

## Gelletshire's Three Ports: by Robin Sharp

### The 3 Ports on the shores of Gelletshire: Charlestown, Limekilns & Brucehaven



This map was extracted from the Pittencreeff Estate Map 1776 created by Robert Scotland.



## THE LANDS OF GELLET:

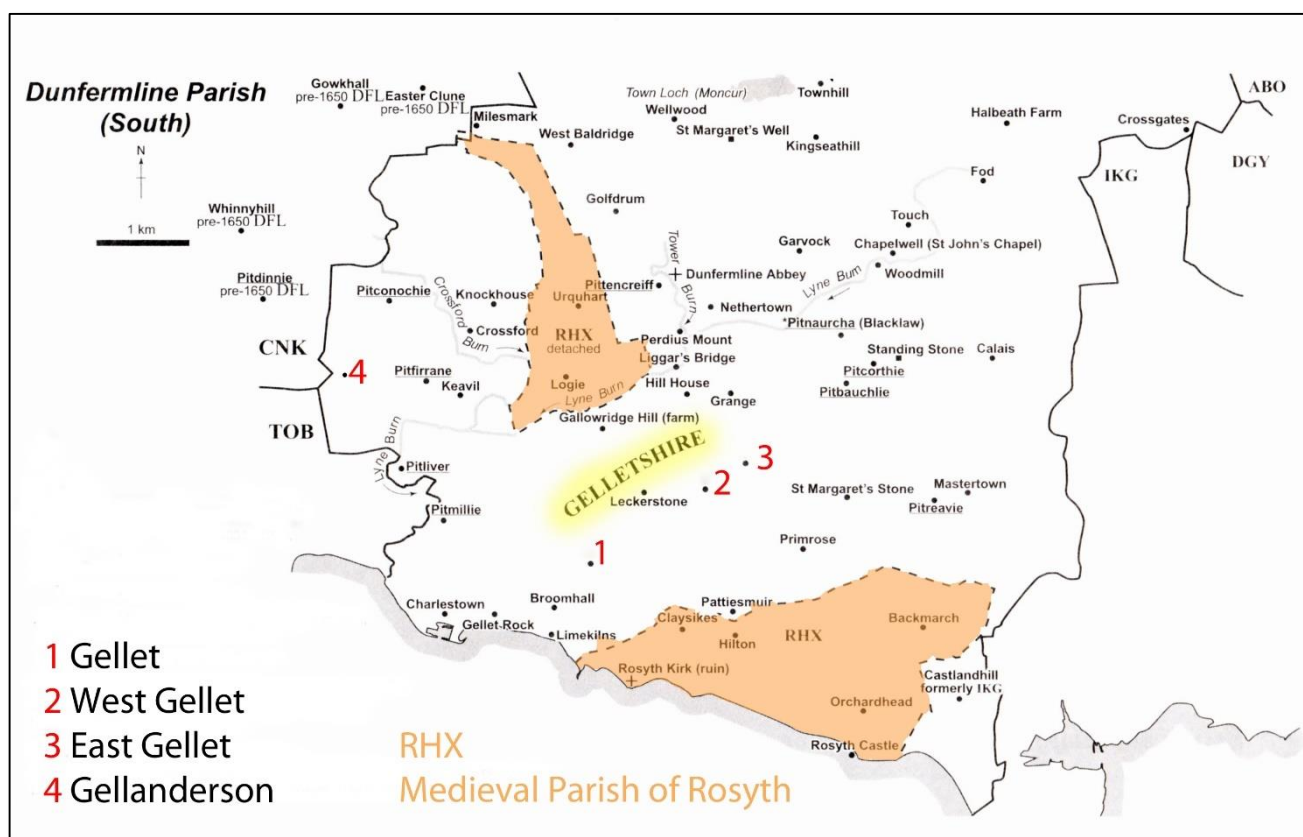
The word “Gellet” has had many different spellings over the ages, Gallald, Gelland, Gallots, Gullett, Gellald but the most learned thoughts are it is of Irish origin and translated means the white shore or cliff. This aptly describes the shore line between Limekilns and Charlestown prior to the extensive Elgin lime works and quarries that existed there from 1750 -1900.

When the Romans sailed up the Forth Estuary to construct Antonine's Wall they would have observed a large white rock face rising above the shore line in this area, rather like mini Cliffs of Dover.

