

Cathedral minister 'thought long and hard' before agreeing to baptise Madonna's baby

Dornoch Cathedral's minister the Rev Susan Brown thought "long and hard" before agreeing to baptise the baby son of pop star Madonna and film director Guy Ritchie.

And the assurances she sought about the couple's religious beliefs were more stringent than those they had to give before their marriage at Skibo Castle the following day.

Mrs Brown confirmed this week that she had received letters and e-mails from church members saying she ought not to have performed the baptism of the couple's son Rocco.

But she told *The Northern Times*: "It wasn't entered into lightly. I thought about it long and hard, as did the Kirk Session when they were told about it.

"Baptism is welcoming the child into the Christian family, and not simply into a branch of it. It's about bringing the child up in the faith of the gospel and the fellowship of the church.

"It requires that at least one parent has to be a member, or have intentions of becoming a member, of the church, and in this child's case that applies to both parents.

"It's not written into church law, but I have an additional requirement. I ask the parents to assure me that one or other of them has a link with a local church congregation. I was able to satisfy myself on that point.

"We have lots of members who have families living elsewhere who come back to Dornoch for a baptism. I always ask if they have a link with a local congregation because what we do is really on behalf of that congregation. If they don't, it's much more difficult."

She also said she had received probably ten times as many letters and e-mails of support as criticism.

Mrs Brown was speaking as Dornoch started getting back to normal after last week's Cathedral baptism and very private wedding at Skibo, which drew hundreds of media representatives to the town from all over the world.

by Duncan Ross

She confessed she had been totally unprepared for the extent of the international media interest the two services had created.

"All the hype has been unbelievable – that's the only word for it. I was completely naive. I had absolutely no idea that this was going to happen."

What did she make of the media? "A fairly mixed bunch, but then so are the human race," she replied tactfully. "There are those who are perfectly charming and apologetic, and then there are those who couldn't care less, and just go for it. I've had experience of both."

Mrs Brown also revealed that special permission was sought to hold the baptism on Thursday evening before an invited congregation. The sacrament normally has to take place at a service of public worship,

"A special concession was made because it would have been impossible to police it on a Sunday morning. That was done in consultation with Church of Scotland headquarters in Edinburgh," she said.

"There was a question, when they saw the

volume of Press, that perhaps it ought to be moved, but then they themselves said, no, we want to come, which is really quite nice.

"Obviously I had given my reasons why it ought to be in church right at the beginning, so they knew what I felt about it. But if there had been a security breach, or any chance of anyone being hurt or anything, I had permission to move it."

Both the baptism and Friday's wedding had gone very smoothly and the couple seemed moved and extremely happy with both.

Mrs Brown added: "I think the people of Dornoch came out of this extremely well. They were so patient. Their town was invaded and overrun, and they managed to keep their sense of humour, which was tremendous. It says a lot for them."

She is also uneasy about the tourist board campaign being mounted to encourage couples to pick Dornoch for a romantic Highland wedding.

"I hope they're not assuming that I'll take any wedding, without first checking what marriage means to the couple involved. People have to want a Christian marriage ceremony, and they have to subscribe to the Christian ideals of marriage, and unless they can do that then they should go to the registrar.

"It's not just a question of book a year in advance and turn up on the day. The church's requirements for marriage are not quite as stringent as they are for baptism, but the couple must want to have a Christian marriage and understand that this is for life and not just for convenience."



Front Page Letter

Sir – I felt that I should write and, through your letters page, express my appreciation to all those in the community that have helped my staff and myself stage such a spectacular occasion.

It was most certainly a triumph, with Mr and Mrs Ritchie thanking us all when they left. I am very proud to say that the castle, the Carnegie Club staff and the local area impressed them.

I would also like to thank everyone for the discretion that was shown throughout the week. This was a specific worry for them and

both were overwhelmed by the way everyone coped with the press intrusion. It was the support and flexibility of the local people that gave a wonderful sense of a community working together.

I hope that the town has benefited from the wedding, both during the event and, hopefully, for some time to come. I am certain that all would agree that Dornoch portrayed itself in a dignified way and as the ideal setting for a most romantic wedding. – **Andrew McPherson, General Manager, The Carnegie Club at Skibo Castle, Dornoch.**

The wedding certificate issued this week by Dornoch Registrar Lesley Connor proves it – Madonna and Guy Ritchie did get married at Skibo Castle on 22nd December.

The extract is the only public confirmation that the marriage actually took place, so tight was security surrounding the event itself.

It also shows that fashion designer Stella McCartney was one of the witnesses, and M Vaughan of London was the other.

Madonna's occupation is stated simply as "singer" and Guy Ritchie's as "film director". His address appears to have been mis-spelled, however, with "Mews" appearing as "Muse".

