to history as 'Willie the Merchant' the brother of Bishop Patrick Forbes of Corse and grandson of the first Lord Forbes. The lands and possessions of the Abbey of Lindores were erected in 1510 by James IV into the 'Regality of Lindores.'. This conferred on the Abbot exclusive criminal jurisdiction with the Abbey lands. Newburgh in Fife for a long time was the burgh to which all within the regality had to go for trial. In 1621 in the reign of James IV an act was passed erecting all lands north belonging to the Abbey into a Burgh of Barony under the name of the 'Barony of Logy Fintray'. The same Act separated this Barony from the Regality of Lindores and enacted that William Forbes of Cragievar should hold the Courts of Barony at the Halltoun of Fintray: also that executions or proclamations against those in this Barony should be done at Halltoun of Fintray and not at the Cross and Tollbooth of Newburgh.

This Act gave Fintray an importance in Church and State within the whole Abbey lands of Lindores. Judicial functions had been experienced from the ancient Mooth (motte) Hill of Fintray to the north-east of the village. A row of double Beech hedges with a pathway between extends from the main road to the Motte Hill.

It may have been at this time that the Tollbooth of Fintray was built of which all that now remains is a single arch of masonry. At that time the offending ministers of the parish of Fintray were imprisoned here after being tried by the Abbot in the Church. Probably the actual meetings of the Barony Court would have been held in the manor, The former country house of the Abbots: later the Fintray residence of the Forbes lairds.

An extract from records of the Burgh Courts held in the Tollbooth (1712 – 1718) shows that, if tenants did not help to repair Cothal Mills dam, they would be fined: Tenants must drive peats for the minister (the name Minister's Moss still exists): no person is allowed to fish in the section of the river Don which belongs to Sir William Forbes, fines would be imposed on trespassing fishers.

The son of William Forbes, another William, became Sir William Forbes, first Baronet of Craigievar. Sir William was a man of note both in the field and matters of state. He was appointed to the Committee of Estates in 1645. He was succeeded as laird of Craigievar by his son John 'the red Sir John' (nicknamed so because of his fiery temper rather than because of his politics). In 1648 Sir John ceased to live in the Halltoun and built the mansion house of Lamington of Tudor designed about 1680.

It is interesting to note that one of the earliest recorded visits of the Presbytery of Aberdeen to Fintray was on 17th July, 1601. They had to deal with a petition from Mr. William Neilson, minister, for an increase in glebe because he thought the original one was too small. The names of the Fintray elders at that time are entered in the record.

In 1662 Andrew Abercrombie, a covenanter, was minister, but he resigned and gave up his living before the Act of 1662 was passed, 'restoring the bishops, prohibiting meetings of synods and assemblies, and forbidding all preaching against the change of pain on punishment. This living was of no great value, his stipend being £5.11.6.1/3 And the Marquis of Montrose in 1645 had burned his house and his crops. Andrew Abercrombie (the minister who took with him the session book and all the money belonging to the session) continued to stay in the parish and preached possibly about the chapel at Hatton till June, 1663, when Parliament forbade extruded ministers to live in or near their former parishes. An interesting item on the record is –

- | | |
|--------------------------------|--|
| 4 th January, 1663. | 'George Bartlet, Smith in Halltoun, for brankis to be set up at the kirk style for punishment of those who deserve the lyk punishment – 14/- and to the wright for upsetting of the standart – 6/-'. |
| 7 th April, 1664. | 'A collection was made for building a bridge over the River Tay'. |
| 5 th June 1664. | 'The session ordained that the taverners that gave drink to those within the parish till they were drunk, should be censured as well as those who were found drunk'. |

A collection was made to repair the cassies so that people from the far side of the parish could attend church by means of riding on horseback.

