

Merchants & money

THE MERCAT or market cross beside you is where Sutherland's wealth was made and spent. Weekly markets were held at the cross from medieval times. By the 18th century, seven county fairs were taking place here every year.

On fair days merchants and farmers poured into town, pitching their sales booths across the graveyard in front of you. They traded, danced and drank for three days, to the delight and profit of Dornoch's nine alehouses!

Over the wall on a flat gravestone you can see our Plaiden Ell, one of three surviving in Scotland. The ell was a fixed measure for plaid, or tartan cloth, and there was a nasty punishment for anyone who sold their customers short...



...dishonest merchants were put in the burgh stocks and pelted with rubbish! Try this for yourself in our town stocks at Historylinks Museum.



In the early 19th century Dornoch's famous mercats went into decline. Roaming pigs were digging up the graves in the churchyard and, to keep them out, the town council built the wall you see here. Unfortunately, the new wall cut the marketplace in half and the fairs never recovered.



Boats & beaches

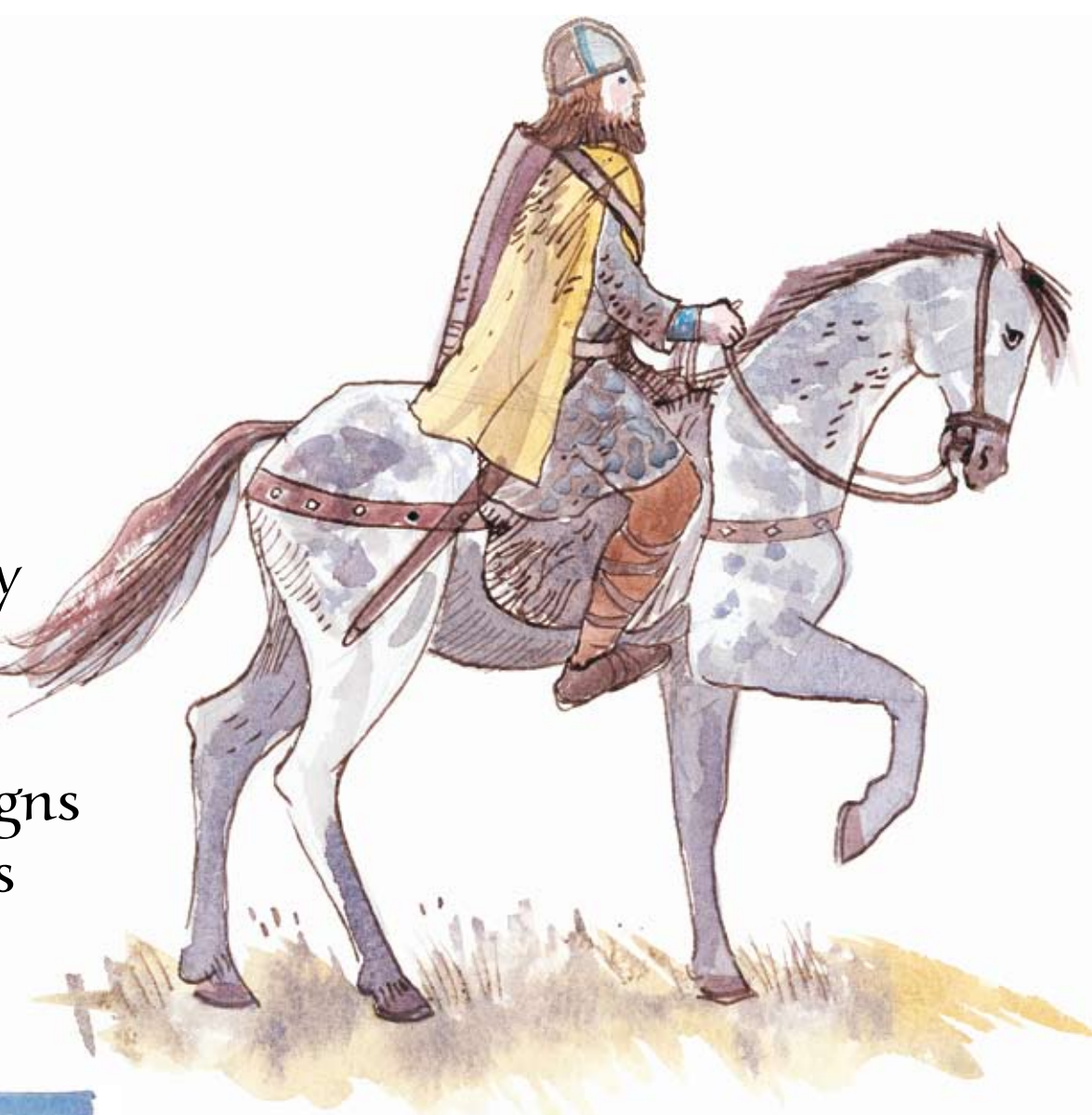
FOR THOUSANDS of years people have made their homes along this piece of coast. They used the sea for food and transport, and farmed the fertile soil of the raised beach. Today the beach is a popular tourist attraction.

The remains of the Neolithic chambered cairn or burial mound in front of you belonged to the area's earliest settlers. Below the original mound of stones (pictured here) archaeologists found two small stone chambers and the bodies of