Alas today much of this rock has been removed, to feed the massive lime kilns of Charlestown, and much of what remains is covered by trees. No doubt the Romans would have used this limestone to create the mortar to build the various fortifications and bath houses along the route of the Antonine Wall.

The use of the term “shire” at the end of a place name is a traditional term for the division of land, for the purpose of governance e.g. the sheriff court. In Scotland it would have been known as the “Schire of Gelland” a gift from King Edgar (first son of Malcolm Canmore/St Margaret) to the monks of Dunfermline Abbey. This is stated in an early Royal Charter of 1098 and there are also many references to the revenues obtained from the Port of Gellat which was Lymekilles.

The lands of Gellatshire comprised, the southern regions of the parish of Dunfermline where there were three communities of East Gellat, West Gellat and Gellat. In its eastern extremity there is the harbour of Brucehaven near the old church at the west end of the ancient parish of Rosyth. It's western extremity probably included Pitliver House and may even have extended to the eastern part of Torryburn Parish, where there was a farm and a toll named Gellanderson.



The lands of Gelletshire remained in the hands of the church for approximately 5 centuries until the period of the reformation (1560) when all the lands were divvied up amongst the prominent gentry of the time (Heritors) and the new Presbyterian Church. It is recorded that the Lands of Lymekillis were acquired by Sir William Murray in 1575. He was the Master of Tullibardine and today we still have Murray Lane located off Red Row.

Also in 1575 some of William Murray's holdings were granted to Robert Pitcairn who married Sir Williams sister Eupheme. Robert became the keeper of the havens of Limekilns and North Queensferry. He played a central role in the communications between Mary Queen of Scots and Queen Elizabeth I of England. After a varied career as Secretary of State, Commendator of Dunfermline and Archdeacon of St Andrews he retired to Limekilns and lived in what we call the King's Cellar in Academy Square. The building bears a shield 1581 with symbols of Pitcairn and Murray who married late in life. However, the earliest reference to this building was in a charter dated 1362 from King David (3rd son of Malcolm Canmore/ St. Margaret). Then it would have been the storage place for wines and fine imported goods before being transported to the Dunfermline Abbey or Dunfermline Palace.

Robert Pitcairn died in 1584 without issue and was buried in Dunfermline Abbey. His lands passed on to his brother and sister (John & Agnes). Agnes married a John Fin (or Fyne or later Phin) and her son Patrick inherited her lands. In 1597 part of the holding was sold to David Seaton and there follows a gap in the written records but prior to 1629 Sir George Bruce of Carnock acquired the lands of Wester Gellet. This is the beginning of the extensive Broomhall & Elgin Estates.

In 1637 Sir James Halkett of Pitfirrane purchased the "Lands of Lymekills" from James Phin.

Also in 1677 Sir Charles Halkett rented the customs of Limekilns for the space of seven years from the Earl of Tweeddale. The Haketts remained the chief feudal superiors of Limekilns and the family name is perpetuated in the portion of the village known as Haketts Hall.

In 1815 Sir Charles Halkett sells his Limekiln holdings to the Earl of Elgin.