In illustration of the administration of discipline for flagrant offences the following extract is given-

- | | |
|--------------------------------|--|
| 4 th November 1683. | 'J.P. appeared and was ordered to stand barefoot at the church door in scarlet: from there she should go to the Public place of repentance, and so to continue till she give evidence of serious repentance. |
| 11 th November | 'J.P. appeared in 'sacloth' for several Sundays from This date. |
| 23 December | 'Intimation from pulpit – Tuesday being 25 th December The people should come to sermon that day'. |

On 14th June 1695, the minister was deposed in Edinburgh and on 24th July the minister with the elders met at the kirk to distribute the money from the box to the poor within the parish. The same day the silver tasse (cup) belonging to the kirk was put in the box and James Anderson ordained to keep the key. In January, 1699 Mr. Robert Burnett, late of Banchory became minister and in February Sir John Forbes of Craigievar gave two communion cups to the session. He had bought these cups out of the vacant stipend of the parish. Rev. R. Burnett received the cups and promised to be accountable for them. At the meeting for the induction of the next minister, Mr. Hutcheson who came from Newhills, it was agreed that, as the church of Fintray was in a ruinous condition, a new one should be built. It was decided that Hatton was the most suitable place for it. Thus ends the story of St. Medan's as the Parish Church of Fintray. The ecclesiastical life of the parish had been associated with that old church for a long time. The parishioners evidently brought the seats that were in the church when a 'dask' was erected, it remained that property of the person who erected it: when he left the parish he bequeathed it to someone else and had his bequest recorded in the session minutes so that it might not be disputed. The only overhead protection from the rain was provided by 'sklaits' and 'lym', but many people had come for worship in that humble dwelling.

In 1703 Sir William Forbes, the third baronet, who had succeeded to the Estate in 1702 had a new Church built. A mound, whose surroundings suggested a moat, was selected as a site. The Church was built, to some extent, from materials from some other buildings. At the present day dressed stones can be seen built into the wall at the entrance to the graveyard. The new Church was no great improvement on the old one except that it was wind and water tight. The heritors took at least a dozen years to furnish it, in a very economical fashion. In 1708 Sir William Forbes gave 20 marks (the price of trees cut down in the old churchyard) to help in the building of a common loft in the Church. The seats in this loft were let by the session and produced about £3 yearly, which was given to the poor. Mr. Osbourne, who was ordained minister in 1712, was the son of James Osbourne Professor of Divinity at Marischal College. During his ministry he had to deal with Jacobite feeling, but he had ways of keeping order, e.g. pillory, sacloth etc. the same as had been used at St. Medan's Church to act as punishment. The manse was removed from St. Medan's to Hatton about this time. Rev Samuel Copland, minister from 1745 – 1795 had the degree of D.D. conferred on him when he was 80 years old. His son, Patrick was Professor of Natural Philosophy in Marischal College for 50 years. Mr John Leslie, schoolmaster was ordained minister in 1796. He and his son, who was at one time his assistant, wrote the new statistical account of the parish. The present Church was built in 1821. During this time body snatchers were frightening the parishioners so much that in 1830 the massive vault with iron door and walls three feet thick was built. Today the ivy covered gable of the 1703 church and the vault door can be seen. The present manse was erected about 1852. Mr John Catto who came from New Pitsligo as minister in 1885 was the author of 'Jottings on the Parish of Fintray'. Rev. Dr. P.C. Millar came to Fintray in 1947. He was awarded O.B.E. during World War 1, and had the degree of D.D. conferred on him in 1945.

Fintray Church was renovated and structurally altered in 1960. During this time Church services and Sunday School classes were held in the Public Hall. When the Church was re-opened gifts were presented. A Communion Table from the kirk session of St. Machar's Cathedral, Aberdeen, and a Minister's chair from the Convener Court of the City's Seven Incorporated Trades. The Trades were 'kirked' at Fintray from 1948 – 1960 under Dr. Millar who was their patron. During his ministry, Miss Alice Cumming, a native of the village, was presented with a

certificate from the Church of Scotland. She had completed 50 years as a Sunday School Teacher.

