



Truly worthy of a Cathedral city—Castle Street, Dornoch, with the fifteenth century Castle on left, the thirteenth century Cathedral on right; Courthouse and the Old Jail form a fitting facade east of the Castle, while timbered gables grace Cathedral Square.

This is My Country

DORNOCH'S WISE BLEND OF OLD AND NEW

FROM PAGE FIVE

A BARE two miles north-north-east of Dornoch is the one-time fishing station of Embo, which itself dates only from about 1820, but it is the most strikingly displayed evidence of the long inhabitation of the area.

This is a fully excavated neolithic burial chamber, now preserved as an ancient monument under the auspices of the Ministry of Public Building and Works. It had itself a long history, for after being used as a burial site by the Stone Age men it was reused a thousand years later for Bronze Age burials.

Caerns, but circles, brochs, complete the picture of prehistoric occupation and tell us that this corner of the Dornoch Firth had as much appeal to ancient man as to his modern successors.

The brochs take us down to the period when the Romans were occupying southern Britain and the native populations in the north of Scotland constructed these great round "forts" as refuges in time of invasion or attack.

St Finnbar
Before the Romans left they had made it possible for the great apostle of the Picts, St. Ninian, to launch his mission in Scotland and it was one of the greatest of Ninian's disciples, St. Finnbar, that Dornoch owed its first introduction to Christianity, or rather the dedication of its first church, for there is no reliable evidence that Finnbar came to Dornoch in person. He died in Ireland at a great age in 578 A.D.

His memory has been preserved in the form of a Celtic cross which stands in the town square until the present century. Tradition of course credits the saint with a much closer connection. At Choc Var for example he was said to retire for prayer and meditation and the "scourge" among the people, that he actually died in the land of Cat (Cathness and Sutherland) among the fierce people.

There was actually a Celtic monastery at Dornoch, which seems to have been established by the finding of traces of the old druidic cells of the monks by workmen excavating foundations for an extension to the old school.

Battle of Embo
The monks must have got short shrift from the Vikings who followed them and from the ninth to the twelfth centuries the county of Sutherland was a Norse colony. Early in the thirteenth century the real history of Dornoch begins with the building of the Cathedral by St. Gilbert de Moravia, settled by his kinsman, William Thane of Sutherland.

Here the Danish general was slain and his army beaten and forced to retire to their ships, which were not far distant. The Earl of Sutherland greatly signalled himself upon this occasion.

Horse's leg
"While he stung out the Danish general and gallantly fought his way toward the Thane, being by some accident disarmed, seized the leg of a horse which lay upon the ground and with that dispatched his adversary."

that is that the name Dornoch or "Durnach" appears on record a whole century earlier, when, in 1136 the Scots King sent a mandate to the lords of Orkney and Cathness bidding them protect the monks of "Durnach" their servants and property.

However, there at least exists tangible evidence of the Battle of Embo in the sarcophagus and sculptured effigy of Sir Richard de Moravia, lord of Skeibo and brother of St. Gilbert, which lies in the Cathedral. He was one of those killed in the battle.

The Cathedral
St. Gilbert succeeded to the bishopric of Cathness, which originally had its see at Halkirk in 1222 after the previous bishop, Adam, had been murdered by the enraged populace there, driven by his excessive taxation — "a saan of butter for every ten cows."

He was driven to set up his headquarters in a less hostile air, and moved the see to Dornoch, building the cathedral there in the 20 years following 1223, next door to the ancient church of St. Barr. When completed it consisted of a nave with two transepts, a choir and a massive tower, supported by four fine clustered pillars and pointed arches richly moulded.

Dornoch takes great pride in its pious founder, who was one of the greatest Scottish church statesmen of the middle ages and the last Scotch bishop to be canonised. Of the Cathedral

owner of the castle, Mr. Alan Macdonald. The Earl of Sutherland lived in the "Fair Castle" of Dornoch for 150 years. The last member of the family to dwell there was William, Lord Strathnaver, son of Earl John, the last Sutherland Earl to be based in Dornoch. He stayed there until 1715.

By this time the most famous Dornoch institution of all—the golf course—was already old. It is first mentioned in 1616 and is the third oldest in the world after St. Andrews and Leith. The "Course" is still run along the curve of the coast behind the sandhills overlooking the great golden beaches round the bay.

The last witch
On the coast is a relic of the middle ages, the Earl's Cross. A stone pillar with a perforated top, shaped like a top, stands on the site of the Bishop of Cathness's arms on the other side and marked the boundary between the lands belonging to the Cathedral and the lands belonging to the Earl.

In a garden facing Carnalga Street in the "Little Town" of Dornoch, close to the Links, with its streets of old-world cottages, is a dark stone bearing the date 1722 in large figures. It marks the spot where the last witch in Scotland was executed, which in 1722 or in 1727 is not now quite certain.

She was Janet Horn, an old woman from the parish of Loth and Sutherland, who was charged with leading a "witch" to her death. She was a very old woman, and she was said to be a witch. She was executed on the 17th of the month.

'Bonnie blaze'
According to Sir Walter Scott, who was writing less than a century after the event, Janet was so "dotted" that she was delighted to warm her hands before the blaze prepared to burn her saying "Eh, what a bonnie blaze! And sae many folk. It's the chiefest sicht I've had for years!"

Twenty-three years after Janet had had the uppermost penalty another blaze was kindled, in the basement of Dornoch Church. For it was 1745; the castle had been occupied by the Jacobite Earl of Cromartie and a blacksmith's forge was needed for making and repairing the soldiers' weapons.

Then in the first years of the nineteenth century a great transformation took place. The town council of Dornoch decided they needed a new market place and wider streets. At that time the Castle still formed three sides of a square. On the south side were the present tower, vaulted kitchens and the Bishop's Chimney (all of which still survive).

The clean, crisp lines of the new Dornoch Academy buildings, opened by H.M. the Queen Mother in September, 1963. The former Academy buildings are being used as the primary department.

Morning Assembly in the magnificent new hall of Dornoch Academy, planned to seat 400, and with a finely equipped stage.

Golf never stops at Dornoch—and certainly not for a little drop of rain. The Old Course at Dornoch was in the news in 1616, almost three and a half centuries ago, and it has been a mecca of golfers ever since.

The caravan site on Dornoch Links and the wonderful panorama of the sands stretching far out into the peaceful waters of the Dornoch Firth. On the far side of the firth can be seen the peninsula of Easter Ross with the high ridge of Ben Wyvis far away to the south.

This charming fountain forms an attractive frontispiece to the south transept of Dornoch Cathedral, the present main entrance, and stands in the pleasant lawn which separates the Cathedral from busy Castle Street.

The interior of Dornoch Cathedral from the nave, looking towards the chancel. The great piers of the crossing and the windows of the choir are the original work of the thirteenth century. The nave was restored by William Burn of Edinburgh for the Countess-Duchess of Sutherland between 1835 and 1837.

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Top picture—the Embo chambered cairn showing the remains of two burial chambers, built of rough stones with massive boulders and containing a large chamber. Originally they were covered by an oval cairn and entered by short passages. Built about 2000 BC they were reopened for later Bronze Age cist burials.



Middle picture—The Witch's Stone at Dornoch, marking the spot where the last witch in Scotland was burned in 1722. Bottom picture—the Earl's Cross on the Old Course at Dornoch marked the boundary between the Cathedral lands and those of the Earls of Sutherland.



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A busy scene in the premises of John Grant and Sons, meat exporters, Dornoch, where baby beef is sent out to customers all over Britain and even as far afield as Holland and Switzerland. With over 30 employees, the firm is the little town's largest employer of labour.



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