SETTLEMENTS
PLANNED VILLAGES

Most of Scotland's villages did not exist in 1700; nearly all of them *did* by 1850. These new settlements were 'planned' villages, deliberately created by a variety of people for a variety of reasons. So who were these people? Why did they do it? What had gone before – and what clues can still be found in today's landscape?

The one part of Scotland where we know that there *were* villages, long before 1700, was the south east – the area settled by the Northumbrian English before Scotland became a unified country. Many of these have names ending in *–ing, -ham, -ton, -ingham* or *–ington*, elements which can also be found on the Northumberland side of the Border.

Elsewhere, rural settlements were smaller, based on the *fermtoun* – a small cluster of houses and outbuildings occupied by tenants who together worked the land. If the fermtoun included a church it might be named '*Kirktoun of* such and such'; if it included a mill it might be named '*Milltoun of* such and such'. Names like this are commonest in lowland Scotland, outwith the south east, as in, Milton of Campsie, Stirlingshire or Kirkton of Kingoldrum, Angus. Another variant is *Cottoun of* – a settlement of cottars (small-holders below the rank of joint tenant). A rare surviving example of what these fermtouns must have been like can be seen at Auchendrain, near Inveraray, Argyll.

Besides these, many of the settlements which had the status of burghs were no bigger than latter-day villages.

The period when new villages were formed (c. 1730 to 1830) is termed the *Age of Improvement.* Landowners at that time were open to new ideas and keen to sweep away the old landscape and its settlements in favour of something much more organised; rectangular, enclosed fields, single-tenant farms, straight roads and well-ordered, geometrically laid-out villages.

In addition to their regular layout, there are clues in the names which they were given: *New* Pitsligo in Aberdeenshire; personal names such as Port *Charlotte* on Islay, or events, as in *Waterloo* (named after the battle), Perthshire.

In some cases the villages remained entirely under the patronage of a local landowner. Tyninghame, East Lothian, created to replace a predecessor swallowed up in expanded parklands, remained small and under the control of the Earl of Haddington. On **Islay**, **the village of Bowmore** was planned by the Campbells of Islay, with grand pretentions beyond its (still) small scale. Elsewhere, and especially in east- and west-central Scotland, there was a huge demand for linen and cotton weavers, in the late 18th and early 19th centuries. Their houses, with their connected loom-shops, added to scale of some new villages at that time. **Letham, Fife**, with its long street of single-storey houses, belongs to this group.

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Cotton, linen and wool spinning were mechanised, around the same time, taking spinning from a domestic activity to one which occupied large mills.

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Landowners who could attract the new textile mills to their villages knew that their prosperity was assured – if only temporarily. New Lanark is the best known example, but there were others, such as Catrine, Ayrshire and Deanston and Stanley, both in Perthshire. **Gatehouse of Fleet, Kirkcudbrightshire**, with its four cotton mills, is a good example. Johnstone, in Renfrewshire, had

several cotton mills and rapidly grew into a town. Another town-sized planned village was **Turriff, Aberdeenshire**, built from 1763 as an extension to an earlier town.

Landowners were not the only parties involved in creating new villages. After the failure of the 1715 and 1745 Rebellions, the Government took over the estates of former rebels – many of them in the Highlands – and attempted to carry out its own Improvements. This included planned villages, where ex-soldiers settled. Callander and Kinloch Rannoch, both in Perthshire, represent the mixed success and failure of these projects.

Another industry which fostered new villages was sea-fishing. A group terming itself the British Fisheries Society was set up in 1786 to exploit the rich fisheries of the Minch – between the north-west Highlands and the Outer Hebrides. They also created the new villages of Ullapool in Wester Ross and

Tobermory on the Isle of Mull. Elsewhere, and especially in north-east Scotland, landowners were active in creating new fishing villages. **Helmsdale, Sutherland**, was a by-product of Highland Clearances, but developed as a fishing community.

Mining was another industry which produced new villages. Most were poorly built and some have gone. One of the better-built mining villages was **Newtongrange, Midlothian**, dating from the 1890s.

Not every new village proved successful: *New* Leeds, Aberdeenshire, failed to live up to its namesake's scale or prosperity; others failed to attract the big, capitalist employer whose labour needs might guarantee success; but evidence of all of them can still be found in the Scottish landscape.

To find out more:

Smout, T.C. "The Landowner and the Planned Village in Scotland, 1730-1830" in Phillipson, N.T. and Mitchison, R. (editors) *Scotland in the Age of Improvement* Edinburgh, 1970
Smith, R. *The Making of Scotland* Edinburgh, 2001

Planned Villages – THEN and NOW

1. What was a 'fermtoun'?

(a) A town that is very closely built, creting a 'tight' appearance on a map.
(b) A small cluster of houses and outbuildings occupied by tenants who together worked the land.
(c) A virtual town made up of many farms, surrounding a real town.

2. What is the name of the period c. 1730 to 1830, when new villages were formed?

3. In this period, many of Scotland's planned villages were built to accommodate workers at new mills in the cotton, linen and wool industries. **Can you think of any examples? What is particular about the type of housing in these settlements? Is it typical of village housing? How do you think such accommodation might compare to that of the mill owner?**

Answers

1. A 'fermtoun' is (b) A small cluster of houses and outbuildings occupied by tenants who together worked the land.

2. The Age of Improvement

3. Examples include: New Lanark, Lanarkshire; Catrine, Ayrshire; Deanston, Perthshire; Stanley, Perthshire; Johnstone, Renfrewshire.