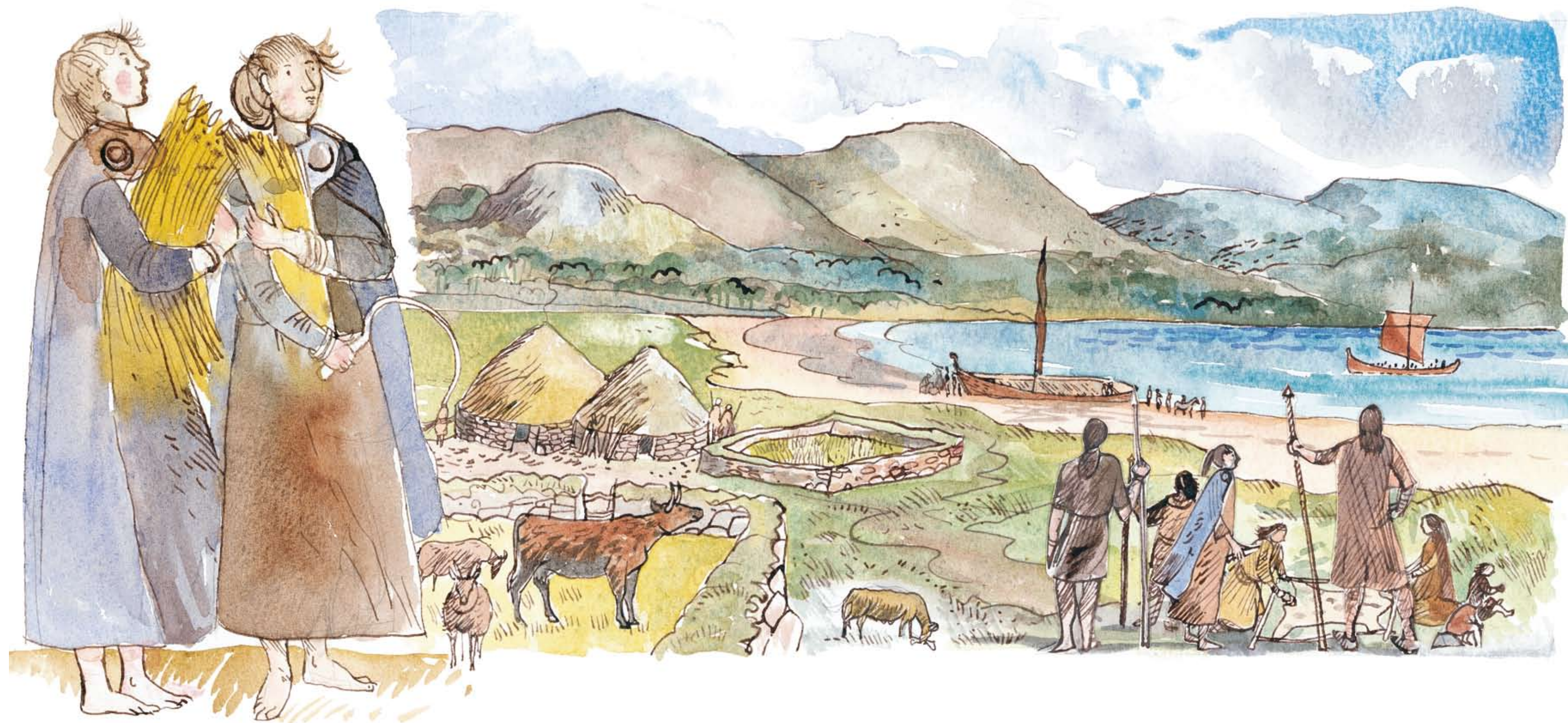
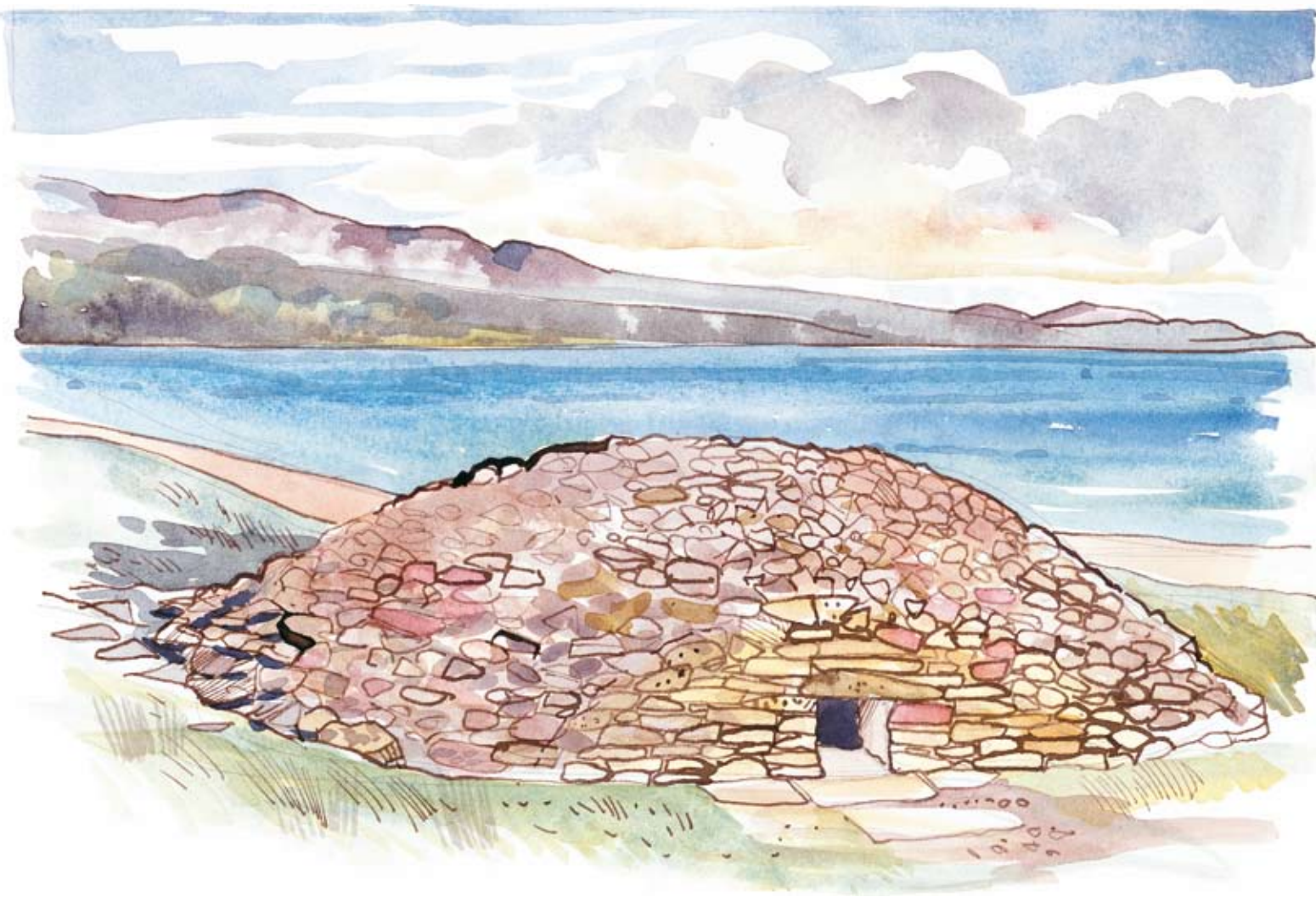
several men, women and children.

If you look closely you can see the upright stones of the chamber walls, placed there by Embo people more than 4500 years ago.

Archaeologists also found signs of later burials and cremations suggesting that it remained a sacred site for a long time.



Like Skibo, the name Embo comes from the Norse word **bol** or farm. We think that it means 'the big farm belonging to Eyvind', one of the earliest Vikings to settle here. Other Vikings followed Eyvind, pulling their longboats up the sand and claiming small pieces of land. They eventually married local girls and lived a peaceful life.



In the early 1800s some evicted families were forced to leave their inland homes and move to Embo, where they were encouraged to take up fishing. The regular streets and houses of the village suggest that it was laid out at this time.

Embo folk became skilled fishermen. The men went to sea in small boats, while the women cleaned and sold the catch inland. When the herring boom began in the 19th century, the men bought bigger boats and moved with the fish down the east coast. The Embo fishwives followed, gutting the herring and earning money in ports far from home.



By the 20th century, herring had disappeared and Embo was attracting a new catch – holidaymakers! Now caravans and windbreaks line the shore, replacing the boats and nets of previous generations.

