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Dornoch Station c.1950-60 DNHHL 2002\_096

## *'The Dornoch I Knew'*

*talk by*

*Jimmy Melville*

*9<sup>th</sup> December 2004*

Well, good evening, everyone.

This is a nostalgic trip back to the end of the 1940s and early 50s, a time when, perhaps, we were listening to the BBC Light Programme, the BBC Home Service, and programmes such as *Life with the Lions*, *Housewives' Choice*, and Radio Luxembourg for those who were lucky enough to have the chance to.

I'm going to go through a progress from one end of the town to the other, and I'm going to start by taking you up the burn from the railway station to what was the bus station. We had Highland Omnibuses operating in the north of Scotland for many, many years until they were incorporated into the state-owned Scottish Bus Group (SBG) in 1952.



Two route 22 Highland buses at Dornoch bus garage c. 1960 DNHHL 2017\_038\_03

Just beyond the bus station were the stock pens, where an event took place every two weeks that, as children, we really enjoyed: the grading. Every second Monday - and don't forget there was still meat rationing at the end of the 1940s, early '50s - farmers and crofters would take their cattle to the stock pens to be assessed. They'd be graded by the Ministry of Agriculture people. The stockmen weighed the cattle and they graded them into about five different grades and, from there, they would go down to the slaughterhouse, sadly, to enter the food chain. It was great fun for us youngsters because the cattle came in by train and sometimes, inevitably, a beast would get away and clear off down Station Road and hop up High Street, and we thoroughly enjoyed it. There were two regular stockmen there. One was Big Angus. Does anyone remember Big Angus from Embo Street? He was quite a character. And his wife, Katie, had the most marvellous laugh.



*Dornoch Bus Garage c. 1950  
DNHHL 2017\_038\_019*

Now back to the bus garage. The bus garage at Dornoch was quite an important depot. I'm only guessing, really, but there were probably about ten or maybe a dozen staff employed there: conductors, conductresses, and drivers - all male drivers in those days, no lady drivers. Jock Smith was the name of the mechanic, and Jock lived in Cromartie Road,. And his wife, she was a teacher at Clashmore School. Jock's other job, on a Saturday night, was to operate the cinema, but I'll come to that later. There were services from

Dornoch bus station up to Helmsdale. The service to Inverness took four hours because, of course, it stopped at every road end. And there were no bridges, of course, in those days.

And now, down to the railway station. I'm not going to dwell on the railway station very much. I worked there, as some of you know; you probably saw the Historylinks Museum video and quite a lot of it was covered in that. But one thing that wasn't mentioned was how the railway, from when it opened in 1902 until even my day, until the day it closed, there was no electricity. No electric power whatsoever. And it was power from Tilley lamps. That's what we operated on. And that's what the likes of Cathy Grant and Mr Sim, the stationmaster had. Or in those days, it was Mr Stewart. Does anybody remember Mr Stewart? He was a little man. In fact, he was known as 'Oxo cube'. He was so small. He was even smaller than me. And he had quite a tall wife, as I recall. All we ever saw of him was when we would go up near the railway station, he would come out. He never said anything. Of course, being the good little boys we were, we just cleared off.



*Railway guard's hand lamp  
DNHHL 2006\_114*

The other important thing at that time was that there was a company called Matheson's, known as 'Wordies'. It was John Matheson, but he was known as 'Johnny Wordie'. He provided the delivery service for goods coming into the station. And he had a horse and cart; a big, big trailer. Really, really heavy. And a Clydesdale horse. He went round and delivered to

the shops. They had the same arrangement in Golspie. It was my Uncle George there. And he was known as 'Geordie Wordie'. Or 'Wordie', really.

At the end of the day, they would have to take this big cart, I don't know why they didn't leave it at the station, or perhaps they did, but sometimes they had to go up to the stables. With this big cart they went down Church Street, up Golf Road, up The Avenue and right round to get to the stable which was just opposite St Finnbarr's Episcopalian church. I think it's actually used as a stable again for different purposes nowadays.



I'll go over to the Social Club now. I don't know if everyone knows the Social Club. It's in an absolute dreadful mess nowadays. I don't think the likes of Betty would thank me for saying that, but it is a disgrace. Horrible colour scheme. But in my day, back in the early '50s, it was a thriving social club with three snooker tables and a table tennis room. We had a full-time caretaker: Hugh Munro. He was known as 'Hughie Fling'. Hughie

only died last year, at over 100, so he did very well. And he lived with his two sisters in the flat above the social club.

We had great times at the social club, but the most novel thing was probably about '53 or '54, just when television was coming into the area, we actually had a TV room. We used to sit, just like you're sitting tonight, the TV would be up here, and we would sit and watch maybe the one channel we were able to watch: BBC1. Yeah, it was unbelievable. That was the social club, and it was a haven for us. We could go there any night of the week, all day Saturday, and probably afternoons during the week. And I think it's just surprising that here we are 50 years later, and there's absolutely nothing for young people. I'm probably exaggerating a wee bit. There probably are youth clubs, but not on the same scale as what we had in those days. So that was the social club. I think it was probably in the '70s when they took away the snooker tables, and I suppose television was perhaps the reason for that.