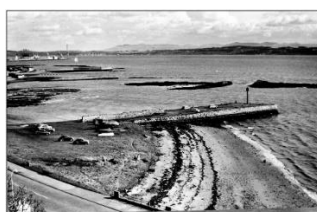
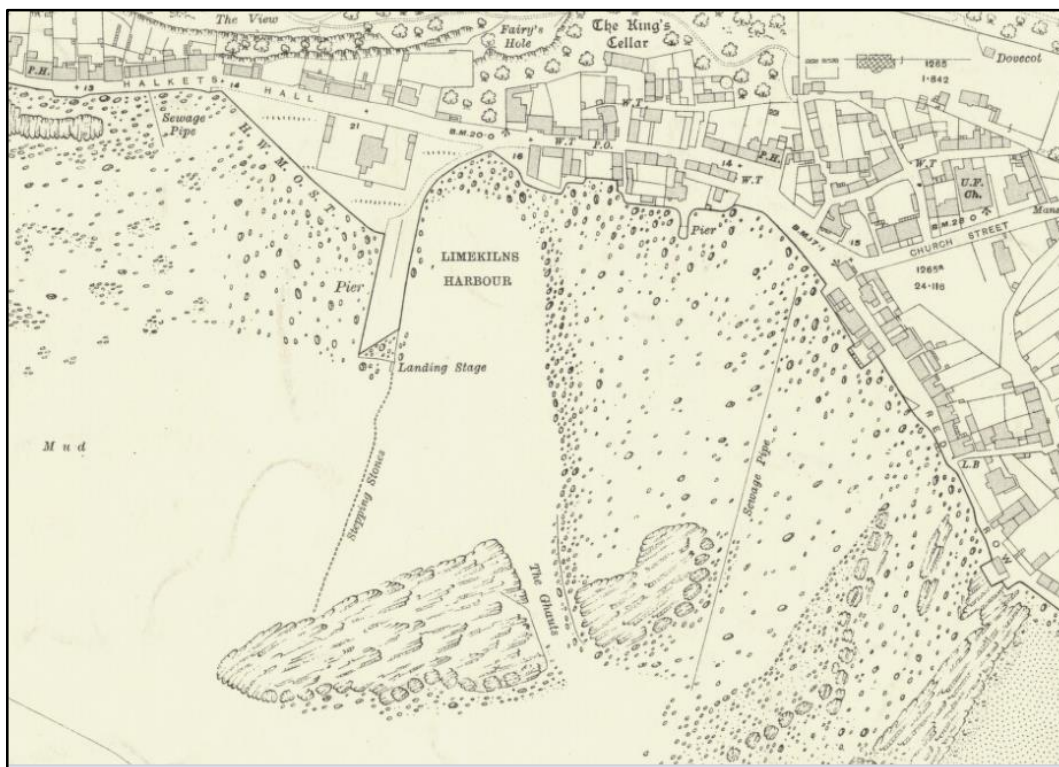
Thus the expansion of the Bruce owned Wester Gellet estate into its present day form of Broomhall Estate. With the first building at Broomhall created in 1704 by the 3rd Earl of Elgin (Thomas Bruce) and extended in 1786 by the 7<sup>th</sup> Earl of Elgin (Thomas Bruce).

Today there are still a number of farms still bearing the name Gellet but it is now a much fragmented ownership from those pre reformation days of Gelletshire.

## LIMEKILNS Harbour:

Limekilns flourished under the auspices of its superiors the Halketts of Pitferrane. Here and at Brucehaven great shipments of coal and lime were made over the years. The volume was such that nearly 50 vessels were registered at Limekilns and were kept busy moving their cargo to all parts of the European Continent. This was in the days prior to steamships and railways but the clippers renowned as the fastest vessels of their day, are all gone. All that remains today are the remnants of the harbour walls, the outer “guauts” or entrance of the port and the old stone pier.

The solidly built houses of the village testify to the comfortable circumstances of generations of skippers and well to do seamen. The place that knew them and thrived under them, knows them no more.

