

Park family history: James Park, Dechmont
Social commentary.

Glasgow Herald, Thursday February 9, 1893 (*British Newspaper Archive*)

Royal Commission on Labour
Inquiry in Glasgow

Yesterday afternoon Mr H. Rutherford, The Assistant Commissioner, held an inquiry on behalf of tenant farmers and proprietors of the Lower Ward of Lanark in the Religious Institution Rooms, Buchanan Street, Glasgow.

Mr Rutherford explained that the Royal Commission on Labour was issued nearly two years ago in reference to certain disputes of a trade character that took place in the South, and for the investigation of these disputes it was thought right by the Government of the day to issue the Commission to inquire into their nature and character. His first duty was to ascertain facts, and then to observe whether the facts collected disclosed any grievances, and, if so, whether legislation should thereupon be proceeded with, and if so, in what form and manner.

Mr Alexander Russell said the Glasgow Agricultural Society had met and considered the questions forwarded by Mr Rutherford, and had appointed the following gentlemen as a deputation:- Messrs James Park, Dechmont; Bowie, Blackbyres; D. Fleming, West Thorn; and John Wallace, Ingle; and these appointed Mr Park, Dechmont, to speak for them.

Mr Wm Neilson, banker, Bellshill, said he was present to speak for Bothwell parish, and it might be better for him to be heard after Mr Park.

Mr Rutherford agreed to this suggestion.

Mr James Park, who was then examined, said that he paid over £400 in rent, and employed four married men and three or four single men. His farm was principally dairy. In the immediate vicinity of Glasgow the farms were arable, but about ten miles off were dairy. Some followed a four and others a six shift rotation. In the immediate vicinity of the city the land was not held by large proprietors, but about ten miles out it was so held. The great bulk of the farming community was composed of tenant farmers. A great many of the agricultural labourers went into the coal, iron, and steel works, but when there was a period of depression in these trades a number of them returned to farming. These were not generally improved. There had been a plentiful supply of labour for some years, more especially of men, but women were scarce. In lifting potatoes early there was immigration from Ireland. The Irishmen perhaps came in June and returned in October. The ploughmen and field workers of all kinds bore favourable comparison with other parts. The character of the work was altered, but there was not much change in the character of the workers from old times. The regular employees on the farm had no broken time. Married men were generally engaged by the year, though there were exceptions, but single men and women by the half-year. The hours were generally ten hours. The farm hands were generally as anxious to secure the harvest as the farmer. There was an understanding that men were to work after six o'clock, if actually required, but he did not think it was ever necessary to use compulsion. It was understood that in the summer the men should put in an appearance at five o'clock at the stable, breakfast at six, and yoke in the field by seven, where they remained till twelve; but it was quite customary to let a man

unyoke a little before twelve if the field was at a distance from the stable. An hour was allowed for dinner, and then they left off at six. Many of the men were generally home half an hour after. In dairy work the cattlemen had early hours, and dairymaids were also earlier than the men- half-past three was the average hour. Field workers had ten hours a day. The dairymaids were not toiling the whole day, it being more a case of waiting on in case of need. Sunday labour was generally arranged by the men among themselves. In winter the men had shorter hours in the field, and seldom was any labour asked for after dark. The wages of the married men were generally from £52 to £54; for single men, £14, £16, or £18 half-year, with board; and women, from £10 to £12 half year with board. He himself employed two boys belonging to the families of the married men, and gave them 10s to 13s a-week. That, however, was not general. In haytime or harvest there was no extra money payment, but refreshments were generally supplied if men were working late. There were few ordinary labourers employed, but when that was the case pay ran from 15s to £1 a week. During harvest in the uplands he had known as much as 4s 6d a-day given to women workers, and for ordinary field workers in the summer – men from 1s 6d to 2s, and for extra men during harvest 4s, and for women during the same period about 1s 6d to 3s. the same rate was paid in the Bothwell district. For ordinary soils 3s were paid for a three-foot drain; for cutting crop where the machine could not be employed, about £1 per care. Married men had free house and garden, coals driven, a boll of meal half-yearly, and two bags of potatoes per year. The meal would be worth about 18s and the potatoes 16s. In some cases they got less and in others they got more. In the neighbourhood of Glasgow a good many were getting two bolls of meal and four bags of potatoes. The unmarried men had bed and board. Cottages had very much increased in number during the last 20 years; but he did not know that they were as yet quite sufficient for the demand. They were, as a rule, as near the steading as possible. The cottages were mostly of one room and kitchen with wooden floors, though perhaps in condition some of them could be improved. The great bulk in this district had been built within the last 15 years, and were good. The old ones were not numerous, and even those were generally in good condition. These houses all belonged to the proprietors. Mr Neilson stated that he believed the sanitary authorities would step in and not allow either the farmer or the proprietor to have a building in a condition that it would be bad for habitation.

