Gilbert de Moravia — the Great Architect

Gilbert de Moravia, who planned and supervised the building of the Cathedral, was related to the powerful Earls of Moray. He was also a near kinsman of the first Earl of Sutherland.

From him Gilbert had received (c. 1211 AD) extensive lands in the vicinity of Dornoch. These included Skibo and Skelbo. Gilbert was noted for his nobility and courage, his great energy and ability.

In 1222 he was elected to the Bishopric of Caithness in the presence of the King, Alexander II. The diocese of Caithness compresence of the King, Alexander II. The diocese of Caithness compresence of the King, Alexander II.

prised all land north of the Dornoch Firth.

The mother church of the diocese had originally been at Halkirk but Bishops John and Adam, the two bishops prior to Gilbert, having been brutally put to death, Gilbert decided to transfer the seat of the diocese to Dornoch. Here at his own expense he built his Cathedral Church.

The original charter provided for the appointment of ten canons. To each specific lands and teinds were given. Each also had a residence in Dornoch, which they were expected to occupy for at least three months in the year. The Bishop resided in the castles of Skibo and Scrabster.

In the 16th Century a new Bishop's palace (now the Castle

Hotel) was erected across from the Cathedral.

The early part of the 13th Century was a time of great activity in church building. The foundation stone of the Cathedral was laid the same year as that of Elgin Cathedral. Both took shape at the same time.

Gilbert was also responsible for building St Peter's Church in Thurso. There is no means of ascertaining how long the Cathedral took to build, but we do know that in 1239 the building was sufficiently well advanced for the first service to be held.

When completed the Cathedral consisted of a nave with aisles, transepts, a quire and a massive tower supported by four clustered piers of local sandstone. The glass for the windows was

Gilbert de Moravia, who planned and supervised the contained medieval stained glass.

During his time as a bishop, St Gilbert reorganised his diocese. He was also a leading figure in national affairs of church and state in Scotland. He died on 1st April 1245, "one of the noblest and wisest ecclesiastics the medieval church produced". He was the last Scotsman to whom a place was given in the Calendar of Saints.

Crear McCartney describes the St Gilbert window, which was installed in 1989 to commemorate 750 years of worship in Dornoch Cathedral.

Of the four ancient elements, Earth, Air, Fire and Water, Water symbolised Cleansing and Re-birth. This leads me to choose that moment when St Gilbert crossed the waters of the Moray Firth to build his cathedral at Dornoch.

The blues and greens of water predominate. With sunshine the window will flood the choir with pure cool colour. The single large figure, and the heraldry, relates this window to the other lancets.

St Gilbert's seal is lost, but Bishop William's seal of 1250 depicting a Bishop on a ship, may refer to St Gilbert and a miracle concerning salmon: this leads me to re-interpret this seal and show St Gilbert on the deck of a ship. The Cross at the prow signifies the metaphor of Ship as Church, and the Anchor symbolises Hope—the second Christian Virture.

An Angel Fish guides the ship across the Moray Firth, and its bow-wave forms the Fleur-de-Lys, symbol of Mary to whom the church was first dedicated.

St Gilbert presents to us a model of his cathedral and carries a Crozier; the knob is decorated with the Cross of St Andrew, and the Curve is decorated with the small White Rose of Scotland — "which smells sharp and sweet, and breaks the Heart." The Seven Roses symbolise the Gifts of the Holy Spirit, their red thorns pointing inwards, reminding us of the Passion of Our Lord.

The Dove, — symbol of the Holy Spirit — alights on Gilbert's shoulder — an allusion also to that other Dove, St Columba, who brought the Church across another Scottish sea to Iona.

King Alexander II took an active part in founding the cathedral at Dornoch. His role is commemorated at the foot of the window.

The Unicorn, supporter of the Royal Arms of Scotland, symbolises Inspiration and Imagination. It points its Golden Horn to the Angel Fish among the "Silver Darlings."