So we come down the bray from there, and go on to Bridge Street. The middle house, where the parents and grandfather, George Maclean, had an antique shop. George and Joyce, they lived there. I don't know if anyone can remember the sheds they had at the back, but he was a joiner, the granddad was a joiner, I think the father was too, and the undertaker, he certainly made coffins anyway. Or maybe the grandfather was an undertaker, was a cobbler rather, because apparently they were known collectively as 'Body and Sole'. The store at the back was fantastic, because they had all these, you probably remember, the tobacco tins. They were beautiful designs, and there were dozens of these tins. What a fortune today. So that was that house.

Now from there I'll come over to the newsagents, Lorna and Graham's. In those days, there was a gentleman by the name of Archie Sutherland who owned that premises, and his wife Joey. He was an electrician, and it wasn't a retail place. I think it was just his workshop. He kept stuff there, perhaps, and would often do work. But he actually lived in the cellar. And there's an access from the bridge itself, in, I think it's a little white brick, little sort of porch

that's there now. But that's the way you'd see Archie going in and out, and that's where he lived. And Joey, she lived upstairs. She enjoyed all the comforts of what was going on up there. And she always used to dress well, sometimes with a fur collar or a fox thing around her neck. And she had two little Pekingese dogs that she used to walk around town with. She was a character.

My earliest memory of the shop next door, the one that's now the butcher's, was a grocery shop. It was Duncan and Nan Macgregor who moved over the road. I can't remember when they moved across the road, but it must have been round about the late '40s. It must have been '46 or '47 when they were in the shop that Ian Milburn eventually took over.

I don't have much to add to that, but I will come on to them in a moment when I go across to Weir & Company. I'll just nip round the corner very quickly to Torneva, is it the one that goes up the steps. It's on the market at the moment. A lady by the name of Nellie Bubbles lived there. Her name was Nellie Mackay but she was known as Nellie Bubbles. She was a retired teacher. She had a pre-war car, and she used to drive about in this Austin Seven or something similar. And she had a brother, Willie, and Willie had only one arm. I think he lost an arm in the First World War. He used to go round Dornoch with Colin McCaskill. Colin McCaskill was a retired shepherd, I think, at the time. They used to sell fresh fish. So Colin used to drive the van, and Willie was at the back with his arm, with his jacket, you know, the sleeve tucked in, and he managed fine, with just the one arm.

Now, move on to the Carnegie library. Again, very different in those days. The librarian was Barbie Grant and she actually lived on the premises. She lived, I think, at the back, coming from the garden, rather than above, because that was the Council Chamber, the Town Clerk was upstairs. I do remember Barbie fairly well. After that, Wattie Ross and his wife took over when Barbie retired, I think. And that was Barbara Gordon's parents.

And then on to Weir and Company, where I had my first job as a 13-year-old. I was the messenger boy there. I always liked Duncan and Nan Macgregor. That building is called Cheadle House and they lived in the flat upstairs. And there was actually fire damage there during the war, not due to any hostile action, I'd add. I think Sutherland was the only county in the land that didn't have any bombs landed in it. That's another story. So they made a tremendous job of it. Do you remember, Jean and Sandy, the black and white tiles? I mean, it was probably four or five years after the war. The materials weren't easily available, but they made a tremendous job of it, and it stood out from all the other shops. And Duncan was a very good grocer, I suppose. He was a little man. He was smaller than me. And he was always dashing around and saying, 'Do this,' and 'Do that, do that'. I suppose he had one main feature, and that was that if someone important came in, he had no qualms about dropping who he was with and shooting off to look after them.



*Duncan MacGregor  
from DNH: 2013\_110\_01*

One day Bella McLean was in, and Bella had a slight stutter. Duncan was dealing with her, and this tall gentleman came in. He might have been the Manager. Of course, Duncan shot



off. Bella turned around to her friend and said, "Look at him. He's just the right height to kiss his arse." That will be my first and last naughty word tonight.

So that was Duncan. And around about 1954, I think, I was message boy there, about '54 or '55, he bought himself a Sunbeam Rapier. Now, do you remember that? I think it was a convertible. I mean, it was just years ahead of its time. It was a beautiful, brilliant red car. And he very rarely took it out, but if he had to go out to Skibo Castle, of course, he would say, "Come on, I'll give you a lift in the car." And we used to go out there and I used to enjoy the run. But it was a beautiful car, and I don't know whatever became of it. Duncan had a garage at the back of the shop. I think it's still there. And I think it's yours, Sandy, isn't it? And he used to keep it in there and take it out and polish it every week.

Now, next door was Ackie. Ackie was one the grocers. I think there were five grocers in Dornoch in those days. I don't have much to say about Ackie's really. He had mostly male staff, which wasn't all that uncommon in those days. There was Hugh Mackenzie, Hugh F, and Sandy Guy and Kathleen Leslie.



I will draw your attention to that lovely archway going into Maggie Hill's hairdressing salon. Well, believe it or not, in Ackie's day, there was a garage. It was just a dreary door at the front. And you weren't aware of that beautiful piece of architecture. Because as most of you probably know, I think it was linked up to the archway down in Gilchrist Square. Apparently, you could get through there and to that one, from what I understand. So that was Ackie Murray.

