

The Soup Kitchen, Borgue



From Free
Church School
to Soup
Kitchen : A
Home with a
History



Donald Tait, 2020

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From Free Church School to Soup Kitchen: A Home with a History

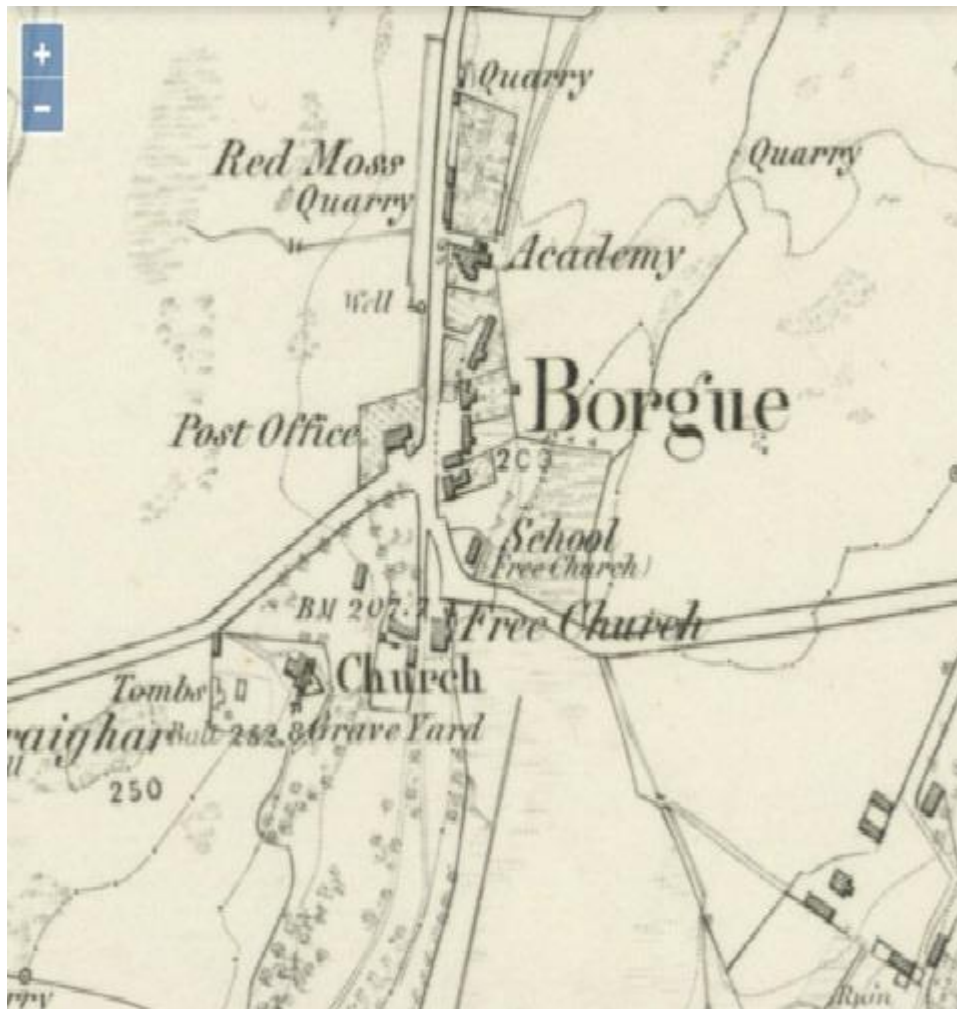


Well known locally as the “*Soup Kitchen*”, this property has played an important part in village life and the local community in Borgue. It also, as this short booklet hopes to show, has an interesting history which illustrates many of the developments in Scottish social and religious life over the last hundred and fifty or so years, as it saw use firstly as a school for the Free Church of Scotland, and then as a Soup Kitchen for the renowned Borgue Academy

PART ONE

TEACHING THE WEANS : BORGUE FREE CHURCH SCHOOL, c1843-1873

The building first appears to have been built as a private dwelling house around the 1840s, before being acquired by the Free Church of Scotland, and used by them as a school. Its location in the village is clearly shown on this map from 1854 below (marked as *School (Free Church)*)



Ordnance Survey Map Series, published 1854

Although now virtually forgotten, the Free Church of Scotland played an important role in the history of Scotland since its foundation in 1843. Sometimes referred to as “The Wee Frees”, it came into being when it split away from the established state church, the Church of Scotland. The main issue was that of patronage, ie who should have the right to choose the church ministers : those who joined the Free Church saw this right as belonging to the members of the congregation, and felt that in the Church of Scotland, too much power in this regard rested with wealthy landowners. In Scotland as a whole, over 400 ministers left the Church of Scotland. In Borgue, it seems that approximately 152 members left the



The Free Church in Borgue, across the road from the Soup Kitchen. Built in 1846, it is now converted into 3 private houses

established Church of Scotland for the new Free Church, ie about 2/5 of the congregation. Famously strict in their religious practices and observations, the Free Church was strongly committed to education, and by means of government grants and using its own fundraisings, by 1851 was running more schools than the Church of Scotland. Teachers

were professionally trained, and the curriculum strongly

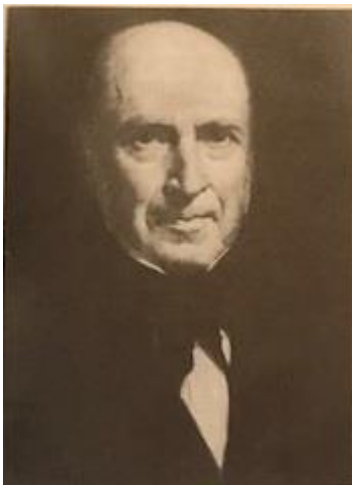
emphasised the strict religious values and ethos of the Free Church.

