

HOW DORNOCH GOT ITS NAME

FLEUCHARRY - Gaelic. Fli (A local legend) - shelling.

The town and parish of Dornoch got its name from the Gaelic word Dorneich, which means a horse's foot or hoof; About the year 1259, the Danes and Norwegians, having landed on this coast, were attacked by William, Thane or Earl of Sutherland. Here the Danish General was slain, and his army beaten, and forced to return to their ships, which were not far away. The Thane of Sutherland fought so well for his side that he swung the battle himself. While he singled out the Danish General, and gallantly fought his way onward, the Thane being, by some accident, disarmed, seized the leg of a horse, which lay on the ground, and with that killed his enemy. In honour of this deed, and of the weapon with which it was done, this place received the name of DORNEICH, or DORNOCH, as it is now called. This tradition is still remembered by the horse-shoe, which is still retained in the Coat of Arms of the Burgh. In memory of the famous event a stone pillar was put up on the spot, supporting at the top a cross, surrounded by a circle, which went under the name of Earl's Cross. Standing on a sandy hillock, it was gradually undermined by the winds and the stone fell down and broke in pieces so none remains to be seen.

The Roman Church was introduced about 1150 when Bishop Andrew was appointed. PLACE NAMES IN DORNOCH PARISH When Earl Harold was forced to make submission to William the Lion in 1202 the Scottish King strengthened the central power in the north by granting the south-eastern portion of the diocese to Hugh the son of Freskyn of Moray. From the time the Murrays steadily extended their power and Moray influence in that quarter gradually declined. After the murder of Bishop Adam in 1220 the power of the Murrays was increased by the appointment of Archdeacon

ACHAVANDRA - Gaelic. Andrew's Field. There was a Bishop Andrew at Dornoch, who had of Assynt were the chief Barons of

ACHOSNICH - Gaelic. Ach oisneach - Cornered field.

ASTLE - Norse. Ash - dale. In 1501 the Kings Court established at Dornoch. In

1503 the Earl of Huntly became heritable sheriff of Inverness. BALVRAID - Gaelic. Baile, bhraighead, - Height.

The Macleods of Lewis having ravaged the country of the CAMORE - Gaelic. Catha - a steep ascent, Mor - large.

CLASHNACRAVE - Gaelic. Clash - hollow, nan craoibh - of trees.

CLASHMORE - Gaelic. - large hollow. The leader

of the Macleods (John Aberich) seemed to have the victory because

EMBO - Norse. Bo - boll - township. The natives pronounce it ERIBOLL in Gaelic, which comes from Norse EYRR - Pebbly beach, and BOLL - Town.

SKELBO - Norse. Shell town.

LEDNABIRICHEN - Gaelic. - Slope of heights. Bir is a point.

FLEUCHARRY /

EARLY HISTORY OF THE CHURCH

The buildings of the Early Celtic Church in Dornoch were made of stone. Its site has been identified of traces of the old dry-built cells of the monks by workmen who were digging the foundations of an extension to the old school, proves beyond doubt that the rising ground upon which the old school stands was the site of Dornoch's earliest ecclesiastical settlement.

The Abbot's house somewhat higher up than the huts of the monks and nearer Bishopfield which no doubt, was the land they cultivated. The mill and the kiln in all probability stood beside the burn on a piece of land to the East of the Masonic Buildings, which afterwards came to be known as Kilncroft. The old well to the East of the Carnegie Library may have been that from which the Monks drew their supply of water for the needs of the brotherhood. They had no winches and they had to push and pull the boats themselves.

DORNOCH CATHEDRAL

Dornoch Cathedral was built by Bishop Gilbert (1223-45). It is the chief structure in Sutherland. It consists of nave, choir, and chancel running from East to West, crossed by North and South transepts, and it has a square tower rising from the crossing. The Cathedral is 126 ft. in length along nave and chancel and 92 ft along the transepts. The breadth of the nave is 25 ft. and the height 45 ft. The tower is 30 ft. each way. The height of the present steeple is 120 ft.

