

Mr. Lang, Arngask Report of his Parish to Mr. Scott 5 Nov. 1790

MS No. 69 Regarding the Parish of Arngask

Arngask 15th. Nov^r. 1790

Revd. and dear Sir,

In compliance with your desire I transmit to you that part of the account of this parish which I had written out at full length.

The ancient as well as the modern name generally given to this parish is Arngask.

This is the designation which it bears in the oldest record preserved here which begins with the history of the ordination of Mr. Gilbert Melvill on the 18th. of Dec. 1688.

The name of the farm which includes the hill upon which the church stands is the same with that of the parish. From this farm the same seems to have been derived but I imagine the word Arngask may be viewed as descriptive of the nature of the parish. It is compounded of Arn which I apprehend may be derived from the Latin Arvum and the Gask which I think is commonly understood to signify what is large. As arvum in Latin conveys the idea of land which may be cultivated so Arngask may signify elevated or large arable land which is a just description of this parish which is entirely composed of hills and almost all these hills are capable of cultivation. At least part of the church must have been built before the reformation as there is a place in the wall for the font and a statue of the foundress who is said to have been a Mrs. Barclay married into the family of Balvaire Iyes under an arch in the attitude of devotion and the beads used by Roman Catholics represented as hanging round her hands. As the whole of the land from the church eastward belonged to the family of Balvaire it seems to have been originally a chapele designed for accommodating the dependants of that family. After the reformation it became a place of worship for a parish collected out of the neighbouring parishes of Strathmiglo Forgandenny and Orwel.

There are three counties which meet in the parish. The county of Fife to the east divided by the Water of Farg from the county of Perth to the west and north west and the county of Kinross which borders with both these counties at the bridge by Darnhead where the new and old roads to the town of Kinross meet. The parish I think is nearly of a circular form and about four English miles in length and breadth. Bounded by the parishes of Strathmiglo, Abernethy Dron Forgandenny Forteviot and Orwel.

In the parish there is a considerable variety of soil. Upon some of the hills it is light and shallow. But there are several banks of very rich fertile ground capable of producing almost any crop. From the hilly complexion of the country the air is pure and wholesome – hence it is that we are neither oppressed with excessive heat in summer nor do we suffer such intense cold in winter as the hoar frost is less frequent and less severe than in low lying places. The most common diseases among us are colds which in some instances terminate in consumptions and a degree of the scurvy which last originates I suppose from the frequent use of oatmeal. Agues I am told were very frequent here some years ago but there has not been a single person afflicted to that disease since I was settled in September 1783.

Many springs are in the parish but not one that I know of possesses any uncommon quality. There is a small river named the Water of Farg which takes its rise in the west part of the parish runs thro' the middle of it and empties itself into the Erne below Aberargie. It abounds with small trout but has few other fish except mennon. The river after an heavy and long continued fall of rain comes down with great force. Near forty years ago a waulk was entirely swept away by it and often still it makes incroachments upon the banks and carries off considerable quantities of ground.

The hills are generally green and afford excellent pasture. Two or three muirs are in the parish mostly covered with heath. There is a very large stone which goes by the name of the rocking stone of Balvaire – On account of a protuberance in the centre it is said to have been moved by a slight touch. This quality however it does not now possess on account of small stones and earth which I find lodged about it.

There is no free stone known to be in the parish but plenty of rock resembling whinstone. What is near the surface is generally of a rotten quality. There is one quarry of good whinstone and I am convinced there might be many discovered if people would go deep enough in seeking them. There is no land in the parish which is not **entirely** claimed. More of it is in pasture than in tillage. They have begun to sow grain only within these few years. As yet little comparatively is sown. They begin to sow their corns as soon as the season answers in March or April. They reap in September and October. The parish supplies itself with the necessaries of life and sends to the market corn butter cheese fowls cattle and some sheep.

In respect of population the parish of a long time has been nearly the same. At present the number of persons old and young within the parish is 554. The annual average of birth for seven years past is about 16. The whole amount of deaths from 21st. Novr. 1783 till 1st. August 1790 is 98 which divided by 7 gives exactly 14 as an annual average. During the same period 16 females were married out of the parish and 21 marriages among residenters within the parish which 21 divided by 7 gives 3 marriages as an annual average.

Under 10 years of age there are within the parish	127
From 10 to 20 “ “ “ “	120
From 20 to 50 “ “ “ “	229
From 50 to 70 “ “ “ “	62
Above 70 “ “ “ “	<u>16</u>
Total	554

I have heard no instances of lives very remarkable for length in the parish. There are about 34 persons who may be properly called farmers. Several people however have small pendicles which they labour jointly with others who occupy possessions like themselves and who for the most part attend to other employments. There reside in the parish about 25 handicraftsmen no apprentices that I know at present and very few journeymen. Including herds there are 59 male servants and 35 females who live in the families where they serve. But beside these a number in the station and office of servants have houses and families of their own. There is only one freeholder in the parish – 152 burgher and antiburgher seceders from ten years old and above. The remainder of the inhabitants belong to the established church.

There are only about 6 batchelors and 7 widowers who have houses in the parish. Two of these batchelors are soon to be married. At present several houses are uninhabited – 123 are inhabited so that at an average there will be five persons to 62 houses and four to 61. The valued rent of the parish is just 2600L Scots – The real rent is not known as the lands are generally possessed by the proprietors.

There is nothing extraordinary about the inhabitants either in respect of personal or mental qualities. They are of a middle size have few wants are seemingly contented with their condition – They are generally industrious and almost all of them decent and sober. I believe I may freely venture to say that there is not an habitual drunkard nor an habitual swearer among them.

As you was pleased to signify that you could furnish me with information concerning the parish of Arngask previous to the revolution this favour would be peculiarly obliging. With best compliments to Mrs. Scott and your family. I am

Revd and dear sir

With much respect and esteem

your affectionate and obedient servant

William Lang

N.B. This letter was addressed to: The Reverend Mr. Scott,
Minister of the Gospel
Perth