It was in 1830 that the old house of Lamington was replaced by the seventh baronet of Craigievar and Fintray Sir John Forbes, By the massive granite pile known as Fintray House. The Forbeses succeeded to the barony of Sempill in 1884 when they assumed the name of Forbes-Sempill. Gwendolene, Lady Sempill was an original member of Fintray W.R.I. in 1921. she acted for a time as President of the branch, and in turn, the Hon. E. Forbes-Sempill and the Hon. M. Forbes-Sempill held that office. Lady Sempill was prominent in Red Cross work and she was responsible for several W.R.I. Members becoming blood donors. Near the West Lodge is a drinking trough, erected by the tenantry of Fintray in memory of Gwyneth Forbes-sempill, a daughter who died in 1910.

The son of Lord and Lady Sempill was a distinguished man. William Francis succeeded to the peerage in February, 1934, and in the same year was converted to the Catholic faith. His first wife who died in 1935 was the daughter of Sir John Lavery, R.A. He had two daughters the youngest of whom was killed on W.V.S. work in London in 1941 His second wife was Miss Cecilia Dundar-Kilburn of Oxford. Their family consists of three daughters.

William Francis completed an engineering apprenticeship just before the outbreak of World War 1. His love of flying was obvious and he volunteered at the beginning of the war. He was selected to test all the new planes at Farnborough. He served in the Royal Flying Corps, the Royal Naval Air Service and the Royal Air Force and was promoted Colonel in 1918. He retired from the R.A.F. a year later and was attached to the Air Ministry on the Advisory Committee on Aeronautics. Lord Sempill made the first flight in a single engined machine between Norway and Scotland and in 1934 he flew 25,000 miles solo to Australia, arriving back in Britain after many narrow escapes. He held numerous decorations including A.F.C. and was honoured by Japan and Greece for his services. He was a former President of the Royal Aeronautical Society.

At the outbreak of World War II he rejoined the Fleet Air Arm and worked with the rank of Commander on the equipment side of the service. He was also keen on gliding and was president of the British Gliding Association from 1933 – 1942. In 1948, he became Chairman of the Panel on Scientific Consultants and Manufacturers and eight years later he became Chairman of the Institute of Advanced Motorists. Lord Sempill who was one of the best linguists in the House of Lords, had many international links especially with Sweden. In 1956, Sweden bestowed on him its highest honour – the Order of the Polar Star – in recognition of many years service in furthering good relations between Sweden and Britain. For more than 30 years he was Chairman of the Anglo-Swedish Society in London. As master of Sempill he used to fly his own small plane and land in the haughlands at Fintray House. One of Britain's most distinguished pioneers of aviation, William Forbes-Sempill 19th Baron Sempill died December, 1965 aged 72 years.

At Cowstones, quite near Fintray House, lived Mr. John Watt who was registrar for the parish. He was well known as a poet. He wrote 'Country Sketches in Rhyme' Which include 'Lines on the return from the Boer War of Capt. The Master of Sempill and Capt. The Hon. Douglas Forbes-Sempill, 1902' and 'a Tribute to the Memory of Lord Sempill.

During World War 11 Fintray House was occupied by soldiers of various regiments. Wooden huts were erected in the grounds to accommodate all the soldiers. One special occasion was the day when Queen Elizabeth (now the Queen Mother) arrived at Fintray House to inspect the ' Black Watch ' of which she was the Colonel-in-Chief. When Fintray House and grounds were sold some time later, most of the trees were cut down to provide timber for building purposes. In 1953 the house was demolished, and twelve new houses in Hatton of Fintray were built with stones from the mansion. So the ancient link with the Forbes-Sempill family and the mansion house still remains. Some of the new houses are named 'Forbes Place '.