The extract below from the “*Ordnance Survey Name Book for Kirkcudbrightshire, 1848-1851, (vol 150)*”, contains the following entry for the building itself:

Free Church School - Situation: at the end of Borgue, A house used as a school house erected in 184? at a cost of about £100 which was defrayed chiefly by the occupants of the parish. It has not as yet any teacher but an annual salary of £20 is allowed by the educational fund belonging to the Free Church

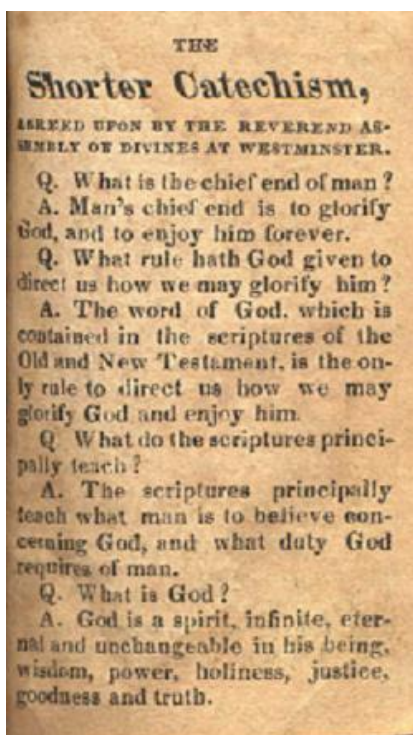
In Kirkcudbrightshire, other Free Church schools were set up at Auchencairn, Dundrennan, Laurieston, Castle-Douglas, and Crossmichael. Probably the best known of these was the one in Castle Douglas, where the church was built with one wing being assigned to the school. It opened in 1844 and quickly built a reputation for itself under the mastership of John Cowper. Inevitably referred to by locals as “*Cowper’s Schule*” by locals, its most famous pupil was the writer S R Crockett, who was a pupil from 1867 till its closure in 1873. He also served as a pupil-teacher. Other Free Church schools in the area were at Dalbeattie (in Mill Street), Crossmichael, Kirkpatrick Durham, Auchencairn and Laurieston (known as “*Robertson’s Schule*”), the school where Crockett had received his earlier education.

There is a considerable amount of evidence of the fierce rivalry that existed between the pupils of the newly established Free Church schools and those from the Church of Scotland Schools. Often things would start with name calling, then progress from there, as Crockett writes : “...*whenever we met a boy from the Established Kirk...we threw a stone at him to bring him to a sense of his position*”. This would then lead to stones being hurled, black eyes, broken teeth, bruises and broken windows etc. (However, in the case of any girls encountered, Crockett observes that “*if it was a lassie, we put out our tongue at her*”). At Auchencairn, the boys from the Free School once disrupted the sermon of a Church of Scotland clergyman by pelting him with rotten eggs. In Borgue, it appears that relations between the masters of the 2 village schools were as bad as those between the pupils. A Mr McMaster, who taught at Borgue Academy, and Mr Bremner, one of the earliest teachers at the Borgue Free Church School, engaged in a very public dispute by trading insults with each other in the columns of one of the local newspapers – though presumably a war of words was more acceptable than an actual exchange of blows.



Sadly, there is little other documentary evidence about the Free Church School in Borgue, such as school logbooks, but we do know that one of the leading figures in its founding was William Poole, who had been sacked from his position at Borgue Academy when he left the Church of Scotland to join the Free Church. Known locally as “**Rector Poole**”, he was prominent in all aspects of the running of the Free Church School in Borgue, and held office in the Free Church itself until his death at Senwick House in 1865. The other leading exponent was of course Samuel Smith, the minister who left his position with the Church of Scotland to throw in his lot with the Free Church. Together, all matters such as the appointment of teachers, what was to be taught would have

been very much influenced by these two men.



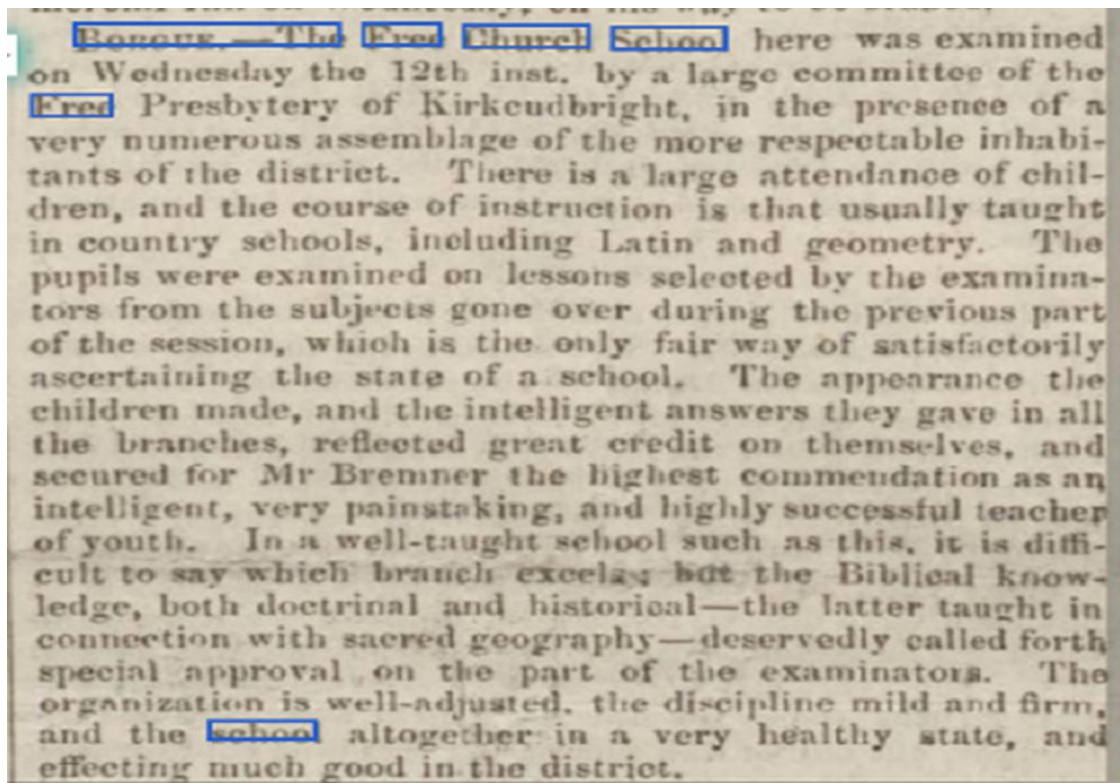
The Shorter Catechism

In any Free Church School, Religious Education was at its core. One of the main ways of doing this was via the Catechism, a series of questions and answers which the pupils were expected to know off by heart. It was also used to teach the alphabet. The minister would visit the school regularly to would examine the pupils on their ability to read the Bible

Typically in the small rural schools, such as the one in Borgue, the younger pupils would work alongside the older ones. The day was often a long one, sometimes beginning as early as 5 in the morning although more often at 6. The majority of children would not progress much beyond the basics of the “3Rs”, however some more able older pupils would advance to Latin, the various branches of maths, as well as literature, history, geography etc. In a

number of such schools, the more academically pupils were prepared for direct entrance to university. The practical subjects were, as customary at these time, taught pretty much along gender lines – the boys received training in subjects like woodwork, gardening etc, whereas girls were taught cookery, needlework etc.

