

DNHHL 2006.275

*Dornoch Social Club*

DORNOCH AND DISTRICT BUSINESS AND TRADES ASSOCIATION

High Street,  
DORNOCH.

December, 1975

Dear

You will no doubt be aware from recent press reports that this Association is extremely concerned about the future of the tourist industry in the Dornoch area and in particular the prospects for lengthening the present season so that local employment and general business opportunities may be maintained and, we hope, improved.

A number of proposals for increasing tourist interest in the area have been made and we are now following these up. The major proposal, however, is for the re-introduction of a Dornoch 'week' - an event which we believe must involve each and every one of the organisations in the Burgh and District if it is to be successful.

We hope, therefore, that one or two representatives of your organisation will be able to join an initial discussion of the proposal to organise such a week at a meeting to be held in the Dornoch Social Club at 7.30 p.m. on Tuesday, 20th January 1976.

For the purpose of stimulating discussion we have prepared an outline of a possible scheme for a Festival Week (copy enclosed) which we feel should be different from events in other localities and should take full advantage of the unique historical background of the Royal Burgh of Dornoch.

Would you please notify our Secretary, Mr Colin Campbell of the Bank of Scotland, Dornoch of your nominees for attendance at the meeting. Mr Campbell can also supply additional copies of the discussion paper should you require them.

Yours sincerely,

W. B. Ashplant

Chairman.



SUGGESTIONS FOR A PROGRAMME FOR ST. BARR'S FAIR WEEK

These suggestions are put forward by Dornoch Business and Trade Association in the hope that they will stimulate discussion among Dornoch people, and that concrete proposals will result from the discussions. The Association's original discussion document, concerning the development of tourism in the area, seems to have met with considerable approval, and has spurred various authorities who are concerned with tourism, into response. What we would like to do now is to bring about some practical effects which will show that we are engaged in a programme of self-help, and that we are worthy of serious support by Highland Regional Council, the H.I.D.B. and whoever else has responsibility for tourist development in the Highlands, and cash to spend.

It may help discussion if we state, in very general terms, the kind of atmosphere which we wish to create during St. Barr's Fair Week; and the basis of the thinking which led to the production of the Timetable of Events which we include with this document.

If we take the idea of resurrecting St. Barr's Fair as being germane to the whole concept of a special week of entertainment, then it should be easy to grasp our intentions. A little historical background might help:-

St. Barr or Finbarr brought Christianity to Dornoch and established a church here which survived until the 17 Century. His influence can be seen in place names and prayers and in an oral tradition which has survived for centuries. He gave his name to parts of the town, and to a fair which was held in unbroken tradition right up to the early 1900's.

In the early days of St. Barr's church the Norsemen were raiding the Sutherland coast, and in any consideration of the development of the St. Barr's tradition it might be a good idea to depict how the church survived "A furore Normannorum".

Having survived the fury of the Norsemen however, the tradition of Finbarr was absorbed into the fabric of Sutherland life. The Finbarr memory was perpetuated in St. Barr's Fair, and the fair became a Dornoch institution. It is the annual tradition of St. Barr's Fair, stemming the centuries, and mirroring the life of the town in every age which forms the basis of our idea for a St. Barr's Fair week.

In 1975, when "holidays with pay" are an accepted part of everyday life, it is difficult to appreciate that a 'Fair day' was one of the few occasions in the year when people had a holiday. Until the late 19th century most working folk were only released from labour on Sunday in order to attend church. Every other day was a work day. "Fairs" were tremendous occasions of high celebration therefore, when local people were released briefly from their work-a-day world, and when this fleeting freedom was celebrated with almost maniacal joy. The work-folk hoarded what little money they could, from economic circumstances which teetered on a knife edge between bare necessity and starvation in order to buy a moment's pleasure at the fair. Yeomen and farmers, husbanded crops and cattle with care throughout the year in order to command a good price 'at the fair'. Frequently "Fairs" were the time and place for the "hiring" of labour, when men, and women, and families, nominally free, contracted themselves to masters for a twelvemonth in return for food, a roof and some small pecuniary return. It was the only time when cash was likely to be freely available in a small community. At such times the vultures gathered. Fairs were the occasion for the 'spivs and drones' of mediaeval society to gather seeking plunder. Fairs were where beggars, thieves, pick pockets, and mountebanks ... (the fore-runners of 20th century confidence-tricksters) ... religeuse of various kinds - male and female; acrobats, conjurers, fire-eaters, escape artists, jugglers, performing bears, candy and sweet-meat sellers, pie-men, butchers, bakers and candle-stick makers; all gathered to take a few pennies from the



It is this atmosphere which, in a controlled way, we would hope to recapture during our Fair Week.