It is thought that the Public School was in existence about 1870: records from 1874 are available. A seminary for girls existed then and was held in the place which is now the shoemaker's shop. This was an endowed school. In January 1875, after the Christmas holidays, pupils from both schools met in the Church as the public school was being enlarged. In 1876 German and French were taught. In 1877 classes in Mathematics and Greek were formed. In 1879 the number of pupils on the roll was 123. In 1889 Swedish drill was introduced, and school fees were abolished in all standards up to the 5th inclusive. School equipment such as a piano, globe for geography, slate racks and books for the library were bought from the proceeds of concerts given by the pupils. In 1892 evening classes were held in – Agricultural Chemistry, Natural History and Land Surveying. The pupils were examined regularly in religious knowledge (the catechism) on those days they enjoyed a half holiday. An interesting note on the weather says that ' snowstorms and severe frost have lasted almost continuously since 28th December 1894 to 20th February 1895 so there has been no writing for sometime as the ink was frozen '. In 1895 pupils had their first lesson in Cookery lasting two hours. At various times throughout the school year, Pupils, teachers and School Board Members were entertained at Fintray House picnics in the summer and parties in the winter. In 1898 lessons on electricity and magnetism were given to all boys over Standard IV. The following year from the proceeds of a school concert a new bookcase was bought: in the same year drawing was begun in all classes. In 1900 copybooks were introduced: corporal punishment was rarely administered after this time. In 1905 it was decided to provide modern type desks. The parish dominee had a salary of £28 plus two small rooms for his own use in the schoolhouse and a quarter of an acre of garden ground. School fees from 60 – 70 pupils amounted to £20 a year. The present headmaster Mr. J. Chalmers has in his custody a register with the scale of fees (about 1870). 2/- was charged for reading, writing, arithmetic and grammar in Standard 1, 2/6 in standard 11, 3/- in Standard 111 3/6 in Standard IV and 4/- in the highest Standards. The fees for Latin, Greek, French, Mathematics were 5/-. In those early days (1884) the headmaster and a teacher both certificated were assisted by two pupil teachers. From 1892 – 1896 there were two certificated assistants, one pupil teacher as well as the headmaster.

Mention must be made of examinations held for Dick Bequest, County Council Bursary and Leaving Certificate. H.M. Inspectors examined the scholars in all subjects regularly. Fast days and harvest thanksgiving days were half holidays at the school. Attendance and variation in the numbers on the roll were often affected by the removal from the parish of farm workers and their families.

Gradually changes could be seen in school affairs. When pupils passed the qualifying examination, most of them stayed on at Fintray to complete their education: some boys went to Gordon's College, Aberdeen. From 1943 onwards pupils who passed the qualifying examination – later the 11 plus exam went to Kintore School, Inverurie Academy, Gordon's College.

several ladies. In 1956, A new constitution was adopted:- 'Fintray Hall Committee, with its property, assets and liabilities would be merged in and transferred to Fintray Community Association '. A new maple floor was laid in the main hall, new toilet and cloakroom accommodation was completed and chairs were bought. In the hall kitchen an electric cooker, fire and two boilers have been installed.

The pupils of Hatton School were getting their meals in the anti-rooms and were having physical training in the hall so the association was making some money in that way. Funds were raised by having Treasure Hunts, Whist Drives Free Gift sales etc. all arranged by the Committee.

With regard to the playing corner, a site opposite the school was made available by Lord Sempill. Earth for making the site level had been got from the back of the hall, Thanks to the efforts of some of the farmers who did excavating and carting work. The ground was levelled by bulldozer, steel posts were erected and wire mesh put up and grass seed sown. A chute, rocking horse and swings bring pleasure to the children. Two seats have been installed so that parents may watch their children play.

For over a century there was a flourishing printer's business combined with general merchant's shop, run by the Cumming family. When Mr. J. Cumming retired and sold the property, the new owners carried on the shop only. The next owners applied for a 6 day licence then set about transforming the place. The shop section disappeared and a public bar took its place. A large airy room that formerly was used as the printing premises has been converted into a luxurious lounge. At night 'The Northern Lights 'as the place is now called lives up to its name. The building which is at the top of a lane off the main road is located by twinkling lights fitted to the front of the porch. During the day visitors are guided by signs erected at strategic points. The 'Northern Lights 'retains a touch of the 'olde world inn' An old pump just in front of the entrance. The old shop door which has been smartened up and faced with wood panelling leads into the public bar where there is ample room for the men folk of the village and visitors to put the dart board to full use. Changes have taken place in the ownership since the ' Northern Lights ' was opened in 1962.,but local people still enjoy meeting there. A car park is now available: music is supplied by various artistes, including singing by a local youth'

Another traditional family business has been carried on at the Post Office combined with a general merchants business by the Moir family. In days gone by, letters were delivered at every house in the parish by 'runners 'from Parkhill, Hatton, Newmachar and Kintore. The first arrival of letters from Parkhill. Then there were two postal arrivals and two despatches from Kinaldie Station. Nowadays the mail is brought by van from Dyce to Hatton of Fintray. Mail is delivered by the van postman all the way to the village including Cothal Post Office. In the afternoon residents in that part of the district and in the village have a second delivery of mail from the van.

