

‘East is east and west is west and n’er the twain shall meet’ Is this
always true?

A Sociology essay submitted at Aberdeen University in 1975 by Rev.
Allan D Scott.

Allan was born in 1924 and brought up at West Mains Farm near
Pennan, where his father was head gamekeeper. He went on to
serve in the RAF, followed by many years in the police force. Finally,
Allan enrolled as a mature student at Aberdeen University where he
graduated in Divinity and became a Church of Scotland minister.

Allan D. Scott,
Wicketslap,
Daviot,
INVERURIE.

East is East and West is West and ne'er the twain shall meet.
Is this always true?

A study of the village of Pennan and district in 1935 showing how the close-knit ancient fishing community of Pennan had little in common with the loose-knit less firmly established country community - yet were on friendly terms and found common interest in the school and church. Secondly to show the major changes wrought in the district during the four decades from 1935 to 1975.

INTRODUCTION

Geography.

Situated at the north-west extremity of Aberdeenshire, Pennan is a fishing village of 55 houses within the estate of Auchmedden, the Parish of Aberdour and the Presbytery of Deer. The area which is the subject of this study is demarked in the north by two miles of sea cliffs; on the east by the Quaynan Den - a deep gully running south from the sea and bordered on either side by an area of uncultivated land mainly of heather and gorse. This natural boundary continues southwards along the Pouk Howe and further dens to the Auchmedden Wood and the Hill of Windyheads which is an area of moorland. The south boundary runs along the Auchmedden Estate boundary westwards through uninhabited moors to join the Tor of Troup - a deep indentation about one mile wide through which flows the Tor Burn which is the Parish and County boundary. The west boundary of this study follows the Tor Burn northwards to the sea at Nethermill about half-a-mile west of Pennan. From north to south is approximately three miles and from east to west two miles - thus the area under study is approximately six square miles and formed the 'catchment' area for Auchmedden School and Church. (See Map) Pennan lies 12 miles west of Fraserburgh and 12 miles east of Banff. To the east the nearest village is New Aberdour $3\frac{1}{2}$ miles distant, to the west Gardenstown and Grovie 4 miles and to the south New Pitsligo 6 miles distant.

Topography.

The northern boundary is mainly of sandstone cliffs rising 300-400 feet. Pennan is situated below cliffs some 100 feet high at the mouth of the Pennan Burn. Built on a shallow shore it is protected from the ravages of the sea by a stoutly built sea wall. Apart from the sea, the only means of access is by a steep, winding road which climbs the cliffs in a series of zig-zags for about/

about half-a-mile up gradients of 1 in 4 to 1 in 10. to join the Fraserburgh - Banff road at Auchmedden School and Church. The inland area is, with the exception of Auchmedden wood, almost treeless, and consists of a series of deep dens separated by hilly agricultural land of poor quality. It would be difficult to find more than a few acres of flat surface within the six square miles. In more ancient times there had been a number of small crofts in the area but in 1935 nothing remained of these but the outlines of the building foundations and frequently the names living on in field names, the area then being divided into 12 farms of varying sizes, then all being under cultivation. Two roads crossed the area - the Fraserburgh-Banff coastal road already mentioned was of hard core but was tarmacadamed in the late 30's, and the Pennan-New Pitsligo road. The former, because of its sharp bends and steep hills, was avoided by most of the infrequent motorised traffic while the latter was little more than a twisting single-track road with few passing places. The accommodation roads to the farms were little more than tracks churned by the narrow wheels of horse carts and were often barely negotiable by motorised vehicles in wet weather.

History.

It is difficult to separate the history of Pennan from legend. The village is said to have been founded by smugglers and traces in caves in the vicinity would tend to lend credence to this legend. However nothing is to be found in the oldest records regarding this activity. The village is named in the Parish Kirk Session records in March 1616 when an 'excommunicate papist Maister Alexander Leslie' is mentioned as having sought refuge there. In 1700 'the two John Wasts' are named as elders in the 'Seatoun of Pennan', In 1807 the names in the 'sea loft' of Aberdour Church include 12 Wests, 5 Gaats and 4 Watts. In 1766 mention is made of a school at Glenquithel (about one mile south of Pennan) and in 1780 Alexander Lesk was schoolmaster/

schoolmaster at Auchmedden School at an annual salary of £25 (Scots) but in 1835 there is regret that no duly qualified person can be found to teach at Auchmedden School for the present salary of £2.1.8 (sterling) with an annual gratuity of £5.