The Cathedral has been a graceful and attractive structure. In the seventeenth century the Chapter House, which stood to the East of the North transept, was used by the Municipal Authorities as the Town House of the Burgh till it became ruinous in 1730. In 1570 the Cathedral was burnt by Sinclair, Master of Caithness, and Mackay of Farr, who ravaged Dornoch during a feud with the Murrays. The central tower was the only part of the Building to escape destruction on this occasion. The Cathedral served as a Parish Church for over two centuries until in 1835 the Duchess of Sutherland effected a more extensive work. Unfortunately the work was undertaken when the standard of ecclesiastical architecture in Scotland was at a low ebb. Recently the interior has been considerably improved and stained glass windows have been added.

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FISHING FOR EELS IN DORNOCH

People of Dornoch used to go to the Little Ferry and bring back cart loads of sand eels, which were put up on the rafters of their cottages to dry. A woman who did not have some eels left over from the previous year when the new load was brought in was considered unthrifty.

FISHING IN THE AREA

There was no fishing in Dornoch but in the Village of Embo.

The life of the fishermen and their wives was a hard one as there were no proper harbour and although there was a small pier where catches could be unloaded at full tide, boats had to be hauled up and down the beach by the fishermen. They had no winches and they had to push and pull the boats themselves.

The crew consisted of four men who had a share in the boat. After the men went to sea the women had to go for bait such as mussels and cockles. This meant walking to the Meikle Ferry or Skelbo or Dornoch Point.

Big boats came in to the Little Ferry but seldom landed catches.

After 1918 Embo as a fishing village gradually declined until by 1938 there was not one fishing boat in the harbour. Things were

MARRIAGE CUSTOMS IN EMBO

The customs of the Embo marriages at the end of the 19th Century and the beginning of the 20th Century were more or less constant.

Matches between couples were made by the parents of the young people, who, they thought, were suited to get married. In long ago days, young couples did not go out courting at nights because the people were busy baiting their lines for the day ahead.

Parents saw to it that the people they thought suitable for matching together were strong, strong enough to launch a boat, and healthy enough to go out in any kind of weather to gather cockles, mussels and lugworm. Some women used to carry their men on their backs out to the waiting boats, because they thought it unlucky for the fishermen to get their feet wet. The Fisherman's wife had to go round the district and sell the fish. Some travelled as far as Rogart, Lairg, Invershin, Bonar Bridge, and sometimes if trade were bad they went to Tain.

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In the choosing of the bride, the groom to be would go with a married uncle to the girl's house and ask her hand in marriage. Then the betrothal would take place. Whisky and other drinks were in great abundance then. As there were no roads, the couple along with two witnesses would walk along the links to Dornoch and register their forthcoming marriage. This was called going to the "cumhnant".

The parents of the young couple would meet to discuss the wedding and then invitations would be issued. The bride and best maid would go to the house of the bridegroom and invite his family. The groom and best man would go round the houses in the village inviting his friends and it was considered unlucky for the bride and groom to meet in the same house.

The night before the wedding was the "reiteach" or "Oidche nan cas", when the bride's feet were washed and all sorts of superstitions were observed. For example, if a girl in front of the fire got a cinder with a red tinge in it she would marry a redheaded man; if she got a black cinder she would marry a dark haired man. That night would be passed in merry making and dancing to music supplied by the piper and accordeon players, and round about the time they might have been thinking of going home to bed the wedding procession would be formed. Until about 60 years ago the procession would walk across Dornoch links to the Church. Pipers preceded the procession. The bride was apart from her groom going to Dornoch. The marriage ceremony performed, the people would go to one of the hotels for a buffet supper and drinks - and more drinks

Towards evening the procession would wend its way home, the women who were able supporting the men. When they reached Embo they went straight to the village hall where everyone who did not go to Dornoch was assembled. An aunt and uncle were waiting outside the hall door. The uncle poured out drinks for everyone as they entered and the aunt scattered rice and broken bread over the guests.

