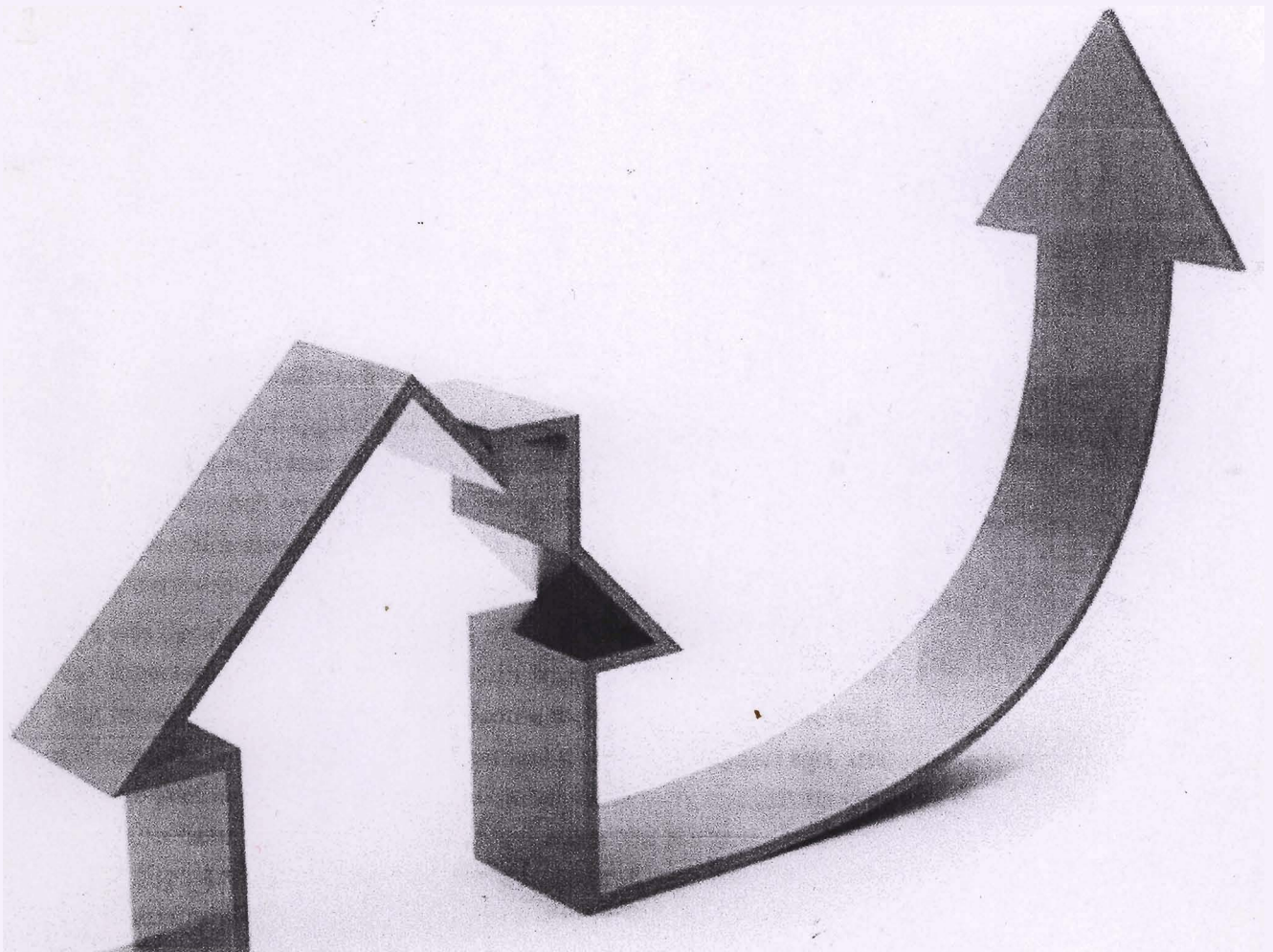


# **DORNOCH**

## **New House Survey 2013**

**by Duncan Allan**



THE RECOVERY of Dornoch from the post war depression started with the opening of the Dornoch Bridge in 1991, the last of the three bridges across the Firths, cutting the journey time to Inverness by half an hour. This brought Dornoch into the periphery of Inverness city region, the economic engine of the Highlands.

Highland Regional Council decided to close Dornoch Academy in 1994. Parents, led by Joan Bishop OBE, took over the running of the school under Conservative Government legislation, appointing a brave and dedicated Head Teacher in John Garvie, which resulted in the school becoming one of the best in the Highlands, attracting pupils from far and wide.