We can also glean some information about school life from contemporary newspaper accounts, such as the article below, taken from the “*Dumfries and Galloway Standard*”, (Wed 19th April 1854), which not only gives an interesting picture of what was taught, but also names one of the teachers, a Mr Bremner (mentioned earlier)



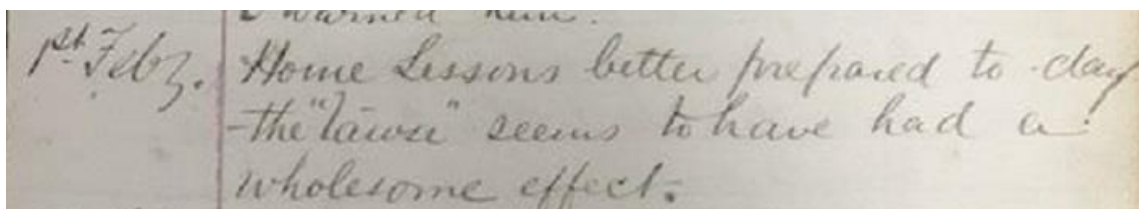
Article from the *Dumfries and Galloway Standard*, April 1854, describing the teaching at Borgue Free School



The infamous tawse

Mr Bremner, mentioned in above article would, like his fellow schoolmasters at that time in Scotland, have worn black clothes: dark trousers, and a frock coat, all covered by his academic gown. His word in the classroom would have been law. The discipline is referred to in the article as “*mild and firm*”, but of course the “*firm*” bit meant corporal punishment, enforced if necessary by means of the “tawse”. This was a leather strap having one end cut into thongs. It was up to individual teachers to decide whether or not to use it. As the log books for the Free Church School at Borgue do not survive, we cannot be certain of its use there, but in the log book for the Free Church school at Auchencairn, just a few miles

away, the following extract from that school's Log Book indicates one of the teacher's enthusiasm for this form of discipline:



1st Feb. Home Lessons better prepared to-day
-the "lāwai" seems to have had a
wholesome effect.

Entry from the logbook of the Free Church school at Auchencairn

The last teacher at the school there, a Mr J. C. Crawford, remarked that *"There nothing like the leather for good dictation"*



MR. A. BREMNER.

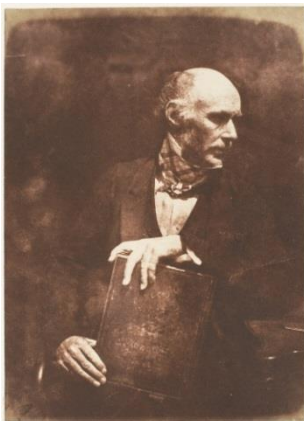
Bremner himself is a good example of a typical Free Church schoolmaster. He had been educated in Edinburgh, and then trained as a teacher at the Free Church College before coming to Borgue. Originally from Keith, Banffshire, the 1851 census for Borgue lists him as staying at Low Borgue farm, along with his sister, Isabella. As well as his duties as a teacher, he is listed as acting as a distributor for the Borgue area of the Saturday edition of the *"Dumfries and Galloway Standard"*. It was standard practice for a schoolteacher at that time to take on second jobs, to supplement their income, and he might also undertake other community responsibilities such as acting as clerk, book keeper, factor, surveyor etc. A few years later, Mr Bremner was on the move – it was common for Free Church teachers to take up posts abroad, as part of spreading the Free Church message.

among the most popular destinations was New Zealand, and it was to here he moved in 1860.

His move to New Zealand seems to have worked out well. He travelled came to Auckland in 1860 in the ship *"Red Jacket"*, a well know liner of the White Star Line, which according to a contemporary newspaper account was the *"finest merchant vessel which has ever come into New Zealand waters"*. He went on to Waitoa South, where he taught for eight years before resigning to become a farmer, then returning to work in education with the Board of Education in Cambridge, New Zealand. He died in November 1905, and is buried in Morrinsville Old Cemetery, Waikato, New Zealand – a long way from Borgue !

He appears to have been a popular and well respected teacher, and this led, on the occasion of his departure from Borgue, to a farewell presentation, described in detail in the *"Dumfries and Galloway Standard"*, in Jan 1860. As it contains references to local families, whose names will be familiar to many in the Borgue area, and demonstrates his affectation both for the area and its people, an excerpt from it in which he expresses his thanks is printed below:

Mr Bremner made feeling and suitable reply. He tendered thanks for the testimonial, and then said : —This unexpected honour and proof of esteem I feel deeply, though I am able but very inadequately to express my feelings. The purse itself and the splendid Atlas, which will preserve with great care, I will regard as a kind telegraph or communication between us ; as a memorial with which I will always associate the kind donors, including, among many other kind friends, the Smiths, the Candlishes, the M 'Adams, the Littles, the Swords, the Stevensons, the Veitches, the M'Naughts, the Dalzells, the M'Caws, and the Papples, who will always hold prominent place my remembrance. (Cheers.) I question if ever I may be settled in a place in this world in the society of whose inhabitants will have so much pleasure as I have had in the society of the people of Borgue; and I question if ever I may find a minister with whom I can labour so harmoniously I have, for upwards of eleven years, done with our beloved minister, Mr Smith. I wish I could induce you all to come in a body and settle with me in Auckland. Again, dear friends, I beg to thank you who are present, and through you my absent friends, for this very handsome testimonial, which, together with the testimonial I received few days ago from my present scholars, through Master Hugh M 'Naught, who made very feeling speech on the occasion, I will ever look upon with great pleasure. (Cheers.) It may be long before we meet again on earth, if that time shall ever come, but believe me, wherever my lot may be cast, I will continue to cherish those feelings of esteem and friendship which your kindness, during our long intercourse, has inspired. My dear friends, I now bid you farewell



Samuel Smith

In July 1858, the Free Church School had played host to a testimonial for the Reverend Samuel Smith, who had been the minister of Borgue Free Church since its inception in 1843, and who as discussed previously played a hugely significant role in the life of the school.