When everyone was in the hall the piper played an eight-some reel. The bride and groom lead with only the more important guests. There would be only this set dancing. This was to give everyone a chance of seeing the bride and groom. The piper then played two or three more dances for everyone and the party then marched home to a big feast prepared by a woman who specialised in doing these feasts.

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They would finish the meal and then go back to the night dance in the hall, after the "baadge" ceremony. The "baadge" took place during the wedding feast. The guests put as much money as they could into a bowl on the table. The money so gathered paid for the wines and the remainder was put into two stockings in preparation for another part of the night's celebrations.

The dancing continued till midnight when the best man and the bridesmaid entered the hall. The best man threw a shawl over the head of the bride (who was dancing) and to the delight of all carried her out of the hall to the place where she and the groom would be sleeping. The groom was left in the hall. At the house the bride was undressed and put into bed. She was given one of the stockings from the "baadge" which she threw to the crowd. The person who caught it was supposed to be the next married in the village.

The bridegroom was next taken and put to bed. He also threw his stocking. The money in the stockings was given to the bride's parents for the next party the following night. The dancing in the hall continued till 4 a.m.

There were no honeymoons, the married couple living at the bride's home for a couple of days and then they would go to their own home. The night they did this was called Hetts. They took what they could of their belongings and with the guests went to their home. It was then that the guests brought their wedding presents. Then with the blessings of all they took their place in the life of the community.

It is wrong to say the wedding party walked to Dornoch in the 20th Century because they would go in large two-horse carriages. These carriages were highly decorated and they would be tightly packed with the more agile guests seating themselves in the most incongruous places.

After the 1914-18 War all the customs except those of the couples and of the eightsome reel in the hall were done away with. This is no doubt because of the fact that most of the people marry outside of the village.

SKIBO CASTLE

Skibo Castle was included in the grant of lands made by Hugo Treskyn in 1211 to kingsman, Gilbert, Archdeacon of Moray, who probably made it his home after his appointment to the bishopric of Caithness in 1223. In the agreement concluded in 1275 between Bishop Archibald and the Earl of Sutherland regarding certain lands in dispute, the "Castle of Schytherbolle" was assigned, among other properties, to the Bishop and his successors.

Even after the erection of the Bishop's Palace at Dornoch in the sixteenth century, it continued to be a residence of the Bishops. In 1455 Bishop Mudy appointed his brother-german, Gilbert, to the constablership of his castles of Strathnaver, but it was re-taken by Captain James Cullen. It appears in various grants of the sixteenth century, and in the new grant of the Earldom of Sutherland in 1601. A letter incorporated in a chapter of Bishop Robert Stewart shows that in the sixteenth century Skibo Castle was a Bishop's dwelling.

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ASHOSIDE - Gaelic. Ash cleanness - Cornfield.

ASHES - Norse. Ash - Gaelic.

ASHVAND - Gaelic. Ash, straightened, - height.

ASHVAND - Gaelic. Ash - a steep ascent, Nor - large.

CLASHAVAN - Gaelic. Clash - hollow, and crash - of trees.

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ASHVAND - Norse. Ash - hill - to ship. The natives pronounce it ASHIBOL in Gaelic, which comes from Norse ASH - Pebbly beach, and BOLL - Town.

ASHVAND - Norse. Shell town.

ASHVAND - Gaelic. - Slope of heights. Ash is a point.

FLEUCHARY - Gaelic. Fliuch - wet; airidh - sheiling.

REARQUHAR - Gaelic. Rhi - declivity; the last part may be a proper name.

TORBOLL - Norse, or Gaelic. Torr - a heap and baile; or from Norse - boll - township.

PITGRUDY - Pit, Place, and grudie - a common place-name in all all parts of Sutherland. Grudie is a river in Durness, a place-name in Lairg.

Norse - Grjot - stones.

GENERAL BACKGROUND HISTORY TO THE AREA

Prior to the Norse period the county north of the Dornoch Firth was occupied by a Gaelic-speaking people. The Gaelic law and customs were prevailed. No written records of the early period have survived the ravages of the Northmen. After they arrived in 872 the Gaelic speaking people gradually receded from the South-eastern Coast and from the river valleys into the interior. The Earl's Cross at Embo is said to mark the site of a battle against invading Norsemen, in which Sir Richard Murray was killed in 1259.