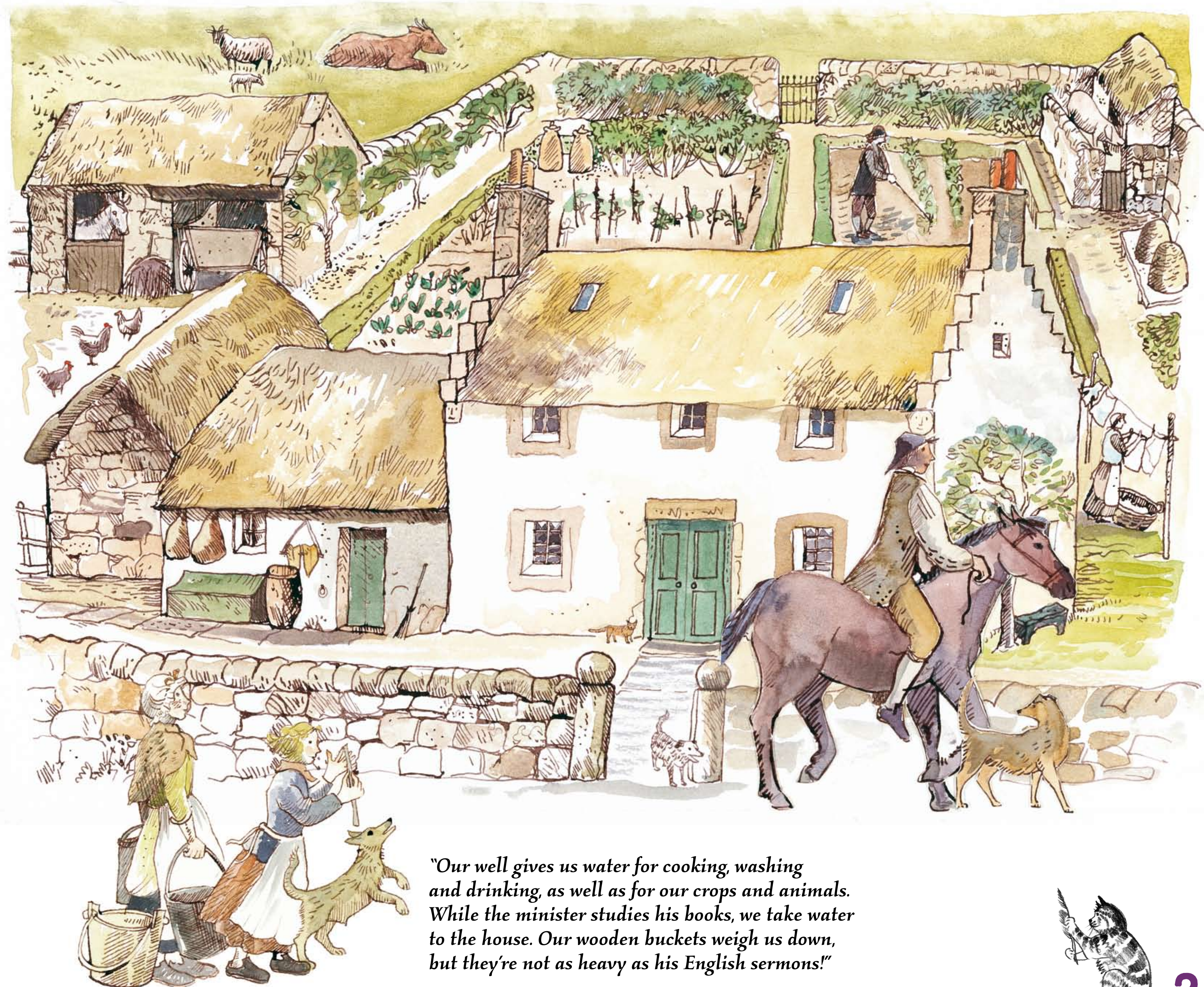


Sermons & sanitation

DORNOCH was an important centre of Church administration and home to many churchmen in the 17th century. They lived in manses or ministers' houses, like the Old Parish Manse pictured here, and preached to their congregations in Gaelic and English.

Sanitation declined as the town expanded in the centuries that followed. 150 years ago the water in the Old Parish Manse well (behind you) was too polluted to drink. Sewage was seeping into our four public wells and rats infested the Dornoch Burn.

In response, a piped water system was installed in 1892. It brought water from hill lochs and, for the first time, flushed sewage away in sealed drains. The fountain by the Cathedral celebrates the day we turned on the new supply. After centuries of use the manse well was no longer needed.



"Our well gives us water for cooking, washing and drinking, as well as for our crops and animals. While the minister studies his books, we take water to the house. Our wooden buckets weigh us down, but they're not as heavy as his English sermons!"



Saints & cells

YOU COULD be standing near one of Scotland's earliest Christian sites.

Saint Finbarr (or Saint Barr) sailed from Ireland in the 6th century and, so the story goes, founded a small Christian settlement here around 540 AD. Evidence was apparently discovered by workmen early last century; on School Hill to your left, they found what they described as "monks' cells", or living quarters.

Did Finbar ever settle here? His influence was certainly strong in Dornoch. Place names associated with him still exist and the parish church, which stood in the graveyard on your right until the 13th century, was dedicated to the saint.

Bishop Gilbert clearly thought highly of him – in 1224 he moved the seat of the diocese to Dornoch and dedicated his new Cathedral to Saint Barr.



Trains & tourists

IN 1902, our first train service steamed into this station. A large crowd welcomed the little engine, for it was a vital connection to the rest of Britain.

For the first time local people could travel easily. Embo fishworkers bought return tickets to England's great herring ports and earned money to send home. Local producers sent fresh fish and livestock to market by rail.

For 58 years the Dornoch Light Railway also brought thousands of visitors to the town. Some played golf, others fished nearby or bathed in the sea. While a few wealthier tourists built second homes here, most people stayed in the town's smart new hotels.



"A handsome carriage met our train and carried us to the Railway Hotel. Our room overlooks the sea and the golf course, and is most luxurious. They say this hotel has over 60 bedrooms – no wonder it cost more to build than the railway!"



Disease & denial

PANIC spread through Sutherland in 1832. A cholera epidemic was raging in Britain and thousands were dying. When the first deaths occurred nearby, the people of Dornoch took steps to make sure that their town remained cholera-free.

They posted guards to prevent anyone entering the town and ordered that, "all pigsties, ashpits and manure of every description be removed from within the burgh." Their measures were successful: no cholera deaths appear in the records.



"Folk are sickening all around and only our guards keep the burgh safe. Some Portgower boys brought this man to be buried in Dornoch, but we thought he died of the cholera and wouldn't let them in. They dug a grave and buried him right here."

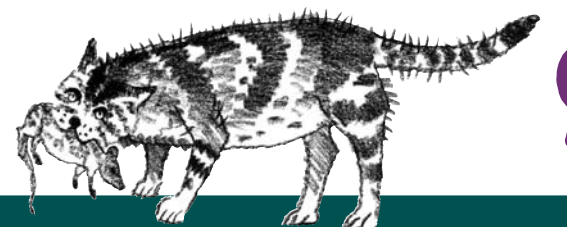


ERECTED
BY K.R.

over the remains

This stone marks the grave of a man brought to Dornoch for burial during the epidemic. He was refused entry by the guards and buried here instead. Such was the stigma of cholera that his son wrote this denial on the gravestone:

of his dutiful Father K.R. who departed this life July 24 1832 aged 44 years. It was then supposed he died of cholera but afterwards contradicted by most eminent medical men.



