

The Origins of Camelon

Legend has it that Camelon was an important Pictish city which was razed to the ground by Kenneth MacAlpine in the first half of the ninth century.

It is said that the only two people to survive in the slaughter were an old Pict and his son who were spared because they were the last persons who were in possession of the recipe for brewing the world renowned heather ale.

The old man informed his captors that he was prepared to divulge the secret but that his son must be killed first. King Kenneth's soldiers acceded to this request and the father laughed at them saying that now the secret was safe forever because although his son might have been broken by torture he never would.

It is recorded in the Statistical Account of Scotland of 1797 that Old Camelon appears to have been formerly a place of consequence.

There are now few vestiges of it remaining but not long ago foundations of houses and the direction of some of the streets were visible. Much has been said of the importance which once it had; we have heard of the riches and ornaments of royalty which were found there when it was taken by the Romans. But we have no authentic documents by which we can decide whether it was a habitation of some of the ancient tribes of North Britain, or whether it was only a Roman Station.

The New Statistical Account of Scotland published in 1845 states "Tradition represents Camelon to have been a sea port, and it is said that fragments of anchors and ancient boats have been found in the soil."

William Maitland in History and Antiquities of Scotland says "The supposed Roman harbour at Camelon is first mentioned in 1695 and 1697 solely on the alleged discovery of an anchor and sea tackle within a century before that. In 1757 its position is said to have been at Dorrator."

The Ordnance Gazetteer of Scotland of 1882 says ". . . it appears, on good evidence, to have been a seaport, under circumstances when not only the river Carron was navigable beyond its site, but the Firth of Forth covered a great part of what is now the Carse of Falkirk, it is said to have been continuously occupied as a town by the Picts."

AMALGAMATION WITH FALKIRK

Camelon which had then a population of approximately 6,000 was annexed to Falkirk in 1900 when the Burgh boundary was extended to include Camelon and Lock 16.

Prior to this there had been great vying between Falkirk Town Council and Stirling County Council as to whether this should be done.

There were many arguments advanced for and against the move, one of the principal ones on the Falkirk side being that sanitary arrangements in Camelon under the County Council were not very good and that the County's new proposals for providing a water supply would prove very costly.

Many of the amenities which Falkirk hoped to provide were also cited and at a meeting on 30th November, 1899 Councillor Christie is reported as listing among these that "... they would be entitled to. what he was looking forward to for other parts of the burgh, a branch library. (applause) When the present library developed that question was bound to be considered."

The County Council's case for Camelon remaining within their administrative area included the fact that Falkirk's rates were much higher and that the Camelon School Board would be amalgamated with that of Falkirk.

The Falkirk Advertiser of 22nd February, 1900 reported that "Parties in favour of annexation have during the past week gone from door to door in Camelon soliciting signatures to a petition which, along with the minute of the meeting that resolved to send it round, is to be forwarded to Parliament to support the Bill, and up to yesterday, we understand, about 700 names had been admitted to the sheet. Taking Camelon as having a thousand houses - and we take for granted that only the heads of households were asked to sign - this would seem a good proportion of the ratepaying population."

CAMELON PARISH CHURCH

Camelon Parish Church was opened on 23rd August, 1840 and it is believed to have been built by a mason called Galbraith, the founder of Bonnybridge Brickworks.

The land on which the Church was erected was donated by William Forbes of Callendar and the building, which was planned by David Rhind an Edinburgh architect, cost approximately £1,100.

The initial impetus for the building of the Church came from Dr Thomas Chalmers, Convener of the Church Extension Committee of the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland.

The bulk of the money for the building was raised by contributions from the Church Extension Scheme but Mr Forbes gave a very generous gift of £300 in addition to the ground.

Rev. William Branks, M.A. was the first minister of the Church and he was, ordained on 1st October, 1841. Mr Branks was an author of some note his titles included "Heaven our Home," "Meet for Heaven," "Life in He and "Christ's Transfiguration."

Rev. John Scott succeeded Rev. John Oswald who had followed Mr Branks in the Ministry on 17th September, 1867 and he was to hold the charge until 1912. Mr Scott organised the first bazaar to be held in the parish as a result of which the manse was built in the eighteen seventies.

The manse is still in existence in Stirling Road as the Ivanhoe Guest House.

On 23rd March 1924 the Church was reopened after being enlarged and restored. The Falkirk Mail reported "A handsome bay has been added to the nave, and also a side transept with gallery and a new back gallery. In addition to the nave, a chancel of artistic proportions has been built with an organ chamber on one side and vestry and session house on the other. Opportunity was also taken to dispense with the harmonium in the church and replace it by a pipe organ." The total expense of this was about £5,575.