The Roman Church was introduced about 1150 when Bishop Andrew was appointed to the Northern ^{see} diocese. When Jarl Harold was forced to make submission to William the Lion in 1202 the Scottish King strengthened the central power in the north by granting the south-eastern portion of the diocese to Hugh the son of Freskyn of Moray. From the time the Murrays steadily extended their power and Norse influence in that quarter gradually declined. After the martyrdom of Bishop Adam in 1220 the power of the Murrays was increased by the appointment of Archdeacon Gilbert of Moray to the vacant see. The Earl of Sutherland, Mackay of Farr and Macleod of Assynt were the chief Barons of the Country.

In 1503 there was a Kings Court established at Dornoch. In 1508 the Earl of Huntly became heritable sheriff of Inverness.

The Macleods of Lewis having ravaged the country of the Mackays were pursued and overtaken at Tutim, Angus Murray of Culbin who succeeded in arresting the outlaw was rewarded by grants of Mackay's forfeited lands in Strathnaver. The leader of the Mackays (John Aberich) seemed to have the victory because he escaped with his life so that Murray's invasion proved abortive.

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For many years at this period the Earls of Sutherland and Caithness were in fierce conflict about questions of jurisdiction. In the eighteenth century Sutherland remained loyal. In 1811 the Countess Elizabeth then Marchioness of Stafford, introduced extensive schemes for the improvement of the agriculture of the county, the making of roads, the plantation of woods, the creation of sheep farms and the establishment of a number of fishing villages. The schemes were unfortunately marred by acts of harshness towards small agriculture tenants, particularly in Strathnaver and Kildonan.

The Crofters Act (1886) by providing security of tenure to the smaller tenants led to a great improvement in their dwellings and in their methods of cultivation. The benefits of this statute were further extended in 1911.

Additional Information

Dornoch is the County Town of Sutherland. Nearby is the village of Embo, a clean little village on the Dornoch Firth with a splendid sandy beach. Further on are the ruins of Skelbo Castle which belonged to the ancient Bishops of Caithness and later to the Sutherlands or Lairds of Duffus which is linked with many a local legend and historic fact. The Castle is supposed to have been built by Sir Richard de Moravia about 1245 and soon after was so important and roomy a place that the Commissioners sent from Scotland and England to meet and escort south the Maid of Norway stayed there, and there heard the tidings of her death.

About the end of the sixteenth century the place was occupied by a certain Marjory Mowat who when the owner Allan Kinnaird, died, produced a will showing that the place had been left to her. But old Allan's heir showed in the Law Courts that the Will was sealed after the owner's death. Marjory Mowat bitterly cursed him saying that evil would befall him and his lands here and in Morayshire. This was remembered when his Culbin land turned into a wilderness of sea and sand.

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MONTROSE AND JACOBITE PERIOD

In 1746, when the Jacobites, were marching northward, creating havoc on the Royalist property, they held high revelry in this Castle soon after dispersing London's troops. But afterwards they had to surrender to a small body of Sutherland Militia within sight of it but on the other side of Loch Fleet, which was once known as the Ferry of Unes. It was here that the Cat tribe of invaders landed about 91 A.D. to take possession of the land given them by the King. personal responsibility for the surrender of Montrose but the Royalists never forgave him. After the Restoration he was forced, owing to persecution, to sell his estates. The members of his family took refuge in the Netherlands where their descendants are still to be found. At the same period several of the Sutherland Lairds, including Robert Gray of Greian, Gray of Skibo, and Murray of Pulrossie, were subjected to heavy fines because they had taken sides against the Royalists.

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In the forty years after 1735 the Sutherland family made large purchases of land and property in the county until, by the purchase of Lord Reay's estates in 1825, the family had acquired practically the whole county except Skibo, Beauchall, and Achany.