Ancient game & American fame

THE ROLLING sandy links in front of you are ideal for golf. As far back as 1630 they were known as, *"the fairest and largest links in Scotland, fitt for archery, goffing, ryding and all other exercise."*

These days 'goffing' is the main activity, largely due to the determination of John Sutherland, golf club secretary from 1883 to 1941. With the help of Old Tom Morris he improved and extended the course you see below.

The Dornoch course became well-known on both sides of the Atlantic. When Andrew Carnegie (then the world's richest man) bought nearby Skibo Castle in 1898, he invited his American and British friends to stay. Some of the world's most eminent statesmen, scientists, musicians and writers played golf with him here.

At the same time, Dornoch's talented sons were leaving for America. In 1907 Alec Ross won the US Open, while his brother, Donald Ross, went on to design more than 500 American golf courses.



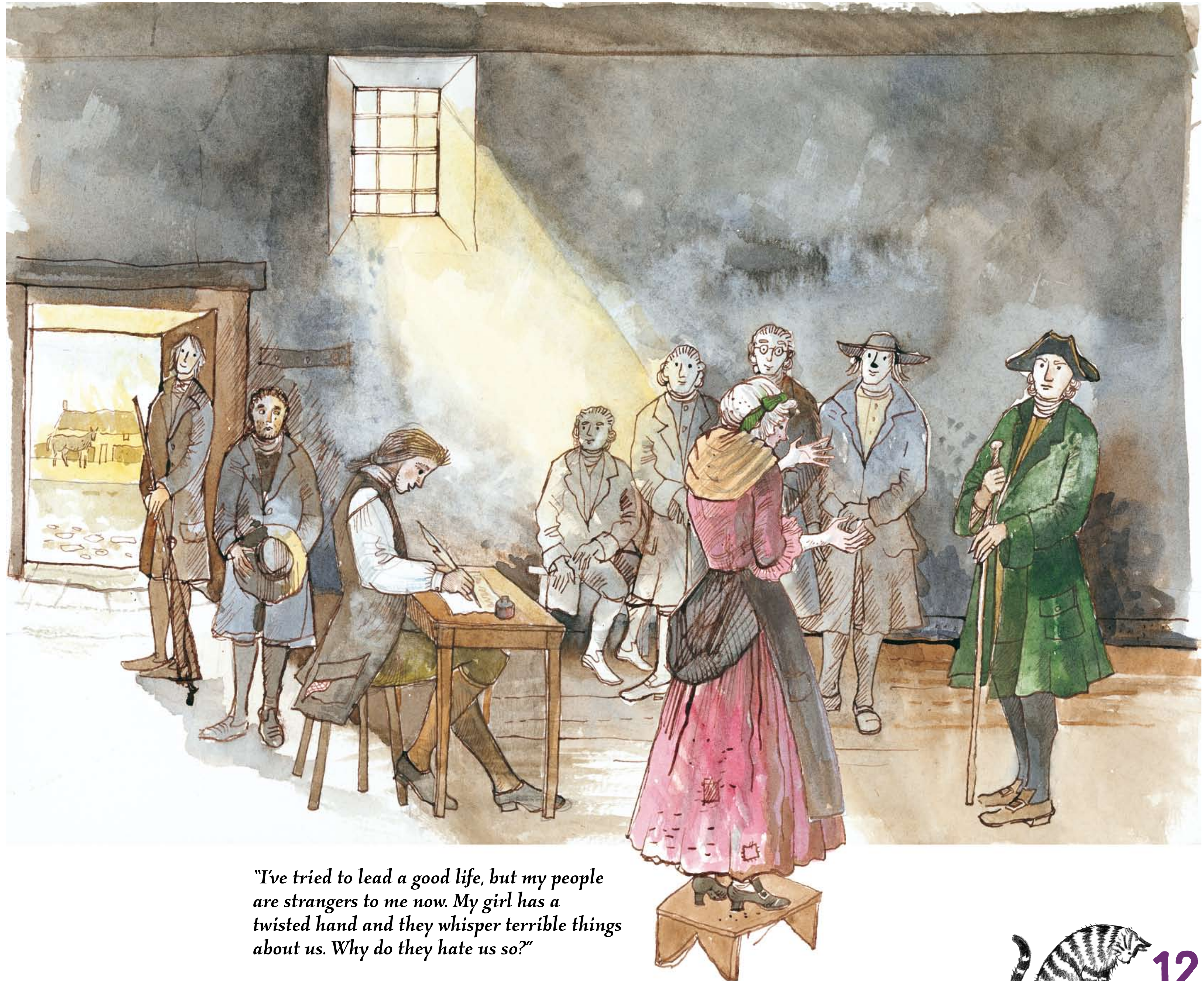
Fear & fire

JANET HORNE had been a lady's maid before she married, but by 1727 she was old and confused. Early that year her neighbours reported that she was using witchcraft to turn her daughter into 'the devil's pony'.

Janet and her daughter (whose hand was deformed) were imprisoned in Dornoch, where they were tried and found guilty of witchcraft. The daughter escaped before she could be punished, but her mother was sentenced to death.

The next day, Janet Horne was stripped, rolled in tar and placed in a barrel. A grim procession carried her to this place, where she was burned alive. She was the last recorded person in Scotland to die in this terrible way.

Janet Horne's execution place was marked by a stone, now part of the garden in front of you. The date on the stone should be 1727.



