

# It's official! It's Dornoch!

**It's official! The long awaited banns confirming that pop diva Madonna is to marry Guy Ritchie at Dornoch on Friday, December 22, were posted yesterday morning in front of a bevy of press reporters and cameramen.**

The appearance of the uninspiring but all important notice ended a fortnight of speculation about the venue for the star-studded nuptials, and a week of world media spotlight on Dornoch.

It also concludes a nightmare week for Dornoch registrar Lesley Connor, besieged by press enquiries.

She told *The Northern Times* yesterday: "The phone has never stopped ringing and it has been hectic all week. I'm exhausted!" She would neither confirm nor deny that she had met Madonna when she visited Dornoch on Tuesday.

The notice reads: Guy Stuart Ritchie .... Madonna Louise Ciccone .... 22/12/2000.

Guy Ritchie, the film director best known for the black comedy hit *Lock, Stock and Two Smoking Barrels*, at 32 is ten years younger than the world-famous singer and actress.

The timing of the posting of the banns means that the *Northern Times* is the first newspaper to be able to claim officially that the wedding will take place in the town.

The bride-to-be was

secretly in the town on Tuesday, visiting the Cathedral where the ceremony is expected to take place, and Skibo Castle, where the reception will be held. She had flown to Inverness Airport by private jet and was then driven North to Dornoch. Security was watertight with each of the four entrances to Skibo being heavily guarded and the bizarre scenario of photographers running from gate to gate in a bid to outwit staff!

## by Alison Cameron

All Skibo employees have been issued with special identity cards to maximise security. The couple will follow actors Robert Carlyle and Ewan MacGregor and golfer Sam Torrance in choosing the former home of billionaire philanthropist Andrew Carnegie for their celebrations.

It is understood that Madonna will wear a dress designed by Stella McCartney, daughter of former Beatle, Paul. Guy, of Scottish descent, will be in full Highland dress.

The wedding is somewhat of a coup for the millionaire's retreat, for Dornoch itself and for Cathedral minister, the Rev Susan Brown.

The press spent days "Desperately Seeking Susan", who will be conducting the ceremony, and

possibly the christening of the couple's four month old son Rocco as well. It is likely that Madonna's daughter, Lourdes, by a former boyfriend will be bridesmaid. Mrs Brown was professionally non-committal throughout, but was also understood to be annoyed at the attention by the end of the week, as lines of cars parked outside the Manse and her phone rang non-stop.

Meanwhile, Dornoch and Tain accommodation providers are rubbing their hands in glee as bookings are pouring in for the big day, and rumours are that some are charging four times their normal tariff.

It's certainly been some week for the "sleepy, remote" village of Dornoch in Caithness or Ross-shire, depending on which paper you read.

Despite speculation that Madonna and Guy (32) would tie the knot at Dornoch Cathedral, locals were convinced that the security nightmare would be a deterrent and until yesterday thought it more likely that the ceremony would be a private affair at Skibo, with the couple being helicoptered in and out. Two national newspapers also suggested that one of the other six venues "in the running" would be used - Ackergill Tower near Wick. A case of paparazzi don't preach...

Whatever, the guessing game has apparently

gripped the nation. Channel Four were in the town on Tuesday morning broadcasting the Big Breakfast live from the Cathedral Green, and the national press sought out every wide-eyed schoolgirl, every wild eyed bar-fly in search of a good quote.

During a dull December week, though, the folk of Dornoch enjoyed every minute. There was a reporter from *The Sun* in the local cafe, the *Daily Mail* in the craft shop and the *Telegraph* in the library, all bringing much needed publicity to the town. But a lot of people also felt irritation at the patronising attitude of many of the media representatives and the lack of knowledge of the area. Big Breakfast presenter Richard Bacon asked an uncomfortable looking Inspector Alan Drummond of the Northern Constabulary if the local police all rode about on bicycles. The Inspector answered coolly that we did, in fact, have cars up here.

One reporter said Dornoch was just a few minutes from John O'Groats - the only name recognisable to many readers in the south.