Legend states that the Golden Horn purified murky water. The Unicorn here therefore symbolises King Alexander's vision that he would, through the good works of Gilbert, bring the North under the King's Peace —

Two Unicorns support the Royal Arms. Only one plays that role here, and it also supports the other arms depicted.

The shields are all related to the long history of Dornoch Cathedral. At the foot the arms of the Church of Soctland, with its motto Nec Tamen Consumebatur, bears witness to the permanence of The Church of Christ.

In tribute to the long line of distinguished successors from St Gilbert to the present day I have placed the present incumbent's monogram in the botton left corner.

Around the head of St Gilbert is the quotation about the Building of The Temple in I Chronicles 22: 2; fitting words chosen by the Rev James A Simpson to mark the 750th Anniversary of the building of this beautiful cathedral.

Fateful Year

Fifteen-seventy was a fateful year in the history of the Cathedral. That year it was set on fire during a clan fued between the MacKays of Strathnaver and the Murrays of Dornoch.

The nave was almost totally destroyed. Though the chancel and transept walls remained for the most part intact, the entire roof was destroyed. In 1616 Sir Robert Gordon with the help of the heritors re-roofed the quire and the transepts.

In his history of Sutherland, he tells how "by special providence" a slate quarry was discovered in the neighbourhood. The slate from this quarry was used to re-roof the Cathedral.

A partition wall was also erected to separate the ruined nave from the rest of the church. What was now a T-shaped church, comprising quire and transepts, became the parish church for the next two hundred years.

During the years succeeding the Protestant Reformation in the 16th Century, the Cathedral entered a new phase in its history. From being a Roman Catholic church, it became for a short period in the 17th Century Episcopalian. For the past three hundred years it has, however, been the Presbyterian church for the area. Visitors sometimes ask why we retain the name "cathedral" (which literally means the seat of a bishop) when we have no bishops in the Presbyterian Church of Scotland.

We do so simply as a reminder of the church's early history, just as South of the Border great churches like Westminster Abbey are still called abbeys, though no longer ruled over by an abbot.

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Dornoch as Site of Principal Church of Diocese of Caithness

Early in the 13th Century Bishop Gilbert de Moravia selected Dornoch as the site of the principal church of the Diocese of Caithness.

In doing so he may well have been influenced by the fact that for several hundred years the Dornoch area had already been under the influence of the Church. Some scholars believe that from as early as the 6th Century, Dornoch had been a centre of religious influence and the site of a Culdee community.

In the Register of the Abbey of Dunfermline there is a letter written in 1140 by David I addressed to the Earls of Orkney and Caithness, praying that "for love of him" they would protect the monks at Dornoch from injury and shame.

