

An Open Letter to Tom Johnston, by Arthur Woodburn

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## ST ANDREW'S DAY NUMBER

It's Happening to Us, by J. G. Kyd; Changing Glasgow, by Sir Victor Warren; What Future for the Borders? by Anderson Scott; Ayrshire's Record, by A. M. Struthers



# *Scotland's Book of the Month*

## AYRSHIRE'S RECORD

by A. M. Struthers

*Kyle for a man, Carrick for a coo,  
Cunninghame for butter and cheese, and  
Galloway for 'oo.*

RECENTLY the Scottish Council of Social Service presented to the National Library of Scotland a book about Ayrshire. It was handed over by Sir Archibald Sinclair. Lord Cooper received it and a distinguished gathering witnessed the ceremony. Why so much fuss about this book? Why was it singled out for this unique honour? It has the simple title **Ayrshire**, by John Strawhorn and William Boyd (20s.: Oliver and Boyd), and is the first volume of the Third Statistical Account of Scotland.

Sir Archibald Sinclair's great-great-grandfather, Sir John Sinclair, was the promoter of the First Statistical Account between 1791 and 1798. By appeals and

threats, he induced the parish ministers to provide him with 938 accounts of their parishes. Some fifty years later the Second (or New) Statistical Account was published. Again it comprised accounts of every parish, written mainly by the parish ministers. This time the parish accounts were brought together for each county with a short note and some statistics added.

The present Ayrshire volume has an aim similar to that of the earlier Statistical Accounts, namely to provide what to-day we would call social surveys of local communities. The Ayrshire book is, however, very different from its predecessors, which were collections of unedited articles, often inaccurate and unreliable, made by the parish ministers. The present volume is the work of two scholars working with

groups of local people over a period of three years.

While retaining the parish as the unit of treatment, the authors have been at pains to show how the parish boundaries in the case of growing towns have lost their former significance. They have grouped parishes in District Council areas so that the relation of individual parishes to the wider district can be shown. By comparison and contrast the characteristics of each community are brought out.

The parish accounts contain surveys of the towns and villages within them. Where, as in the case of Ardrossan and Stevenston, by combining two parishes a more realistic account can be achieved, the authors have combined them.

Important as these questions of grouping are, even more important is the material within the accounts. The previous Statistical Accounts gave us pictures of local communities through the eyes of the parish ministers. A hundred years ago—and even

more so a hundred and fifty years ago—the economic and social structure of most Scottish communities was very much simpler than to-day. Instead of 46 separate communities, each having a clearly definable life of its own, Ayrshire has 100 towns and villages scattered among its 44 parishes, making up a complicated network of interrelated and interpenetrated communities.

The growth of towns, the rise of industries, the spread of rail and road transport have all combined to make the local community very complex.

To produce a social survey of such a complex community needs the guidance of the sociologist and the intimate local knowledge of a group of people who are familiar with different aspects of their community. The accounts of the Ayrshire parishes are composite pictures built up in this way.

Another important difference between the present Ayrshire volume and its predecessors is that a third of it is devoted to the County. This section, in sixteen chapters, deals with the unity we know as Ayrshire. Geography and History, Agriculture and Fishing, Mining and Manufacture, Public Administration and Community Life are all dealt with in so far as they help to explain the life of the local communities.

The question naturally arises, "Why write such a book?" For an answer we must look back to

Secretary of the Scottish Council of Social Service, A. M. STRUTHERS travelled widely before he chose Edinburgh as his home. He has worked in Glasgow, Manchester, and was employed for some time in the United States. He has written a number of short books on social affairs. Educated at Glasgow University, he graduated B.Sc. in 1923.



1943 and 1944 when the Scottish Council of Social Service was looking forward to the days of peace. It was endeavouring to understand the problems and difficulties of our smaller towns and our rural communities. Comprehensive pictures of their economic and social life simply were not available.

The Council collected information about a few places as different and as far apart as Elgin and Cowdenbeath, Kilmarnock and Kilsyth, Girvan and Hawick. The information about Hawick was written up and published as "A Social Survey of Hawick." It caused considerable interest. The *Glasgow Herald* wrote:

"A Social Survey of Hawick" should be made compulsory reading for everybody concerned with local government in order to encourage study of the history and present state of other towns along similar lines. No matter where we are headed, it would be an advantage to know exactly where we have come from.

That was in August 1944. In November of the same year Mr J. G. Kyd, C.B.E., suggested that the time had come when a modern Statistical Account should be undertaken. Encouraged by the interest in the Hawick Survey, the Council then entrusted a Committee, under the chairmanship of Mr G. P. Laidlaw, O.B.E., with the task of examining Mr Kyd's suggestion.