Copies of the certificate can be purchased from the registrar for £8. One of the first to do so was local Councillor Duncan Allan, who said he was donating it to the Historylinks heritage centre as a permanent reminder of Dornoch's day in the world media spotlight.

Extract of an entry in a REGISTER of MARRIAGES

MG0150981 CE

(Section 37(2) of the Registration of Births, Deaths and Marriages (Scotland) Act 1965)

MARRIAGE Registered in the district of				District No.	Year	Entry No.
Dornoch				182	2001	1
1. When married 2000 December Twentysecond						
2. Where married Skibo Castle Dornoch						
3.		Bridegroom		Bride		
Forename(s)		Guy Stuart		Madonna Louisa		
Surname(s)		Ritchie (Signed) Guy Ritchie		Ciccone (Signed) Madonna Ciccone		
4. Occupation		Film Director		Singer		
5. Marital status		Single		6. Date of birth		Year Month Day
				1968		9 10
7. Country of birth		England		Divorced		Year Month Day
				1958		8 16
8. Usual residence		7 Queens Gate, Muse, London, SW7		54 Sheffield Terrace, London, W8		
9. Father's forename(s) surname(s) and occupation		John Ritchie, Advertising Executive (retired)		Silvia Patrick Ciccone, Vintner		
10. Mother's forename(s) maiden surname(s) and occupation		Amber Parkinson (ms) or Ritchie or Leighton		Madonna Louise Fortin (ms) or Ciccone (deceased)		
11. Person officiating with designation		(Signed) Susan M Brown, Minister at Dornoch Cathedral				
12. Witnesses with addresses		(Signed) Stella McCartney, 1 Soho Square, London, W1				
		(Signed) M Vaughan, Flat 5, 9 College Place, Horesia Road, London, SW11				
13. When registered		Year	Month	Day	14. (Signed) Lesley Conner, Registrar	
		2001	1	3		
15.						
16.						

