

# 'Fine tribute' for long-time Dornoch Cathedral minister

## OBITUARY

The Very Rev. James Simpson 1934-2024

A SERVICE of Thanksgiving for the life of the Very Rev. Dr James Simpson, a former Moderator of the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland and Royal Chaplain, was held at St Leonard's in the Fields Church in Perth.

Regarded as one of the Kirk's most distinguished ministers, Glasgow-born Dr Simpson served historic Dornoch Cathedral for more than 20 years.

He was also renowned as a popular after-dinner speaker and best-selling author, raising more than £80,000 for Cystic Fibrosis research and support for a condition which afflicted his first granddaughter, Sally.

In 1993, he was appointed chaplain in Scotland to Queen Elizabeth II.

A keen and low handicap golfer, Dr Simpson - known to his many friends as Jimmy or Jim - was an honorary life member at Royal Dornoch Golf Club, where being appointed captain was one of his proudest moments.

His two-year term was cut short when he was appointed Moderator in 1994/95.

The Perth service was attended by many of the family's friends from Dornoch, with the golf club tartan very much in evidence.

In a recent interview, Dr Simpson recalled: "When I arrived from Glasgow, life revolved around the Cathedral and the golf club, although I quickly realised there were many more golfers than churchgoers when I preached as the sole nominee!"

"Naturally I joined the golf club and made friendships which have endured to this day."

His passion for golf saw an invitation extended to be chaplain at the 30th Ryder Cup held at the Belfry in 1993. The trophy was won by a US team captained by Tom Watson, edging out a European side led by Bernard Gallacher.

While he played celebrated courses such as Augusta and Pinehurst on his travels, Royal Dornoch enjoyed a special place in his heart and he wrote a short history of the club.

After graduating from the University of Glasgow with first class honours in Mathematics and Physics, Dr Simpson had contemplated a career studying atomic research.

At the time, however, there were no vacancies at Harwell, which concentrated on developing peaceful uses of atomic power.

The only career opportunities were at Aldermaston, which specialised in developing nuclear weapons.

Not wanting to spend his life in the

manufacture of nuclear bombs, former Eastwood High pupil Dr Simpson returned to his native city to study Divinity at Glasgow University.

After a spell at Greenbank Church in Clarkston, ministries beckoned with Grahamston Parish Church in Falkirk and St John's Renfield Church in Kelvindale before, in 1976, he was called to be minister of Dornoch Cathedral.

During his 21 years in the Sutherland town, he was credited with transforming the ailing Cathedral congregation into one of the most vibrant and best attended in the Highlands.

After retiring from his role in Dornoch in 1997 he became interim minister at Almondbank and Tibbermore, and went on to provide a valued helping hand to several churches, including Brechin Cathedral, St Leonard's, Scone Old, Crieff and Bankfoot.

Dr Simpson was a prolific writer of articles for the Church of Scotland - his regular column over more than 10 years in "Life and Work" was eagerly anticipated by readers - and various golf magazines at home and abroad.

His first book, "Holy Wit," topped Scotland's best-sellers charts for months.

He went on to publish 13 further books, with "Life, Love and Laughter" and others recounting humorous and uplifting tales from his life as a minister and anecdotes about people as diverse as Robert Burns, Martin Luther King and Lee Trevino.

During his time in Dornoch, he was proud to be awarded an Honorary Doctorate from Aberdeen University.

Dr Simpson campaigned for an "opt out" policy on organ donation. Granddaughter Sally died at the age of 27 after undergoing a double lung

transplant two years earlier.

Dr Simpson died peacefully at his Bankfoot home near Perth - which he had named "Dornoch" - just a few weeks after family from near and far gathered along with Helen, his wife of 64 years, to celebrate his 90th birthday.