DOMNOCH 150 YEARS AGO

From the end of the sixteenth century until the end of the nineteenth century, there were two kinds of markets held in Domnoch. In Bishopfield the Cattle Market was held and the other, Feill Bar of Bazarfair, was held in the graveyard; the graves were sadly desecrated and later a road (the present High Street) which had up till that time been a narrow path, was built covering many graves. There was about thirty stalls at the market, where linen and different materials were sold, and the measuring stone can still be seen in the church yard. On market days, the children had a holiday and their chief delight was the buying of tin whistles, gingerbread, and gundy, a sort of toffee in high yellow slices.

Formerly, New Year's Day was of little importance, and Old New Year's

MONTROSE AND JACOBITE PERIOD

In his march through Sutherland in 1651 to the fatal field of Carbisdale, Montrose received scant local support. After he had been defeated he wandered about for a few days in the wilds of Upper Strathoykel until compelled to surrender. He was taken to Ardvreck Castle. Macleod of Assynt was from home at this time but his wife who was a strong Covenanter at once reported his capture to the authorities and Montrose was transferred to Skibo Castle, then he was taken to Edinburgh. Macleod had no personal responsibility for the surrender of Montrose but the Royalists never forgave him. After the Restoration he was forced, owing to persecution, to sell his estates. The members of his family took refuge in the Netherlands where their descendants are still to be found. At the same period several of the Sutherland Lairds, including Robert Gray of Creich, Gray of Skibo, and Murray of Pulrossie, were subjected to heavy fines because they had taken sides against the Royalists.

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Year's Day was instead a great day for people. Those of the East played the West at bools on the links. The bools were hard, black balls and the idea was to see who could throw them the furthest along the links towards Embo. The competition used to start about ten o'clock in the morning and continued until four o'clock in the afternoon. Afterwards there was always a great deal of feasting.

There is a solitary grave. It contains the bones of a man who died at Fortgower. He was refused burial at Dornoch cemetery because it was said, contrary to the beliefs of doctors, that he died of Cholera.

DORNOCH IN THE 19TH CENTURY

About the beginning of the 19th century the Old Council House which stood on the site of the present Court House was destroyed including one or two shops which were on the basement, and this involved a loss in the Burgh of Dornoch revenue. The only income now available was that got from grazing of the links. The Town Council took steps to preserve the links from injury, and from that day anyone who turned the soil of the links or carried away any of the earth could be taken to Court. Apparently the links provided material for the construction and thatching of houses.

In 1815 the grazing of the links was set up for the price of one-shilling, but although the rent was so low, no-one was set to rent it. Afterwards it was found that a large part of the community strongly opposed the renting of the grazing, which they considered to be an interference upon their rights.

DORNOCH IN THE DAYS OF THE DROVE ROADS

The cattle from the neighbourhood of Dornoch were taken to Shibe and became part of the Shibe Drove. They were taken South to Falkirk by the Clyde and then they forded the Clyde at Bonmahon.

DORNOCH AND CHOLERA 1832

In the year 1832 cholera, a dangerous infectious disease spread into Sutherland from the South. Helmsdale and Golspie suffered from this disease, so the people of Dornoch were worried by the fact that the disease was so near them. After a meeting was held, the Town Council sent out statements warning the people to keep their houses clean. A committee was set up to see that the directions were carried out, and they made a report which told of how poor the people were. The houses were in such a state of disrepair that the people could hardly find a dry spot for their beds. The streets were very dirty, as many people threw their garbage into them, owing to their want of proper ashpits. But the inhabitants were very fearful of infection, and did all they could to prevent its introduction into the town. Small pickets of guards were set up round the town/

town in all directions to stop anyone coming in from the infected area. No one was given respect. The County Fiscal, who was coming to the town on important business, was turned away.

Near the Earl's Cross there is a solitary grave. It contains the bones of a man who died at Portgower. He was refused burial at Dornoch Churchyard because it was said, contrary to the beliefs of doctors, that he died of Cholera.

The cholera scare did more to improve the sanitation of the town than any threats from the magistrates and must be looked upon as a blessing more than a curse to the county.

