

WEMYSS BAY.

Although included in the *quoad sacra* Parish of Skelmorlie, Wemyss Bay is a separate group of houses, lying on the north side of the railway station, and, like Skelmorlie, is a watering-place of modern origin. The houses, numbering in all about 20, are irregularly built in a bay, with a beautiful beach gently sloping down to the water's edge, and securely sheltered from the north and east winds by a range of well-wooded heights. At either extremity, the bay is bounded by red sandstone rocks of irregular appearance, worn and honey-combed by the action of the waves. "A considerable extent of the beach to the north of the bay is also composed of this same red sandstone, intermingled with a coarse conglomerate and dykes of trap, but in several places it relaxes into a kind of rough gravel or shingle, which forms a convenient footing for the bather, and affords an easy launching place for small fishing boats, and other kindred craft." Originally, Wemyss Bay formed part of the Ardgowan estate, (Sir Michael Shaw Stewart's), and was given to Wallace of Kelly in return for the lands of Finnock, in the year 1814. Kelly was sold in two distinct and nearly equal portions,—Mr. Scott of Glasgow purchasing the one (Kelly portion), and Mr. Wilsone Brown (also of Glasgow) being the purchaser of the other. The latter built the Castle (Castle Wemyss), and feued several portions of the ground, but was obliged to sell in the year 1860, when Mr. John Burns became possessor. He has since considerably enlarged the Castle, (designed by Billings), and laid out the grounds with great taste. Long before any of the present houses were erected, the whole bay was overgrown with trees and shrubs down to the water's edge. The only habitation was an old fisherman's house, called "Wemyss Cottage," and so named on the old plan annexed to the Ardgowan title deeds.

At that time the salmon fishing at Wemyss was very valuable, and was let by the Laird of Ardgowan to a Mr. Main of Edinburgh. Before the excambion took place between Mr. Wallace and Sir Michael's ancestor, portion of the ground in the centre of the bay was feued for four houses. These houses were built considerably before the end of the last century by Mr. Orkney, grandfather of Provost Orkney of Rothesay. They were designated "New Glasgow," from the fact that Glasgow merchants occupied them, and for many years were the only houses in the bay. They were all of the same design, and the proprietors seemed to have constituted themselves into a "Dean of Guild Court" on a small scale, as we are credibly informed that there was a clause in the titles, or at least a written agreement, binding each proprietor to respect the similarity of design, and forbidding him to alter or improve his dwelling without the consent of the others. This agreement, of whatever kind it was, must have fallen sadly into abeyance, since one of the houses, Dunloe, belonging to Mr. Hunter, has been so altered and improved as to be scarcely recognisable in its original form ; other two have been improved away altogether, and their places supplied by one large and commodious house, called Redholme, possessed by Mr. Ronaldson.

The only remnant of the past still standing entire is the property of Mr. John McKinnon, Glasgow. One can have some idea of the increased value of house property in this locality from the fact that this house was bought in 1857 for £280, and sold in 1877 for £1400. Adjoining Dunloe, but nearer the shore, is Ardvar, the property of Mr. N. B. Stewart, partner of the celebrated firm of Stewart & McDonald, Glasgow, who occupies it during the summer months.

Passing Tighnamara, occupied by Mr. Edwin Higginbotham, a large and commodious house, but with no architectural beauty, and Villa Clutha, we come to Ferncliff, a Gothic structure designed by Rothead, beautifully situated, and snugly ensconced beneath the precipitous rock which rises immediately behind it.

Perched on the abrupt precipice above Ferncliff, and commanding a most extensive view, is the residence of Mr. Martini, Danish Consul for Glasgow. Adjoining Ferncliff on the north is the English Episcopal Church, a very elegant Gothic structure of red sandstone, designed by Mr. Burnet of Glasgow, and built in 1879, in memory of the late Mrs. George Burns. It contains a fine chime of eight bells set on key G.—the only chime, so far as we are aware, on the West Coast. Service is conducted here during the summer months, when clergymen of ability, selected by Mr. Burns from various parts of England and Ireland, officiate. A little further on is Wemyss house, a large and commodious family residence, built of white sandstone, from designs by Mr. Salmond of Glasgow, possessed and occupied by Mr. George Burns, to whom Wemyss Bay belongs. Leaving the shore, the road now turns inland, passing the gates of the Castle, from which a sight may be had of the fine lawn and beautiful shrubbery of Castle Wemyss, the growth of which, to all who know the exposed nature of the site, must appear a marvel of gardening skill. Following the road, the visitor can now go right on until he comes to the massive gates and porter's lodge, where the Inverkip road is reached, by which he can return home; or, after passing the Castle gates, let him take the first road to the right, which, after traversing the wood for a short distance, leads along the brow of the cliff homeward.