Mr. and Mrs. Robertson live in Devon Cottage which is quite near the 'The Northern Lights ' Mr. Robertson is an authority on the works of ' Burns ' having been President of Burn's Society in Aberdeen before coming to live in Fintray. He has given 'The Immortal Memory 'at various places and composes poetry too

At the smiddy Mr.J. Johnstone presides over a business run by his brother, his father and his grandfather before him. At one time about 300 horses in the parish came to be shod. Nowadays, of course, there are no horses on the land, although there are a few

ponies. Welding is an important job at the smiddy now and petrol is supplied from the pumps nearby. Mr. Johnston is registrar for the parish.

The bridge across the Don at Boat of Hatton was formerly a two girder one. While a new bridge was being built, horses could not cross to go to the smiddy as only a footpath was available. The blacksmith used to take his horse-shoeing equipment across the river and shoe the horses there. The new bridge was opened in 1936.

The parish has always been an agricultural one. In former days the main line and the Buchan line helped the farmers. Kinaldie and Kintore on the main line are little more than ½ mile from the boundary. Parkhill and Newmachar on the Buchan line are just over a mile from the boundary. Hatton is 1 mile from Kinaldie. So it wasn't too difficult for farmers to have agricultural products taken to the station and coal etc, brought from the station by horse and cart. When motor transport became common it made a big difference in the life of the farmers.

Apparently the river Don had no attraction for prehistoric man when he came to Fintray, near the south-west boundary of the parish at Sken's wood he built himself a village of circular huts. These hut circles were investigated in 1924 and were found to range from 25 – 35 feet in diameter with walls sometimes of earth and sometimes of stones. The entrances were at the most southerly point of the circle. Evidently our primitive ancestors preferred to keep out the north wind. The inhabitants of the village were farming folk who hunted and fished to add to their supply of food. Around the huts they had small plots in which they grew corn which was ground in their own quern. Some had pens in which they kept cattle and pigs.

Flints were found in abundance all around the ancient village. Stone celts (chisel edged pre-historic tools) have been found at various farms. Hammers of various shapes have also been found. In 1887 an urn was discovered on Temple Hill near Fintray House it had been rounded by the potter's wheel and had ornamental markings on it. Stone whorls used in the spinning of flax have been discovered. In St. Medan's churchyard at the east end of the church about 1870 was found a bishop's silver triangular ring with letters on it MARI I.H.S. . A replica of this ring is now in the Antiquarian Museum in Edinburgh.

Dr. S. Copland who was parish minister from 1745 – 1795 states that the population was 920 and there was 4 blacksmiths, 13 house carpenters, 10 tailors, 7 weavers, 5 masons, 1 dyer and 9 shoemakers in the parish. There were several taverns in the district (church records tell of taverns). Potatoes and turnips were coming into general use: fewer cattle were needed since horse ploughs had been introduced. The people were, in general, industrious: but the knitting of the stockings carried on by the women of the parish, was perhaps not good for the health of the workers, as it entailed too much sitting. Mr J. Shand's farm house at Hatton was a Hotel at one time. Travellers changed horses on their journeys between Aberdeen and Inverurie. Until a few years ago there was a tailor in the village. The shoemakers shop is still there and there is the Joiners workshop near the smiddy. Opposite the shoemakers shop is a wooden pump still in working order. Most of the houses in the village have their own water supply but in days gone by the pump would have been a meeting place when the residents came to draw their supply of water.

Just outside the village on the left side of the road is a little clad mound called Donald's Hillock. It is said that weapons used in battle were found here. The Parish War Memorial has been placed on this mound, very simple and appropriate.