It is recorded on 21st May 1699 that the Kirk Session was perturbed that the fishing boats of Pennan should not stay later at sea than sunset on Saturdays while in 1704 there were moves to build a harbour. In 1831 the population of Pennan was 180 - 6 boats of 4 men each were engaged in white fishing while 5 long boats engaged in herring fishing were stationed at Banff there still being no harbour at Pennan. At this time Pennan fish - fresh, salted and dried, were renowned over a wide area while several men were engaged in the mill-stone quarry which produced the finest mill-stones in Britain. (The round mill-stones were cut from the bed rock at low tide, a flat bottomed boat or coble was positioned over the stone at high tide then the stone lashed to the bottom of the boat when it grounded at low tide. The boat and stone were then floated off at the next high tide. Traces of the quarry and partly cut mill-stones are still to be seen). Prior to the late 19th century when Auchmedden Church was built, the Parish Church at New Aberdour served the whole Parish. Parts from an ancient chapel at Chapel Den (about 2 miles south of Pennan) were built into the old Parish Kirk at Aberdour which dates from the 15th century (now in ruins). One of the oldest gravestones in Aberdour Churchyard is to the memory of one of the Bairds then lairds of Auchmedden (mentioned in a local prophecy understood to have been by Thomas the Rhymer - 'As lang as there are eagles on the crags of Pennan there will be Bairds in the lands of Auchmedden) --- "Heir lyes Andw Bard who lived in Auchmedden at the Muhl and depairted 1453". The Bairds occur frequently in the Parish Session records but the association appears to have terminated in 1745 when William Baird 'chif of that ancient name participated in the rising and thus occasioned him and his descendants the loss of the family estates'.

Needless/

Needless to say, the eagles have long since departed from the crags of Pennan. The foundations of the old mansion house of Auchmedden were still to be seen a few years ago near the farm of Mains of Auchmedden.

In 1831 it is recorded 'the want of internal communication is severely felt in Auchmedden and until roads are made it is feared that little can be done by the tenantry in the way of improving that property'.

In 1935 the estate of Auchmedden was owned by Alexander Whyte, Montcoffer House, Banff who ran it as a sporting estate with the aid of his factor Alexander E. Brodie, Solicitor, Banff. At this time my father was employed as head gamekeeper on the estate and we occupied the farmhouse of West Mains. I was then eleven years of age.

Time

I have chosen the mid 1930's as a time for this study for several reasons. The district was still very active, modern transport had not made its impact with the resultant disruption of the Pennan way of life, T.V. was unknown and few owned radios, the effects of the 1939-45 war were still in the future and perhaps primarily - because I have first-hand knowledge of the district during this period and have not had to depend to any great extent on unchecked accounts given in various writing in which I have found many inaccuracies.

Choice of Area.

In addition to my knowledge of the district, my choice of the area was influenced by the fact that it was partially screened from exterior influences by its geographical location and which also encouraged the country community to look inwards to Pennan as its centre.

Pennan Village - 1935.

In 1935 there were 55 houses in Pennan village of which two were derelict and used as sheds or stores. All the available building space had been utilised - the houses standing close to the bottom of the cliffs with their gable ends facing the sea. A narrow street ran the length of the village with a few sheds standing between the street and the sea-wall - a protective bulwark of tree trunks and stone and lime which served as a protection against the ravages of the sea in stormy weather. However at high tides during a northerly gale, it was not uncommon for the waves to wash over the sea-wall and dash pebbles across the street and against the houses. Wooden shutters were kept handy to protect sea-facing windows and sandbags to protect doors. The harbour was at the east end of the village near the mouth of the Pennan burn which was the village's only water supply until a piped supply was installed in 1937. At the west end was the village hall - an ex-army hut purchased and erected by the inhabitants/

inhabitants about 1929 which was in regular use for social events and entertainments. In the village were two general merchant's shops and a Post Office (with the only public telephone), a carpenter's shop, a cobbler's, and an inn. Until 1932 the inn had been owned by a local man - George West - who at one time owned the local bakery, was the local coalman and carter and owned the village hearse. He was known until his death as Geordie Baker. The inn then passed into the hands of 'Incomers' - a family from outwith the district.

The Fishermen of Pennan.

In 1935 inshore fishing was still profitable - the Moray Firth had not then been dredged clean by the trawl and the seine-net - and 10 fishing boats were operating from the harbour. The majority of these were 2 man motor boats with one 3-man and a few single. The crews usually consisted of close relatives, the boats being owned by the crew. In season the crews fished for mackerel which were transported to Fraserburgh Fish Market for sale, white fish such as haddock, cod and whiting which were sold locally or were cured by salting and drying, and lobster and crabs for Smithfield.