Dornoch provost Duncan Allan, as ever, is never one to miss an opportunity. Not a camera whirred, nor a reporter embellished, without him being there in the forefront, highlighting the merits of the town. All power to you, Duncan, as you got at least nine mentions of the golf course, two of the beach and a brilliant "Craig Doyle - I've never heard of him" quote in the national frame.

by **Stan Arnaud**

THE glittering guest-list for pop queen Madonna's Highland wedding began to assemble yesterday as Oscar-winning actress Gwyneth Paltrow, rock star Sting and dress designer Stella McCartney jetted into Inverness.

While the celebrities were given a full VIP welcome and whisked from their planes in flashy cars with darkened windows, there was no such special treatment for groom Guy Ritchie's family.

The film director's father, John, stepmother Shireen and stepbrother Oliver arrived on a scheduled British Airways flight, collected their own baggage and drove off in a rented Ford Focus.

They were understood to be staying with friends near the Nairnshire village of Cawdor rather than joining the other members of the wedding party assembling at Skibo Castle in Sutherland, where the ceremony is expected to take place on Friday.

As he waited for his bags on the luggage carousel at Inverness Airport after a flight from London which had been delayed nearly two hours by freezing fog, Mr Ritchie sen said he and his family were looking forward to the big day.

"We love the thought of it, it's very welcome, very exciting and it's going to be great fun.

"I feel very honoured at the prospect of having a daughter-in-law as talented as Madonna. I think she has a fantastic strength and I have thought that for years.

"But she can be quite down-to-earth and she is also a very nice person. She has a fantastic personality and she is quite charming."

Former soldier Mr Ritchie, who joined the Seaforth Highlanders at Fort George, near Inverness, in 1947, said he was delighted the wedding was taking place in an area he and his son knew very well.

He said: "I was at Fort George for years and commanded men there. Guy has spent a lot of time up in this area and is very fond of it.

"I used to take him shooting on the grouse moors near here. He bagged his first two grouse

near Aviemore. He loves shooting, as does his friend, Vinnie Jones."

Mr Ritchie was unable to confirm if former footballer-turned Hollywood actor Jones would be best man to his son.

"The first I knew of that was when I read it in the papers," he said.

"I was under the impression he was in America shooting – a film, that is."

However, Jones, who launched his acting career with a hardman part in Ritchie's hit film, *Lock Stock and Two Smoking Barrels*, was rumoured to have arrived in the Highlands under cover of darkness aboard a private jet late on Monday.

Gwyneth Paltrow and Stella McCartney arrived in a private jet at Inverness at 12.15pm.

Miss Paltrow, who, it has been suggested, may be Madonna's maid of honour, left the aircraft first, wearing sunglasses, a grey wool hat, dark three-quarter length coat, jeans and trainers and carrying a purple bag.

Stella McCartney, daughter of former Beatle Sir Paul, and one of the designers rumoured to have created the wedding dress for the pop star, followed, also wearing dark glasses, a black coat and long patterned skirt and carrying a multi-coloured bag.

The pair had to wait several minutes in a portable cabin at the runway's edge until a Range Rover from Skibo Castle arrived to collect them. Miss Paltrow waved to photographers as she left the cabin.

Rock star Sting, his wife, Trudie Styler, and their entourage arrived soon after 1pm aboard the same Falcon 2000 jet which had carried Madonna and Ritchie north the previous day.

A large amount of luggage, including musical instruments, was unloaded from the plane to a minibus from the Morangie House Hotel and the party left in a Daimler limousine and Mercedes car.

Madonna and Ritchie were first introduced by Trudie Styler at a party at her London home in 1998.





■ The groom-to-be's parents arrive. *Pictures: Les Parker.*

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■ Stella McCartney at the airport



■ Gwyneth Paltrow in happy mood

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# Fleeting glimpse only for fans as Madonna jets in

by **Stan Arnaud**

POP queen Madonna made a low-key appearance yesterday when she touched down at Inverness ahead of her marriage in Dornoch this week to film director Guy Ritchie.

From the moment the private jet touched down at Inverness airport yesterday afternoon until her departure nine minutes later in a dark-windowed car, all that was to be seen of the world's most famous bride-to-be was a fleeting glimpse at the far side of a runway.

Her most famous song, *Like a Virgin*, was played by a lone piper as she arrived.