Among the gifts he was presented with by members of the congregation was a pony, a handsome set of gig harnesses, and a very rich and elegant tea-service of silver-plate, beautifully engraved.

Again, the event was covered in detail by the local press, and in a speech of thanks Smith mentions his gratitude to a number of people in Borgue, whose names, like those mentioned by Bremner, will be

familiar to many inhabitants of the area – Sproat, Smith, Sword, Candlish, Houston and Gordon. He also makes some interesting

observations about changes that had been taking place in the agricultural practices of the area around that time, which are worth noting:

The outward aspect of the parish has in that time been greatly changed. Barren hills are converted into forest-. In the place of stagnant marshes, and unsightly bogs and morasses, are now productive meadows, waving corn field. The knolls and hillocks, so frequent in our pasture lands, and unpropitious to the speed of the plough and the comfort of the ploughman and his team, on not a few of our farms have mysteriously disappeared. Turnips and mangel-wurzel occupy tracts where furze and heath, or thorns and briers, had held during ages past unquestioned supremacy. Lime and guano, bone-dust and blood-manure, judiciously applied, to stimulate the latent energies the soil, have added greatly to the average bulk of our corn yards, and, with skillful selection of stock , have given shape, fibre, muscle, and fat to herds and flocks of which Smithfield is not ashamed.*

Smith was to retire in 1861, and died in 1868, but as he was an acute observer of life in Borgue, it is worth noting his thoughts one of the great themes of Scottish history, the emigration of its population in search of betterment. Many people are familiar with the local expression “*Out of the world and into Borgue*”. However, it can easily be reversed to read “*Out of Borgue and into the world*“, as throughout the 19th century many thousands of people left rural Scotland to seek employment across the globe, and Borgue was no exception. In his speech quoted above, Smith describes this process as it affected the young people of Borgue:

For what purpose during the last twenty or thirty years have these yearly swarms quitted the parent hive ? To push their fortunes, to realise an independence which they saw little prospect of reaching at home. Whither have they gone? To all corners and quarters the globe—many to England, there embark in mercantile pursuits—many to Canada and to the United States, to settle there as landholders, tradesmen, and merchants—many to Australia, as stockholders, and. traders, squatters and gold-diggers—some are honourably serving their Queen and their country amid the jungles India —some have chosen the waters the deep for their home, and the life of the British tar for their road to independence. One will be found occupying a position eminence as a medical practitioner county town of England; one is the respected and popular minister over a numerous flock of Australian golddiggers ; one, the representative of his fellow colonists, has a seat in the colonial parliament of N.S. Wales, and makes his voice heard in the Legislative Assembly, in support of the rights and interests of the people. occurred to me, when turning my thoughts to the subject, with a view to these remarks, to make out list, so fur as my memory could serve me, natives, at least parishioners of Borgue who have left their native land, and are now pursuing their callings in such spheres life as have offered the greatest attractions elsewhere. I here introduce this necessarily imperfect list, somewhat in the shape of appendix to the remarks just offered. Of natives and parishioners Borgue, there are now resident in London, 7; in Liverpool, 15; elsewhere in England, 28; in the United States of America, 28; in Canada, 42; in New Wales, Victoria, Tasmania, and India, 22 ; in the West Indies and Bermuda, 5; in the army, 5; and at sea, 15.

Another of one of the teachers at the Free Church School for whom some documentary evidence exists was John Fergusson, born in Portobello near Edinburgh. On coming to teach at the Free Church School in Borgue, he took lodgings in Blackbriggs Cottage, a mile so outside the village, and taught at the school till he left for a post in Newport, Fife in 1864. A zealous Free Churchman, he seems to have been held in high regard at the school, as evidenced by a presentation to him in December, 1860



PRESIDENTATION—BORGUE FREE CHURCH SCHOOL.
 —Previous to their Christmas holidays, the children attending the **Borgue** Free School took occasion to testify their respect and affection for their teacher, Mr Fergusson, by presenting him with a testimonial, consisting of a handsome rosewood writing desk, and other seasonable gifts. This offering was put into Mr Fergusson's hands in the presence of the scholars by a deputation of their number, consisting of Masters William Veitch, Antony Gordon Smith, and Alex. Candlish. These young gentlemen, in delivering it, expressed to Mr Fergusson the esteem in which he was held by his scholars, and the gratitude they all felt for his valuable instructions, and for his unwearied kindness in imparting them. Mr Fergusson, in very feeling and appropriate terms, returned his thanks to his scholars and their deputies for the highly gratifying tokens of their regard which he had just received at their hands.

Described as a zealous Free Churchman, Mr Fergusson received in 1860 a presentation by his pupils to mark their affection

It became clear as the decades past, that it made little sense to have 2 schools, ie the Free Church School and Borgue Academy, in such a small place as Borgue. Also, the expense of having a school building to maintain, and salaries for the masters, was putting a strain on the always fragile Free Church finances. Accordingly, the 2 schools came under pressure to merge. A Mr Bernard Lawson was the last schoolmaster to teach in the Free Church School. Originally from Buckhaven in Fife, the 1871 census for Borgue records him, like his predecessor, John Fergusson, as living as a lodger in Blackbriggs cottage, a mile or so outside the village. He retired in 1873, and shortly afterwards the school closed and the pupils of the Free Church School in Borgue joined up with those in Borgue Academy. Many were reluctant to see this happen, and found it hard to accept, but the Education (Scotland) Act of 1872 had meant the era of Free Church schools was effectively over, and marked a watershed in Scottish education. For the first time elementary education was made compulsory for all children aged between 5 and 13. The existing parish and burgh schools were taken over by the state and managed by locally elected School Boards. The new system was co-ordinated nationally by the Scotch Education Department with the curriculum emphasising the teaching of reading, writing, and arithmetic, as well as the religious aspect. But there was to be no place for the specific religious teachings of the Free Church.