Then, of course, you went on and next door was the chemist. And the chemist, the pharmacist, was Joe Wickham. And Joe was a character. He, as a friend of mine, reminded me only the other day, about when he was playing golf, teeing off from the first tee and, for some reason, he somehow managed, to hit his ball into the tennis courts, which were directly behind him. Work that one out! Joe was a very fit man, a strong man when he was younger, a boxer in the army. And there was one of the local characters, Eric Sutherland, 'Eric Stack', he was known as, as some of you will know. Eric was a big man and apparently they squared up one day and wee Joe put Eric on his backside.



*Joe Wickham with a member of staff  
DNHHL 2006\_239\_02*

One of my favourite Dornoch stories does concern the chemist. It was coronation year, 1953. And there'd been all this controversy about whether it should be Queen Elizabeth I or II in Scotland. You know the argument. Anyway, the chemist was selling souvenirs. And somebody, I only found out a couple of years ago who the guilty party was, put a note through the door saying if they didn't stop selling the souvenirs, the shop would be blown up. It was pretty serious stuff in Dornoch in 1953. So we were all a bit alarmed. Murdo Mackay was the local police sergeant and somebody called him. Sometimes, you know, there's Dick Barton, eh?

Dick Barton. I'll get them. I'll get them. And he spent, I think, at least two nights sitting all night in the chemist's chair waiting for these anarchists to turn up. But they didn't turn up.

At that time, we lived and did for many years at number four Gilchrist Square, just behind there. We were lying in bed one night, just dropping off to sleep when there was this heck of an explosion. Boom! I'd never heard anything like it in my life. And of course our first thought was, that's it, it's the chemist, they've got the chemist. But no, fortunately, it was across beyond Elm Bank, where Donny MacDonald used to live. Behind there, where that new house has been built that's going for a small fortune, there was a garage, Robertson Fortress. And it had caught fire. A fire had started and it was the cylinders exploding. That's what, so there was relief all round. I've never forgotten that.

I just want to take you down to Gilchrist Square briefly because there were a few characters living there. It was known as Dog Street. And the reason for that, I believe, was because when people attended the market, they all tied their dogs up down there, just across from the marketplace. We lived at number one for some time. Bobby Bingo and his wife lived at number two. Irene, I think I saw you earlier on. The Davidson family lived at number three. Mel was number three. Angie, the gardener - does anyone remember Angie the gardener? She lived at number four. And Betsy Grant, who was a very elderly lady, lived at number five.



*Gilchrist Square DNHHL 2017\_013\_06*

Eric and Kirsty lived next door. Eric was a bit of a character, really. He had lots of different jobs. In fact, one of the jobs he had was going around, working for a crofter called Jim Leslie. Jim had the contract of collecting all the rubbish, you know, the bins in Dornoch, using a tractor and trailer. Everyone had a fire in those days, so there were ashes flying all over the place. They had some sort of canopy on the trailer which didn't really work.

One day, Eric had apparently gone off to Edinburgh, and met a woman called Kirsty. It all happened very quickly, you know, a whirlwind romance. I think they were married, but I'm not absolutely sure. They arrived back and the following morning, Eric left Kirsty in bed, went off up the street and bumped into Owen the baker, Jim Leslie, and it might have been Puff, the joiner. And he said, "Boys, come on, I want to show you something." He shot off back to his house with them, took them in, through to the bedroom, and he says, "Well, what do you think of her?" And that was his way of introducing his dear wife to the locals: "What do you think of her then?"

So back onto the High Street and the family guest house today was Omand's the bakers. And a very fine baker's it was, too. The bake house itself is still there. It can be seen at the back of the house. They had a retail shop, a front shop, and Nellie Mackenzie worked there. And all I can say about that is that they had a very good selection of all the wrong stuff you should eat.

The grocers, I should say the other grocers, they bought in their bread in those days from Glasgow. I can still remember seeing it coming on the train. Yes, we used to get our bread delivered all the way from Glasgow, even though we had two bakers in Dornoch.

Next to that building or part of that building has also been Mrs MacDonald's Tea Rooms and a guest house. When it was a lodging house, policemen and other people were lodged there. And my mother would send me, because she kept hens at the back, my mother would send me along with the bread, the stale bread for the hens. And I used to see the likes of Huey Cameron there. I can't remember the policeman, you know, but I can still see the pipe smoke sort of pouring into the air. I think Alvin Anderson's mother used to help out as well.

From there on to what is now Beauty in Dornoch. I'm not sure if Leonard Will was there or not in those days, but he certainly was a bit later on. But Leonard used to repair bikes and he was an electrician as well. And he was a character. He liked to be known as 'Skipper Will'. He used to lead the scouts and we used to go to annual camps with him. He had this yacht out at Little Ferry that he'd always planned to sail across the North Sea, but I'm afraid he never quite made it. It ended up in the backyard of that place until five or six years ago, when it was sold to somebody in Golspie.

Behind the house behind Leonard's shop was Howie the Dentist. Do you remember Howie the Dentist? I don't remember much about him. He must have left when I was very, very young.

From there we go on to the Bank of Scotland. Mr MacLean was the bank manager. On the left, where the cash machine is today, that was the entrance to the bank. You went in there and there was really no public area. And I can still see, oddly enough, the interest rate at the time was about three and a half per cent, which is what it is today almost, if you're lucky. And it used to be Mr MacLean as the teller. Oh, yes, there was a very small staff in those days.



Next door to the Bank was the headmaster's house. I remember Mr Robertson coming and living there.