The origin of the name "Wemyss Bay," applied to this locality, is matter of doubt. It occurs in old maps of the last century, and is at least one hundred years old. The general term Wemyss or Weems is common in Scotland. It is derived from the Gaelic *uamh*, a cave, and is applied to those subterranean dwellings or earth-houses built by the primitive Picts, which served to hide the people and their goods in time of war. Many of these have been found in different parts of the country—in Forfar and Perth Shires, and in the Orkney Islands, &c. Wilson, in his *Archaeology* (to which the reader is referred for a more minute account of these Weems), says :— "In general, no external indication affords the slightest clue to their discovery. To the common observer, the dry level heath or moor under which they lie presents no appearance of having ever been disturbed by the hand of man ; and he may traverse the waste until every natural feature has become familiar to his eye without suspecting that underneath his very feet lie the dwellings and domestic utensils of remote antiquity."

As to the origin of the general term then, there can be no doubt. The only difficulty is, that none of those caves having ever been discovered in this locality, so far as we can learn, it is not easy to trace any connection between the name and this particular place, unless, indeed, it may have been applied to one or two natural caves which may be seen in the cliff at different places. It is to caves of this description that the villages, East and West Wemyss, in Fifeshire, owe their names; but there the caves are very conspicuous. A story is told us which, if authentic, would explain the origin of the name on a very different principle. It is to the effect that an old fisherman called Robert Wemyss used to reside here some time during last century, and that three gentlemen who had been in the habit of hiring his boat for fishing during several summers, thought they would give the place a name, portion of the bay having previously been called "White Week," and sometimes "Kelly Bay." They discussed several names, but could not agree on any until one of them said, "Let's call it after old Bob." Accordingly, the place was called (Bob) Wemyss' Bay.

KELLY.

Near the railway station, on the opposite side of the road, and overlooking the line, stands the large and commodious house of Kelly. Its external appearance, though neat, is very plain, and has no pretension to architectural beauty. The situation, however, is particularly good, the pleasure grounds tastefully laid out, and the surrounding scenery rich and attractive. The house is built of red sandstone; but a former proprietor, thinking to improve its appearance, got it painted white, and it is now a conspicuous object from the opposite coast. "The coast at this place, and, indeed, along the whole course of the Firth, from Inverkip to Ardrossan, is bounded at a short distance back from the shore with a range of hills, sometimes rising in gentle slopes, and at other times in abrupt rocky precipices, from which can be had a succession of rich and varied views." Advantage has been taken of this conformation of the ground for the building of several fine houses along the coast, such as Skelmorlie Castle, Knock Castle, Routenburn and Fairlie Castle, &c. Among these, Kelly stands pre-eminent as one of the oldest as well as one of the most beautifully situated of them all. Dr. Young, the present proprietor, has added a large picture-gallery to the south end of the house, and to his collection of very fine pictures he has recently added two masterpieces of Salvator Rosa, brought from Florence.

ORIGIN OF NAME AND HISTORY.

The name is Celtic, meaning a wood, and is often found in combinations, such as Kelburne (a wooded burn). The estate, as already said, is very old, and was the seat of an ancient family named Bannatyne. The first of the family who possessed the lands, was James Bannatyne, who had a grant of them from James III. In *Crawford's History of Renfrewshire*, it is stated that the original charter was extant in his time, but he does not give its date. As, however, James III. was slain in 1488, at Bannockburn, the gift must have been bestowed before that. The Bannatynes continued to hold the estate for more than 300 years, when it was purchased in 1792, by Mr. John Wallace, the acknowledged representative of the Elderslie Wallaces, and descendant of Sir William Wallace.

The old mansion house—Kelly Castle—stood in the present garden, "nested up among the cliffy rocks," about a quarter a mile higher than where it now stands, but was destroyed by fire in the time of the Bannatynes. It is evidently to this situation that the words apply :—

"There lived a carle on Kelly-burn braes,
Hey an' the rue grows bonnie wi' thyme."