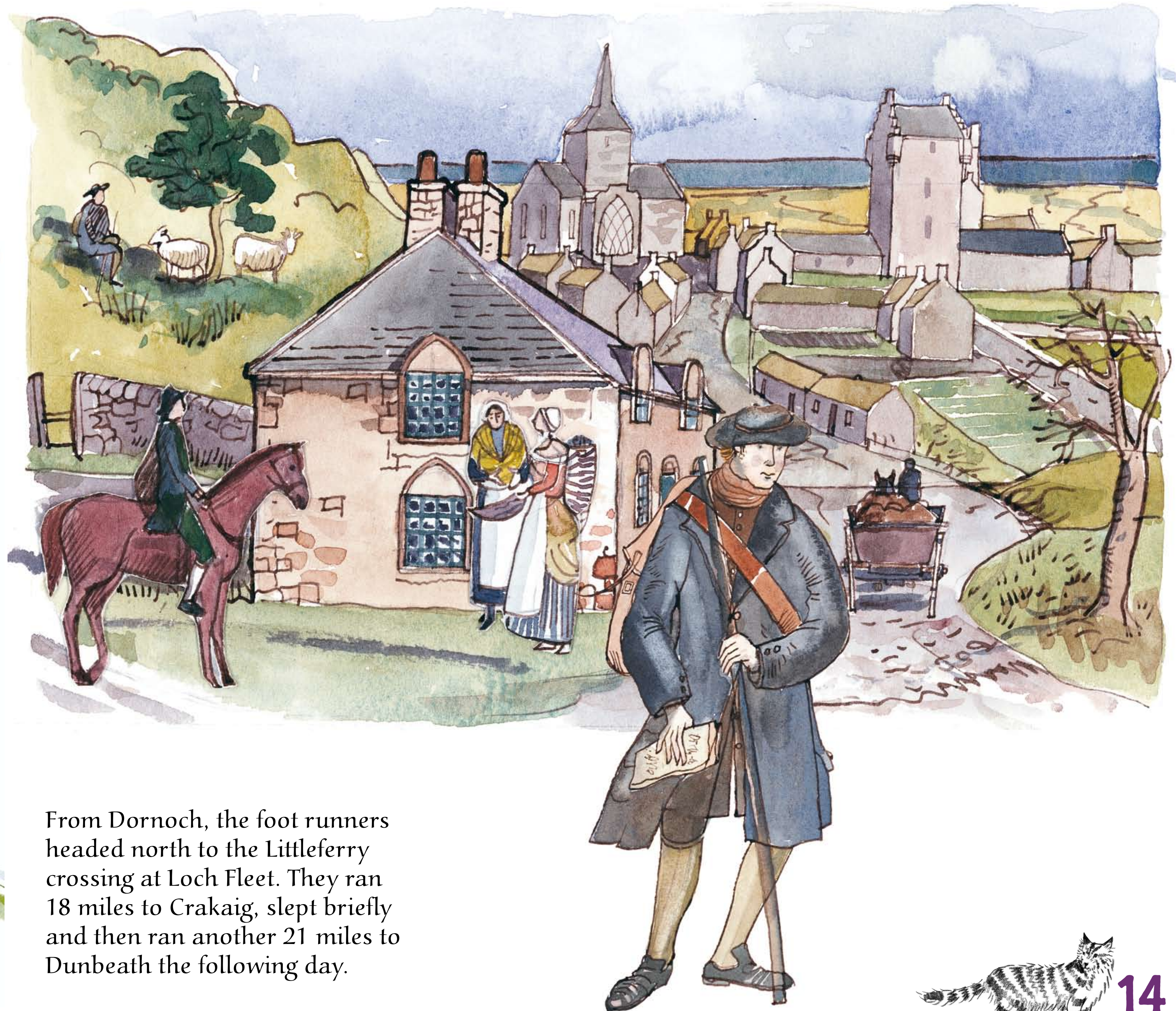
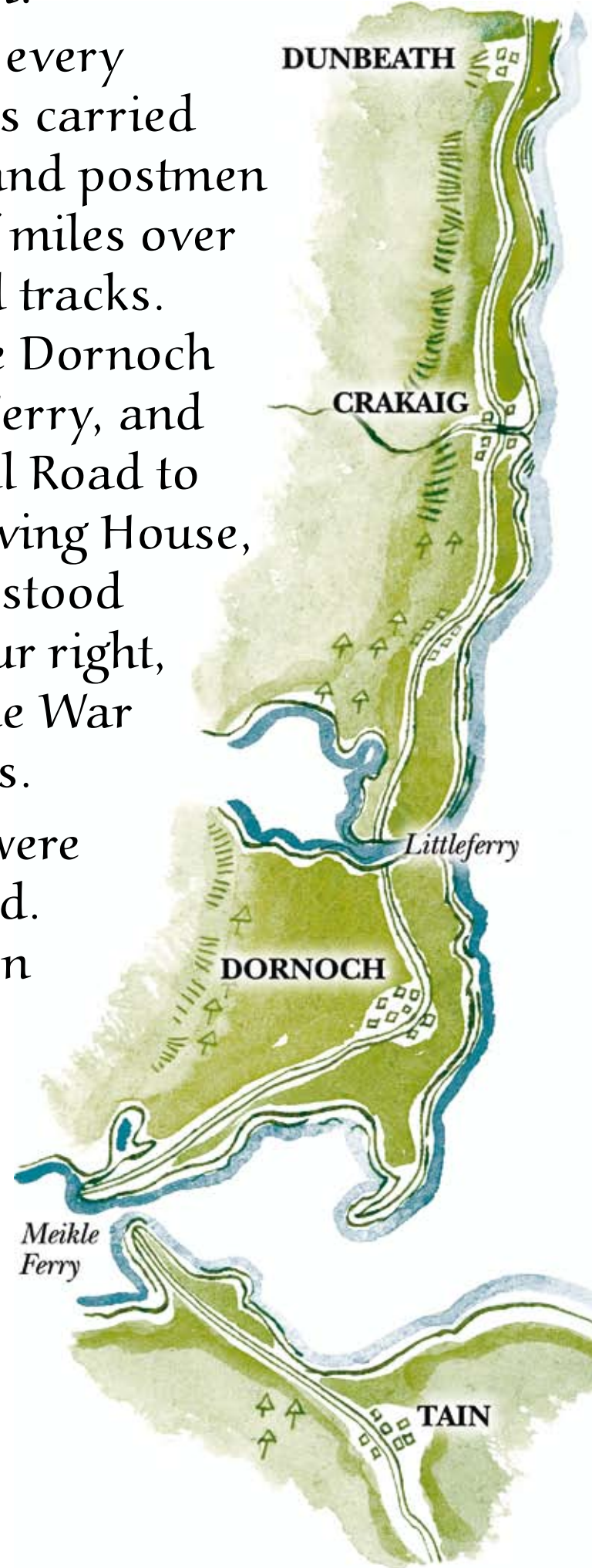
"I've tried to lead a good life, but my people are strangers to me now. My girl has a twisted hand and they whisper terrible things about us. Why do they hate us so?"

Running for the post

CAN YOU imagine a world without email, phones or roads? A world where athletes deliver your post?

200 years ago every piece of mail was carried by foot. Sutherland postmen ran hundreds of miles over rough paths and tracks. They crossed the Dornoch Firth at Meikle Ferry, and ran along Cuthill Road to Dornoch's Receiving House, pictured here. It stood on the hill to your right, near to where the War Memorial now is.

Foot runners were always welcomed. Families relied on them for news – of soldier sons fighting abroad or of relatives in Canada, Australia or America.



From Dornoch, the foot runners headed north to the Littleferry crossing at Loch Fleet. They ran 18 miles to Craikaig, slept briefly and then ran another 21 miles to Dunbeath the following day.