In its report in November 1945

the Committee gave the following reasons why it considered a Third Statistical Account desirable:

The present is a time of great social and economic changes. If these changes are to take place with the minimum of upheaval and disruption, there must be an understanding of the best way to make them serve the well-being of the communities they affect. The preparation of a Third Account of each local community in Scotland would strengthen the understanding of its growth; how its industries have developed; how it has built up its social life; and how its traditions have been handed on from generation to generation. Each account would take stock of special assets and difficulties, and would enable comparisons to be made between the existing state and that of a hundred years ago, or between communities that are similar in some respects, and would include a summary of sources of information. This would be of great advantage to those concerned with local government, with the local social services, and with town and country planning; and would help to show the relation of local to national problems and difficulties.

The purpose of preparing a Third Statistical Account was regarded by the authors of the Laidlaw Report as a serious and a practical one. If the proposed accounts were to come up to the standard demanded by modern life with all its complexities, certain requirements were desirable. "It would be essential to secure the co-operation of a large number of people . . . who would

be willing to give freely of their time to the study of their communities," and "to provide these local people with expert guidance and direction regarding the kind of information they might collect and how best they could gather it." The report expressed the hope "that the enterprise would secure the support of the Universities . . . particularly in securing a high standard, a minimum of wasted effort, and a proper balance between the different subjects of study." It was "hoped that the Church of Scotland and indeed all the other Churches would give their wholehearted support." The report finally suggested that pilot surveys should be undertaken as soon as practicable.

The Scottish Council of Social Service accepted the Laidlaw Report and set about carrying out the suggestion that pilot surveys should be undertaken. The Nuffield Foundation and the Scottish Universities were approached. The former made a generous grant to enable each University to carry out a pilot survey. *Ayrshire* is one of these pilot surveys. There have been completed by the other Universities, surveys of the Counties of Fife, and East Lothian, and the City of Aberdeen. These pilot surveys will be published in the near future. The Church of Scotland has given the enterprise its blessing and many of its ministers have given invaluable

service in the preparation of accounts.

The experience of the preparation of the Ayrshire volume has fulfilled the hopes of the Laidlaw Committee and confirmed the view that many local people "would be willing to give freely of their time to the study of their communities." Individuals and groups of individuals, ministers and teachers, shopkeepers and factory workers, miners and lawyers, officials and elected representatives of local authorities have co-operated with Dr Strawhorn and Dr Boyd in preparing what Mr James Cunnison, O.B.E., in the introduction to the book calls "a collective account of Ayrshire life and work in 1950 made by Ayrshire men and women."

The mere preparation of the Account has stirred up many hundreds of Ayrshire people to a renewed appreciation of the importance of their community. There are over thirty Community Associations in the county. Struggling and experimenting, often meeting frustration and discouragement, they are trying to discover "the best way to make the great social and economic changes of our time serve the well-being of their communities." The accounts of their communities will certainly help them in that task.

In those communities where village life seems to be dying the authors provide a picture which



may help towards a better understanding of why it is dying and may even inspire an effort towards revival. The following extract is typical of many:

According to Hurlford people themselves the village life leaves a good deal to be desired. . . . It is shocking . . . that an area the size of Hurlford and district should have no sub-food office, no sub-fuel office, no sub-electric or gas office and that it should be necessary for householders to go off to Ayr on all sorts of business. What is even worse is that there is a general indifference to anything that concerns the village. Everywhere there is an air of neglect. The Institute and the Old Men's Cabin are in an unsatisfactory condition. There is no cinema. . . . Outside the churches . . . nobody seemed to have any serious interests . . . gambling was rife . . . 40 men kept racing-dogs. There was no Community Centre or other organization of the kind to act on behalf of the village as a whole and no desire for such a body.

The authors give the picture of the domestic critics, but go on to point out that facilities for good social interests are not completely lacking. "Obviously there are people in the village who get things done." They then provide about half a dozen reasons for the unsatisfactory state of affairs.

There is one final question which the reader no doubt will ask. This is the first volume of the Third Statistical Account. There are 33 Counties and 4 Cities in Scotland. We have seen that Aberdeen City, East Lothian, and

Fife will shortly be published. What of the others?

These first four have been carried out as pilots, to show what can be done and how it can be done. No decision has been taken regarding the preparation and publication of the volumes covering the remaining 30 counties and 3 cities, but already material for about 300 of the 730 parishes of these counties has been collected under the direction of Mr Kyd. In the nature of the case no decision can be taken till the first four volumes have been subjected to the criticism of the people of Scotland.

If further volumes are to be produced, money will be required to enable the Scottish Council of Social Service and the Scottish Universities to do what they have done in the case of the pilot surveys. The Scottish Council of Social Service has completed the task it set itself when it accepted the Laidlaw Report. Whether it, along with the Universities, will accept further responsibility depends on whether Scotland thinks a Third Statistical Account of the whole of Scotland is wanted, and if so, provides the necessary finance.

The ceremony in which Sir Archibald Sinclair and Lord Cooper were the principals may mark not merely the publication of a book about Ayrshire: it may mark a new appreciation of the importance of the local community.