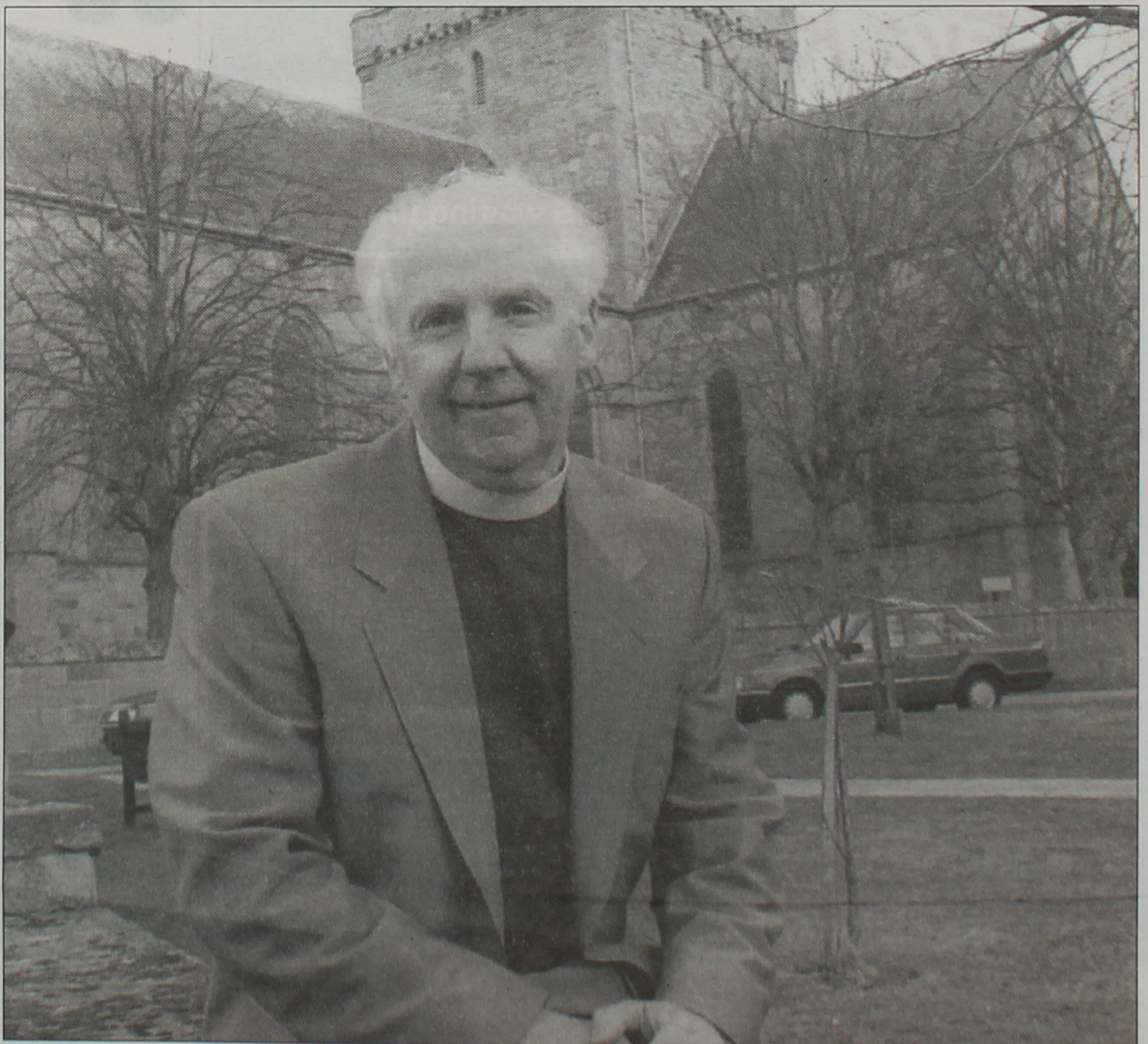
Past Moderators of the Church of Scotland, the Very Rev. Dr John Chalmers and the Very Rev. Dr Andrew McLellan shared the Service of Thanksgiving.

Another former Moderator, the Very Rev. Dr David Lacy, gave a reading and eldest son Neil gave a fine tribute on behalf of the family.

Dr Simpson's successor at Dornoch Cathedral, the Very Rev. Susan Brown, took an earlier private family service at Perth Crematorium.

With son-in-law Derick Macaskill playing "Highland Cathedral" on the bagpipes, retiring donations were invited for Cystic Fibrosis Research and Bankfoot Church Centre.

Dr Simpson is survived by his wife Helen, their five children, eight grandchildren and two great-grandchildren.



The Very Rev Dr James Simpson pictured during his time as minister at Dornoch Cathedral.

Picture: Bannerman Media