The demise of the school in Borgue is recorded in two documents of the time. Firstly the Valuation Roll of 1876 shows the Free Church School of Borgue, then described as being owned by the trustees of the Free Church, for Andrew Houston, Bridgend, Kildarroch, as being “*empty*”. This is confirmed by Slater’s Directory of 1878, which notes that although there is a Free Church School *building* in 1878, it is no longer in use as a school



Thereafter, there was a lot of discussion as to what the future of the building should be, as the lease which had been drawn up in 1848 with Andrew Pringle of Low Bogue contained no guidance on this matter. It appeared for a spell that the building was used by a local joiner, John Main, as a store, until it entered into the next phase of its life as, again to quote local historian Adam Gray, *“the renowned Soup Kitchen”*

PART TWO

FEEDING THE WEANS : THE SOUP KITCHEN



Background to the development of Soup Kitchens in Scottish Schools :

It would appear from the Log Books for Borgue Academy that soup was first served up to the children on 05 December, 1884. This date coincides with the attention that was increasingly being directed at a serious problem that had been confronting teachers: how to educate children who were going hungry. The solution proposed

was simple, and consisted of *“feeding the stomach, then the mind”*. In other words, there was a clear link being made with educational attainment and proper levels of nutrition. In England, in the 1870’s, Sir Henry Peck, a wealthy business and landowner, introduced school dinners, which were proven to improve learning. Sir Henry then had a school kitchen built and he also provided a garden, so the pupils could learn how to grow vegetables, an idea which was to be taken up later in Borgue.

In Scotland, around the same time, efforts were being made in the towns and cities, like Dundee, Glasgow and Edinburgh. However, the unique character of the problem in rural areas was also being noted, as there, children were having to travel considerable distances to get to school, and were in serious need of sustenance during the day. In Aberdeenshire, for example, by 1884, it was possible for school children to buy a bowl of soup, which had been prepared in a local cottage, for a halfpenny, the menu including broth, pea and potato soup. Earlier, a school soup kitchen had been instituted in a school at Farnell, near Brechin in 1878, after a complaint from the parish minister, Reverend T. A. Cameron, that, *“the school children suffered a serious hardship during the winter months in not having the opportunity of getting a comfortable hot meal during the school day”*. Lord and Lady Southesk, the local landowners, took an active role in fund-raising among the local farmers. As a result the children were given soup daily, at the cost of a halfpenny, as long as they provided their own spoon! The school results in the five years after the creation of the soup kitchen showed a marked increase in the academic success of the pupils, as well as the absence of *“any serious epidemic or illness among them, from which other schools in our neighbourhood have not been free”*. Soup Kitchens were seen to be working.

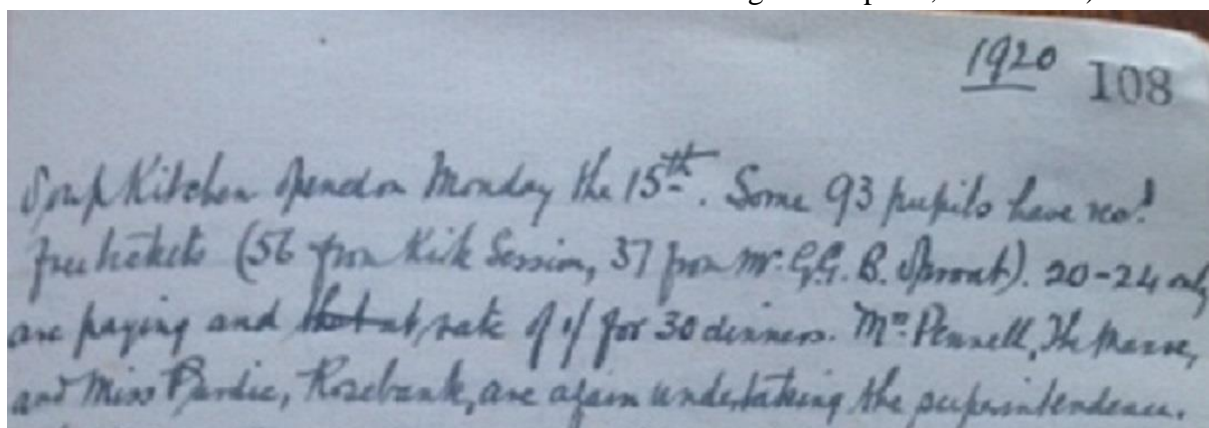


Samuel Smith, an early donor to the Soup Kitchen

The Soup Kitchen in Borgue: For information about its operation, sources of funding, staffing etc, we are lucky to have the Log Books for Borgue Academy. They refer to the Soup Kitchen on a number of occasions. The Headmaster of each school run by one of Scotland's School Boards was obliged to keep a daily log book of occurrences at the school, particularly with details about factors affecting pupil attendance (such as epidemics and severe weather); staffing; physical condition of the building etc. Other information which might be entered, include the subjects being taught; dates and results of visits by H M Inspectors; end-of-term or end-of-year prize giving etc. War Two. The Soup Kitchen only operated over the winter period, typically from October/Nov through to spring and the Log Books carefully record these dates, as well as noting the overall number of meals supplied. For example, from Oct 1916 till Mar 1917, the Kitchen provided 8500 meals.

Funding : From its outset, the Kitchen was reliant on voluntary contributions, whether of money, time, or produce. One critical source of money was donations, often from wealthy individuals such as Samuel Smith, whose contributions helped set up the Kitchen. He was born near Borgue in 1836 and went to Borgue Academy before going on to Kirkcudbright Academy and attending Edinburgh University. He then went on to make his fortune in the cotton trade in Liverpool, before becoming an MP. He never forgot his roots in Borgue, and gave generously to support the Soup Kitchen in its early phase.