*School House (left) and Bank of Scotland House (right) DNHHL 2001\_312\_001\_64*

It's maybe appropriate at this stage to go up the hill to the Burghfield Hotel. I think the Currie family had been in residence since 1946. And the stories about the Burghfield, they are legends. I'm certainly not going to go into them tonight. But it's nice to say the Curries ran that very good business for a long time, well over 50 years.



*Burghfield Hotel c. 1946  
DNHHL 2014 013 427*

Back in High Street next to the headmaster's house, , where the Cathedral Cafe is today, Mrs Kearns came from Edinburgh. or somewhere like that. to open a business in the late '40s. Before that, it was A.K. (Andrew Kenneth) Fraser's. Mrs Kearns took it over and really built up a very, very successful business. Sadly, her husband died when she hadn't been here very long. Then, after a few years, she married Mr MacLean, the bank manager. So it all worked very well. Mrs MacLean's business did very well and was only closed in the late '70s?

And then next to that, which is the present-day baker's, well that was David MacLeod or Dai MacLeod, another grocery shop. Eventually they moved from there and went down to where Joyce MacLean is, where the antique shop is (*corner of Castle Street and Castle Close*), and developed that as a very nice grocery shop as well. In fact, my friend Duncan used to stand up in the flat over on High Street with his binoculars at night and watch progress to see what was going on there because there was always intense rivalry between the grocers. In those days there was retail price maintenance, I think everyone charged the same, really, you couldn't sell at any.

Now, I hope you'll find the next bit interesting. I'm really talking about the complex that Grant's have now. The whole complex, that is. Well, 50 years ago, it was a very different set-up altogether. Just opposite today's Baker's, there were two houses. We lived in the one... you'd think I lived everywhere. We lived in the one just across from the baker's shop. That was number 1 High Street, as it was known in those days.

Next door was Peter MacDonald, the sign writer, and his family. So our gable end faced down High Street, and at the bottom of the gable end, away from the baker's, there was a big metal gate which allowed you to go into the back of the butcher's shop, as it was then. Then there was another gable end, facing up to the Cathedral Cafe. And that building there, which today is probably where they sell the bread and that in the supermarket, that was a ladies' and gents' hairdresser's. In fact Barbara Grant, or Barbara Morrison rather, who runs that business now, it was her grandparents'. Her grandfather, Ackie Macgregor, was the barber. (It was her brother, Duncan Macgregor, who had Weir and Company.) And his wife, Helen, she was the ladies' hairdresser. And again, they ran that business for many, many years.

Next to that was the butcher's. Most of you probably know that, especially having seen the video about the railway, that Grant's was a very successful company. I mean for a small town in the Highlands to have gained so many markets all over the country, down in England, the South African shipping line, the director's canteen at Leyland Motors. I can still see all these addresses. And I think it was quite an achievement for a company in Dornoch. The two running the business then were Charlie Grant, who was Barbara's grandfather and, of course, Barbara's father was Donald Grant. All golfers would know Donald.

On the other side, the other brother of Charlie's was Captain Bob, and he was a character. And he probably ran the admin and the sales side of it, with his son Glenn. Charlie was a very gentle man. Again, that's Jessie Vale's dad. He sometimes used to send for me. I was only quite small. He'd say, *"Well, did you brush the floor, Jimmy? Dad does things like that, you know."* Then, when I was finished after 23 hours, he would put his hand in his pocket, and he'd come out with some change and he would take a big penny and a little sixpence, and he



would say, "Jimmy, now, which one do you want? The big one or the little one?" "The big one, please." He enjoyed it!

They had what was known as the back shop and then the boiler room. And they used to have two huge tubs there that had coal fires below. They used to boil them to get them up to temperature, and they made loads of black puddings and haggis that time of year, and white puddings, and there was always a tremendous smell of cooking in there. It's what my father worked doing there, and my brother, Willie, as well.

Duncan Bethune, Dennis's dad, Kathy's brother, Jim, his mum, and old Willie McCullough from Littletown worked at Grant's. A lot of people worked with them; a very loyal workforce for many, many years. And, of course, the one place today was the two houses, the ladies and gents' hairdressers and the butchers.

Of course, B T Wright had the dairy at the corner next to the post office. It was a superb dairy, really. Well, we call it a dairy, but they sold, obviously, ice cream and milkshakes in these beautiful tall glasses. They had the house next door, and behind that, that's where they used to bottle the milk. I used to have a little machine with a little foil cap and just plop them down. So that was that building there. It's quite amazing how it's all changed.



*Dornoch Dairy c.1930 DNHHL 2015\_043*

We're going along St Gilbert Street, or Back Street, as we call it now. Kathy, did you say once there was a sort of play area, there was a lot of grass? In fact on High Street back then, there was no parking next to the graveyard. There was always a green verge opposite the houses, and it was quite rough, really, because there wasn't the need for car parking. And we used to dig little holes and put a crockery tin in, and we'd go off all around. Yes, that's right.

And where Russell's garage is today, that was only built again in the early 50s. It was at Finlay and McRae. I'll come on to Finlay later, the cobbler, shoemaker. Finlay had his stables there.