Peter de Savary bought Skibo Castle in the early nineties and turned it into the Carnegie Club, adding a new 18 hole golf course and recreating a Victorian estate for the rich to come and holiday. He was successful in attracting rich Americans and Skibo became the largest private sector employer in Sutherland.

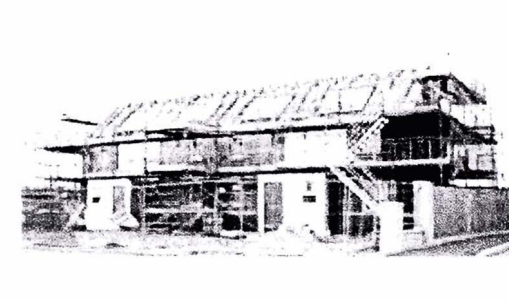
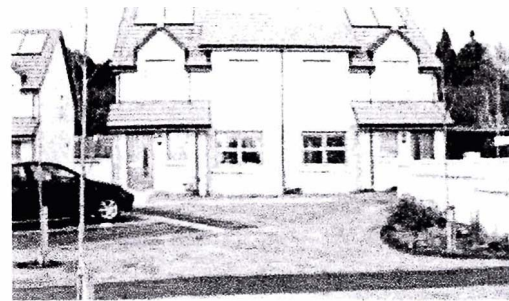
Some of us remember when lady members of Royal Dornoch Golf Club used to bake cakes for sales of work to raise funds for the Golf Club. However, a drive to attract American members, helped by good publicity from Ben Crenshaw and Tom Watson and the Donald Ross connection by the then Secretary/Manager, John Duncan, greatly improved the fortunes of the Club, and it prospered.

At this point, the literal dominance of our Cathedral, which has experienced many vicissitudes for almost 900 years, should be mentioned. Births, deaths and marriages are all presided over by the charismatic Rev Susan Brown, who draws a large congregation at a time when church attendance is falling all over the country.

Approaches were made to North Highland College to create a campus in Dornoch on the St Andrews model, to create a degree course in Golf Management, which opened in 2000. The acquisition of the Burghfield House Hotel expanded the campus to include degree courses in Scottish History and Business Studies, and courses in Hospitality.

The final seal of approval was achieved when the First Minister of Scotland held a Cabinet Meeting in Dornoch. But there was something missing. Dornoch was derided for being inhabited by locals living in stark council houses at one end of the town and elderly retired golfers in a dreary suburb at the other. There was some truth in this jibe.

It was decided to try and attract a more eclectic population by building attractive housing that was within their means, either to rent or buy, more in keeping with the handsome town dwellings that are such a distinctive feature of Dornoch. That was more than 10 years ago, and it has proved successful. Credit is due to all developers and private citizens who have responded so well. Most attractive towns and villages in the Highlands, especially the city of Inverness, have been ruined by being surrounded by a dreary suburban sprawl, full of ugly bungalows





served by strange looping roads beloved by Council road engineers. The 2010 census results reveal, as expected, that Dornoch is the only settlement area in Sutherland that is substantially increasing its population. So we seem to have got things right.

Over twenty years ago, a survey was carried out in Culloden, Inverness, to find out where people had come from and why. The results were not quite what was expected, since 40% had come from within the Highlands and many others were fleeing from English cities. It was not just oil, and tourism was the main factor in drawing them to Inverness.

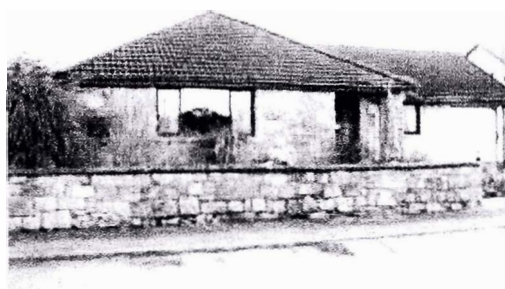
This survey seeks to find out who lives in the new houses built recently within the Royal Burgh of Dornoch.

The New House Survey is confined to the 100 new houses built in the Royal Burgh since the Millennium. It excludes Embo, Camore and the new largely middle class satellite village of Hilton of Embo, which straggles along Embo Street.

The new houses have been built mostly in six developments, consisting of mansions at Earl's Cross Gardens, an attractive social housing enclave at Morrison Court in Bishopfield, the three-storey town houses in Dornoch Square, a development of terrace housing adjoining Meadows Park football ground, a large development at Ross Avenue, south of Evelix Road, and a new building to order project at Dean's Park, south of Sutherland Road on the western boundary, where it is good to see the adoption of vernacular Scottish design.

