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Kemnay from Parkhill

In the early days of photography landscapes were a popular feature in photographic albums. One of the more popular views in Kemnay was taken from Parkhill, with Bennachie in the background and the parish kirk with the smiddy and joiners shop in the foreground. It is a far more tranquil scene than that of today. The kirk is situated in open country and with a number of old trees surrounding it.

This picture would have been taken around 1908, as the house to the extreme left, Tornahaish, was built in 1907 by James Forbes, blacksmith at Kirkstyle for nearly forty years, for his retiral. The house to the extreme right, Louisville, so named after a sister of the builder, was built about the same time by Donald Stuart, whose family were tenant farmers in Kirkstyle for many years. Donald, or Dan as he was more commonly known, was a building mason to trade and had just returned from a spell in South Africa with his brother-in-law, Billy Abel of Leylodge. No doubt he had returned with a few pounds in his pocket and built the house. It was leased out and was for long occupied by William Bremner, who ran a watchmaker's business in the village. John Stuart, younger son of the builder moved into the house in 1959.

Considerable roadworks were carried out then, with the pavement being made up. Ground for this was taken off the foot of the gardens and the garden dykes were built. Two heaps of road metal can be seen in front of the joiner's large wooden shed. This shed housed an old pit saw mill where trees were cut into planks. The logs were rolled up a ramp to the left of the shed and through an opening which was closed by sliding doors. The log was then sited over a pit inside the shed, and was cut by means of a large two man saw, operated by one man on top of the log and the other down the pit. It is said that sawyers used to travel from Aberdeen in the winter to carry out this operation, although this never happened during the tenure of the present proprietors who took

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over in 1898.

The two doors on the gable gave access for storage, and down below can be seen the local advertising bills. In front of the workshop stands a stack of timber, which at that time would have been mainly local softwoods and hardwoods. To the left of the workshop several horse carts are in for repair. The custom of the time was for the carts to be washed after the turnip crop was sown, the end of the spring work, and those needing repair were put to the joiner. There was not a great need for carts during the summer months, and their repair provided both blacksmith and joiner with much of their summer work. The business of joiner and blacksmith went hand in hand and in nearly every parish the workshops stood quite near one another.

Most of the village tradesmen usually had a croft along with the business. The croft buildings at the joiner's lay between the house and the workshop, and the two doors in the picture led to the byre and the barn. The fields of the croft are in the near foreground, whereas those of the blacksmith lay to the left of the churchyard. The joiner's house, tenanted by James Downie, who took over the lease in 1898 is of a simpler design than that of the blacksmith of about 1871, having been built several years earlier. The previous houses were in a long line at the roadside. Robert W Duncan took over the lease of the smiddy in 1907.

The smiddy stands alone on the opposite side of the road, and sadly, is no longer there. All that now survives is the wooden extension nearest the camera which at that time was the shoeing shed for the horses. There were three hearths within the smiddy, one at either end, and the third on the middle of the roadside wall. The lean-to building to the left held the stock of iron and coal.

Partly obscuring the door of the store is a small corrugated iron

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shed which housed the toilet arrangements for the smiddy. There was no flushing toilet as is the norm nowadays, but just a board on which to rest one's posterior. The smiddy was at that time a meeting place for worthies and others, as it has been down through the ages. One such visitor was Jock Begg, a large stalwart of a fellow, who had a peculiar liking for John Barleycorn. One day, whilst in a state of considerable inebriety, he had need of the sheddy. He unfortunately toppled off the plank and became stuck in the contents below. After several attempts at extrication it became clear that he could only be released by removing the roof and hoisting him out by means of a block and tackle. He endeavoured to clean himself by rubbing his person up and down against the wall after the manner of a horse against a fencepost. One needs little imagination to picture the scene. Jock still had to be got home - no easy task in view of his bulk and his condition. His brother, another farmer in the district, eventually heard of the mishap and in due course arrived with a horse and cart. Jock's successful despatch was achieved by tipping the cart, sitting the unfortunate on the rear shelving and then tipping the cart back into position.

The church, set in the midst of the parish burial ground, is the second known building on the site. The present place of worship was built in 1844 replacing a building, whose belfry of carried the date 1632. The trees, which at one time surrounded the church, succumbed to old age, and the last of them was removed in the 1920's. The building to the left of the church dates from 1831, its purpose being to prevent the practice of grave robbing. It consists granite walls and roof three feet thick, the roof being arched inside. Its security was completed by a thick metal door with three locks, the keys of which were held by three different people. Originally there were two tiers inside on which the coffins were stored until such time as decomposition made their contents useless for research. They were then removed and interred in the churhyard. It now serves as a tool shed for

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the churchyard staff.

The village skyline has changed dramatically over the years as building extended. The house roofs visible in the picture are situated in Paradise Road. The land immediately behind Louisville was purchased by Mr Downie from the estate at the same time as the area beyond was purchased by the Council as an extension of the graveyard. The blacksmith's croft was acquired for housing in the 1960's.

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