

The cutting of the first sod of the Dornoch Light Railway was performed at St Michael's, Dornoch, on Tuesday, by Miss Florence Chaplin, on behalf of the Duchess of Sutherland, who is at present detained in the South on account of the illness of her elder son, the Marquis of Stafford. The ceremony created lively interest in Dornoch, as the opening of a railway to the burgh had long been greatly desired by the inhabitants. A very large and representative gathering from the town and district witnessed the proceedings, most of the official bodies in the county being represented. The Highland Railway officials present included Mr Wilson, Manager; Mr Gowenlock, Secretary; Mr Garrow, Superintendent of the line; Mr Roberts, Chief Engineer; and Mr Drummond, Locomotive Superintendent. Miss Chaplin, who is staying at Dunrobin Castle, was accompanied by the Duke of Sutherland and Lady Constance Mackenzie. They were received at Well by Provost Sutherland and the Magistrates of the burgh.

#### INTERESTING SPEECH BY THE DUKE.

The Duke of Sutherland narrated the history of the movement for the formation of the railway. He said it was about ten years since the Dornoch people and the Town Council began to agitate for a railway to the town, and the need of railway communication was brought before the Highland Railway Directors. We are glad to welcome here to-day the Chairman and General Manager of the Highland Company. In 1891 a deputation of Dornoch people met my father at Dunrobin, and pressed the claims of Dornoch for a railway, and my father then offered to give the land required free, and to consider the question of financial assistance, if a survey and estimate of the cost was obtained. However, the matter remained in abeyance till 1894, when it again came to the front, and it was then recognised that the ancient burgh of Dornoch was again a rising place, and that the Town Council and inhabitants deserved encouragement in their efforts to secure railway communication. There is no doubt that the more Dornoch becomes known the more its various advantages will be appreciated. We all felt that when the railway was made to go round Dornoch this ancient burgh was somewhat unjustly treated, although at the time there were good reasons for the line being taken inland. In 1894 I therefore authorised, on my own responsibility, the employment of an engineer to make a survey, plans, and estimate of a light railway from Golspie to Dornoch, by Little Ferry, with a view to the formation of a private Company. The survey and plans were made and considered by the Dornoch Town Council, and submitted to the Highland Company, in the hope that they would join us. Before, however, anything was done, the Light Railway Act of 1896 was passed, this Act making provision for Government assistance, and otherwise providing facilities for the construction of light railways. In September 1896 a Light Railway Conference was held at Golspie to consider the Act and the question of constructing light railways in the county, and as a result of that conference the Town Council of Dornoch, the Sutherland County Council, myself, and others applied for an Order for the formation of a Company and construction of the line. In April 1897 the Light Railway Commissioners held a public inquiry at Dornoch as to the needs of such a line, and were so impressed by the whole circumstances of the district that they at once indicated that they would report favourably, and

#### RECOMMEND THE GRANTING OF AN ORDER,

and in August 1898 the Order was granted and Company formed. The Treasury agreed to make a free grant towards the cost of the line of £9000, but this was hedged about with conditions that made it difficult to settle terms for construction and working of the line with the Highland Company, that Company having, under section 5 of the Light Railway Act, and under the conditions of the Order, to construct and work the line. The position of the Highland Company did not warrant them in undertaking to construct and work the line except under a guarantee against loss, which, after considerable negotiations, some of us agreed to give. Thus the barriers were removed, and the Company's shares having been fairly well taken up, the Directors considered themselves safe in asking for tenders for construction and authorising the work to go on, and, as you know, the line is now in course of construction. Another satisfactory element is that, on the Directors last autumn representing to the Treasury the difficulty they had to contend with, the Treasury intimated that they were prepared to in-

crease their free grant from £9000 to £14,000, and also modified some of their conditions. This placed the Company in a position which ensures the working of the line without loss; and the Directors believe that it will yield a dividend on the capital. There are still some shares to take up, and we hope that after to-day they will be at once applied for. There is no doubt of the fact that the railway will prove a very great boon to Dornoch and the whole district, and we all wish it every success. (Applause.) I have now to ask Miss Florence Chaplin to cut the first sod of the Dornoch Railway. (Applause.)

After the turf had been gracefully lifted by Miss Chaplin, the company, headed by the town band, marched into the burgh, where a sale of work on behalf of the Scottish Red Cross Society was opened by Lady Constance Mackenzie. A cake and wine banquet followed in the Sutherland Arms Hotel. Mr Donald M'Lean, Commissioner for Sutherland estates, presided over a representative company. The toast "The Dornoch Company" was proposed by Mr T. A. Wilson, General Manager of the Highland Railway. He said he was sure the opening of the line would bring new interests and changes to Dornoch. He advised them to buy what remained purchasable of the Dornoch Railway stock, and emphasised the importance of the people of Dornoch and district having control of their own line. The toast of "The Sutherland Family" was proposed by Mr Bannerman, Rogart, Vice-Convener of Sutherland County Council, who alluded more particularly to the excellent work the Duchess had done both in creating home industries for the peasantry and in finding a market for its disposal. Other toasts followed.

#### DESCRIPTION OF THE RAILWAY.

The total length of the route is 7 miles 1080 yards, and it is understood the construction of the line will be free of any great engineering obstacle. The greatest difficulty will be experienced almost entirely at the Mound Station, the earth embankment there amounting to upwards of 7800 cubic yards. At present the Mound is only a single platform station. The first station building was a wooden erection, and was demolished in 1877, when the present premises were built. For many years great inconvenience has been felt in consequence of the inadequate accommodation provided for the growing traffic, and between five and six years ago the platform was considerably extended. The old bridge which carries the roadway over the railway is to be demolished and a new structure is to be erected some 20 yards further south. This bridge will be composed of stone abutments and steel girders, and the structure will have a span of 40 feet. The new railway curves off from the main line about 100 yards south of the Mound Station, and, crossing the roadway, will be carried over the Mound by a handsome viaduct. Some difficulty will be experienced in sinking the foundations of the viaduct piers on account of the rise and fall of the tide. The viaduct will be constructed of stone piers with rubble built in cement, and will have steel girders. The Rogart and Golspie road is carried over a new embankment to the viaduct, where it will pass underneath one of the spans and join the existing roadway. From the viaduct the railway will be laid along the side of the Mound, and will thereafter skirt the shores of the Dornoch Firth. At Fourpenny, about four miles from the Mound Station, a small platform will be erected, and at the fishing village of Embo further on a platform 60 yards long and a loading bank will be provided. The station at Dornoch will be situated within 100 yards of the burgh, and a large passenger platform and a loading bank will be provided. The country through which the new railway passes is not void of interesting and

#### HISTORICAL ASSOCIATIONS.

There are the ruins of Skelbo Castle, at one time the Highland residence of the Sutherlands of Duffus; and then there is the Little Ferry. The ferry is renowned as the scene of a battle between the Danes and the natives of Sutherland. The fight took place on the Dornoch side of the water. Dornoch itself is an ancient and interesting town, and in the neighbourhood of the burgh are numerous spots to which tradition has attached an interest by its tales of the many bloody struggles which were erst so successfully maintained there against foreign invaders. Objects pointed out with interest are, it is said, the socket of the old Gallows Tree and the Fatal Stone. At that stone occurred, it is alleged, one of the very last instances in Scotland of the burning of a witch, in the person of an old half-witted woman from Tarbat, in Ross-shire, in 1722. The work of the new line has been designed by Mr Wm. Roberts, engineer-in-chief to the Highland Railway Company, and the contractors for the work are Messrs Chisholm & Co., Inverness.