Extracted from the Register of Marriages

on Third January 2001

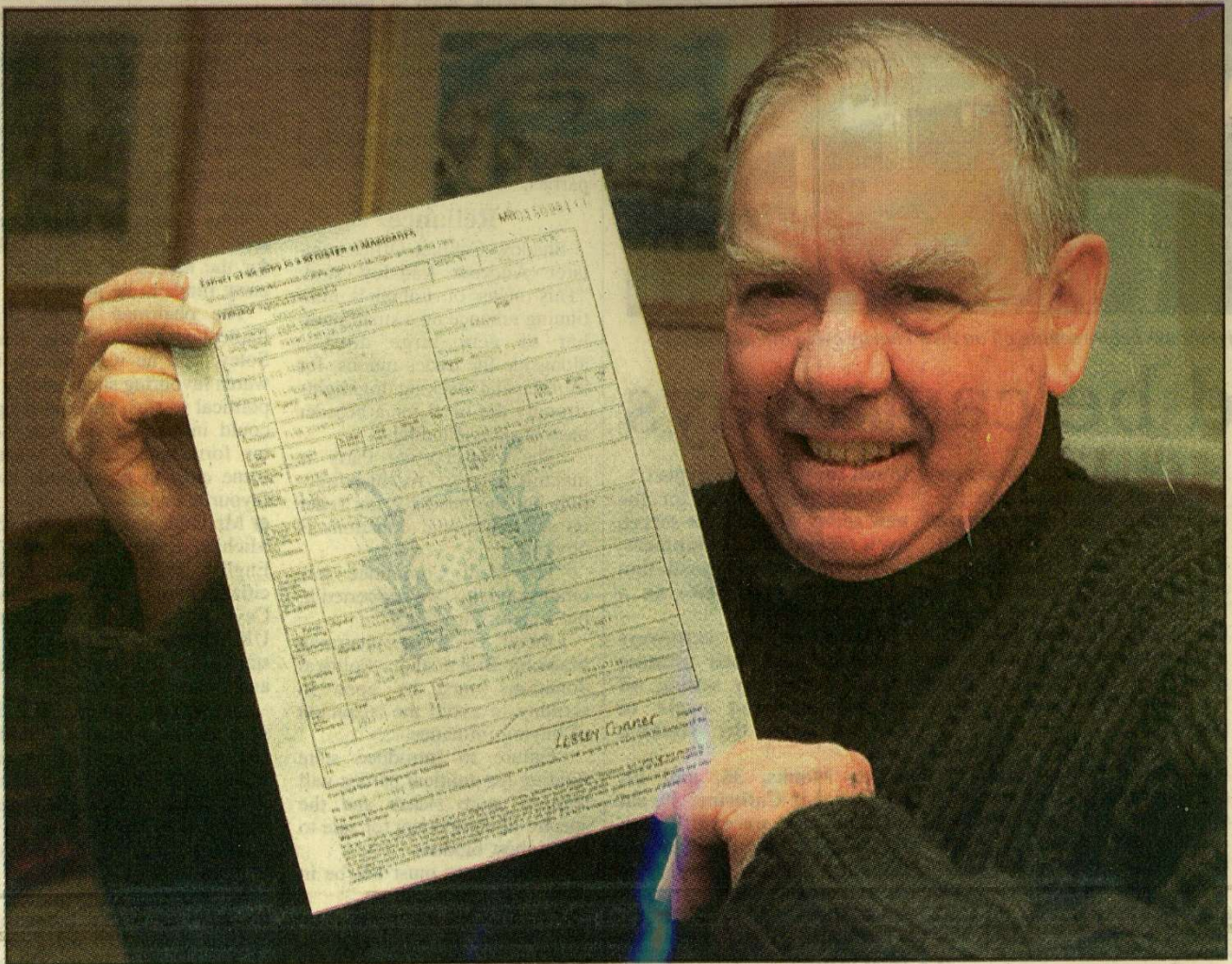
Lesley Conner

Registrar

The above particulars incorporate any subsequent corrections or amendments to the original entry made with the authority of the Registrar General.

Warning

It is an offence under section 53(3) of the Registration of Births, Deaths and Marriages (Scotland) Act 1965 for any person to pass as genuine any copy or reproduction of this extract which has not been made by a district registrar or assistant registrar and authenticated by his signature. This includes any photocopy made by any other person. Any person who falsifies or forges any of the particulars on this extract or knowingly uses, gives or sends as genuine any false or forged extract is liable to prosecution under section 53(1) of the said Act. This extract is evidence of an event recorded in a register of marriages. It is NOT evidence of the identity of the persons(s) presenting it.



■ Dornoch provost Duncan Allan with a copy of Madonna's wedding certificate. Picture: Ian Jolly

Certificate a memento of star's wedding

by **Andrea Elderfield**

AS MADONNA and her new husband Guy Ritchie flew to the US yesterday, it emerged that there will be a lasting memento of their Highland wedding in the village that hosted the event.

The couple wed at Skibo Castle, near Dornoch, and the village's provost, Duncan Allan, has bought a copy of the marriage certificate.

He will frame it before handing it over to Dornoch Heritage Society to mark the occasion when the village caught the attention of the world's media.

Provost Allan said: "I want to mark, for historical purposes, when the entire world's media focused on Dornoch."

He said he also hoped the coverage would increase people's awareness of the Highlands as an all-year-round tourist destination.

He dismissed rumours in some national newspapers that the pair had only had their marriage blessed at Skibo.

The Dornoch Heritage Society has been running for 20 years. Three years ago it acquired a building in Dornoch's Meadows Road to preserve items that are, or will become, historical artefacts.

Society chairman Peter Wilde said that putting the framed marriage certificate in the Historylinks museum was an excellent idea.

Mr Wilde said he would add some supporting material and make a display devoted to the wedding, which took place on December 22, following the christening of the couple's four-month-old son Rocco at Dornoch Cathedral the previous evening.

The couple have now begun the second leg of their honeymoon in the US, after leaving Luton Airport yesterday in a private jet.

'We couldn't have done this in Hollywood'

Dornoch Community Council member and the Cathedral's depute session clerk, Fergus Robertson, said this week: "Since the wedding the reaction locally has been quite incredible."

"I spoke to one American journalist who told me: 'We have loved being here. Your people are great, your town is great and your police are great. The Cathedral setting on Thursday night, with the floodlights and the mist rolling in, was just spectacular – we couldn't have done this in Hollywood.'"

"The atmosphere on Thursday night was electric, but cheerful and happy. The shopkeepers and B&Bs have done excellent trade and, although they're not giving anything away, it's been quite a coup for Skibo. And in Susan Brown we have our own superstar. She must have been driven demented over the past few weeks, and she's come through it all smiling and with enormous dignity."

At the informal family service in the Cathedral on Christmas morning she'd asked the children to bring along some of their presents. One little girl proudly produced her Barbie doll, complete with wedding dress. "We've had a few of these recently," joked the minister, who then borrowed her daughter Hannah's new scooter and sped off down the west aisle to the cheers of the congregation.

Last week's invasion by hundreds of photographers and film crews from all over the world has had an unexpected spin-off for the locality. "I have it on good authority that there are now several homes and crofts in and around Dornoch boasting nice new stepladders," chuckled Mr Robertson.

"The paparazzi cleaned out every ironmongers for miles around of aluminium stepladders, but when they departed on Saturday they just walked away and left the lot."

Fellow community councillor Angus McLaren, "captain" of the Carnegie Club at Skibo Castle, said: "It was a very successful event. It has given Skibo and Dornoch worldwide publicity, and we now have to capitalise on that. It's a marvellous opportunity for all of us."