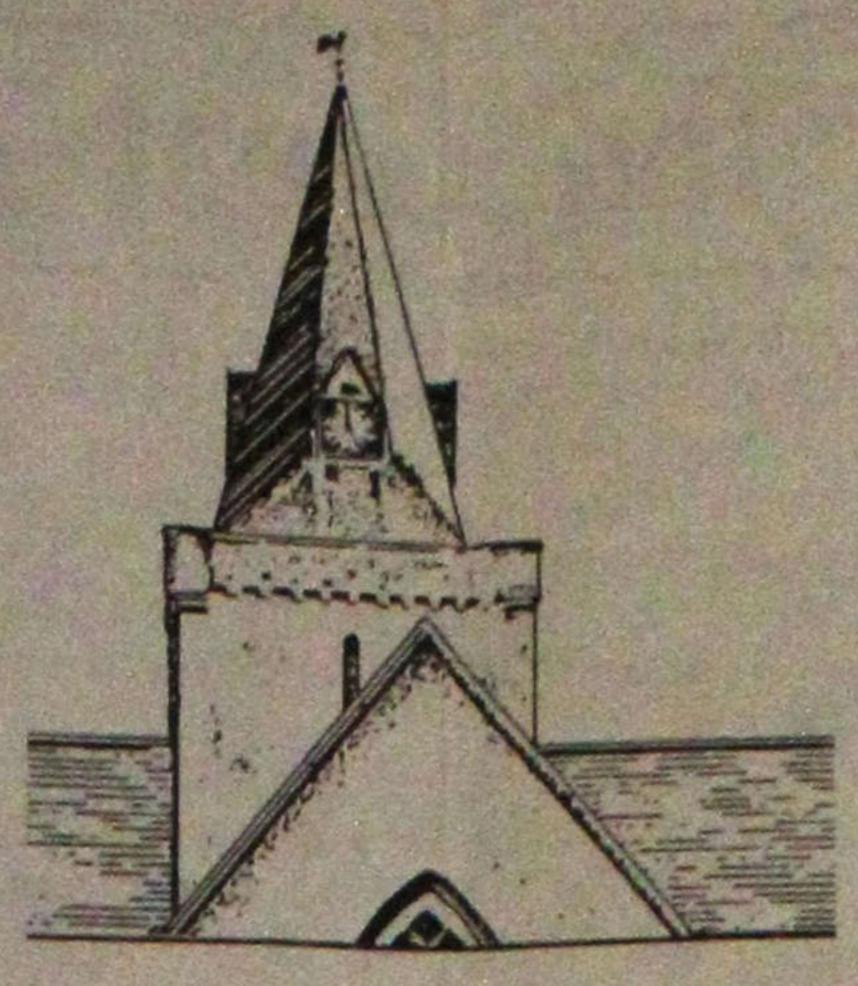
From 1239 until the Reformation, Gilbert's great Church with its high altar and its numerous chapels and clergy, continued to serve the purpose for which it was founded.

Many of the priests came to Dornoch from St Andrews, where they had been trained for the priesthood.

Discovering here superb links land, they introduced a game which some of them had learned at St Andrews – the Royal and Ancient game of golf.

The first written records of golf being played in Dornoch are dated 1630. Sir Robert Gordon, the early historian of Sutherland, tells us how: "About this toun ther are the fairest and largest links of any pairt of Scotland . . . they doe surpasse the feilds of Montrose or St Andrews."

It is generally recognised, however, that golf was played in these parts by the priests and others for almost a hunderd years before then. Because of its medieval cathedral and world famous golf-course, Dornoch is sometimes referred to as the "St Andrews of the North."