Pennan men were also to be found on the herring drifters operating from Fraserburgh while it was not uncommon for a Pennan man to be found in the West Coast puffers - small cargo vessels plying between the islands and the mainland. - Others were to be found on the ocean going cargo ships - which was known as going 'deep sea'. It was quite usual to spend a season at the herring fishing - perhaps a year or two on the puffers followed by a spell 'deep sea' with interludes of inshore fishing from Pennan.

A salmon fishing coble operated from Pennan, the crew in the main being Pennan men, but here the employment was of a more permanent nature the same crew returning year after year for the salmon netting season (February to September).

Over 90% of the population at this time were the off-spring of fisher people resident in Pennan for generations. There had been considerable inter-marrying with the result that nearly all were related - the surnames Watt, West and Gatt being in prominence.

In 1935/

In 1935 28 families in the village were so named but by 1975 the number had declined to 10. To avoid confusion tee-names were in general use such as Jimmy Alec, Jeannie Ann, Jeannie Ann's Sandy, etc. Although those of marriageable age might go outside the village for their partners - there was a strong tendency to marry into fishing families from neighbouring villages and towns. The average male could be described as under average height, dark haired and complexioned and of stocky build. The women - as fresh complexioned, well built and generally of pleasing appearance. All spoke the Buchan dialect but with a distinctive accent known as a 'fisher twang'.

The community was close-knit, deeply religious but still harboured strong superstitions often found in such communities whose livelihood is to be gleaned from the sea: e.g. the words 'salmon', 'rabbit', 'minister' and 'kirk' were taboo and were replaced by 'silver fish', 'hairy beast', 'man in the black coat' and 'the house on the hill', while one must not whistle a tune while at sea in case this raised a gale. Dishonesty was almost unknown in the village and I doubt if any door was locked at night.

The husband - wife relationship could be termed very close and was a true partnership. While it was the woman's job to fetch the white fish from the boat on landing, to clean and cure the fish - by smoke or by salting and drying - it was not thought amiss for the man to share in these tasks. Likewise in baiting the lines - generally the task of the woman, the man would usually lend a hand in addition to fetching the bait. However selling the fish direct to the customer was the wife's province - but sending the fish to the market was the man's..

As I have said the Pennan native was deeply religious - but he was 'Auld Kirk' and unlike neighbouring fishing villages the religious sects of Plymouth Brethren, Glose Brethren, etc. had by-passed Pennan. Sunday was the Lord's Day and was strictly observed. No boat put to sea until after midnight that day. Never-the-less the Pennan man was no puritan kill-joy. He enjoyed life and although his pleasures might be sneered at by the modern reader/

reader - there I find much to applaud. Drink in moderation was not frowned on - but drinking in excess was and there was little or no drunkenness in the village. The Pennan man did not believe in 'propping up the bar' of the local inn for evenings on end but did not hesitate to call in for a bottle of beer if he was thirsty. About four houses had a radio which was still in its infancy and electricity was not installed until after the 1939-45 war. Whist, dominoes and draughts were popular and whist drives held in the hall or school were well attended. Of course there was always a 'good news' with neighbours when everything from fishing in the bygone days to modern politics were discussed often with a profundity which would have astounded the politicians.

There is no space for gardens in Pennan but the adjacent hillside known as the Haven Lea was marked off in plots for which the occupiers paid the laird a small rental. There potatoes, vegetables and fruit were grown to supplement the potatoes and dairy produce bought from the local farmers. Even in his gardening the sea took preference over the land - the Pennan man preferring sea-weed as manure as against farmyard manure. Food was appreciated and the Pennan man ate simply but well. Sea food - fresh or cured formed a substantial part of his diet (what better than boiled salted herring and potatoes in their jackets?). Meat was supplied by butchers from neighbouring villages who called in vans.

One man I must mention, did not fit into the general pattern. He was the local postmaster, who, although of the surname Watt, was a jack-on-all-trades. In his time he was dairy farmer, beekeeper, cobbler, and shepherd running a small flock of pure sheep - in addition to owning a fishing boat. Although not outstandingly successful at any of his ventures, never-the-less when the feus of the village came on the market in 1947 he purchased the village and became the local laird - a position now held by his son who in 1935 was the only person from Pennan at University.

The Inland Area.