Apart from the small exclusive development at Earl's Cross, all the new houses are within 10 minutes walk of the Cathedral and are of a higher density with small gardens, but with ample car parking and common ground under management contract. There is a great diversity in accommodation to suit all tastes and most pockets, including affordable accommodation. It is no longer evident which is private and which is social housing, and 'ranch style' bungalows are no longer being built. It should be mentioned that Todd Warnock, an American citizen, is undertaking a marvellous restoration and extension of Links House, shortly to open as a boutique hotel.

There is planning consent for another 300 houses. 14 houses were under construction during the course of the survey and 2 new small building sites were being prepared at Bishopfield and Littleton. Thus, it seems likely the population of Dornoch will increase to 2,000 in the foreseeable future.



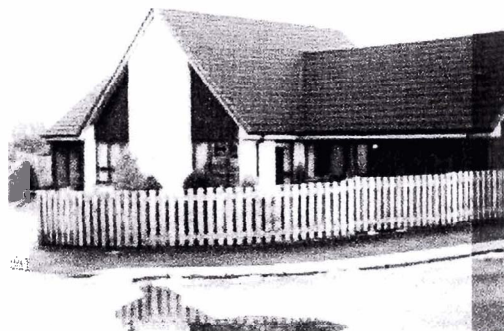


## Statistics

The survey was carried out before Easter, because it was aimed at permanent residents, not visitors. 66 returns were received from the 100 houses, which is quite good considering that at least 20 of the vacant houses were second homes, holiday lets or for sale. Holiday homes and holiday lets have become an integral part of housing in Dornoch. We would be well advised to liaise with Cornwall Council on this matter. Thus an 80% return was achieved.

Readers will judge for themselves from the statistics and they require no comment from me except two that caught my eye. Why are some cafes closed on Sunday, this is a holiday town. It reminds me of the days when the Cathedral Café used to close at midday with a notice saying 'Closed for Lunch'. A radio ham suggests that we should start Radio Dornoch. A local solicitor explained that new housing sold readily because it was affordable, met the requirements of the buyer and, being well insulated, was less expensive to heat.

DORNOCH, 2013



# Dornoch New Housing Survey 2013

Total Replies: 66

## Where did you move from?

Responses: 67

Location	Total	% Total Replies	% Responses to Questionnaire
Dornoch	21	31.8	31.3
Scotland	19	28.8	28.4
Highlands	17	25.8	25.4
England	7	10.6	10.4
Rest of Europe	2	3.0	3.0
Asia	1	1.5	3.5

## 2 What is your Occupation?

Responses: 73

Occupation	Total	% Total Replies	% Responses to Questionnaire
Professional	21	31.8	28.8
Retired	16	24.2	21.9
Hospitality sector	6	9.1	8.2
Unemployed	6	9.1	8.2
Golf	5	7.6	6.8
Agricultural/Forestry	4	6.1	5.5
Technician	4	6.1	5.5
Medical	3	4.5	4.1
Office	3	4.5	4.1
Local government	2	3.0	2.7
Retail	2	3.0	2.7
Emergency services	1	1.5	1.4
Student	0	0.0	0.0

## 3 What attracted you to Dornoch?

Responses: 89

Attraction	Total	% Total Replies	% Responses to Questionnaire
Employment	22	33.3	24.7
Attractive environment	17	25.8	19.1
Golf	12	18.2	13.5
Good schools	11	16.7	12.4
Suitable housing	11	16.7	12.4
Retire	10	15.2	11.2
Offered tenancy	3	4.5	3.4
Escape city life	3	4.5	3.4
Oil-related	0	0.0	0.0

## 4 What do you think Dornoch lacks?

Responses: 77

Need	Total	% Total Replies	% Responses to Questionnaire
Games hall	28	42.4	36.4
High speed broadband	21	31.8	27.3
Function hall	16	24.2	20.8
Supermarket with petrol	12	18.2	15.6

## Other suggestions

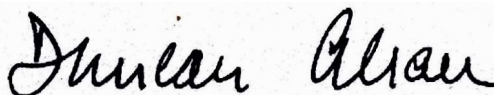
Activities for teenagers + pre-school, playparks, family-friendly cafe, public toilets, youth club, radio station, emergency chemist, decent pub.

Also suggested that youths should be surveyed for their suggestions.

## Acknowledgements

I wish to thank Roger and Sue Boyce, Fiona Macdonald, Chris Ferne, Councillor Jim MacGillivray and my wife for their help and encouragement.

The views expressed here are mine alone.

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading 'Duncan Allan'. The script is cursive and fluid, with the first name 'Duncan' and the last name 'Allan' clearly distinguishable.

Duncan Allan