

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



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.



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.

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-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.

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 to 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 site of the old Celtic church, which was built in the early seventh century, and also in the early medieval tower, which stood until the present century. Tradition of course credits the saint with a number of miracles, but the most famous is his connection with the "Cnoc Var" for example he was said to retire for prayer and meditation to the land of Cat (Cathness and Sutherland) among that fierce people.

That there was actually a Celtic monastery at Dornoch seems to have been established by the finding of traces of the old dry-built 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, abbot of his kinsman, William Thane of Sutherland.

The Thane, who was also the first Earl of Sutherland, was the hero of one of the last conflicts between the native population and their "scourge," the Scandinavian invaders who had lorded it over the Province of Cat for so long.

This was the Battle of Embo, a shadowy and semi-mythical event, which saved the burgh of Dornoch, the principal symbol on its coat of arms, the horseshoe. A particularly like the version of the old story given by the writer of the Old Statistical Account.

"The town and parish of Dornoch," he says, "derive their name from the Gaelic words 'Dorn' and 'Elch'—'flint' and 'horseshoe'—there being a tradition to this effect: 'About the year 1259 the Danes and Norwegians, having made a descent on this coast, were attacked by William Thane, or Earl of Sutherland, who 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 singled out the Danish general and gallantly fought his way toward him, Thane, being by some accident disarmed, seized the leg of a horse which lay upon the ground and with that dispatched his adversary."

And so, the story goes, Dornoch was called the place of the Horse's Hoof, and adopted the Horseshoe for its coat of arms. The only snag about

that is that the name Dornoch or "Durnach" appears on record a whole century earlier, when, in 1336 the Scots King sent a mandate to the Earls of Orkney and Caithness 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 Skelbo 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 Caithness, which originally had its see at Halkirk in 1222, after the previous bishop, Adam, had been murdered by the enraged populace there, driven to revolt by his excessive taxation. "A saan of butter for every ten cows," he brought it better 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, choir, and a massive tower, supported by four fine clustered pillars and bearing arches richly moulded.

Dornoch takes great pride in its ancient church, one of the greatest Scottish church statements of the middle ages and the last Scottish building to be canonised. Of the Cathedral



that he built the only parts now visible in the interior are the four great piers and bearing arches of the tower, with the walls and windows of the choir.

All the rest has either been destroyed in the many vicissitudes of history or obscured by the "restoration" carried out between 1835 and 1837 by William Burn of Edinburgh for the Countess-Duchess of Sutherland.

Two great disasters befell the Cathedral in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. In 1570, when the town of Dornoch was stormed and given to the flames by the wild Mackays of Strathnaver the Cathedral was totally burned except for the tower in which the burghers of the town held out for a week.

## Guy Fawkes

The second calamity occurred on the night of November 5, 1605, the night of the "Gunpowder, Treason and Plot," in which Guy Fawkes, the "Catholic" who had been caught in the act of blowing up the north arcade of the cathedral nave.

But it is now time to tell the story of Dornoch Castle, which stands on the site of the original Bishop's Palace attached to the cathedral. In 1587 this Palace was given to the Earl of Sutherland by his brother-in-law Bishop Robert Stewart. It is clear that the building was erected before that date and may well be of the late fifteenth century. It was then a large and stately building, with three towers forming a courtyard which was enclosed on the north side by a high wall with a gatehouse in the north-east corner.

The present tower was at the south-west corner. It played a part in the history of the burgh in 1570 which I have already mentioned, for it alone, apart from the tower of the Cathedral, was able to hold out against the siege of the wild Mackays.

There is a fascinating link between this sack of Dornoch in 1570 and the Dornoch Castle of the present day. One of the Murrays who was defending the castle in that week of bloodshed was wounded in the cheek and fled to Lewis in the Western Isles. He was nicknamed "Glo-gorm," the "blue smith"—because of the colour of his scar. A remote descendant of his, Dr. Murray, was later to become M.P. for the Western Isles. His daughter Aileen is the wife of the present

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 buried at 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 Old Course is still run along the curve of the coast behind the sandhills overlooking the bay.

## The last witch

On the course is a relic of the middle ages, the Earl's Cross. A stone pillar with a perforated, spoon-shaped top, it bore when intact the Sutherland arms on the side and the Bishop of Caithness's arms on the other 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 burned, whether in 1722 or in 1727 is not now quite certain.

She did Janet Horn, an old woman from the parish of Loth, who was charged with leading a party which she rode to the "stitches" rendezvous and on the grounds of Satan. The daughter, a fishwife, happened to have burned the witch's body, which she contracted her fingers and gave them the deformed look which is the "pony" story.