The singer, her fiancé and their entourage were whisked away in a convoy of Range Rovers to Skibo Castle in Sutherland to prepare for the wedding on Friday.

Photographers, camera crews and reporters from around the world began gathering at the airport early on a bitterly cold morning to await Madonna's arrival. By the time her Falcon 2000 jet came into sight shortly before

1.30pm, about 150 members of the media were gathered in a pen at the edge of the runway.

The star is said to have been inspired by the romance of a wedding in the Highlands and she cannot have been disappointed as she alighted from the plane to see the snow-covered hills of the Highlands bathed in bright winter sunshine.

The plane, which had flown from RAF Northolt, was met on the runway by three Range Rovers and several of the ever-present bodyguards, who emerged to supervise the transfer.

Mr Ritchie, 32, who shot to fame after directing the hit film *Lock Stock and Two Smoking Barrels*, was the first of the VIPs to emerge, wearing a black polo neck and beige trousers. He was followed by Madonna, 42, sporting dark glasses, a three-quarter-length red-and-orange tartan jacket and black trousers.

The couple's four-month old son, Rocco, who is due to be christened at Dornoch Cathedral on Thursday, was

carried down the steps in a Moses basket by a member of their entourage. Another lifted Madonna's four-year-old daughter, Lourdes, into one of the cars.

Personal items, including bags of clothes and a guitar case, were carried from the plane and loaded into the waiting vehicles.

As they left the airport, a helicopter, understood to be carrying a film crew, took off and followed the convoy.

For the small band of fans who had joined the media to await her arrival, Madonna's fleeting appearance proved to be a bit of a let-down.

Anne Cowley, 51, of Inverness, said: "I am quite disappointed. I did think she would at least come and give us a wave, or drive past us."

"But it's still very exciting just being here and being part of it. She has come to a wonderful place to get married and I hope she really enjoys every minute of it."

Weheony Barras, 27, also of Inverness, said: "This is the closest I have ever been to a superstar - even though it was not very close."

However, piper Calum "Spud" Fraser, from Grantown, was delighted with his walk-on part.

He said: "I just came down here in the hope of being able to play for Madonna. At first I was told I wasn't going to be allowed on to the runway. I was absolutely delighted when they changed their minds and let me on. You never know, after hearing me she might want to re-record *Like a Virgin* with me on the pipes."

Last night, the first guests on what is expected to be a star-studded list began to arrive in the Highlands.

Madonna's manager Carresse Henry and friend Debi Mazar flew into Inverness from Los Angeles, via London Gatwick. Ms Mazar, an actress from New York, who met Madonna in the city in the 1980s, described herself as one of her "oldest young friends". She said: "This is all very exciting. I have never been to Scotland before."

"This is going to be a fantastic week for everyone."

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■ Madonna and friends arrive at Inverness airport

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## Sister of the bride arrives

by Stan Arnaud

MADONNA's younger sister Melanie flew into Inverness yesterday in advance of the superstar's Highland wedding.

Wearing a brown fur-collared coat, the 36-year-old looked tired as she arrived on a scheduled flight from London with husband Joe Henry.

The pair were accompanied by Madonna's public relations manager, Liz Rosenberg.

They were met at Inverness Airport by staff from Skibo Castle.