SIMPLE DIGNITY

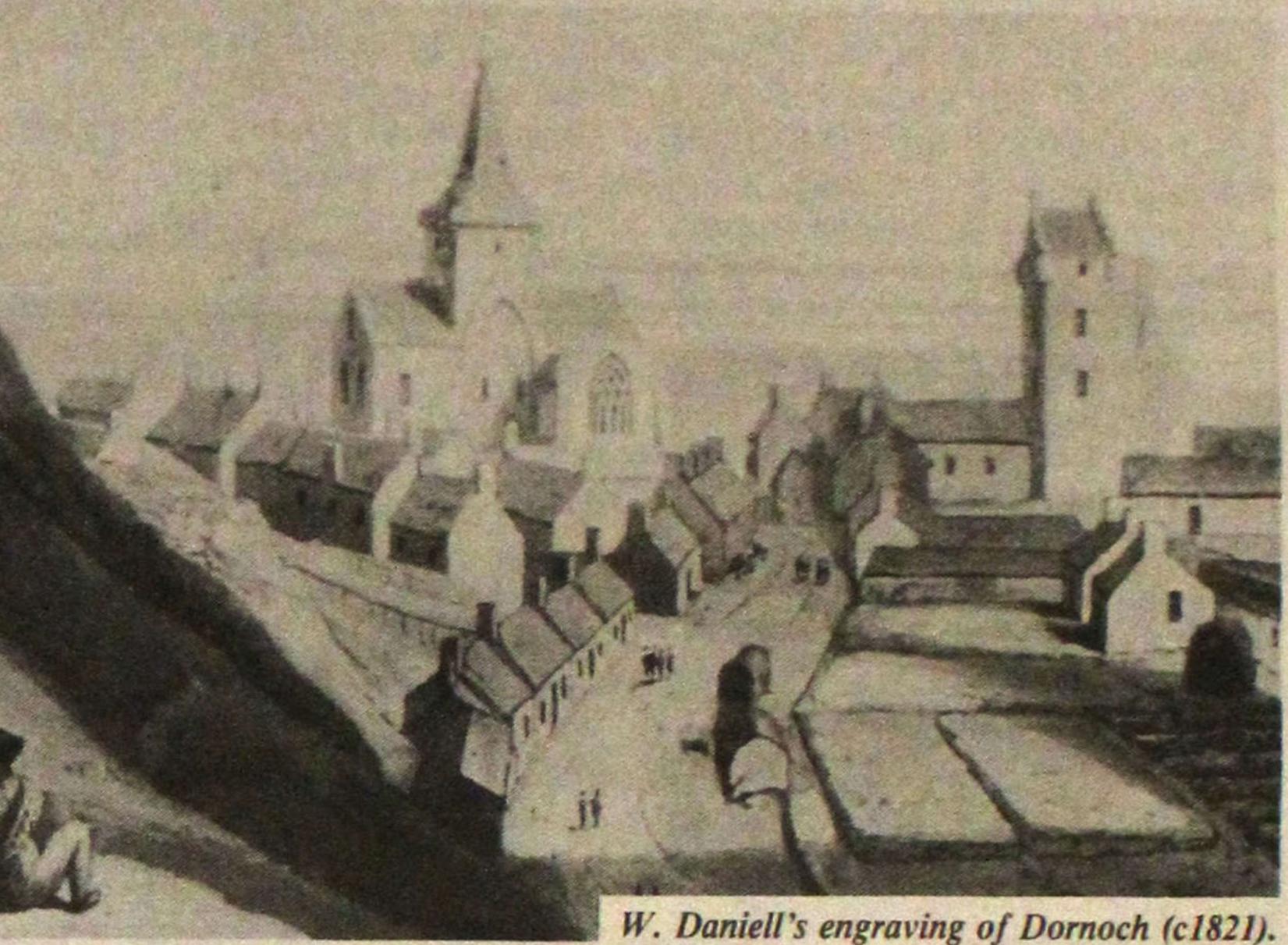
The atmosphere within the church is one of simple dignity. Its fine proportions give the building a suggestion of more space than it actually has.

If the visitor stands in the entrance of the nave and faces the chancel, the stonework he sees dates for the most part from the 13th Century.

The four great piers and arches supporting the tower are part of the original fabric. They are 27 feet in height including the capitals. The arches rise to a height of 47 feet above the original floor. Beneath this lofty canopy "fully equal to the best transitional work anywhere else in Scotland", Bishop Gilbert's mortal remains were laid in 1245. His tomb and relics were venerated, until they were desecrated in the sacking of 1570.

An interesting feature is the existence of various irregularities in construction, perhaps the most prominent being that none of the four arches of the crossing is of uniform height, nor are the four piers accurately spaced. The ensuing difference in span has produced curious results in the inter-section of the mouldings. Only in the south east pier do all the members intersect properly.





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THE HYDRO-ELECTRIC BOARD, AS PART OF THEIR CONTINUING PROGRAMME TO "LIGHT UP THE HIGHLANDS" WERE DELIGHTED TO HAVE BEEN INSTRUMENTAL IN LIGHTING UP DORNOCH CATHEDRAL BY SUPPLYING POWER FOR THE FLOODLIGHTING.

We congratulate the town of Dornoch



and the congregation of the Cathedral in having reached this milestone in the Royal Burgh's history.



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