At her trial Janet was asked to repeat the Lord's Prayer in Gaelic and persisted in saying "Ar n-Athair a bha air neamh."—"Our Father who wert in Heaven." Instead of using the present tense.

It was just one little word that was wrong. But it sealed Janet's fate, for she was regarded as a convincing proof that she was addressing the Devil, who had been expelled from Heaven for his rebellion against the Most High.

## '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 cheeriest sight I've had for years!"

Twenty-three years after Janet's fate, the upstart penalty another blaze was kindled, in the basement of Dornoch Church. 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).

But at right angles to this was a wing, known as the Record Room, stretching north across what is now Castle Street. A strong wall with a gatehouse ran along the north side to near where the pleasant fountain now stands in front of the Cathedral. The whole area was known as the Castle Close and contained a huddle of small houses.

The council wished to clear all this away to drive the present Castle Street through the West. In 1812 but it was not completed until 1850 when the present Courthouse and Old Jail were built.

In the intervening period various makeshift arrangements had to be made. The Castle tower, with its spiral stone staircase was re-roofed and turned into a Courthouse and Jail. A new building was erected over the vaulted kitchens for use as a school.

house. This room is now the very charming drawing room of the Castle Hotel. The Courthouse in the Castle was the lofty square room in the tower which is now the bar.

It was during the period when some rooms in it were in Dornoch acquired its one and only ghost. It was that of an unhappy sheep-stealer once imprisoned in the dungeons. After it had ceased to be a den for a time and it was then that the ghost put in his first appearances.

Miss Marion Mackenzie, daughter of Sheriff Mackenzie, who was Sheriff-Substitute of Sutherland for over fifty years until he retired in 1912, and who herself lived in the castle for seventeen years tells how both her mother and her uncle, the minister of Avoch, saw the ghost.

## Weird face

He was described as having a weird face, long grey hair, a blue coat with two brass buttons, knee breeches, thick grey stockings, buckled shoes and a Balmoral bonnet. He was sitting in the Sheriff's study when Mrs. Mackenzie came in from the garden to get some homecombs for tea. She ran out to tell the family.

When she came back the ghost was gone. Shortly afterwards the Minister of Avoch came to stay but left hurriedly the next day. They heard later that he had wakened during the night and had seen the ghost standing by his bed. He told it that he did not want to see it and disappeared.

Dornoch is one of those places that still have an official Town Crier. The present occupant of the post, Mr. Simon Bain, who lives in a charming cottage in Carnalga Street, just opposite the "Witches' Stone," has held the post for over a quarter of a century.

## Academy story

A list of the 23 known headmasters of Dornoch was published in the souvenir programme at the official opening of the new Academy buildings by the Queen Mother, on September 25, 1963. They began with William Paip, who was schoolmaster from 1585 to 1588 and continued the centuries to the present Rector, Mr. A. F. Robertson, who took over in 1950.

There was no doubt a Cathedral School in the middle ages. From the Cathedral the school moved to the Town House at the Mercat Cross in the High Street and from there (c. 1580) to the Castle. There was a grammar school at least as early as 1641 and later an English School conducted by a mistress who was paid 6/- Scots per quarter per pupil.