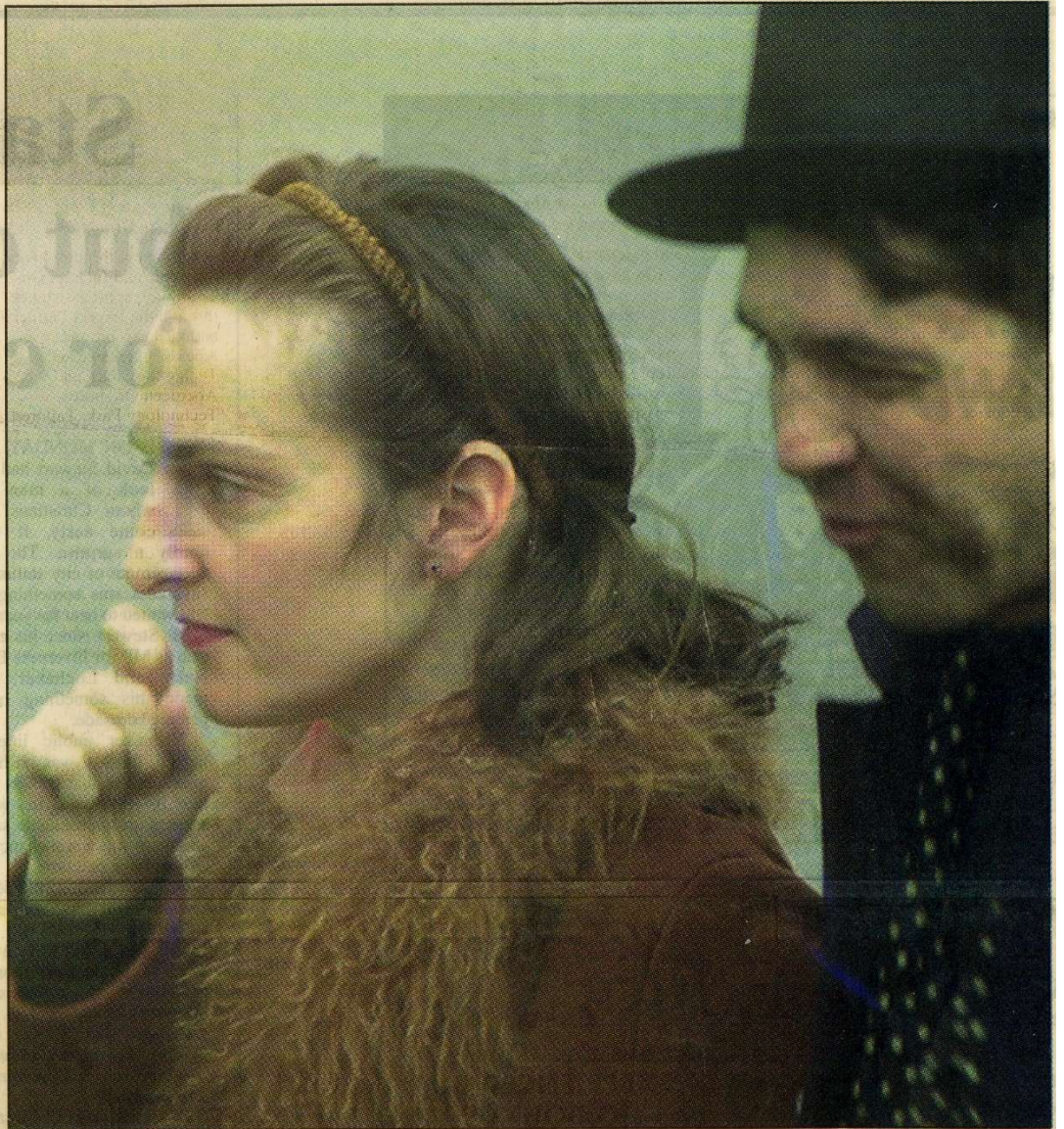
Mr Henry, a recording artist, who was sporting a black trilby hat, long coat and black and white spotted silk scarf, said: "I am very excited about the wedding and being in Scotland."

Also aboard the British Airways flight was French photographer Jean-Baptiste Mondino.

Mondino, who took the picture of Madonna which features on the front of her latest album, *Music*, is expected to photograph tomorrow's wedding.

He and an assistant unloaded two trolleys of photographic equipment before being driven to Skibo. He declined to comment.

Later a Range Rover driven by a staff member from the castle met a passenger from a scheduled flight from Edinburgh. It is not known who the dark-haired man, who got into the car on the runway, was.



■ The Henrys on arrival at Inverness. Picture: Sandy McCook.



# Dornoch under siege from world's media



Photographers jostle for position outside Dornoch Cathedral this week. Word has it there's not a stepladder left for sale north of Inverness.



# chats at Skibo

by **Andrea Elderfield**

AS MADONNA and Guy Ritchie relaxed in the Highlands yesterday, questions were being asked over how long the people of Dornoch would lay out the welcome mat

As Dornoch's provost, Duncan Allan, was interviewed by a camera crew for the 20th time and shop workers were asked, yet again, whether they were making any three-tiered wedding cakes or long white dresses, the traditional Highland welcome was still in evidence.