So much for scene-setting. Now, may we put forward some particular ideas, which we trust will relate to this general background. Let us reiterate the point made earlier, that these ideas are an attempt to maintain a general theme ... that of the occurrence, in chronological order, of St. Barr's Fairs, the changing social scene, reflected in dress, manners, politics and affluence here in Dornoch, and the relationship of local events to the great happenings in Scottish history.

#### HISTORICAL THEME

It will help to create an atmosphere of festivity and celebration if the town can be "decorated" and if the townspeople can be persuaded, when it is practical, to wear mediaeval costume. (This mode of dress continued with little variation to be worn for nearly 600 years).

For the town, flags and banners would add an air of gaiety, and at little cost, we might produce a set of heraldic shields for hanging on lamp posts. The school might participate in the manufacture of these items ... although a high degree of 'finish' is essential.

We have suggested that a 'Pageant' would be a good idea. In this instance we have divided the pageant up into 'episodes' rather than have one continuous long performance. We have done this for the following reasons:-

- (1) It should be easier to organise a series of episodes rather than put on a continuous performance.
- (2) By spreading out the pageant we maintain interest throughout the week of the Fair.
- (3) In an episodic pageant more detail can be included and more information given.

The 'Week' starts on Monday as far as our programme is concerned. Monday has been chosen quite deliberately. Saturday is frequently the day when people go or arrive, Sunday is out for obvious reasons. On Monday, Tourists are settled in and ready to start enjoying their holiday. So Monday's programme should start the week "with a bang". It should create the atmosphere and set the scene for the whole week's activities.

The final episode of the pageant on Saturday should be a grand performance. "The Battle of Golspie" with its opportunities for displaying acres of tartan, for pipe-music and all the romance of the '45 should give us a fitting climax to St. Barr's week.

There are three major considerations with respect to the pageant:-

- (1) Who is to write the episodes
- (2) Who is to produce the episodes
- (3) Who is to perform in the episodes, produce the costumes and the props, lighting and special effects - like music and sounds.

Doubtless a town meeting will help to resolve some of these points. Perhaps serious thought might be given to the possibility of employing a professional "Producer". There are plenty about and they come cheaper than you might think.

DAY	HISTORICAL THEME .....	A PAGEANT IN DAILY EPISODE
MONDAY	ST. BARR'S FAIR	To be held in and around Cathedral Square. Local traders plus invited traders to set up market stalls. A 'grand procession' with a medieaval theme .... a sort of Lord Mayors Show. Sheep or ox roasting. Local WRI's to produce medieaval food. Miracle Play.
TUESDAY	EPISODE 1 OF THE HISTORY OF DORNOCH	The Coming of Finbar. The establishment of the church. The Coming of the Norsemen.
WEDNESDAY	EPISODE 2 OF THE HISTORY OF DORNOCH	Gilbert de Moravia takes over his lands and establishes his suzerainty over Norsemen. Begins to build the Cathedral. Bishop of Caithness.
THURSDAY	EPISODE 3 OF THE HISTORY OF DORNOCH	The Battle of Dornoch between Murrays and Mackays. 1570.
FRIDAY	EPISODE 4 OF THE HISTORY OF DORNOCH	The taking of Montrose and the Rising of Glencairn. 1650.
SATURDAY	EPISODE 5 OF THE HISTORY OF DORNOCH	The Battle of Golspie. 1745.



## DAY TIME ACTIVITIES

We have assumed that the Pageant will be put on during the evening when local people will be available to perform. There will be a need to provide a series of activities during the day if interest is to be maintained and if people are to be attracted into town off the A9.