Now, just behind that, most of you will not be aware of it, other than perhaps people who have lived in Dornoch for a while, there's a stone building that Russell uses as a store, and that was a fish and chip shop. That was Sam McGregor's fish and chip shop. Oh, it was a fantastic place, it really was. You accessed it just across from Gillespie's, or where Graham TV Ross is today. One section was the counter service, and there was a restaurant as well and it was Jock Maclean, Jenny Cummings from Embo there. So that was a busy little corner that really doesn't exist anymore.



*Old fish & chips shop  
DNHHL 2008\_068\_26*

I'll just go very quickly to the war memorial, because most of you will know that it hasn't



*Original location of Dornoch War Memorial – Poles Road  
DNHHL 20074\_057\_275*

always been where it is today. In fairly recent years, about 10, 15 years ago, it was moved. It used to sit right in the middle of Poles Road, so the road went either side of it, in a sort of triangle shape. The roads either side were quite narrow really and it was a bit of a traffic hazard, I think. Well it got so anyway with the increase in traffic.

I remember in one of the storms we had in '53 or '54 or '55 - we used to get really big snow storms then. This snow was half way up the memorial, to the statue itself. It was so deep. Now it's unlikely that will ever happen again for two reasons. Global warming perhaps is one. But, of course, in those days, where all the houses were built on what they call Cnoc an Lobht and Rowan Crescent, was just open fields. So of course the snow just piled straight in like that. So that's not likely to happen again.

I'll just speak very briefly about the school, because there's not an awful lot to be said before the new high school was built. In my final qualifying year, we certainly had some outbuildings, and my qualifying year was spent in what we called a hen house. Maggie Fraser was the teacher. It was a corrugated iron building. And you can still see it. If you go out past the school, there's a farm on the left hand side, John Jeevan Farm. And if you look round you'll see this corrugated iron building behind Primary One. And that was our class, on the left-hand side, you can't miss it. It's cream, cream coloured. It was in the school grounds at the back, along with a couple of other outbuildings.

So, back to the war memorial and from there, I'd like to go 100 yds further along Castle Street to the West Church Hall. Isn't it looking well since they put floodlights up. But the lights that we saw, of course, were the cinema. It was the picture house and every Saturday night you could go there, certainly during the '50s and '60s. TV brought an end to it, I suppose. And that's what we did on a Saturday. We went to the cinema there. It was Jock Smith, who I mentioned was the mechanic at the bus station, and Sammy MacLennan, they were the projectionists. It was always well supported. I think in those days, you could sit in the balcony for two and sixpence. There was a slightly sloping ground floor and I think it was nine pence at the front, then one shilling, one and six at the back. And I will mention here a character by the name of Arnold Fraser. I don't know if anyone remembers, but Arnold Fraser was a bit of a character. He was very short-sighted, so he had to sit down among us little ones at the front. And of course, everybody would start chatting and he used to get very angry with us.

So, now from there, I'm going along to Gillespie's. It's always been known as Gillespie's, I think. Peter and Rena are around, when did you move in there, Peter? *"From the fifties. Sixty-four, I think. But we came to Dornoch in fifty-three."* So, yes, Gillespie's. Mr. Sampson, Willie Sampson, was it? 'Yes'. And Angus Munro. Everyone knows Angus from Hoy. I always thought it was Hoy in Orkney, but apparently it's a Hoy in Caithness he came from. 'Yes, that's

*right*'. Yeah, because I always wondered about the Caithness accent coming from Orkney. And the only thing I can remember of that was the thermometer. Did you tell me once somebody stole it? I had seen some low temperatures on that.

Of course, it was very different because there were very narrow pavements in those days and along the pavement there was a curved wall. Remember? Came around for about maybe eight feet up to the front of your building. Then, of course, coming along from there, there was obviously no Chinese takeaway and, when I mentioned about the dentist, it must have been the 60s when they built their surgery in there, I think.

Of course, on the left-hand side was the Eagle Hotel run by Gordon Tewsley and his brother George. That was quite an establishment, Cathy, wasn't it? I'm asking you, not that you might have any first-hand experience with having lived across the road at the back of it. But Gordon was a great guy. He always wore his white apron. In fact, he was a bit like the man out of *'Hello, Hello'* on TV, a black pullover and white apron, the very man. As boys, on a Sunday, we used to sit at the bridge and watch him going down to church, down to the east to go to the Free Church. And he used to wear Cuban heel boots - we didn't know they were called Cuban heel boots in those days - but he had these high heels and a fancy hat on and really fancy clothes. He was a real dandy, yeah. And that was the only time we ever saw him dressed up. But he had a very good business and he used to have people, including some policemen, lodging with him.

Of course, some of the Embos used to come down. There's one quite funny story, I think. One Embo man, quite drunk outside, hanging on to the ivy - it was all full of ivy in those days. And apparently, a bus used to come and take them up to Embo because there was no regular bus service. So I think it was Roderick Ross, Roddy Ross, who was coming along and the Embo man asked, *"Has the bus gone to Embo yet?"* And Roddy said, *"Yes, I think so."* And he said, *"Was I on it?"* Those were the words.