Another well-known name listed as a donor is that of George G B Sproat, 1858-1927)



The above entry from the Logbook shows how G G B Sproat paid for 37 children to have their meal at the Soup Kitchen. (those who had to pay were charged 1 shilling for 30 dinners)

His family farmed around Borness, and he himself was involved in sheep, cattle (including the local Belted Galloway Cattle) and also found time to write poetry and songs - by far his most popular and best remembered song is “*Bonnie Galloway*”, enthusiastically sung by natives of the province all the world over as the classic expression of their enthusiasm for their birthplace..) Other donations came from wealthy individuals such as local landowners and farmers, from such well known farms as Ingleston, Auchenhay, Culraven, Margie, Barlocco; and local estates such as those at Earlston, St Mary’s and Knockbren. Other private donors listed in the logbooks are a Mr Bertram Smith, of Broomlands, Beattock and a Mr James Smith of Craigielands.

Such donations were clearly making a difference. A report from the Education Department noted: *“If properly provided, school meals, whether given at a school canteen or at a feeding centre outside the school premises can have an educational value for the child as great as the medical. If a properly balanced meal be well cooked and well served under attractive conditions and with a happy discipline, its nutritional value is enhanced, and its educational value incalculable.”* In 1908, the Education (Scotland Act) was passed which allowed schools to use public money to provide help for poorer pupils. However, the need for income from donations was still required, and in addition to private donations, the Church was to play an important role.

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Borgue Educational Trust: Expenditure.

June 12	By W. Stewart 37½ cwt. coals	1	12	10½
Oct. 26	“ J. Huston Mackenzie, Glasgow’s etc.	3	10	0
Nov. 26	Heskett. 48 bushels coals @ 1/4	3	4	0
Dec. 29	J. Middleton 40 bushels coals @ 1/4.	2	13	4
Jan. 1	A. Houston. Carting 16 bus. coals iron.	0	4	0
Jan. 23	J. Middleton 24 bushels coals @ 1/4	1	12	0
April 2	Cheques for Childrens’ Dinners	7	8	6½
Feb. 25	Joseph Heskett. 24 bushels coals @ 1/4	1	12	0
June 23	Wm. Stewart’s etc.	1	1	4
	Balance on D/R. £ 7. 0. 0	25	14	1½
	do by hand 11-12-5	13	12	5
		£	41	6 6½

June 23 Examined and found correct

James Buchanan Henderson
Robert Sproat Elder

In April 1891, the Church wrote out cheques to pay for meals at the Soup Kitchen

Donations from the Church: The records for the Borgue Free Church do not mention the Soup Kitchen, but the Minute Books of the Borgue Parish Church Session meetings show many examples of regular payments made from church funds to provide meals in the Soup Kitchen for the poorer pupils. All donations had to be approved in meetings of the Session, chaired by the minister. At the time of the donation pictured on the left, this was James Bell Henderson, and a Robert Sproat is mentioned as an elder)

Fund		Expenditure		125
1919	Feb 6	Thomas Mc Lauchlan		
1920		Coals to 14 parties at 15/- each	2,	
1920	March	Paid E. L. Munro for Soup Kitchen	10	10 0
1920	March	Balance in hand	2	16 0
			16	7 6
			£	52 13 3

Likewise, another entry shows money paid on 20th March, 1920 to the then Headmaster of Borgue Academy, Mr Edwin Munro. He would then use this money for the Soup Kitchen funds.

Money paid by the Church to help the Soup Kitchen, March 1920

Fundraising Activities: Fundraising activities were another source of revenue vital to the operation of the Soup Kitchen. They took a variety of forms, for example whist drives, concerts, Burns Nights etc. Many of these events were described in the local press, usually the *Dumfries and Galloway Standard*. Since many of these articles also contain information about life in Borgue, and as they mention by name the staff that ran it, a few of these articles are quoted below:

BORGUE SCHOOL SOUP KITCHEN : *In connection with Borgue School Soup Kitchen, which has been discontinued for the session, the best thanks of the pupils, teachers, and committee are due the following for generous support: Sir Charles Hope-Dunbar, Mrs Cross, and Knockbren Estate for rabbits; Messrs Adam Gray, T. McMillan, J. R. Parker, D. J. Gillespie, T. A. Sproat, J. Finlay, and Sam Brown for potatoes; Borgue House Estates for turnips; Mr Gillespie for carrots; the Education Committee for coal; and the school garden for most of the green vegetables. Mrs Gibson continued to act as a most efficient cook, and during the session approximately 5500 meals were served. The kitchen is by no means self-supporting, but it is most gratifying to all concerned that the annual appeal for funds by means of whist drive or concert meets with a most generous response. **From Dumfries and Galloway Standard, 03 May 1939***

Note the reference in the article above to the school garden, as this was an obvious source of vegetables which could be used to provide many of the ingredients for soup, eg turnips, carrots, and potatoes. The ground used for the garden was part of the Headmaster's garden, a large extent of 800 square yards. According to Adam Gray, few pupils actually enjoyed chores such as weeding and lifting potatoes, but nonetheless produce from the garden played a significant part in providing supplies for the soup kitchen. As a later newspaper article noted, ***"Owing to the "Dig for victory" campaign the school garden this year was able to supply all green vegetables required for the Soup Kitchen"***

BORGUE CONCERT: Programme by Pupils. Borgue Public Hall was packed overflowing on Thursday evening when the school concert was held in aid of soup kitchen and school funds. Rev. W. J. Pennell occupied the chair, and in his introductory speech referred to the good work done by the organisers of the soup kitchen. As auditor of the accounts he assured the audience that the money raised from year to year was well spent. He said that Borgue School had not had a concert for a few years, but was sure the programme to be submitted that night would be in keeping with the best traditions of the school. The programme, which was lengthy and pleasingly varied, was sustained by Borgue pupils and evacuees, and all acquitted themselves with great credit to themselves and their teachers. The music was under the direction of Miss Black, Miss Matthews, and Mr Milne; Mr Iain McLachlan staged physical training displays; and Misses Little and Anderson dealt with elocution and sketches, including the singing games of juniors.