The area inland of Pennan which I deal with, formed part of the Auchmedden Estate and was the 'catchment area' for Auchmedden School which stood near the church at the junction of the road from Pennan with the Banff - Fraserburgh coast road. Of the 11 farms in the area, 4 were owned by the occupiers (3 by members of the same family), 3 were leased as out-farms by local farmers, 2 were leased by tenant farmers, and 2 were leased as out-farms by farmers living outwith the area. All the dwelling-houses were occupied by persons working on the land, as were the two cottar houses. The majority of the farmers employed local single men who resided in bothies or 'chaumers' on the farm. Terms of employment was by the 6 month period and there was a constant changing of personnel at the two dates when the employment contract expired - 28th May and 28th November - the Whitsunday and Martimus Terms. The married men were employed by the year and only changed at the May term - but generally they were less inclined, on account of their families, to stay at one farm less than 12 months. The farm worker's contract stipulated a 'fee' per 6 months period in respect of a single man - in 1935 varying from £6 in respect of a boy of 14 years to approximately £26 for a mature foreman horseman. It was considered a disgrace to 'sub' part of the 'fee' during the term - so the worker was affluent twice per year. In addition to his fee, the married man had perquisit in the form of firewood, peat, oatmeal, potatoes and milk with a free house and garden. Hours were long - usually 6 a.m. to 6 p.m. with a break of one hour for lunch. The horseman was expected to breakfast his horses before he had his own and to 'supper' them about 8 - 9 p.m. before settling them down for the night.

The Country Family.

In 1935 the effects of the 1929-32 slump were still reflected in agriculture - produce prices were low and most farmers were far from affluent - a state of affairs which continued until the war. As a result there was no extreme class stratum, the farmer worked with/

with his employees and there was close affinity with them. Known by the employees as the 'mannie', the farmer still held the power of the employer and especially in the case of the landlord farmer, his living standard was considerably higher than that of the employee. The farmer's family could afford new clothes but generally the employee's had to be satisfied with second-hand or 'handed down'. The tenant farmer was little better off than the 'cottar' and as his was the smaller acreage and the poorer land, he had a continuous struggle to make ends meet. Food was plain but plentiful being based on potatoes, oatmeal and milk supplemented by rabbits which were plentiful, fresh fish in the summer and salted fish in the winter. Meat was for Sundays only and the left-overs were used as a basis for soup or 'stovies' during the week. Entertainment was almost non-existent. Families thought little of walking up to three miles in each direction to attend the infrequent events in Pennan, while the unmarried youths cycled 12 miles to Fraserburgh on Saturday evening to attend the cinema or have a few beers.

The only cars in the district were owned by two of the landlord farmers and the poor bus services did little to encourage forages into the surrounding areas. The children were reared to follow their parents' occupation and generally did so. It was assumed this would be an accepted fact and they were never encouraged to look beyond their family background and dream of branching into a trade or to look for a higher standard of living.

The country family could also be termed close knit. The comparative isolation of the dwellings meant that the wife was dependant on her husband's and family's company during the evenings but was on her own during the working hours. The farmer's wife's duties, in addition to those of the normal housewife, were concerned with the dairy side of the farm, e.g. milk, butter, eggs etc; but the proceeds from such sales went towards the family budget. Those of marriageable age in the farmers' families, tended to seek their partners from other farming families but the farm workers cast their net wider and frequently married outwith their community - girls from towns or villages and vice versa.

Although the majority of the farming families were poor, there was exception to the rule - one landlord farmer who had married a Pennan girl who although unqualified, taught the primary half of the local two-teacher school. With no family, and the largest farm in the district to which had been added an out-farm, this family enjoyed a standard of living far higher than the remainder and owned one of the two motor cars. Never-the-less this was one of the unhappiest of the homes. This could be attributed to the comparative affluence, the lack of a family, and the wife being employed making her financially independent and having interests outwith the farm. The husband in turn was not averse to seeking other female company and also drank quite heavily. Although the other men in the district were not abstainers, their drinking was confined to special occasions and it was almost unknown for any of them to be unfaithful to their wives. These families were closely knitted, the wife and family sharing in the work and worries of the farmer.

Synthesis.

In the small area under discussion, we have seen there were two distinctly separate communities. In Pennan the interest of the inhabitants lay in the village and the sea but in the landward area the inhabitants had little interest in either. However two mutual interests did bridge the gap - the church and the school. The church had the lesser influence and tended to be Pennan dominated. The country folk were certainly less religious and few could be troubled to attend church, preferring instead a day of leisure as only the essential duties were performed on Sunday. Similarly there was almost 100% attendance at Sunday School by the Pennan children but only infrequent attendance by the country children - and had the Christmas treat not been organised by the Church, attendance at Sunday School being the necessary qualification, then I doubt if any of the country children would have been seen there.