*Ivy clad Eagle Hotel c1930  
DNHHL 2006\_103\_03*

Shooting off down to The Meadows. Sandycroft was a working croft, it was the Mackay family had that. Oh yes and the Piggery. There was a pig farm down there. Sally knows all about it. Where are you Sally? That's it, where you keep your stock now. But in those days, it was Munro and Grant who are at the moment the butchers in Castle Street. Jackie Grant owned the piggery down there. And he had a wonderful little man, an Irishman, Paddy, who used to look after the pigs. He was some character, wasn't he? When you asked, "Paddy, how many pigs have you got?" He said, "49, or 50 including myself". And he used to get very drunk on a Saturday. And when the pipe band started playing a jig or something like that, he would take his hat off, throw it on the ground and start doing his Irish jig. He was harmless, never bothered anyone. And he would end up at the chip shop for his tea.



*Sandycroft DNHHL 2006\_103\_03*

The Meadows was quite handy because, again in these big snowstorms, the helicopters used to get the local authorities to light a fire to get the way of the wind. And they used to come in and refuel there perhaps and go off and drop fodder or feed stuff off around the countryside.

Just very briefly we come to the curling rink. That was an operation. You can see the photographs down at the Heritage Centre. That was going until, can anyone tell me? Ian McKay? *Until the sixties, really.* But, you know, it had nice lighting around it and everything. it was a good one, but then we just probably didn't have the frost after that. And the surface cracked.



*The curling pond c.1962*  
DNHHL 2011\_089\_03

And just beyond that, it used to flood. Then just a bit along from that, not quite where the squash court is, but Grant's, the butcher's again, they used to have a bone store for want of a better word, used to pile all their bones in there. They used to be carted away every now and again to be turned into glue or something like that.

So, back up onto Castle Street. I'll start off at the northern side, Sinclair Mackintosh's. That was Finlay Macrae's the shoemaker, and he was a right character. He didn't work particularly hard because he was too busy entertaining the men that would go in and spend half the day with him. He was a kind of rough character. When he played football he was noted for breaking legs and he was banned from playing in Sutherland. So he used to drive off on his motorbike over to the Black Isle to get a game there until he got banned from there. He was a mad keen Rangers fan. Oh, if Rangers lost you couldn't speak to him on a Sunday. And he used to get his words mixed up as well. He never called a Jaguar a Jaguar, it was always a Jagger. I don't know if there are any elderly or young football fans here, but there was a South African footballer by the name of Don Kitchenbrand that played for Rangers back at that time, the early '50s. One day he had a particularly good game so on the Monday when all these visitors were in, Finlay turned around and he said, "Did you see Kitchenbrander?" Not Kitchenbrand. *"He went down the wing like a thundering bolt."* And there was a Robert Ross who was one of the local worthies and he used to rag Robert something rotten.

I can maybe get some help at the back for the next one, but where did Mr Raddison have his shop? Was it where the pet shop is today or the one next to that? It's the one that Tom had. Well, that was the pet shop, was it? I couldn't remember, Maureen, whether he had it before Sutherlands or after Sutherlands. It doesn't matter for that. Before Sutherlands. And next to that was Alistair Davidson. Alistair, that's Isabel's husband or ex-husband. He's out in Canada now. He was quite an enterprising chap. He claimed to be the pioneer of the static holiday caravans down on the caravan site. Just by the way, about the caravan site. It was local volunteers actually who put all the infrastructure and utilities into that. Digging trenches and that. They did very well back in the early '50s.

Alistair also ran a van selling shoes and just got around the north coast and west coast. And there's one story. I think I can tell. Mrs. So-and-so, who had five daughters, went down to him and said:



*"Mr. Davidson, the children are going back to school next week and I really need to get some shoes."*

He replied *"Yes, I know Mrs. So-and-so, but you never paid for last year and I'm sorry I just can't help you. I feel really bad about that but I can't help you"*.

And she said, *"Oh, that's okay."*

Then she immediately went to the kiosk, phoned Isabel and said, *"Oh Isabel, I've just missed your husband and I'm so anxious to get five pairs of shoes for the children to go back to school next week."* *"Don't worry Mrs. Mackay I will send them up on the bus."* And she did. When her husband got back, she says, *"You missed a big order there you know but don't worry I sent them up,"* and he laughed. He took it in good part. And so that was that.

The next shop was the Co-op, the Co-op grocers, where Luigi's is today, and that was about the fifth of the grocery shops and it only closed in the late '70s, I think.

Next to that is, of course, Macdonald's. It's the only shop in Dornoch that still retains its original name (*until c 2016 when it became the hardware department of 'Dornoch Stores'*). I was talking to Fiona Macdonald yesterday. It was her grandad who came up from Beaulieu who opened that shop. I think she thought it was in 1906 so it's almost 100 years ago. The poor man went off to the war - he was Donnie's father and Jimmy who was Sander's father, that was their dad - and he never came back; he was killed in 1918 which was rather sad. There was a much smaller shop in those days; it was only a fraction of the size it is today. Of course, all these shops only had narrow windows. It was only in later years that they extended them. Next to the last shop on that terrace with a wee Spar was another good baker shop. I always remember they had a tub of salt herring.

The other side was the butcher's that's across from Luigi's, and that was a busy butcher's shop. All the butchers had their vans to go around the countryside because of course people couldn't get in too often. They had a couple of vans. I used to go in there quite a bit and the housekeeper was Kate Grant. I do remember Jock Grant who was a brother of Charlie and Captain Bob - it was all the one family.

Now I mentioned further towards the Castle down a little lane lived Mrs. Sykes and Miss. Mould. I don't remember an awful lot about them, but I know one of them did give me a little wooden train set, which today I think would be quite valuable. They also owned the house just beside the Museum where Mary Grant lives today and Bob Shaw, who was Margaret Macdonald's father, was a chauffeur, I think, to them.