Although great havoc was created by the disease in Glasgow and even in Inverness, Sutherland escaped the worst of the plague except for Golspie and Helmsdale, where no precautions had been taken against it. Doctors were scarce in the North at the time, so it was more from the efforts of the people than because of Medical Aid that Dornoch escaped completely.

1832 marked the end of such public danger as garbage in the street and ashpits at every house, and since then Dornoch has kept up a very reasonable standard of sanitation.

DORNOCH IN THE DAYS OF THE DROVE ROADS

The cattle from the neighbourhood of Dornoch were taken to Skibo and became part of the Skibo Drove. They were taken South to Falkirk Tryst, as far as we know they forded the Kyle at Bonar. Writing in the Old Statistical Account in 1793, the Minister of Creich reported "there are no bridges in this parish. The people have been amused from time to time with the hopes that a bridge would be particularly convenient for drovers; all the cattle driven South from Sutherland, Caithness and Lord Reay's country (except the parish of Assynt) having hitherto been obliged to cross the Kyle by swimming, which when the weather is bad and the Kyle much swelled by rains, hurts the cattle greatly, especially when the night following proves cold. Sometimes they refused to swim in which ^{case} they had to be ferried across in cobbles (boats). The people pretend to foretell whether they shall have a good market or not by their readiness to swim".

The first iron bridge was built by Telford in 1814.

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The droves were not always taken to Falkirk. There was a three-day Fair held at Dornoch (St. Barr's Fair), and one at Ardgay called Feilliteachan. At these Fairs, as well as the selling of animals, home spun cloth and various commodities were sold. There were also competitions held between the different parishes and it was from these Fairs that the Highland Games originated. The big cattle Fair was held at Crieff at Michaelmas Time (in September) but in 1770 it was transferred to Falkirk. It was called the Crieff Fair but the one at Falkirk was called the Falkirk Tryst. There was also a cattle fair at Muir of Ord. This road has now unfortunately

It was during the latter half of the seventeenth century that the great trade in black cattle which the Highlands and Islands reared, became important. The drovers took the cattle slowly southward over the wide drove roads or cattle raikes, along which the cattle fed and improved as they travelled. When General Wade began his roads in the early 1720's he had these cattle raikes as a guide on which to base the course of his military roads. General Wade, however, did no road building North of the Great Glen. The Judge at the time wanted to go

Cattle droving as such, is only lately dead in the Highlands.

The Hanging Tree was used for Donald Mackay who killed a man said to be a witch, and was sentenced to death. To show his THE DORNOCH MAILS IN THE EARLY 19TH C. / Fling before his hanging.

SPORT IN DORNOCH IN THE 18TH CENTURY

Many years ago Shinty was the universal game of the people of the North. In Dornoch a game was played annually on Old New Year's Day. Practically the whole male population took part. At eleven o'clock in the morning they all set out with their sticks to the Links, and from then on they kept at it until darkness prevented them from continuing.

EARLY HISTORY OF THE GORON

THE DORNOCH MAILS IN THE EARLY 19TH CENTURY

In this district the mails were carried from Tain to the Meikle Ferry where the boat was waiting to take the mails across the water. When they crossed there was a coach with five horses waiting to take the mails into Dornoch. When the horses reached Dornoch they were put in a stable at the top of the School hill. Here the Dornoch mails were delivered, and with a fresh team, the coach sped on towards Embo. The road went via Earl's Cross, and below Gallows Hill where the Gibbet used to stand. This road has now unfortunately been built over by a new Bishopfield housing scheme.

ROUGH JUSTICE IN EARLY DORNOCH

In the days when the jail was part of Dornoch Castle it was quite possible for a prisoner to escape from it. The origin of Dornoch Law concerns a notorious sheep stealer who was captured and imprisoned. The Judge at the time wanted to go out shooting white hares, but he knew that if he did his prisoner would escape so he said: "I'll hang him to-day and judge him tomorrow".

The Hanging Pole was used for Donald Mackay who killed a hare said to be a witch, and was sentenced to death. To show his contempt for his judge, he danced the Highland Fling before his hanging.

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