From Dumfries and Galloway Standard, 20th December, 1939

BORGUE SOUP KITCHEN. After a most successful session Borgue School soup kitchen closed at the Easter holidays, and the milk in school scheme has now been resumed. Funds for the soup kitchen were raised by the school concert in November, and these were supplemented by pupils' payments and Kirk Session endowment grant. However, but for the generosity of a number parishioners the success of the venture would have been curtailed. The teachers and all responsible now tender best thanks to the following for gifts of potatoes, etc.: Messrs Alex. Hogg, Upper Senwick; D. J Gillespie, South Park ; Adam Gray, Ingleston ; William Campbell, High Borgue; J. It. Parker, Auchenhay; J. M. Gilmour, Chapelton; Borgue House Trustees, per Mr James Edgar, manager; Sam. Brown, Culraven; Mrs Hyslop, Cairniehill; Messrs T. McMillan, Margrie, and John Sneddon, Barlocco. Two anonymous gifts were also received. Most of the green vegetables used were provided the school garden. After excellent service for sixteen years Mrs Gibson retired from the position of cook, and her place was taken by Mrs Muir, whose services were highly appreciated. The merchants this year wore Messrs A. D. Brown & Son, for groceries and Mr D. C. Cochrane, Gatehouse, for butcher meat. A most helpful supply of rabbits was continued throughout the season by Mrs Cross, Earlston; Sir Charles Hope-Dunbar, Mary's Isle; and the Knockbrex Trustees. Approximately 6500 meals were served

From Dumfries and Galloway Standard, May 1940

*BORGUE SOUP KITCHEN: After another very useful session Borgue School soup kitchen closed before the Easter holidays. Mrs Muir continued to act as cook with her usual efficiency, and during the winter months upwards of eight thousand meals were served. Teachers and pupils are grateful to parishioners for generous gifts of potatoes, vegetables, and rabbits. Owing to the "Dig for victory" campaign the school garden this year was able to supply all green vegetables required. To the following special thanks are due, : Sir Charles Hope-Dunbar, Mrs Cross, Mrs Sutherland, Mr J. Douglas Brown, Mr W. Cruickshanks, Mr J. Sneddon, Captain Stobart, Messrs Alex. Hogg, Adam Gray, and D. J. Gillespie; Borgue House Estate, per Mr Jas. Edgar; Mr W. S. Campbell, Mr J. R. Parker, and two anonymous donors who delivered potatoes without leaving names. Mention must also be made of the gamekeepers— Messrs Gavin Johnstone (The Isle), Robert M'Call (Earlston), and J. J Jarret—who in spite of the severe weather always had rabbits forward in good time. **From Dumfries and Galloway Standard, Apr 1941***

*CONCERT AT BORGUE. In aid of school soup kitchen funds a most enjoyable and successful concert was held Borgue Public Hall on Friday evening. Mr J. Henderson, schoolmaster, presided over a crowded house. The programme, which turned out to be more lengthy than usual, consisted of quartets, solos, elocutionary pieces, conjuring, A Brains Trust," and comedy sketch. Those taking part were Misses H. and R. Hogg. W. Twiname, I. McKenzie. Mrs Ireland, Master D. Armstrong, Mr E. G. Lorimer, Mr Geo. Bernard Southamton), Mr D. J. Devin. Rev. G. Tuton, M.A., "The Brains Trust consisting of the Chairman, who acted as question master, Mr Geo. Kirkwood. M.A., Rev. Mr Tuton, Master Eric Henderson, and Mr E. G. Lorimer. The main questions dealt with farmers' profits, the weighing of coal, clerical collars, the composition of the moon, and the blindness of love. The second half ended with an amusing sketch, having as its theme a case mistaken identity, and played by the following: Mrs R. Twiname, Miss I. M'Kenzie, Miss D. Matthews, Mrs Raphael, Mr Kirkwood, and Mrs Henderson (producer) . Mrs Collin, Kirkcudbright, acted accompanist to the soloists. The artistes were hospitably entertained by a ladies' committee under the convenership of Mrs Kerr, The Hotel. Thanks are due kind friends for donations of food. An enjoyable dance followed to music by local performers, viz., at the piano, Miss H. Hogg, Miss J. Law and Mrs Henderson; piano accordion, Messrs Fred M'Creadie and William Cruickshanks **From Dumfries and Galloway Standard, Nov 1941***

As well as information about how the Soup Kitchen was funded, the Log Books show how the events in the Soup Kitchen were affected by what was happening in the rest of the country, for example like all communities the Second World War had a huge impact on Borgue, as the following entries from the Log Book shows -

12th .. Owing to local food officer's failure to provide a permit to buy goods recently rationed, the soup kitchen had to be suspended.

Soup Kitchen cancelled for the day

On 12th February, 1942, a combination of rationing and bureaucracy meant that the Soup Kitchen did not operate— so presumably the children had to go hungry for the day...

The Soup Kitchen opened today with one hundred and one pupils participating. A new cook (Mrs Milligan) has taken charge as Mrs Muir has gone to work in a munition factory.

Mrs Muir goes to war...

Mrs Muir goes to war – In November 1941, Mrs Muir, one of the cooks, left to work in a munitions factory. Other teachers who left for the war were William Milne, who left in April 1940 to join the Royal Engineers, having taught in Borgue for only a year. His successor George Kirkwood, similarly taught for only a year before being conscripted into the RAF.

Despite the fact that the Borgue Soup Kitchen seemed to be running successfully, in 1942 there was an intervention by the Department of Education for Scotland who issued a circular which suggested that soup was not by itself a sufficiently nourishing meal. As a result, they were “**very anxious that soup should be superseded where possible by dinners or lunches rich in proteins**”. Needless to say, this aroused the ire of locals, who were quick to point out the vital distinction between soup provided to pupils in the towns and cities with that offered up in rural schools like Borgue. The former, as one member of the local Education Committee pointed out was a thin dirty, inedible liquid, whereas the latter type of soup which he saw being served in the country schools was a “**good thick substantial soup with plenty of potatoes, turnips, and other nourishing food in it**.” A local provost pointed out that he had visited schools in the area to experience first-hand the quality of the soup the children were given, and “**he had never once found an instance in which the soup was not most acceptable and appetising, and soup he would readily and gladly take himself**”



Crawford Jarrett, can recollect memorable meal in the Soup Kitchen

Personal Recollections: Sadly, there are now few people alive in the village with first hand recollections of the Soup Kitchen. The author Adam Gray notes that opinion of the food varied – as perhaps you could expect – but that there was always a mad dash down the street to see who would be first to their plate of soup. It seems literally to have been a plate of soup, and nothing else, though some children may have brought with them a “piece”. Mrs Margaret MacConchie, from Laggan, a hundred years old at the time this booklet being was written, recollects being taken down to the Soup Kitchen at lunchtime. Mrs Barbara Linham remembers the room was dominated by a very large, black range with the pot containing the soup on top. One day, when he thought no one was looking, a young Crawford Jarrett took a peek inside, to see what was cooking. It was a decision he quickly regretted, as a sheep’s head stared back at him!