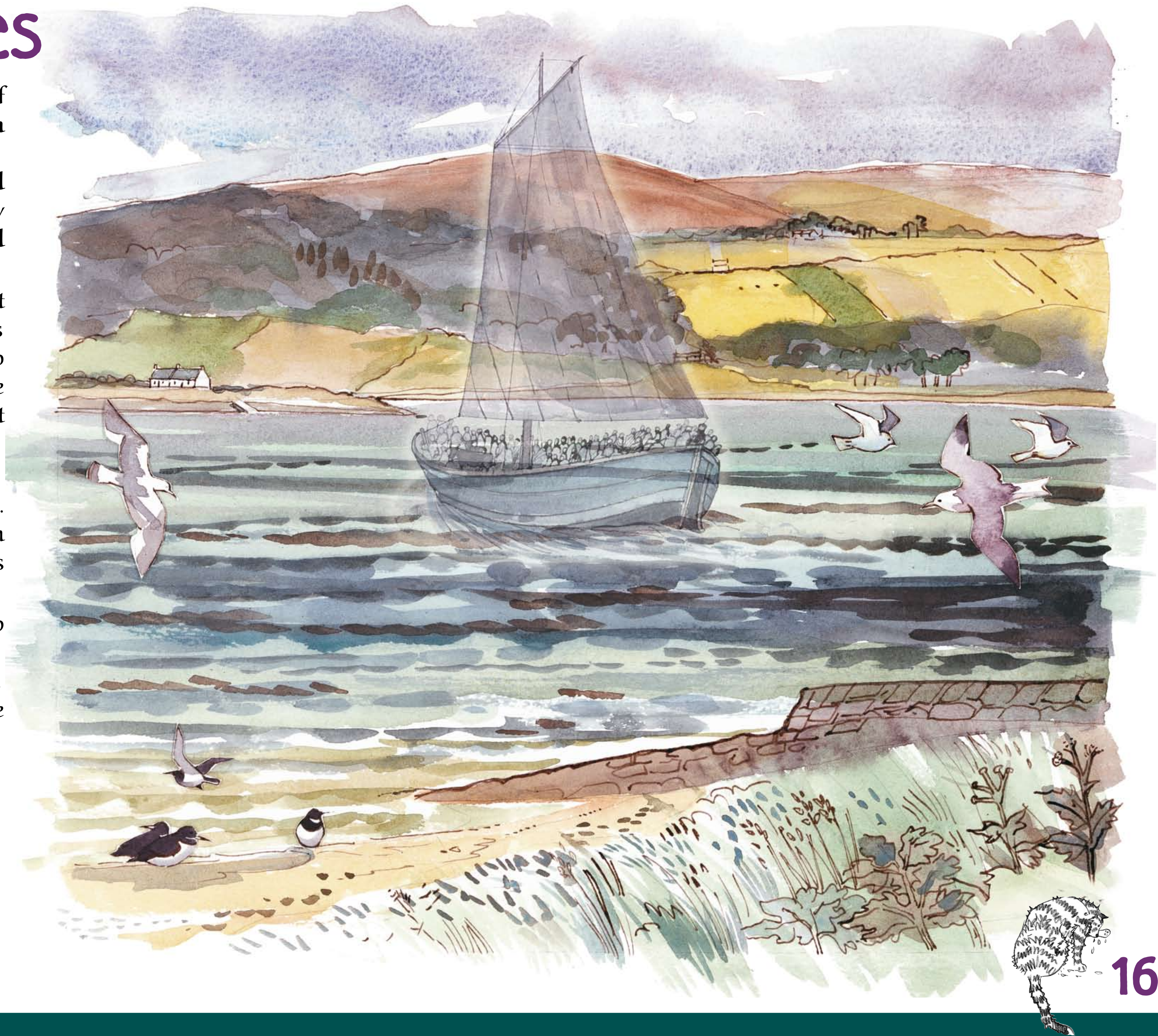
Currents & cries

IN 1809 this ferry crossing was the scene of a tragic accident. On 16th July, more than 100 people boarded the ferry to cross to the opposite shore. The day was calm and passengers were excited at the business they hoped to transact at the Tain fair. Many had all their money and stock with them.

The ferry was low in the water as they set off. A passenger shouted that the boat was overcrowded, but the ferryman continued to turn broadside to the tide. Minutes later, the boat became swamped by a large wave – it sank almost immediately.

Only a dozen passengers managed to swim to the shore. 99 people were drowned. More than half the dead were from Dornoch parish and hardly a family in the area was untouched by the tragedy.

The Meikle Ferry Fund was set up to help bereaved families struggling to survive without income. Over the next two years it raised £2,900 and gave assistance to more than 200 people.



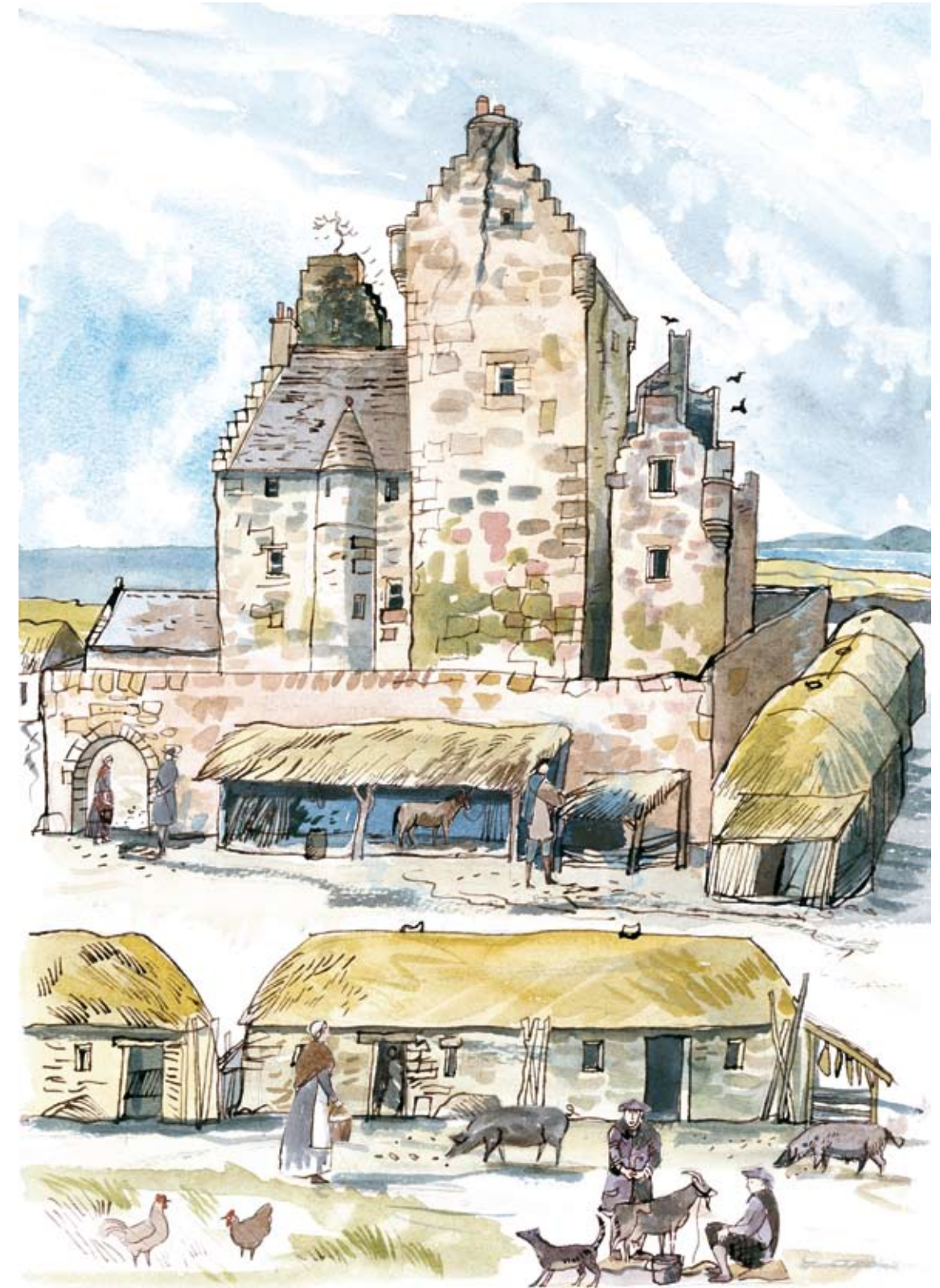
Cathedral & castle

IN 1224 Gilbert de Moravia became Bishop of Caithness and began building the Cathedral on your left. He used local stone and glass, paying for Scotland's smallest Cathedral out of his own pocket.