*Miss Mould. Detail from DNHHL 2008\_2011*

Where Arthur and Carmichael are today, that was Alastair Topp and his mother, Mrs. Topp. And oddly enough, your home, Joan, there was Mrs Topp in that house and Miss Tapp in your house. There were two other gentry ladies there. It was Miss Stoddard and Miss Tapp. And I think they used to wear leather coats. They lived for years. And she always had a dog. And Donald Grant, that's Barbara's, Barbara Morrison's father, came back from Dingwall one day

with a little Spaniel pup, and he gave it to me. It was a fine dog except it went off down into Dornoch. It used to wander around. It started killing hens, so we had to get rid of it. And in fact, Miss Tapp took it and called it Roy. For years afterwards, I'd see Roy out. They had a very comfortable life there.

Then, in the next house, it was Colvin, the gardener, Cathy Colvin's dad, and then Russell Mackenzie's. Perhaps if I'm losing some of you, I'm sorry. That's the house next to Joan, the middle house, the terrible looking one that I think I was going to do something about one day. Well, we'll get there. We'll get there. I think we've got plans for that. The Mackay's took it over as a hairdresser's and put these things in.

Across from there, where Russell Mackenzie's house is today, that was the market garden, and a very productive market garden it was. And presumably, it was there to serve the castle in the early days. I don't know an awful lot. I must find out some more about the history of Miss Mould and Mrs Sykes. But we used to go in, and you could go and collect strawberries or raspberries. And he would say, *"There you are, Jimmy. Now, keep whistling,"* so I wouldn't eat any.

At the other end, there was a family called Moody. He was a bus driver. I don't know if anyone remembers the Moodys. They moved to Tain.

Where the post office is today, that was Slater's. That was another grocer's shop. Pete Grant ran that shop then, when Slater's gave it up – they must have been a national chain - Pete took it over

I'll talk very briefly about the cathedral, because it hasn't really changed much in the last 800 years. Well, it has, really, but not in the last 150, I suppose. All I remember is the bit of excitement when the new lighting was introduced early in the '50s, the up lighters. I think I've got my timing right there. Before that, it was very poor light. And of course, now they've been superseded by much more efficient ones. And the christening font, in my day it was, I think, where the lectern is today, rather than where it is at the moment.

Does anyone remember Miss Mackay? I'm just trying to think back. She was a Sunday school teacher. We used to go for Sunday school, and we used to go into the little room behind the organ and have our lesson. It used to be Miss Chisholm, but before that was Miss Mackay. I think it was Miss Mackay. It doesn't matter. So that's really what I've got to say.

Moving on from the Castle behind the Jail was the Drill Hall. Again, a marvellous facility that no longer exists. In the town council's wisdom, and I'm sure for good reasons, they sold it for the princely sum of £7,000 sometime in the early '70s, or late '60s. Early '70s, yes. Just unbelievable, because we don't seem to have anywhere anymore, apart from the West Church Hall. We've already discussed the Social Club, but the Drill Hall was marvellous. That whole building was marvellous. Just as you went in there was one little room, now part of the Jail, which was the bus office. So the buses used to park outside there, and that's where you would get the buses. Cathy, who came from Sandycroft, she worked in there. The army cadets also operated from there and the TA as well. The hall was a good sized hall. You'd go into through what the Jail is today, where the looms were, I don't know if you realise the

looms were there covering a that whole area. We had lots of dancers; it was a great place to have dances. Good stage. Also Badminton, that's right. When I was very young, it was the picture house, before it moved to the West Church Hall. At the gable end facing the barn, at that end, there was a little building on stilts, and the projector was there. That was the projector room, and it showed all the pictures.

I remember, when I was quite young, going down there to watch some film or other, and going back in the dark, and I think either Miss Mould or the other lady there died, and the grave was open. It was sort of covered but it was quite spooky because there was very poor lighting in those days. In fact, the lights went off at about ten, maybe eleven o'clock, or something like that, and I remember, when I was 16 or 17, coming back from dances and not being able to find the gate when there was no moon. I didn't drink, I assure you. It was so black, so different to today, when the birds are singing all night, I believe.

Oh, can I just mention, I don't know who was responsible for putting all the stuffed heads on the wall. Do you remember the buffalo, and all the African animals, do you remember them? They suddenly appeared, late '40s, and I don't know whatever happened to them. Where did they go then? I don't know. They were on the wall, they were all around. There must have been a good, 15 or 16 of them. I don't know if they were all shot on safari, sometime or other.

I must mention the old post office, which became the tourist office. It still has the masonry title 'Post Office' it is quite clear, and it was Macintosh, the postmaster. He was quite a character. All the posties used to operate from there, with their vans, plus the telephone exchange. I mentioned Johnny Wordie, who drove the horse and cart for the railway, well, his daughter, Maggie, she was known as 'Maggie Wordie', and she only died about 10 years ago in Tain, I think. Maggie worked there. There were probably some others who I can't remember.



*The old post office c.1955  
DNHHL 2003\_249*

Across from the Post Office there was the, the police station and is it my imagination, but I think they had railings around it. Do you remember that, George? Oh, well, I don't know if I read that, I just saw the photographs, but the railings were around there and, in fact, in light of an event, it happened some years later, they could have been left there, because someone ran into the front door but that's another story.