A consideration of the kind of activity which would be appropriate must take into account the nature of the majority of tourists who are likely to be in town during Fair Week - specifically, we must consider what the general level of sophistication is likely to be.

The nature of the audience will obviously depend on the time of year when the Week is held and this paper cannot proceed without having examined some arguments in connection with timing. No doubt these arguments will be rehearsed in greater detail when the town meeting is held.

Many people will wish to hold the week at the height of season when the financial return is thought likely to be greatest and when the weather might be expected to remain fine. Against this proposal consider:-

- (1) The purpose of St. Barr's Fair Week is to extend the Tourist season as well as to provide entertainment.
- (2) The Height of Season Tourist tends to be our least sophisticated visitor. There are more children in town during height of season. This could mean having to provide a greater number and range of activities.
- (3) If we are looking for financial support from H.I.D.B. then it could be essential to choose an out of season date.

The following proposals are based on the assumption that St. Barr's Fair Week will be held in early June or mid-September. If the Fair is held in July/August then a good deal more will be required in the context of sand-castle competitions, funny-hat parades, comic football matches etc., which involve visitor participation.

A car-rally - (cooperation with police) essentially not a speed event (i.e. estimate low average speed) but a rally based on (a) map reading (b) item collecting (c) solving clues related to local history, flora and fauna. A Treasure Hunt .... based upon the town's history and with clues presented pictorially so that foreigners can participate. Special prize for children - or possibly a special competition for under 12's. A five-a-side football competition for local clubs. Full and hopefully, spectacular use of the golf course. Piping - the pipe band is likely to be in great demand throughout the week, but one would like to see a competition for local (i.e. Highland Region) bands. How about St. Barr's Fair Trophy to be awarded annually, plus cash prize of course.

We suggested enlisting Service Participation in the paper on tourism and we that an approach should be made to all three services for display teams, bands and whatever e.g. choppers from R.A.F. Lossiemouth doing Air Sea Rescue off the beach. Royal Marines - mock landing, band, drill team. Queen's Own - Pipe Band. Perhaps the Queen's Own, and the Scots Guards could be persuaded to send up recruiting teams during Fair Week - great if they would wear nineteenth century dress. Letters to all local service depots, to Scottish Command in Edinburgh. Approach to Col. Gilmour and Admiral Dunbar Naismith.

What about an "Estates Competition" on Royal Tournament lines - (Forestry Commission, Skibo, Cambusavie, Torboll, Sutherland etc.) based on estate skills - fencing, tree felling, tree trimming or whatever - or perhaps some kind of estate pentathlon based on skill in a range of activities. A tractor driving competition with chicane, parking, trailer handling etc., over a timed course.



Waitresses race in Castle Street.

Folk Group Festival cum Ceilidh in the Square.

Partition off the Square and charge for admission or charge for programme.  
Refreshments.

Consider which professional companies might be persuaded to attend, and what professional help, within the sphere of "The Drama" and "Music" might be obtained by an approach to the Scottish Arts Council, and to the Secretaries of the Scottish Universities Students Unions for dissemination, to the Secretaries of Drama Societies, Music Societies and the like. Perhaps ~~we create~~ a Dornoch Festival of Drama and Music, (akin to the Edinburgh Festival Fringe) to coincide with St. Barr's Fair Week. We might suggest that a "Son et Lumiere" could be produced in the Cathedral Square, or that some appropriate performance might be staged in the Cathedral.

No doubt the Town Meeting will come up with a host of new ideas which will carry us through the week.

If we can get near 100% participation then all kinds of things are possible. Perhaps we are more likely to obtain this out of season, when people are not so tired, or so occupied with trying to make a living. If we aim to produce a total experience, involving memorable sights, sounds and tastes then we will have succeeded.

It goes without saying that all these activities will involve the production of posters, leaflets, pamphlets and programmes. There must be a first class P.R. and advertising programme which will excite the media and get them here. We must ensure that the programme is planned in sufficient time to publish the advance notices which should go out to travel agencies, package tour operators, "The Caravan Club", and the rest, advertising hotel, B & B and camping facilities in Dornoch.