But there were signs that it may have been wearing slightly thin.

Retired housewife Joey Mackay, who has lived at Dornoch for 14 years, stood at the bus stop with her friends watching people being filmed getting off the coach from Inverness. She said the media attention was great for the town.

In the tourist office across the square, area manager Sandra Peterkin busied herself making up press packs and inviting German, French, American and British filmcrews and journalists for a dram and piece of wedding cake on Thursday morning.

She said: "It is one of the best things that could have happened to this area."

But in the Dornoch Inn on the square, where only two locals sat, barmaid Fiona Sutherland said: "It is very exciting for the town, but I do not know how we will feel about it by Friday."

"Most people do not really know what to expect. They are really very much in the dark because something like this has never happened before."



■ Skibo Castle, scene of the wedding which put Sutherland on the media map.

And Alasdair Taylor, 51, unemployed, from Dornoch, said it was a lot of nonsense and the media attention was pathetic.

He said it was blasphemy for someone called Madonna to be married at this time of year in a Presbyterian church. He added: "She is capitalising on the story of Jesus Christ."

Elayne Grimes, Northern Constabulary media relations officer, was just back from a meeting with a very relaxed couple pleased to be out of the dreary London rain.

"She is delighted to be here, she really loves this part of the world," said Ms Grimes, who was organising the security for the christening to be held at the town's cathedral tomorrow evening.

"She has been here a few times before and is looking forward to the christening and the wedding."

"She is very relaxed and chatty and said it was the nicest place in Britain."

Ms Grimes said Madonna, who sat next to her fiancé bare-footed beside a log fire with the smell of mulled wine in the air, talked about the snow-capped mountains as she made the final touches to her wedding arrangements.

The 42-year-old pop star and mother-of-two described the mountains as the icing on the cake.

Madonna, was said to be looking forward to some "girly pampering", taking a few spas, doing some yoga and spending time with her friends.

Those friends are almost as likely to need security as she is. They include pop singer Sting and his wife, Trudie Styler (who introduced the couple) and their children.

Ms Grimes said Madonna's four-year-old daughter, Lourdes, and four-month-old son, Rocco, were keen for them to arrive so they might have someone to play with.

The Sting family arrived yesterday afternoon and are thought to be staying at Morangie House, near Tain.

Bridget Armstrong, of the Dornoch Bakeries, had just finished an interview with a television station. She said: "It's a great promotion for Dornoch, especially at this time of year."



# Minister defended

A senior elder at Dornoch Cathedral yesterday (Thursday) sprang to the defence of the minister, the Rev Susan Brown, after reports that she'd been criticised by "religious extremists" for her role in Madonna's wedding to Guy Ritchie, and the baptism of their son Rocco.

The depute Session Clerk, Fergus Robertson, also appealed for "restraint and respect" as fears grew that Thursday evening's scheduled baptism at the Cathedral might be switched to Skibo Castle if the media frenzy threatens to get out of hand - depriving local people of their only chance to see the celebrity couple and their baby.

As the siege of Dornoch by the world's press and TV networks intensified - perhaps the biggest invasion of the town since the Vikings - an Inverness news agency issued a story claiming the Cathedral minister had received hostile letters from people on the "presbyterian right wing" of the church.

These allegedly criticised her for agreeing to baptise the child of unmarried parents, and marrying Madonna - a Catholic divorcee - in the Church of Scotland.

The agency quoted Mrs Brown as saying: "As regards fan mail or otherwise, I'd rather not comment."

Mr Robertson told *The Northern Times*: "If these reports are true I would be appalled.

Dornoch Cathedral has been at the forefront of ecumenical progress for many years, and in that respect Susan Brown is following on from her predecessor, Jim Simpson."

Earlier this year, he pointed out, the Cathedral had welcomed Bishop Mario Conti of Aberdeen to conduct a service ordaining local man Ken Bromage as a deacon in the Roman Catholic Church. Last month Mr Bromage had taken part with Mrs Brown in the Remembrance Day service at Dornoch War Memorial.

## by Duncan Ross

"The fact that Madonna is a Catholic matters not one whit," said Mr Robertson. "As for divorce, I thought we had passed the stage of worrying about that sort of thing."