However in the school there was close synthesis between the two groups of children. Although family background came to prominence/

prominence in sport and games - 'countrymen' v 'fishers' etc., generally there was close friendship amongst the children which often continued into adolescence. In the final two years of school life i.e. 12 - 14 years, cooking was taught to both sexes as a compulsory subject as a high percentage of the Pennan boys commenced employment as cooks on the herring drifters or on West Coast puffers. The highlights of the school year were the school concert and the annual picnic. Very few parents missed either event and at the picnic the two communities were brought closely together as parents.

A few Pennan boys sought their first employment on the land - perhaps influenced by their school life, but almost in all cases they were at sea within a few years. It was uncommon for a country boy to be employed at the fishing.

Thus in the school - and to a lesser extent in the church, there was ground common to both communities and the former exerted a strong influence over both.

Changes Wrought in the district during the years 1935-75.

The 1950's saw the decline of Pennan as a fishing village.

Trawlers and seine netters had dredged the inshore fishing grounds causing the men to seek employment elsewhere - usually on larger fishing boats or on cargo and passenger ships.

The following table illustrates the changes.

<u>Number of Males Employed in Fishing & Trades.</u>		
	<u>1935.</u>	<u>1975.</u>
Fishing from Pennan.	14.	2.
Inshore Fishing from Fraserburgh.	23.	-
Deep Sea - Cargo and Passenger.	3.	2.
Agriculture	5.	1.
Other Trades.	10.	13.
<u>Females.</u>		
Fishing Trades.	6.	5.
Other - Nursing, Factories etc.	18.	9.

The above Table tells its own sad story. The only increase is in other trades.

A study of the number of boats permanently in Pennan Harbour bears out the decline in fishing.

	1935	1975
Fishing Boats	10	2
Pleasure Boats	2	17

In 1935 there were 55 habitable houses in Pennan and all were occupied by full-time residents. In 1975 only 45 houses remained habitable. Of these 28 were occupied by full-time residents while 9 were in use as holiday homes.

In 1935 all the 14 houses in the country district were occupied but in 1975 this number had declined to 6. Of the 12 farms in the area - in 1935 6 were owner/^{or tenant}occupied, 4 were farmed as 'out farms' by farmers resident in the district and 2 were farmed by farmers resident outwith the district. In 1975 the respective numbers were 1, 1 and 10. This shows the movement away from the area - the farms having being bought by farmers resident outwith the area and utilised as marginal farms where cattle could be grazed in the open and out-wintered, the necessary fodder being grown on the home farms in more fertile areas. All but 2 of the farms in the Tor Valley were combined with an expanse of moorland to form an open cattle range which can be tended by 2 farm workers. The remaining 2 farms were added to an adjoining farm in Banffshire to become one large unit. The meal mill fell into decay in the late 30's while the remaining farms have all been sold to 'incomers'. Not one farm in the area is now occupied by the same family as it was in 1935. The school was closed in the early 50's and the children are now transported to New Aberdour and Fraserburgh.

The following table shows the number of children receiving education in 1935 and 1975 - combined area.

	1935	1975
University Education	1	3
Secondary Education	-	4
Primary Education	50	5
	<u>51.</u>	<u>12.</u>

The increase in the number receiving secondary and university education is simply a reflection of the national trend.

The population of the two communities by age groups clearly demonstrates the depopulation problem.

	<u>PENNAN.</u>		<u>COUNTRY AREA</u>	
	1935.	1975.	1935.	1975.
Over 65 years of age.	37	13	2	6
16 to 65 years.	83	47	34	16
5 to 16 years.	23	7	27	-
Under 5 years.	<u>18</u>	<u>2</u>	<u>3</u>	<u>6</u>
	161	69	66	28

At first glance it could be assumed that the increase in the under 5 years in the country area is encouraging. However when we note that in 1935 of the 22 adult males living in the country area, 21 were engaged in agriculture; but in 1975 of the 15 adult males only 6 are so engaged; it is realised that but for the housing shortage and the increasing tendency of town workers to obtain a country home from which they commute to work, the situation would be very much worse.

In 1975 the fishing community of Pennan was quickly becoming a minority and I fear that within two generations it will no longer exist as such. The country area is now so sparsely populated that it can no longer be called a community. The interests of the inhabitants now lie outwith the area so one could say that the inhabitants of the country area now have less in common with the inhabitants of Pennan than was the case in 1935. However so many factors have contributed to this state of affairs that one cannot say that the closure of the school and the decline in the importance of the church were primary factors yet this certainly hastened the decline of Pennan as the centre of interest of the area under examination.

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I am also indebted to Alexander Downie, retired fisherman, Pennan who filled in many blanks from memory.