Bishop Gilbert also built himself a bishop's residence. 200 years later a new Bishop's Palace, or Castle, was built on the site. On your right, you can still see the tower of this 15th-century palace, now the Castle Hotel.

By 1800, clan feuds and lack of money had left parts of the Cathedral and Castle in ruins. Around you, poor families lived in hovels made of turf. Help came from the Duke and Duchess of Sutherland, who had the Castle and Cathedral restored and the turf houses removed.

This peaceful green has been here ever since.



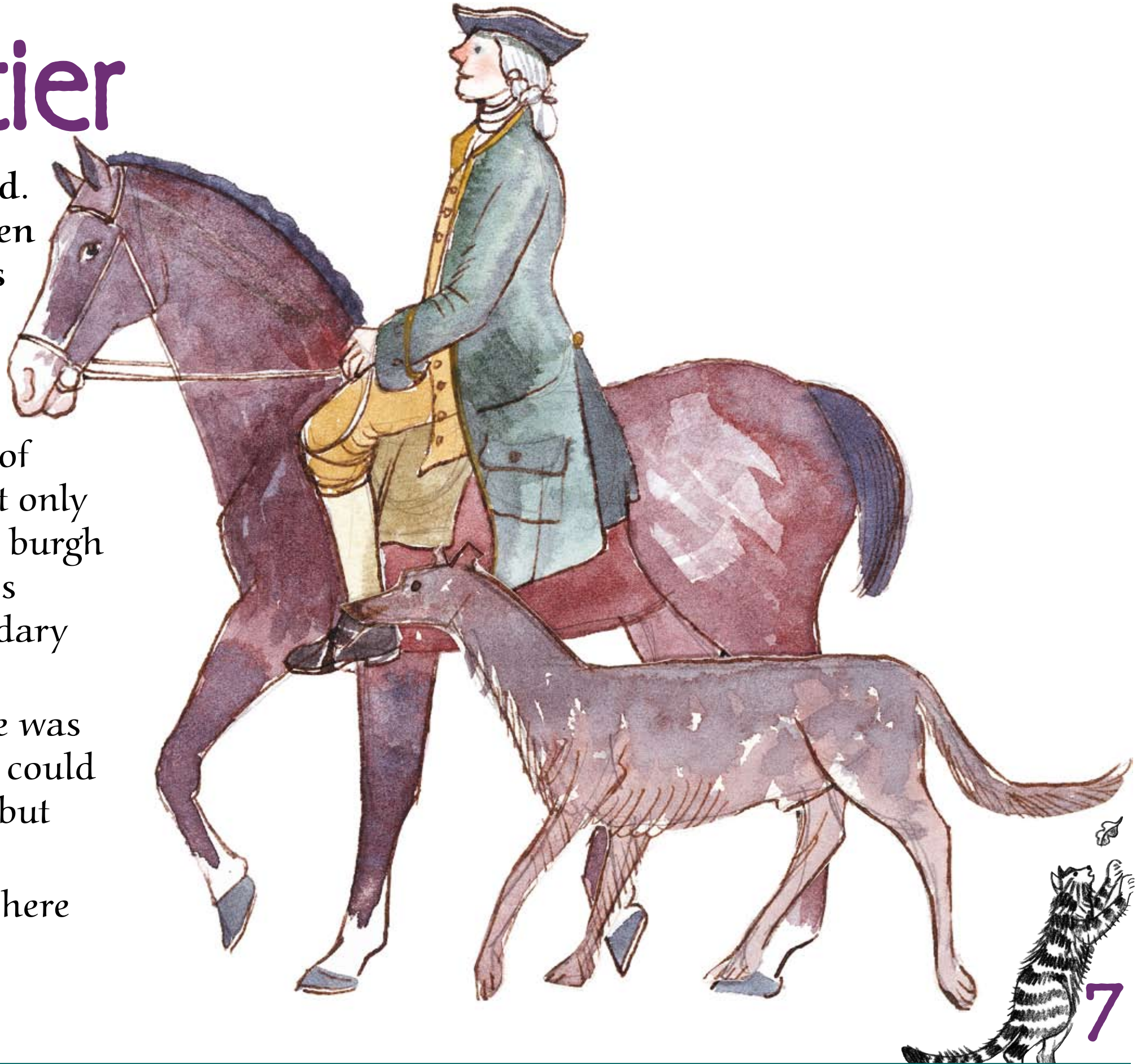
A false frontier

DON'T BELIEVE everything you read. This is not a well and has never been one. The real St Michael's Well was much closer to the town, on the other side of the railway station.

This stone was put here in 1832 by George Gunn, factor to the Duke of Sutherland. A new law declared that only men living within seven miles of the burgh boundary could vote in the country's elections. Dornoch's northern boundary was set at St Michael's Well.

Unfortunately for George his home was just outside the seven-mile limit. He could have moved house to save his vote, but instead he 'moved the boundary'.

