

Mr James K Bell, Dornoch

THE community of Dornoch was greatly saddened by the recent passing of Jimmy Bell, who during his years in the Royal Burgh provided quality education as a teacher; was held in high esteem as a hard working and committed councillor; and was respected as the most learned person on the history of the town.

James Kirkland Bell was born in Moffat, Dumfriesshire, in September 1912, the only son of David and Mary Bell. Shortly afterwards, his parents moved with Jimmy and his two sisters to Motherwell. One of his tasks as a boy was to deliver "pieces" to his dad who was working at the time in the Dalzell plate mill. It was here that his love for football and his devotion to Motherwell FC began. This remained with Jimmy as a passion throughout his life and he used it as a means to enthuse youngsters into sport and activity.

At the age of 12, the family moved again — this time to Fort Erie, Ontario. He received most of his education in Canada, training as a teacher, and had begun teaching when the Second World War broke out. By this time the family had moved to Buffalo, New York.

In 1940 he joined the Canadian Army and sailed back to Britain, despite the US border guards telling him that Britain was a lost cause. As a supervisor in the YMCA, with the honorary rank of captain, his task was to work for the welfare of the soldiers. He was torpedoed off Tunis, saw service in Sicily, and witnessed both the savage battle for Monte Casino and the disastrous Dieppe raid where the Canadians took heavy losses in the first Allied attempt to invade Europe.

In 1943, while stationed in Inverness with the Forestry Corps, he met and subsequently married Jessie Grant, daughter of Charlie and Jessie Grant from Dornoch. After moving to Dornoch, he took up a position teaching English, history and geography at the then Sutherland Technical School.

Jimmy and Jessie's two sons, Grant and David, both shared their dad's interest in sport and no-one was prouder that Jimmy to see both lads play football and golf to a high standard.

In 1966, Jimmy and

Jessie took on the responsibility of looking after 40 more boys, when they were appointed, respectively, warden and matron of Earl's Cross boys' hostel in Dornoch. Many boys from the North and West coast owe a lot to his determination to see them succeed.

At that time the luxury of education within daily travelling distance was not available; even weekend buses home were years away. When school reopened in August it was the norm for boys to stay continuously until the October "tattie" holidays. Jimmy, throughout his years as warden, also had to contend with a heavy teaching workload. All who had the good fortune to be at Earl's Cross with the Bells, staff and boys, will testify that they were both totally committed to their work and looked after and raised the lads as if they were part of their family.

After they retired from Earl's Cross in 1977, Jimmy's commitment to the community came to the fore. He served on the district council for Dornoch, and he was a founder member and chairman of Historylinks and played an important part in the development of its permanent home down by the glebe.

Even as Jimmy entered his 90s he would deal with each query about Dornoch with great enthusiasm. If he did not know the answer himself, he certainly knew where to find out and who to contact.

Those who knew Jimmy knew a man who was so grateful for all the many gifts with which he was blessed. Never one to boast but yet a man so proud of his sons, their families and devoted to his wife Jessie.

Jimmy had so many qualities: an intelligent man, his ability to pass on knowledge to others was a joy to witness and done with clear, logical and lasting effect, holding the listener with interest and building a desire to learn more.

He had a vast general knowledge, including poetry and literature, but particularly he loved geology, archaeology, local and natural history. He knew all the rocks in Sutherland, the brochs and hut circles, possibly on an individual basis. He inspired his great friend, Struan Robertson, to chart all of the early settlements along the Evelix and to

meticulously record other aspects of Dornoch's archaeology. He knew more of the history of Dornoch than anyone else and was still contacted regularly by people from all over the world wanting to trace their Sutherland ancestry.

Jimmy loved bird watching; his Sunday afternoon jaunts with Donnie MacDonald were legendary and made a huge difference to the classification of the birds of South-East Sutherland. His younger son David still remembers the excitement of being with him around 1970, when they found what they thought was the first osprey's nest in the county following their re-introduction to Scotland.

Jimmy was a lover of sport, both for its own sake and because he passionately believed in the value of sport in building character and comradeship.

He was a county-level tennis player in Canada, a long-distance runner, a swimmer, and perhaps surprisingly given his height, also played basketball for his college. In Sutherland, he helped organise countless football and athletic events, and was also a proficient caddy for his brother-in-law, Donald Grant, when he was in his heyday on the links.

Jimmy maintained a non-playing membership of Royal Dornoch Golf Club in order to support the game in the area, even although he did not himself play.

Latterly, when he could only spectate, he still passionately supported both Motherwell and Scotland.

Principally Jimmy was a devout man. He had been brought up very strictly; his family belonged to the Brethren. In Dornoch he and Jessie attended both the Free Church and the Church of Scotland and Jimmy was distraught if he had to miss a service due to ill health or any other reason.

They always had a clear commitment to the Christian faith and to living a good life in the sense that the Bible defines it. This was done humbly and without fuss; it showed in the ways he was always willing to help, to encourage and to comfort. He and Jessie were especially delighted when Grant joined the ministry. Jimmy's deep faith



supported him through his life, especially in later months as his health deteriorated.

Underlying all Jimmy's being, he was a dedicated family man. This was quite a challenge for someone who himself came from a relatively small family to join the Grants of Achosnich and the Frasers of Dalchiel, who are so numerous that they now have established colonies in most corners of the known world.

Jimmy and Jessie were married for over 60 years and were a true example of a devoted couple. He supported Grant and David on their varied paths through life and he deeply loved his grandchildren Seonaid, Gordon, Sarah, Alison and David and, the most recent addition, his great-granddaughter Emily.

Jimmy was alert and uncomplaining to the end and was grateful for the care he received, especially from the local doctors and nurses. Ronnie and Is Bruce, and Barbara and Sandy Morrison were also especially generous in helping him while he was ill.

Jimmy would have been deeply embarrassed by the tributes that so many have given.

The family take great comfort from the many cards and letters received. The writer of one card in particular accurately captures the spirit of Jimmy Bell: "The community shall all miss Jimmy. He was a man small in stature, but a giant in Dornoch."

Jimmy is survived by his loving wife Jessie and his two sons Grant and David. Grant is minister at Culbokie, while David is professor of economics at the University of Stirling. They extend their warmest thanks and gratitude to everyone who has been so supportive and kind.

James K Bell was a special man and those that were privileged to know him share with the family their deep loss.