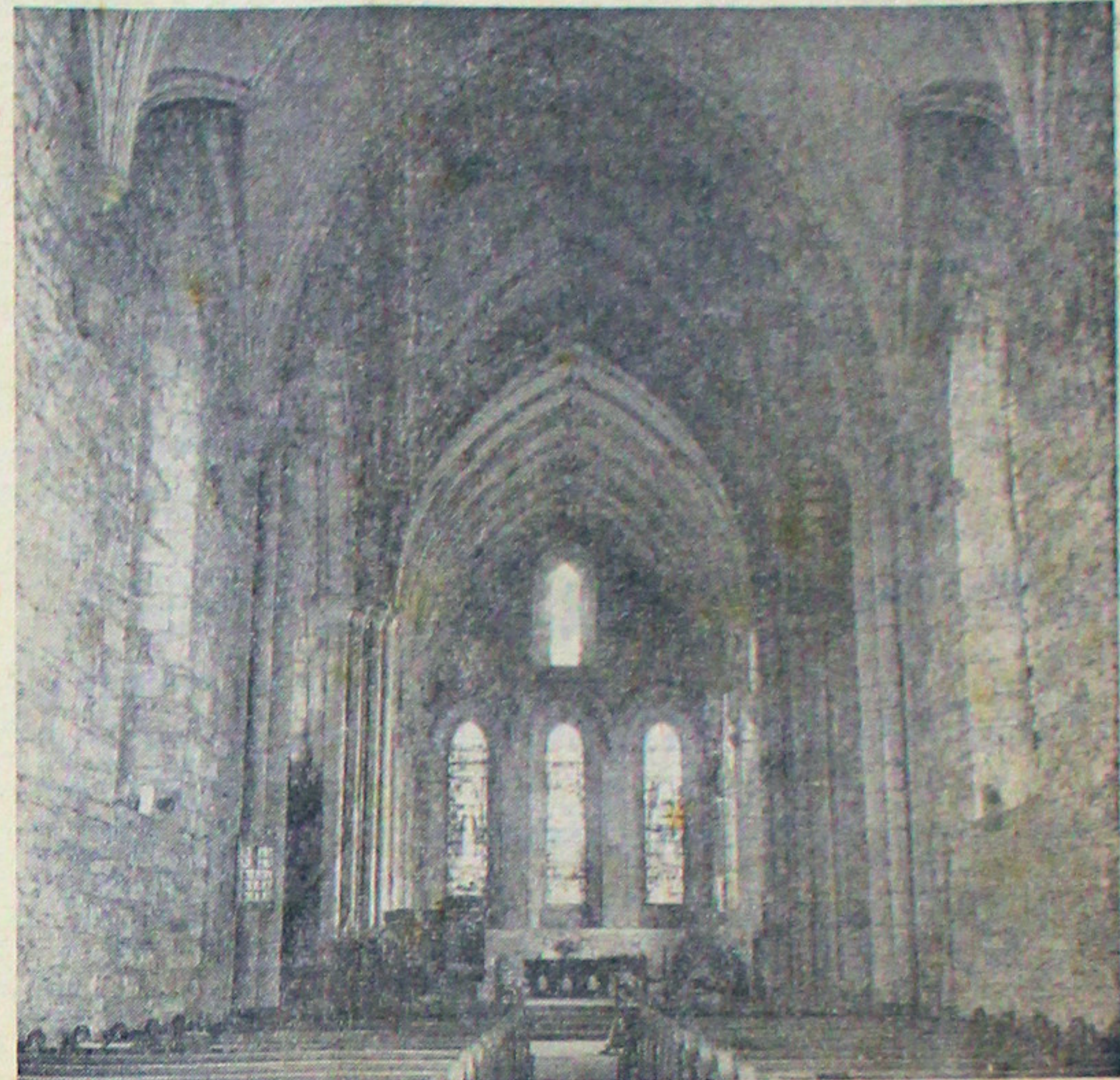
By 1845 there were three schools, the parish school and two female schools and after the Disruption the Free Church founded its own school. In 1857 it amalgamated with the parish school on Schoolhill. This remained in use until 1913 when the original building of the present Academy opened on its site to the west of the burgh.

The modern Academy has a splendid hall (seating 400) with stage, science labs, for chemistry, physics and biology, a homecraft suite with small flat in addition to needlework and cookery rooms, technical rooms and gym, with direct access to a farmstead play area, music and art rooms and library with provision for 3000 volumes.