However, he goes on to say that this didn’t put him off his lunch - nothing like a hot bowl of mutton broth on a cold winter’s day...

In 1935 the Milk Marketing Board, keen to find a market for its products, introduced a scheme for the introduction of milk to pupils. It came into operation, at a charge of one old ½ penny for 1/3 of a pint.

It would appear from a newspaper account that, in 1942, the Soup Kitchen served as a temporary cookhouse for a Royal Army Service Corps Company billeted in the village. It was also briefly used during wartime as a Public Hall.

At the end of the war, peace time considerations came to dominate public affairs. The prevailing mood in the country was that the State should play a greater part in the health, education, welfare, diet etc of the population, paving the way for major post war reforms like the National Health Service. The Soup Kitchen continued to function immediately after the end of the war, but its days were numbered. One of the last donations recorded in the Log Book was made in Dec 1945, of £6.00 (from the Rainy Fund) by the Kirk session.

In October 1947, the Meals in Schools scheme came into operation, and was located in purpose built accommodation in Borgue Academy itself. Mrs Joseph Clark was appointed cook, and Miss Betty Murray as her assistant. The State was now officially in charge, and the era of the Soup Kitchen had ended.

The building was subsequently acquired by John Neil, a local contractor, and over the years has been a well-known feature of the village, playing its part in the celebrated annual Borgue Fair. It remains in the Neil family till this day, having been converted into a stunning holiday home for visitors to enjoy as they experience the charms and attractions of the area.

APPENDIX: SOUP KITCHEN STAFF

The following names were found in the Log Books for Borgue Academy, and are listed alphabetically, with a note of at least one year in which they were working, and any other information I have been able to find.

Barbara Blackley (cook) 1923

Mrs Chesney, (cook) 1946

Mrs G O. Elder Born Margaret Stalker Crichton, daughter of a doctor, she was married to the Revd George Ogilvy Elder, M.A., who was for 32 years minister of the Free Church in Borgue, from 1867 till his death at the F.C. Manse in 1899. As a minister's wife, she would have been expected to support her husband's work, and this included helping to cook and deliver the meals to the pupils at the Soup Kitchen. She died at Limetree Cottage, Borgue, 1920, aged 80

Mrs Gibson (cook) Described as "*a most efficient cook*" she retires in 1940, after 16 years' service.

Mrs Gordon (cook) 1946

Mrs Milligan (cook) 1941. Lived at Borness Cottage, and in 1941 takes over from Mrs Muir (see below), who leaves to go to war work.

Mrs Muir (cook) In 1940, she takes over from Mrs Gibson, before leaving in November 1941 to work in a munitions factory. Is mentioned in the "*Dumfries and Galloway Standard*" as a member of the Borgue Womens' Rural Institute.

Miss Betty Murray (cook) 1946. One of the last members of staff in the old Soup Kitchen, she was subsequently employed in the new kitchen run by the Education Department. Remembered by Crawford Jarrett, then a pupil.

Mrs Pennell – A long serving member of staff, wife of the Rev William Joseph Pennell, who was the minister in Borgue Parish church from 1899 until 1942. When she retired, a deputation from the Parish Church, (led by John Parker from Auchenhay) paid a glowing tribute to the work she had done in the community, including the running of the Soup Kitchen. In an article in the *Scots Magazine*, (Sept 1999), written by I. A. N. Henderson, who grew up in Borgue at that time, she is described as being one of a group of 5 who more or less ran the village as they saw fit (The others mentioned were Willie Walker, a joiner; John Henderson, the headmaster at Borgue Academy; Wull McTaggart, a roadman noted for his strongly socialist views (highly unusual in Borgue at that time); and Adam Gray, well known farmer and author of a number of publications about Borgue). Mrs Pennell's appearance, according to Henderson, resembled that of the then Queen Mary, "*in her long, tight coat and her cabbage hat, and her wee thin walking-stick*". She was clearly a strong willed lady, accustomed to getting her own way, and capable of "*generating a fear among the boys that Queen Mary never could*". In similar vein, another well-known local, Jock Parker, from

Auchenhay, remembers “*that Mrs Pennel, who supervised the soup kitchen, was feared not only by children but adults as well. The bravest thing a boy could do was to pinch apples from the Manse orchard, and not many succeeded*”



Headstone of M A Jessiman

Margaret Ann Jessiman She was appointed to Borgue Academy as an Assistant teacher in 1914. She originally came from Aberdeenshire (where she had 13 siblings...) and she is listed in the 1911 census as living in Rhynie Parish, Aberdeenshire aged 20, and working at that time a schoolteacher. She was appointed (from a list of sixteen applicants) as Assistant Teacher. When she left in 1917 she was presented with “*a handsome black Moroccan purse bag in recognition of the great interest she has taken in the pupils and their work*”. Subsequently, she followed a well-worn path for young female teachers in Borgue, by marrying a local farmer, Samuel Brown who farmed at Culraven. The couple eventually

moved south to Devon where Samuel died in 1966, aged 89 years. However, he chose to have his ashes interred in the churchyard here in his native Borgue. Margaret Ann Jessiman herself, died 2nd July 1987, at the ripe old age of 96, and also has her headstone in Borgue churchyard.

Miss Esther Purdie, 1920. Lived at Rosebank, marries a David Ballantyne, dies at Rosebank, 1929, aged 40. In 1924, the then headmaster Mr Edwin Munro made a speech in which he mentions her generous service to the Soup Kitchen.

THE AUTHOR WOULD BE DELIGHTED TO HEAR FROM ANYONE WHO MAY HAVE DOCUMENTS, PHOTOGRAPHS OR MEMORIES THAT RELATE TO THE BUILDING KNOWN AS “THE SOUP KITCHEN”

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February 2020