As for baptising a child of unmarried parents, he added: "How many are nowadays? A large percentage of children are conceived out of wedlock and the parents are subsequently married - and that's what's happening here. How could one deny baptism to an innocent child, anyway?"

"At every baptism the minister asks the congregation to stand in testament to the vows that have been taken, and pledge ourselves to the child's future as well.

"I would like to think that, despite all their money and fame and prestige, when this wee chap grows up he might one day come back to the Cathedral and say 'this was where my mother and father brought me to be christened'."

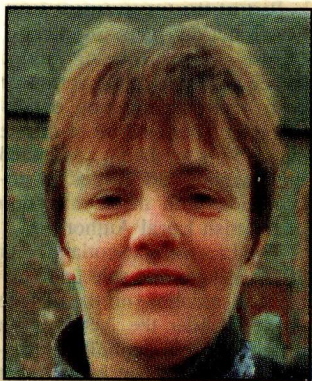
Mr Robertson acknowledged that Madonna's raunchy image and sexually explicit promotion of herself and her music might offend some church folk. But he added: "Look at the

life of our Lord, and what he did for Mary Magdalene. Whatever one thinks of Madonna's performances or her moral character, who are we to start throwing stones and criticise people? Who are we to reject her and turn her away?"

He said Mrs Brown had his unequivocal backing. "Everything she has done has been with the support of her Kirk Session."

It was reported on Wednesday that, with media activity in Dornoch reaching fever pitch, fears were growing that the scheduled public appearance of Madonna, Guy and baby Rocco outside the Cathedral after the baptism might get out of control. Although police reinforcements are being drafted in, the fear is that Madonna's jittery security staff may switch the christening to the privacy of Skibo Castle where the couple are due to be married today (Friday).

Said Mr Robertson: "I pray that the media's presence doesn't spoil this occasion for the couple, and for the people of Dornoch. I would appeal to them all to show restraint and respect".





# The Rev Susan attacks reports

THE minister who performed the christening service denied national newspaper reports that she was not happy about it because she felt the wedding should come first.

The Rev Susan Brown said she was furious at reports that there was a rift between Madonna and her over the timing of the wedding.

She said: "That is crap."

Talking about last night's service, she said it was "very traditional" and added: "Church law does not state that a christening has to be a public affair."

A senior elder has defended Ms Brown for agreeing to christen Madonna's baby in the Church of Scotland knowing that she is a Roman Catholic and they are unmarried parents.

Depute session clerk Fergus Robertson said he would be appalled if it was true that extremists had sent hostile communications to Ms Brown.

He said that Dornoch Cathedral had been at the forefront of ecumenical progress and had welcomed Bishop Mario Conti of Aberdeen to ordain a local man as a Catholic deacon.

He said: "The fact that Madonna is a Catholic matters not a whit. As for divorce, I thought we had passed the stage of worrying about that sort of thing."

"And how many parents are married these days? Many are conceived out of wedlock and their parents get married later and that is what is happening here. How could one deny baptism to an innocent child?"

## Raunchy

"I hope baby Rocco comes back to the church when he is big and says: 'This is where my mother brought me to be christened'."

He agreed that some of the congregation might not approve of Madonna's raunchy image but said: "Look at the life of our Lord and what he did for Mary Magdalene."

"Whatever we think of Madonna's performances, who are we to start throwing stones and criticising?"

● The couple were given special treatment by the Sutherland marriage registrar. It is normal for the bride and groom to pick up the banns from the office to complete the preliminaries relating to the wedding.

But in an unusual move, Lesley Conner delivered the banns which were posted on December 6 to Skibo Castle.

A spokesman for the Scottish Executive said: "In view of the situation, special arrangements were put in place. The couple were not asked to collect the banns as is normally the case."

● The Highlands of Scotland Tourist Board said that more than £200,000 of bookings had been taken in Dornoch and Tain alone as a result of the nuptials and christening, with over 1,500 nights booked.

The tourism spin-off could amount to millions of pounds, said a spokeswoman.

● Liberal Democrat MSP for Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross, Jamie Stone, tried to give the couple a bottle of Scottish Parliament whisky as a wedding gift – and to say thanks for all the publicity they had generated for the area.

But his offer was turned down by the couple who told their security team that it was a nice gesture but to donate the bottle to charity.