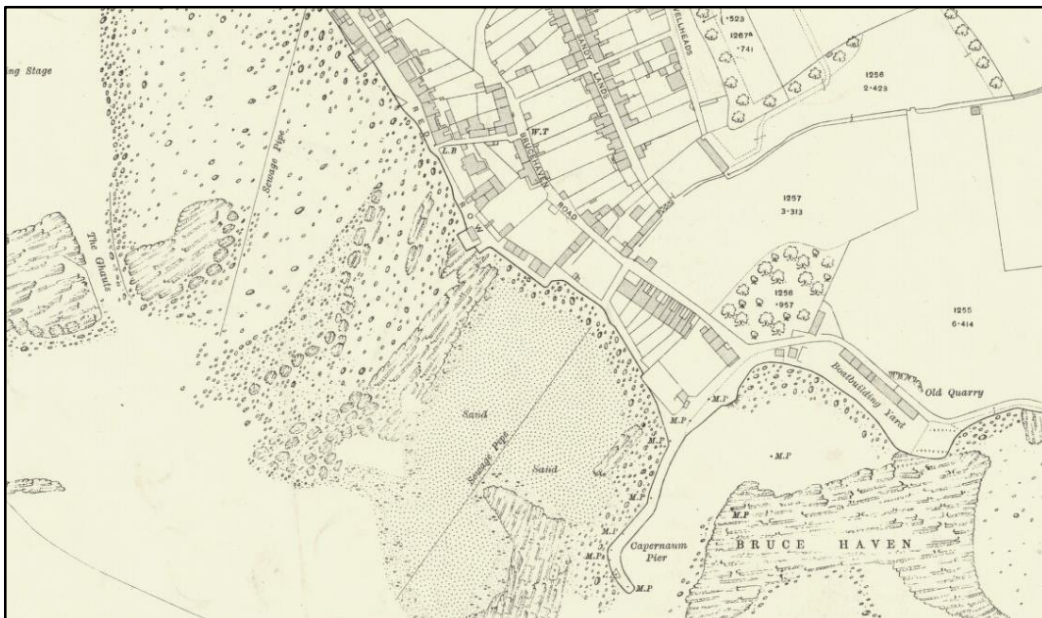


## BRUCEHAVEN Harbour:

Travelling to the east of Limekilns along the Red Row and towards Brucehaven or Capernaum Pier as it is called by many of the locals, you walk through a corridor of time where the ancient industries of the Forth were practised. Salt making, fish curing, rope making, soap making and ship building all took place along this corridor of medieval time. Much evidence remains and can be discovered during a pleasant walk from Limekilns to Brucehaven.

The pier at Brucehaven was built by George Chalmers in 1774-76 for his coal trade. Chalmers was a prominent merchant from Edinburgh who traded and eventually settled in Dunfermline. He lived in Pittencrief House located in the "Glen Park" of Dunfermline. He owned lands rich in coal to the north of Dunfermline and was competing with the "Coal Barons" of the day the Harketts, the Bruces and the Wellwoods.

The harbour became the home of the Brucehaven Shipbuilders. In 1823, 200 carpenters and many boys were employed. Most of the wood used was imported from the Continent by ships returning from deliveries of coal and lime. Many of the famous "Indian tea clippers" were built at Brucehaven.





## **CHARLESTOWN Harbour:**

In the mid 1700's land management and the industrial revolution were changing the coastline of Gellertshire. The Jacobite Rebellion (1745) was over and many of the land owners were looking for ways to improve their estates and increase their revenue streams. The Earl of Elgin's land holdings were modest then, in comparison to that at the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century, but the Broomhall Estate had an enormous seam of accessible limestone which could be easily worked and put to use. In 1752 the 5<sup>th</sup> Earl decided to exploit this limestone and created a new village of 100 houses to accommodate the workforce for mining the limestone and operating the kilns.

Central to the whole success of the enterprise was Charlestown Harbour. The building of the harbour was one of the first parts of the plan to be done. The inner harbour and pier were completed by 1761 and then in 1824 it was extended with the creation of a new outer harbour.

In conjunction with limestone mining and the operation of the kilns there was a need for a large amount of coal to feed the large draft kilns. Many tons per day were required to fire the 14 operational kilns. So the Earls of Elgin started the acquisition of lands (north of Dunfermline) which were rich in coal seams. This provided the coal for the kilns but it also needed to be transported to Charlestown. This led to the development of many waggon ways and railways to meet this need. The evolution of these transport systems is a huge story in itself. Sufficient to say that a large network culminating in the use of steam trains evolved into what was known as The Elgin Railway.

See Early Railways of West Fife by A W Brothie & Harry Jack.

From this harbour developed the first passenger railway service in Scotland. Andrew Carnegie when he emigrated to America travelled by a horse drawn passenger service from Dunfermline to Charlestown railway station. Here one could buy a ticket at the harbour office to any part in the world. Many folks left for the Empire – Australia, New Zealand and Canada. Some like the Carnegies opted for the U.S.A

After the decline of the Limestone quarries the port of Charlestown was underused however it quickly found a new trade to support – Ship Breaking. In 1922 Robert McCrone founded the company Metal Industries which was to become the largest shipbreakers in the UK. Charlestown harbour along with the Port of Rosyth became key locations for this new industry which was involved in the disposal of the scuttled World War I, German High Fleet.

Today all 3 harbours are now engaged in the tourist and sports industry, providing modest accommodation for today's leisure boats and also providing fascinating subjects for the easel and camera. One of the few remnants of the Lime industry is the Gellert Rock. This is a huge pinnacle of a rock (60 x 60 ft) that sits on what remains of the limestone ridge between Charlestown and Limekilns. It is a reminder to the extent of this industry and the shoreline of the white cliffs of Gellertshire.





#### References:

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- 4) Early Railways of West Fife by A. W. Brothie and Harry Jack.
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- 6) A Short History of The Villages Charlestown, Limekilns & Pattiesmuir by Susan Chesher, Linda Foster and Laurence Hogben

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