There are two gallon hills: one behind Boat of Hatton and the other to the north-west – a nearby farm is called Gallowbrae. These were presumably on church lands for great churchmen had the right of 'pit and gallons'. The hill of Hatton was at one time a common across which was a 'right of way'. This path still exists today and the place is known as the Hatton Rough or Wood. Many of the rights of way were 'kirk roadies' and still are.

In 1810, William Anderson, farmer in Hatton began to cut down his crop with a scythe instead of a sickle. This was a great help to the farmer, for it meant that 15 persons could harvest 5 acres per day. Much of the shearing with the sickle had been done by women, but when the scythe was introduced the best men on the farm took over the cutting. Women were still needed, to make bands of straw to bind the sheaves. The scythe was quickly adopted for cutting oats but for several years more, the sickle was used for cutting barley. By 1840 the highest rent paid for a farm in the parish was £400 per annum, the population was now 1012.

Farming and its auxiliary industries are still the backbone of Fintray's life and work. At the nearby Fintray Mills of Mr James T. Ogston, about 50 men are employed and a wide range of feeding stuffs is manufactured. The Mills also deal with fertilisers, lime and seed grains. There is also a substantial timber trade and haulage contractor's business. In 1792 when the Mill started, only one small building was in use. Throughout the years great and alterations improvements have been carried out and the present huge buildings are very modern in their equipment. Grinding stones from Aberdeenshire mills make a unusual dyke at the approach to the dwelling house.

A short distance away at Newton of Fintray there is an important poultry rearing industry.

The Civic Trust gave one of their Class 1 awards for 1962 for the charming house Newton Muir, built by Mr. J. W. Johnston for his son Robin. He and his wife are both keen on car driving competitions. Seven silver cups have been won by Robin in hill climbs, speed tests, etc. They are both members of Aberdeen and District Motor Club, who have had three very successful meetings at Fintray.

A modern hill-climb track has been made in the grounds of Fintray House and enthusiasts come from far and near to see the contests.

In 1964 Mark, the son of Mr. and Mrs. R. Johnston was the winner of a silver cup and a cheque for £500 in the Stork Bonny Baby Contest organised by the Evening Express.

Some years ago the boys in the district joined the Scout movement and some time later the girls joined the guides. There are no Scouts or Guides now.

At one time, Fintray had a successful youth club. As well as the usual social meetings, members took part in physical training, country dancing, leatherwork and drama. A complete band was formed by three girl members and a boy. (two accordions, piano and drums). Members of the club boys and girls took part along with many other clubs in Aberdeenshire in a pageant dealing with Scottish history. Princess Margaret attended this display which took place in August 1957, at Drum Castle, Aberdeenshire. Most of the young people of the parish are now members of the Young Farmers Club which has its meetings in Inverurie. Several members have been successful in speech making contests. Many are members of the badminton club, meeting twice a week in Fintray hall. Table tennis is popular too.

Two curling ponds in the district attracted a number of enthusiasts. One pond was near the manse, the other in Fintray House grounds. Both are out of use now, but many people are still interested so attend an indoor rink in Aberdeen.

The local people have always been interested in football. At one time there was an enthusiastic ladies team, 'The Fintray Furies'. In 1956 this team was presented with the 'Greeness Shield' award for annual competition among womens' athletic clubs. At the same time Fintray Football Club, Newmachar and District League champions were presented with the Cheyne Cup for the second successive year. This year the club is taking part in the summer league games as usual.