The present house was erected by Mr. John Wallace in 1793, and subsequently greatly enlarged by his son, Mr. Robert Wallace. "By him chiefly," says Crawford, "the place has been formed, not only by his energetic improvements in agriculture, by which he has greatly extended the arable lands, but by extensive plantations of wood, both valuable and ornamental." Originally, the southern boundary of Kelly estate was Kelly burn, but in 1814, by a contract of excambion entered into betwixt the Earl of Eglinton and Mr. Wallace, the latter got possession of Auchindarroch, that portion of ground between Kelly burn and the Beithglass Parish road, leading from the U.P. Church to Upper Skelmorlie. Another exchange was effected between Mr. Wallace and the Laird of Ardgowan, by which the lands of Finnock were given up to Sir Michael's ancestor in return for Wemyss Bay, which, from being part of Ardgowan, became portion of Kelly estate, and continued to be so until Mr. Alexander's time, when the estate was divided. Mr. Wallace, sen., seems to have been a very shrewd and energetic man of business, and

carried on an extensive trade with the West Indies. A story is told of him which may not be uninteresting. Having reason to suspect the honesty of his officials in the West Indies, he adopted a strange expedient to detect the imposition. Disguising himself, and going out to the Indies in the capacity of a clerk, he sought and obtained employment in his own office. None of the officials recognised him. An old negress, suspecting who he was, said to some one in the office, "If Massa had been in this country, I would have said that was him." Not much attention being paid to her remarks, Mr. Wallace was undetected. He, however, detected the fraud which was being practised on him, dismissed his principal officials, and had their places supplied by more trustworthy men. At his death in 1803, Mr. Robert Wallace, the eldest son, succeeded to the estate.

After the passing of the Reform Bill he entered Parliament as the representative for Greenock, and his name is intimately associated with the system of Penny Postage. Indeed, we believe that to his labours as Chairman of the Parliamentary Committee, the country is chiefly indebted for its introduction. The enthusiasm with which he was received by the working classes in Greenock on the occasion of his election was immense. Feeling ran very high, and no stone was left unturned by either party to gain the seat, but on the declaration of the poll, it was found that Mr. Wallace was returned by a large majority. As illustrative of the vigorous efforts put forth, a story was told us by Mr. Wallace's coachman, Mr. William Beith, who died recently, aged 89, and who remembered the scene. A drunken shoemaker, belonging to the town, was eagerly canvassed by both parties. As his craving for drink was much stronger than his political principles, it was well known that the party which treated him best and watched him most closely would be certain to secure his vote. A Mr. Johnstone, on behalf of the Conservatives, agreed to sit up with him all night, regale him with potations of whiskey at judicious intervals, and have him early at the poll on the following morning. How Mr. Johnstone passed the night we are not told, but next morning he and his companion set out for the voting. On the way he kept continually dunning into his ear the name of "Cochrane," the gentleman for whom he was to vote, and who was Mr. Wallace's opponent on this occasion. As they got near the door an immense crowd was gathered which kept continually shouting "Vote for Wallace," "Wallace for ever." Entering the polling booth, the shoemaker was asked for whom he voted. Mr. Cochrane's name was doubtless on his mind when he entered, but just at the moment of being asked the question, the shout was again heard outside "Wallace for ever," which so completely effaced the remembrance of Cochrane from his mind that he stammered out "Wa-Wallace," and to the disgust of Mr. Johnstone and his friends, who all knew of the self-denying efforts which had been made to secure him, the shoemaker's vote went to the other side.

Shortly after Mr. Wallace entered Parliament he was obliged to part with Kelly. He had previously built that row of houses on the side of the turnpike road leading to Inverkip, situated about a mile from the station, and called by him "Forbes Place" after his wife—a daughter of Sir William Forbes, Bart, of Craigievar, Aberdeenshire. In anticipation of leaving Kelly, he had intended the house at the north end of the row as a residence for himself; but, changing his mind, or his affairs turning out to be more involved than was at first supposed, the whole estate was sold, and Mr. Wallace left the district. Mr. Alexander, an Australian merchant, was the purchaser, but he only retained possession for two or three years. Becoming bankrupt, the estate fell into the hands of his creditors, by whom it was sold in two distinct and nearly equal portions to Mr. James Scott, Glasgow, and Mr. Charles Wilsone Brown, also of Glasgow. The one part forms the present estate of Kelly, and the other of Wemyss Bay. Mr. Scott, in his turn, sold Kelly to Dr. James Young, the present proprietor, in 1867, Mr. Brown having sold his portion of the estate in 1860 to Mr. Burns, the present proprietor.