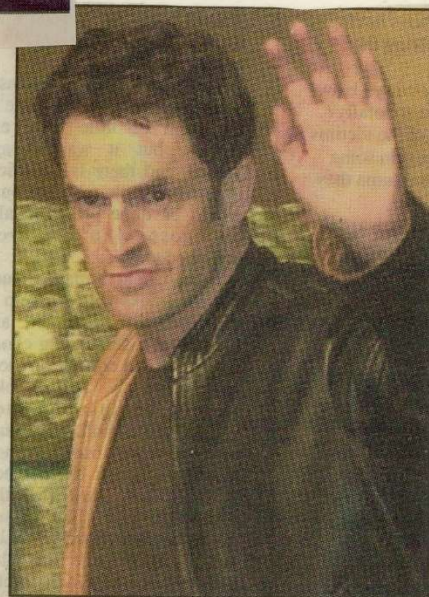


■ The Rev Susan Brown leads the carol service for Dornoch pupils. Picture: Colin Rennie





Pop star Sting and his wife Trudi Styler arrive at Dornoch Cathedral for Thursday evening's christening.



■ Rupert Everett . . . waves to the crowds





Fashion designer Stella McCartney, daughter of Sir Paul, was also on the guest list.



■ Gwyneth Paltrow . . . Hollywood glamour

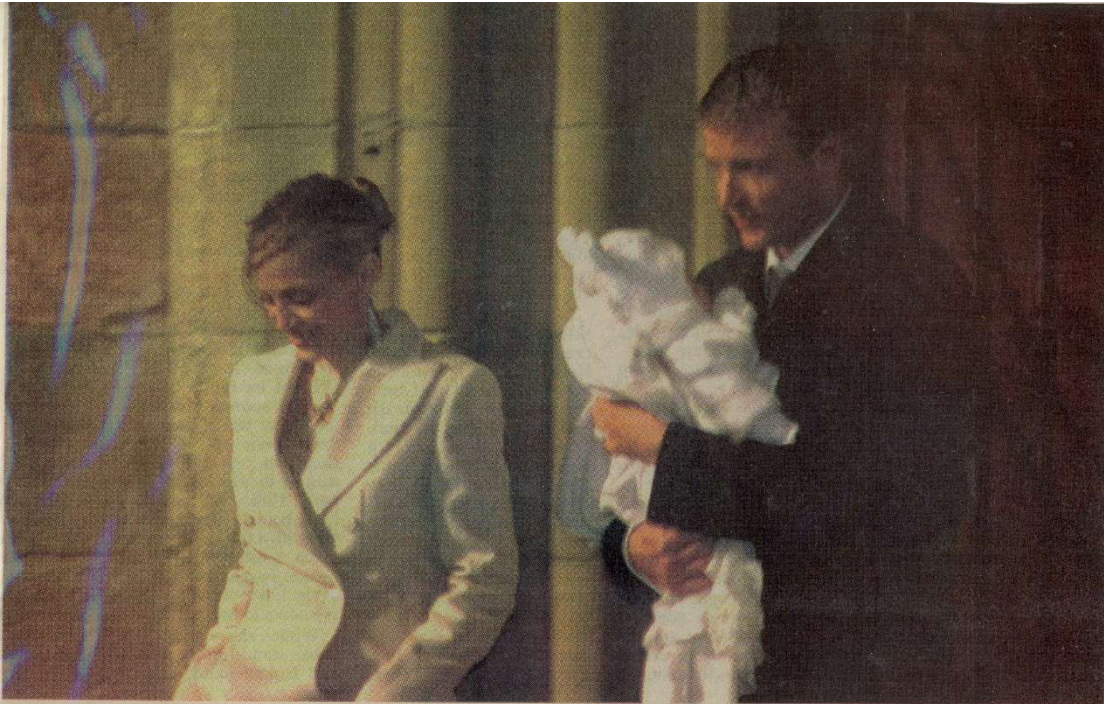




■ A warm wave and a warm-clad baby in his father's arms delight the cathedral crowd

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The picture the world was waiting for – Madonna and Guy Ritchie emerge from Dornoch Cathedral's south door after baby Rocco's baptism.







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