Mr Park, continuing, said he did not know that there was any scheme of drainage in connection with the cottages, but the water supply was generally convenient. All had out-houses attached to them. All cottages had gardens, but in some instances the gardens were not much cultivated. That specially referred to those who were of a migratory character. So far as he knew, there was no demand for allotments; and he believed that men working ten hours in the field could not be expected to do much to small allotments of land.

Mr Rutherford said that was the general feeling among the men all over the country. Mr Park said that a thrifty man might save as much money as would enable him to take and stock a small farm of 70 or 80 acres, but the time the neighbouring farmers would require that man's services he would be required on his own land. Some of these men had turned out splendid farmers.

Mr Neilson corroborated Mr Park's statement, and said he had some men in his mind who had taken some small farms at 40 years of age.

Mr Findlay also corroborated, and said the farm to be profitable would require to be about 70 or 80 acres.

Another gentleman said that for a market garden a smaller number of acres would be sufficient.

Mr Park said it was general for farm servants not to keep live stock. All the benefit societies were small local funeral societies. In agriculture unions were unknown, though agitators had been trying to breed strife between the servants and their employers. The relations between employers and employed were good. Speaking generally, the agricultural labourer was in a good, comfortable condition, and in some cases might be said to be better off than the farmer.

Mr Fleming said the agricultural labourers were very much better off generally than they used to be 15 or 20 years ago.

Mr Neilson corroborated this, but in the Bothwell district the ploughman as a man, was not better off than he was 20 years ago.

Mr POark said that a great deal depended upon the men themselves.

Mr Findlay said that well-doing men could live comfortably.

Mr Fleming said that they were the only class which paid neither rent nor taxes.

Mr Rutherford said he had received a paper from Mr Speirs of Newton, who engaged his men monthly, and held a month's notice on either side was sufficient and worked well. He complained of the difficulty of dealing with the men, and thought that the cottages should be numerous enough and large enough to enable grown-up sons and daughters to live in the family. He allowed them a certain number of holidays, and at New Yea gave them a double wage for a week.

Mr Park said that the farmers in the district preferred the hiring markets, because they could see the men and talk with them.

Mr Neilson said that was also the opinion among the farmers which he represented.

Mr Park remarked that Mr Speirs was in advance of the times; and though it might come to monthly engagements, the farmers were in favour of continuing the present system.

Mr Neilson said he believed the men were also in favour of it, as it gave them two holidays.

Mr Rutherford said that it confirmed what he had already heard from the men.

Mr Neilson then said that the evidence given by Mr Park had been almost identical with that he had been empowered to give. He only wished to add that being farther from Glasgow the Bothwell district was largely composed of dairy farms.

Mr Russell said that the evidence given by Mr Park referred to the whole district.

Mr Rutherford then thanked the farmers for their presence that day and the evidence they had given.

This concluded the proceedings.

Add in newspaper reference to married recruitment by Walter (?) Park and references from Devine