Members of the Women's Guild (30) meet in the Public Hall once a month during winter and spring. They provide home baking for the seaside mission in Aberdeen, they knit or sew garments for a 'baby box' so that after being baptised babies may receive a gift, they provide posies which Sunday School pupils present to the mothers at the baptism service, they knit blanket squares. Among places of interest visited are New church extension scheme, Mother and Baby Home, Domestic School College in Aberdeen, Police Headquarters in Bucksburn, Blairs College in Aberdeen, Balmedie Eventide Home (where they supplied the entertainment). To raise funds a very successful daffodil tea was held. A pulpit fall was presented to the Parish Church and a sum of money donated to help with the purchase of individual communion cups. Young mothers are invited to attend the Guild Meeting when a talk of interest to them is being given e.g Sunday School organiser, Aberdeen talking about Sunday School teaching methods. Delegates who attend the Presbyterial and Assembly meetings report to the Guild members. The 'Echo' meeting which is held in turn by the Churches in Presbytery has been held three times in Fintray Church. The catering was done by members assisted by non-members of the congregation. Delegates from 82 Guild branches (approx .500) attend this meeting, when full reports of the General Assembly women's meetings are given. A former president of Fintray Woman's Guild Mrs. P. C. Millar had the honour of attending the coronation in 1953.

A Sunday School class for pupils under school age is now held in the manse, conducted by the minister's wife and a young assistant teacher. Other classes are held in the Church before the service. After finishing Sunday School pupils naturally move up to the Bible Class And from there they join young communicants class to be prepared for full church membership. At Christmas, the pupils put on a performance of the 'Christmas Story' in church. Along with members of the Choir, senior pupils sing Christmas Carols in the village. Children are encouraged to attend the Church service. Prizes are awarded for perfect and regular attendance at Church. In connection with the 'Moral and Social Service' pupils entered a painting competition. Prizewinners had the privilege of attending a church service in Aberdeen along with prizewinners from other districts. There is a party in the Public Hall at Christmas, a summer picnic by bus to Newburgh, Aberdeenshire, where the children enjoy all the usual games, races etc. on the sands.

Fintray W.R.I. had its first meeting in 1921. Throughout the years members have benefited from a variety of demonstrations, many of them on cookery, by 'Calor' or 'Rural' Gas, later by electricity. There have been illustrated talks on foreign countries, with special mention of the womenfolk, their work and their hobbies. When Groups were formed Fintray joined Inverurie Group. Members are kept informed by what is going on at Group Federation and National Conference level by delegates who attend these meetings. Fintray members have taken part in inter-institution competitions at various shows - Aberdeen, Ellon Turriff and Inverurie Group. The cup for this sort of competition has been won twice at Inverurie, in 1959

and in 1966. At the present time membership is just over 50 so the Institute competes in the over 45 section of the shows. Various prizes have been won from time to time. Several members have 1st class and some have 2nd class certificates in baking and cooking in Housewives Test. Two members have 1st class certificates in Handicrafts Tests. Some gained certificates from St. Andrew's Ambulance Association after attending classes in First Aid in 1942. Several members buy Savings Stamps every month. The Institute has been connected with the National Savings Movement since 1940. Members have taken part in Household Quiz programmes along with members from neighbouring branches. Teams have been entered for the Preliminary of the Drama Festival. Places of interest have been visited e.g. Press and Journal Office, a Lavender Factory, Pitmedden Gardens, Balmoral Gardens, Druminnor Castle, Blair Castle and Crathie Kirk. Four members visited Edinburgh in 1959 to see 'The Daughters of Scotland' an entertainment in the Assembly Hall for S.W.R.I. members and their guests, on the occasion of the 9th Triennial Conference of the Associated Country Women of the World.

Throughout the years entertainment has varied. For a long time members did the catering for the Burn's Supper, which was followed by a concert and dance. Later on came a Scottish Night with supper supplied by an outside caterer, then musical entertainment. The well known Bobby Watson and his team of dancers, Anne and Laura Brand the famous singing sisters, and Mr. John Mearns and his concert party have been very popular entertainers at Fintray.

John Mearns, Greenlands, attended Fintray School. He is a commercial traveller now living in Aberdeen. During the war years he raised money for charities by staging concerts at places up and down the country. He has been heard many times on radio, he has been seen on T.V. shows at various times. He has compeered shows and introduced talented young people e.g. Ingle Neuk on Grampian T.V. His special brand of humour and his ballad singing are delightful to hear. He has appeared many a time in his native village hall and as recently as January 1966 he and a concert party entertained a large audience at a Scottish Night organised by the W.R.I. Members treat the children of the parish to a Halloween Party in the hall. One year the competition will be 'neep lanterns' another year the children will have to appear in fancy dress. They enjoy all the games and sometimes a film show. Funds are raised by having Treasure Hunts, Whist Drives, and Raffles. House-to-house collections are organised e.g. Cancer Relief Fund, Red Cross, etc.