We'll go, very quickly, down Shore Road, because just going round, as if you were going to the Museum, there's that big open area where the big lorries are parked. That was a farm steading belonging to Grant's the butcher's and, in fact, my mother, when I was quite young, used to go down and milk cows there. Also, around about this time of year, Grant's used to send lorries up to Caithness and buy hundreds of fowl: chickens, geese, turkeys, and they all used to be plucked down there. They used to work 24 hours a day; it was really hard work.

Then, of course, there was the slaughterhouse as well. When I say the slaughterhouse, that was the old stone building which was the gas works, or whatever it was at one time.

The doctor's surgery was also there, and the doctor's home. Maggie and Margaret lived there. My earliest memory is of the arrangements your dad had for seeing his patients. There was no receptionist, apart from your mother, but he had this little contraption, a little buzzer. Do you remember the buzzer? When a patient left, the doctor would make his notes up, and then he would press this little thing, and that buzzer was your signal to go through and see Dr MacLeod. I can still remember his home visits, and how he would give us a packet of spangles out of his drawer, just to keep us happy; that it might rot our teeth didn't matter.

Going down, I'll just cut across very quickly from there down to Littletown, across from where there was a motel there is a wee cottage and behind that, there were Nissen huts. In actual fact, there were once Nissen huts all the way up Golf Road, where all the bungalows are today. I think there were Polish servicemen living there, but at the time I'm talking about, after the war, they'd all gone.

Seaforth MacGregor was the local motor hire. In fact, he had Duncan Allan's house on Cathedral Green but he used to keep his two coaches and several cars and operate from these Nissen huts.

*Seaforth MacGregor's.  
Detail from DNHHL 2012 053*



Talking about Nissen huts very quickly, along Stafford Road, before there were any houses built there, there were some Nissen huts there and I remember one family at least living in them because of the shortage of housing. Trudy's Café was a converted Nissen hut. I think that was probably in the early '50s, except it wasn't Trudy's; it was Donny Mackenzie, 'Tubby', who opened that. It was a good thing for the youngsters because there was a jukebox, probably near the mid-'50s and that was great fun.

Coming back into The Square, there was a Dornoch Inn. There's not an awful lot to say about that really. It was totally different in those days. Where the car park is, there were a lot of lockups which were part of the Sutherland Arms Hotel that was burnt down. It was burnt down in 1941. There was the Annexe, which was part of the Sutherland Arms, which became a shop that only changed its name in the last two or three years, and that was Mabel's shop, 'Graham and Company, haberdashery and ladies' clothing'. Mabel must have worked there since the war. She must have worked about 60 years, I suppose, altogether.

One thing I forgot to mention, though I mentioned the police station. We had our own police force then: the Sutherland Police Force. It was very small. The Chief Constable was Chief Ross. I only ever saw him once in his uniform, in fact I didn't know he had a uniform until he appeared in it one day. I think it was Lord Kilmuir who was getting the freedom of the town, and there he was, I couldn't believe it. Usually, he'd just wear a plus-four. There was Inspector Tom, who lived just round the Murray Road and maybe two sergeants - Sergeant Mackay, and I don't know who the other one was - and maybe a smattering of constables throughout the county, and that was it. Oh, Roddy Mackay. I didn't know if Roddy was a sergeant then. They had a Ford, they had a car known as a Ford V8 Pilot, I think it was - it was a bit like a Buick. The policemen weren't averse to having a dram in those days, and a bit later too. On one occasion one of them found the car Ford V8 parked and drove it back to



the Station. Some time later he had a phone call from someone with a rich sounding voice saying that his V8 Pilot had stolen his V8 Pilot. Roddy had actually driven this man's car back to the police station. Knowing Roddy, because he became one of our councillors later, he managed to talk his way out of it.

The boys' and girls' hostels had been set up in 1948-'49 for people who hadn't been here very long. Because there was no secondary education on the north and west coasts, these poor youngsters, at eleven years of age, had to leave home in August, when term started, and that was them in Dornoch until Christmastime. It must have been quite daunting for a young youngster. But that improved a lot; latterly, they were home every weekend.

Anyway, back to Golf Road where the Nissen huts were, and I think I'm going to finish up now. The golf club was very different in those days; probably only half the size it is today with all the extensions and so on. And they had the caddy, or professional shop. Was it the professional shop first, then the caddy shop? The one where the car park was, where Robbie Grant operated from. You know, just the little huts. The caddy set, that's right.



*Golf Club House c.1930 DNHHL 2013\_029*

The grounds staff, or the greenkeepers rather, were Jim Mackintosh and brother Duncan, actually known as Barrel. And Robbie helped them, presumably, at some time, did he? But who else had they on? I mean, it's incredible to think that the two of them probably carried out most of the work on the course, didn't they? I just want to say about that terrific wagon. they had. It was called a Patterson. I'll always remember it because it ended up in Eric Sutherland's back yard, at the back of his house. It was just like a pickup that you have today. It was a very old pre-war thing. It had a wooden body. And I think that was the only wagon they had. They certainly had motor mowers, but how did they manage to look after that golf course when you consider the size of the staff today and all the machinery they had?

So with that, I'm just about finished. I don't think I have anything more to say.