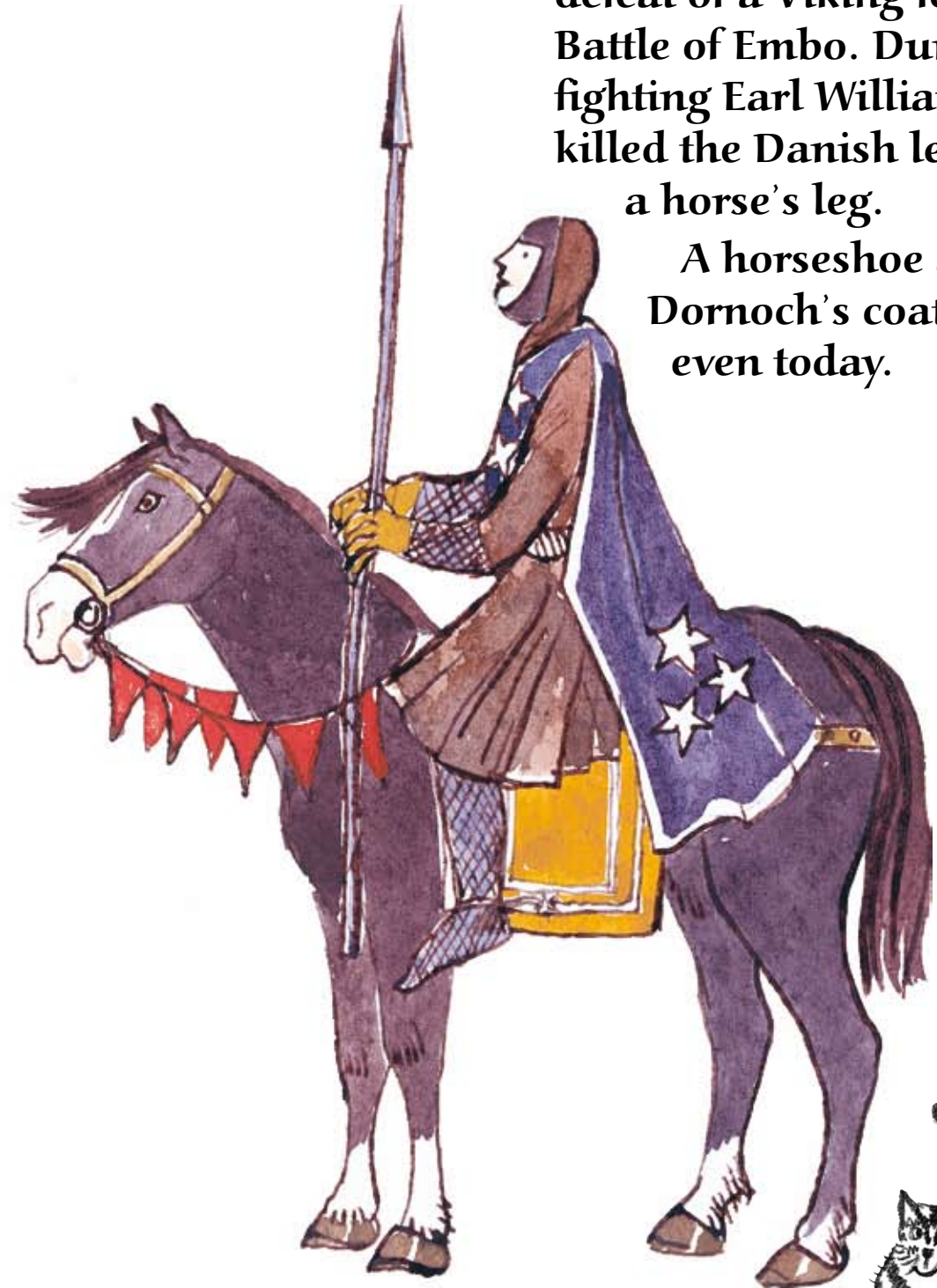
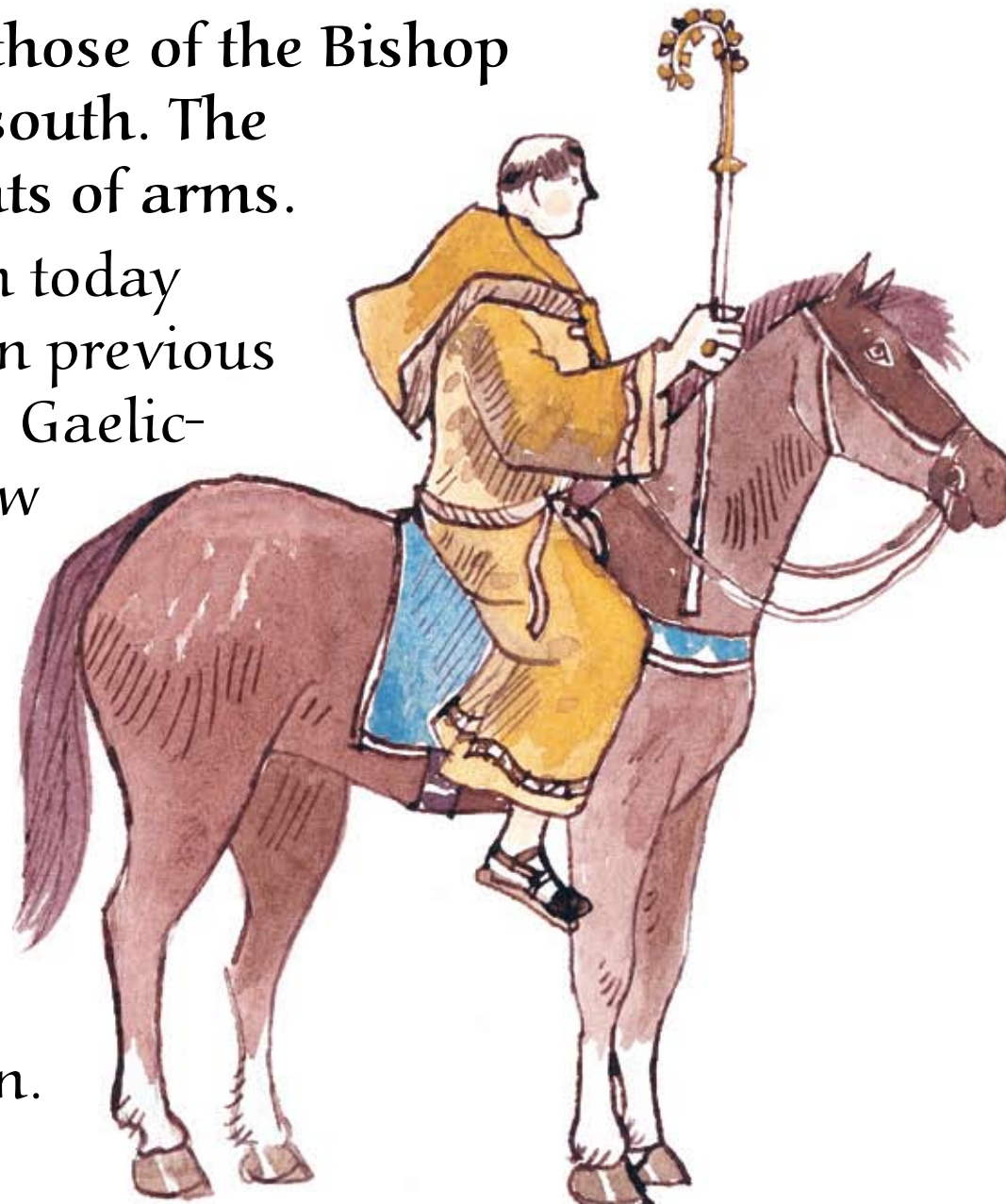
His ingenious memorial has been here ever since!



Shields & sanctuary

CAN YOU SEE the shields carved on either side of this stone? This was probably the boundary mark between the northern lands of the Earl of Sutherland, and those of the Bishop of Caithness in the south. The shields are their coats of arms.

The stone is known today as the Earl's Cross. In previous centuries, Dornoch's Gaelic-speaking people knew it as *Sgiath Gillibert*, or the Shield of Gilbert. Fugitives reaching this point could claim the sanctuary of the Cathedral and be safe from persecution.



Not far from here was another 13th-century stone: the Righ or King's Cross celebrated the defeat of a Viking force at the Battle of Embo. During the fighting Earl William allegedly killed the Danish leader with a horse's leg.

A horseshoe appears on Dornoch's coat of arms even today.



Rents & refugees

CAN YOU believe this attractive hamlet used to be a refugee camp?

During the Clearances, evicted families arrived here and built temporary turf huts for shelter. In time, they were able to replace these dwellings with stone-built walls and thatched roofs. Their refugee settlement soon became known as Littletown.

Ironically, the refugees did not escape their former landlord. In 1820 the town council came looking for rents. Leases were signed and payments made, but not to the council. The councillor who had negotiated the new leases was the Duke of Sutherland's factor, and the new Littletown rents went direct to the Duke himself!