People in the parish meet at various times in the Public Hall, Whist Drives are held by the organisations in the district. Treasure Hunts, Community Association annual general meetings, local Farmers Supper and Dance (held in the autumn) and the annual Congregational Meeting.

There is a telephone exchange, street lighting has been installed for some time now. Fintray is still a mixture of the old and the modern. 'Lindores Place' is the name of some of the new houses. The former postmaster has built himself a new bungalow near the Post Office. The tailors place has disappeared and the house has been modernised.

At Cothal Post Office a general merchant's business has been carried on for many years although the old shop was a small building at the opposite side of the road. Two old cottages there, and another cottage beside the site of Cothal Mills have been modernised, and a new bungalow built there. This will ease the housing situation a little. On the hill behind Cothal shop and on two farms to the north, are radar equipment for guiding aeroplanes into Aberdeen airport.

When Gwendolene Lady Sempill left Fintray House at the beginning of World War Two she went to live at Cothal House which belonged to Hon. M. Forbes-Sempill who was then in the W.A.A.F.. The name was changed to Little Fintray . A small window was let into a wall so that there would be a view towards Fintray. The house now has a new owner and the name has been changed to Fintray Lodge. The grazing has been retained for highland ponies belonging to Hon. M. Forbes-Sempill.

At the other side of the road lies the residence Fae Me Well, which formerly belonged to Hon. E. Forbes-Sempill. The owners now are Sir Dugald and Lady Baird Who will have bestowed on them in June, 1966 the Freedom of the City of Aberdeen, in recognition of their valuable services.

These two houses set on the steep banks are situated in one of the most attractive parts of the parish. In summer, through the trees a wonderful view can be had of the river Don lying far below. The foliage from the trees, mostly Beech, on both sides of the road, meets overhead.

For many years Seymour Cobley, Inverurie rented fields at the roadside near the Home Farm and at Fintray House, for growing bulbs. At the height of the season, hundreds of admirers came to see the wonderful display. Now only one field near the Boat of Hatton is planted with bulbs which lend colour to the district. Farm steadings in the district are of good quality and most of the farmhouses and cottages are modernised. Electric light supplied by Hydro Electric Board makes an improvement in the lives of farmers and their workers. In common with many other places, combine harvesters are used in Fintray. The population is over 600 and the parish is still the 'Fair Strand'.

'Behold how Fintray's plains delight the eye
For fertile soil there's none with them to vie'

Information has been taken from New history of Aberdeenshire (Alex Smith C.E. – Lewis Smith Aberdeen) This book was consulted in Reference Library, Aberdeen. Jottings on the Parish of Fintray by Rev. John Catto, minister of the parish. This book was published in connection with a Bazaar to be held in Fintray House Grounds on 27th July, 1901 to raise funds for a kirk organ. The Press and Journal on March 1964, had a special feature about The Parish of Fintray, so this paper was consulted for some of the details of early times, e.g. School, Church etc. Further details about schools in the early days were obtained from the headmaster, who also lent his copy of 'Jottings on the Parish of Fintray'.

Details of school work, youth club, W.R.I., Woman's Guild, Church and Northern Lights, were filled in from memory as the W.R.I. member has been living in the district since 1939.

Information about the hall was obtained from the secretary of Fintray Community Association. details about Fintray Mills, the Smiddy and the Post Office were given by their respective owners.

Lines of poetry by an eighteenth century author of 'Don a poem'

This is a transcript of an article written for a Scottish W.R.I. competition by one of the Fintray members The late Mrs. M.A. Angus of North Lodge Fintray composed this

in the early 60's following a lot of research The result of the competition is not known.

Many changes have taken place since then (nearly half a century) and we are very grateful to Mrs. Angus for passing on her knowledge to residents of the parish, also to her daughter Margaret Angus for allowing us to reprint it.

May 2009. .