

# 'Few men in modern times have made such an impact on a town's appearance'

**OBITUARY:** Duncan Allan, soldier, tea planter, publican and local councillor who worked hard to improve the fortunes of Dornoch but whose heart was always in India.

DUNCAN Allan was born on February 8, 1927, on the Kanjikoah tea estate in Assam, India, where his father was manager.

He was educated in England where he attended the same prep school as the late Alan Clark, of Eriboll and diary fame. Duncan was a good boxer and gave Alan a hard time in the ring on a number of occasions.

Duncan joined the Queen's Royal Regiment at the age of 17 and, after being selected for a commission, was sent to the Indian Military Academy at Dehradun from where he was commissioned into the 1st Gurkha Rifles of the Indian Army.

After two years on the North West Frontier, where conditions were not unlike those in Afghanistan, he spent three traumatic months shepherding refugees in Punjab after the terrible carnage that followed the partition of India.

After leaving the army, he followed the family tradition and became a tea planter for a Scottish company.

The only question that he was asked at his job interview was whether he was a Catholic. He knew how to answer.

Having spent 10 years learning his new trade on the tea estates, he was promoted to visiting agent and immediately embarked on a vigorous new planting programme.

This had the happy consequence of creating thousands of new jobs, as an extra labourer was recruited for each acre of tea planted.

Sadly, after 22 years of service, a promising career came to an abrupt end when the rupee was devalued and all British employees were sacked. So Duncan, with his wife and family, had to adjust to cold, grey socialist Britain.

It was a difficult transition from running tea estates to running pubs in Scotland. He said that it was like going to prison for 15 years.

Retiring from the pub trade at the age of 62, Duncan returned to Dornoch where he had owned the Eagle Hotel.

He was shocked to see how run down the town had become.

He was determined to try to do something to improve the situation and, aged 65, he won an election to the council and kept his seat for 15 years.

He set about a methodical programme to restore Dornoch's fortunes with the help of members of the local community and public bodies such as CASE, HIE and North Highland College who supported his efforts, which were based on encouraging population growth.

He was determined to restore the parish population to its level at the first census.

He used to say: "It is people who make things happen and we have not got



This image of Duncan Allan was taken when housebuilders Springfield Properties named a street in its new housing scheme Allan Gardens, in his honour.

enough of them."

At the age of 81, Duncan received a quite unexpected invitation to visit India with his wife, Alison.

They revisited tea gardens in North Bengal, the Terai and Assam, and Duncan found to his great delight that his once exceptional command of the Gorkhali and Hindi languages had not deserted him.

Chatting with the locals was always his way of finding out what was really going on. His heart was in India.

As well as devoting himself to the community, Duncan was a dedicated family man, a loving husband of Alison, dear father of Patricia, Victoria and the

late Ian, and cherished grandfather of Gemma, Charlotte, Kirsty and Amy.

Duncan passed away peacefully in Raigmore Hospital, Inverness, on Sunday, July 28, and his funeral service was held at Dornoch Cathedral on Monday, August 12.

Cllr Jim McGillivray, who gave the eulogy, said: "There can be few men in modern times who have made such a personal impact on the appearance of any town as Duncan achieved in Dornoch in his time as councillor."

■ To read the full eulogy and learn more about Duncan's achievements and his lasting legacy to Dornoch, visit [www.northern-times.co.uk](http://www.northern-times.co.uk) and search his name.