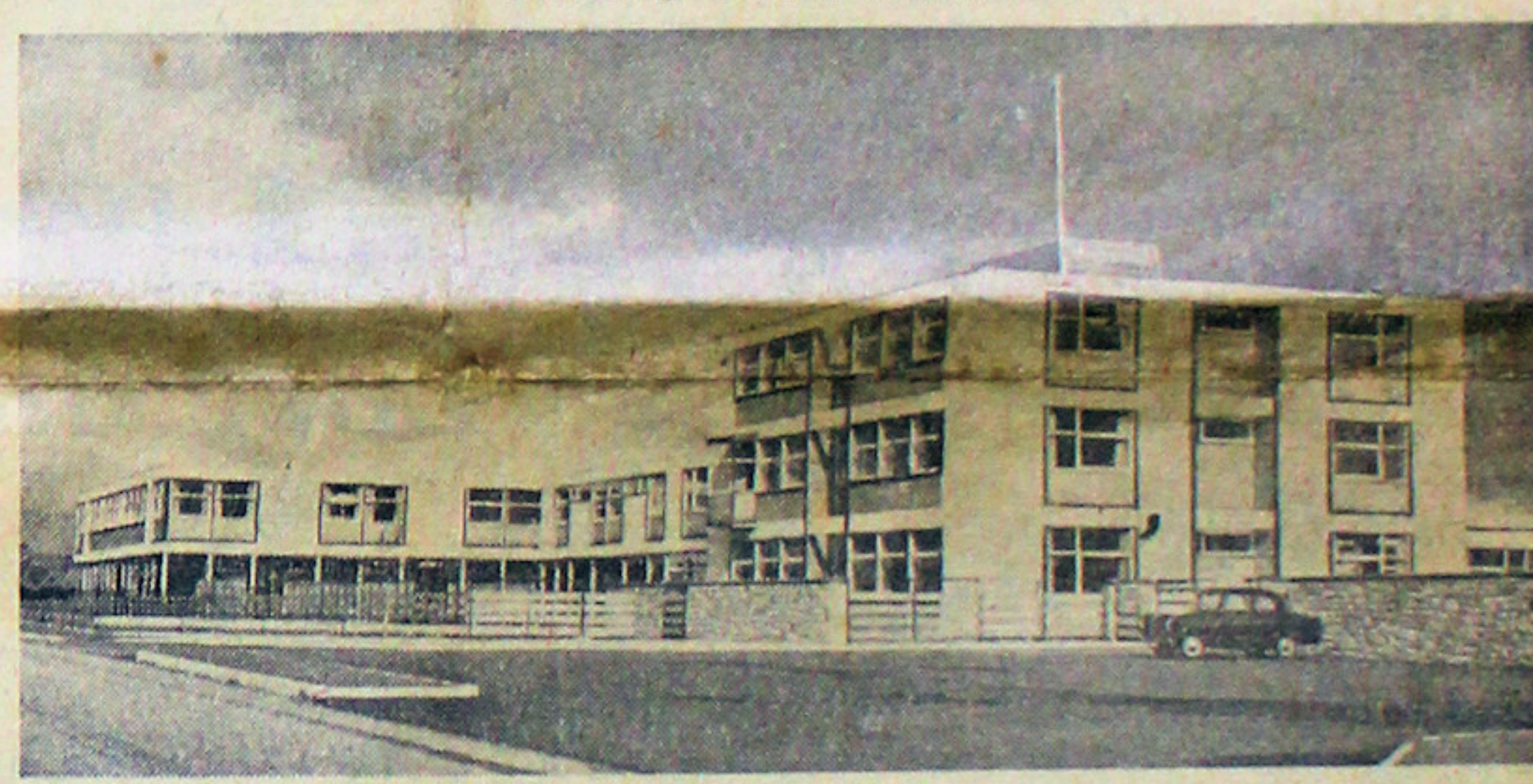
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The interior of Dornoch Cathedral from the nave, looking towards the chancel. The great piers of the crossing and the windows of the choir are the original work of the thirteenth century. The nave was restored by William Burn of Edinburgh for the Countess-Duchess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



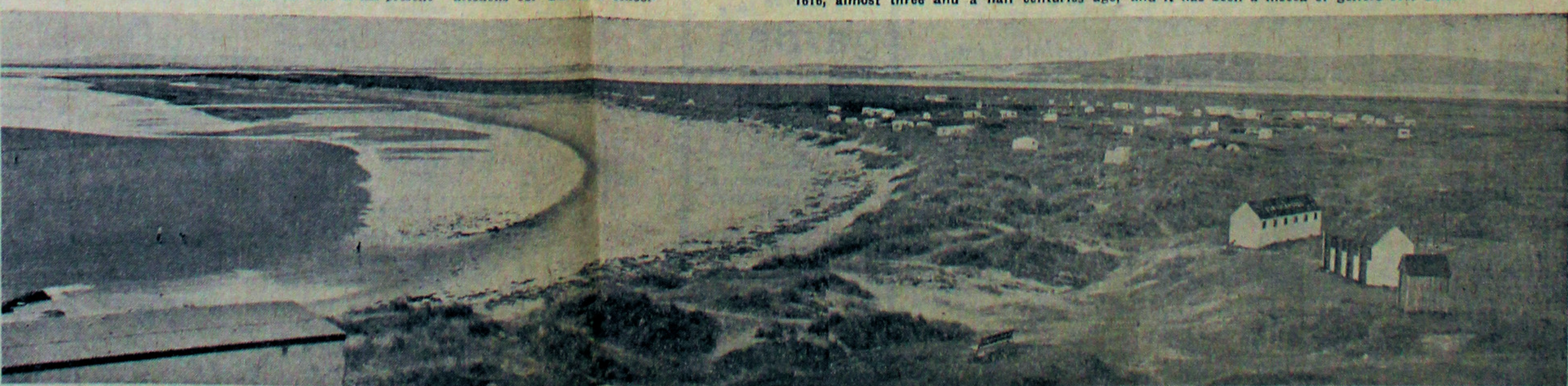
The clean, crisp lines of the new Dornoch Academy buildings, opened by H.M. the Queen Mother in September, 1963. The former Academy buildings are being used as the primary department.



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.