Although semi-retired and no longer actively involved in the management of the club, Mr McLaren said everything had gone according to plan so far as he was aware. "We've had no complaints, anyway!"

He added: "When our members visit Skibo we normally mix with them, but on this occasion it was quite different. It was a group of private guests, so we weren't involved in any hosting."

Mr McLaren said Skibo's staff had coped admirably with the occasion. "It says a lot for

our staff. They are very loyal."

He was also able to nail repeated speculation in several newspapers that the staff had been forbidden to leave the estate over Christmas to prevent information about the wedding leaking out.

"Quite untrue," he said. "We can't just lock them in!"

There were also reports that Mr and Mrs Ritchie had planted an oak tree in the grounds to commemorate their marriage. Not true, either, said Mr McLaren.

There was evident satisfaction that Skibo's reputation for ensuring the security and privacy of their members and guests had stood up to its greatest test so far. The international hack pack picketing every castle entrance last Friday spent a miserably cold and largely fruitless day.

Those few who earlier managed to sneak in, commando-style, and hide in the shrubbery for days and nights, were spotted and ejected in good time by security staff using, it's believed, thermal-imaging equipment. The wonder is, after nights in the open at this time of year, there was anything remotely thermal about the intruders for the equipment to detect.

"From our point of view, it was good that our security held up," said Mr McLaren, "because that goes round the world too."

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Page One Comment

Dornoch woke up this week and pinched itself. Did the most famous woman on the planet really come to our Cathedral to have her baby baptised by our minister? Did she really get married next day at the castle down the road? Or was it all a dream?

Well, it wasn't a dream. But it could easily have become a nightmare. The tabloid hack pack in full cry is not always a pretty sight. Their circulation wars are a brutal, cut-throat business, seldom fought by the rules of the Geneva Convention, and civilian casualties are common. Even the "posh" papers are increasingly in the market for celebrity stories, and this was one of the biggest yet.

Add to that the international *paparazzi*, renowned for their stalking of the rich and famous with long lenses, together with the presence of the world's major TV networks, and the scene was set for the mother of all media battles in and around our tranquil little county town last week.

What happened instead? Peace broke out, with joy to the world and goodwill to all men. Well, almost. Perhaps it was the Christmas spirit. Perhaps it was the Highland mist descending on a floodlit Cathedral that beguiled the restless throng outside. It was certainly a spectacular sight.

Whatever it was, Thursday night's appearance on the Cathedral steps by Madonna, Guy Ritchie and their newly-baptised baby was a happy, joyful occasion for everyone there, hardened hacks included. As they all said: "The atmosphere was tremendous."

Friday's wedding at the castle was a chillier and more frustrating affair for the media, but served to enhance Skibo's reputation for guarding the privacy of their guests. There will be those who say this 48-hour glitz-buzz was all a piece of froth and a fuss about nothing. Bah, humbug. Madonna's visit brought excitement and a touch of glamour to many, a welcome fillip to local businesses and, even more importantly, it's put Dornoch's name up in lights on the world stage.

Money couldn't buy the publicity the area's enjoyed in the past few weeks – all of it singing the praises of the place and its people. Who now would scoff at Susan Brown's prayers for a good tourist season?

The minister herself has come through a trying few weeks with great credit and dignity, as have our local police officers whose low-key handling of a potentially tricky situation did much to ensure its success. None of this would have happened, of course, without the Carnegie Club at Skibo Castle. It's contribution to the local economy is not always appreciated as widely or as generously as it should be.

But, as one visiting journalist put it last week, the real star of the show was Dornoch itself.



Newlyweds Guy Ritchie and Madonna leave Dornoch yesterday, having evaded the prying cameras of the press gang

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Scotch mist: Madonna, scrum and the invisible

by Stuart Millar
Scotland Editor

JAMES AND ROBERT Jones could have been forgiven for allowing themselves a pat on the back. Up against the world's most security-conscious pop star and its most ruthless paparazzi, they were within a hair's breadth of pulling off the most audacious celebrity scoop in decades: an illicit recording of the christening of Rocco John Ritchie, son of Madonna and her husband-to-be Guy Ritchie. In tabloid terms, gold dust.

Their methods were extreme. For more than 60 hours, Robert, 51, had managed to conceal himself inside Dornoch Cathedral's organ, along with two plastic binliners for bodily waste. At 8pm on Thursday, all feelings of hardship slipped away as he made his way towards the cathedral door. A full hour had passed since the proud parents, their son and the 30 A-list guests had left, and the team of private security guards had completed their final sweep of the building. Adrenaline pumping, he opened the door... and froze in horror as he was spotted by the guards being debriefed on the cathedral steps.

As the Madonna wedding

party made its slow, hung-over retreat from the Highlands yesterday, the people of Dornoch were struggling to come to terms with the mayhem. Since Monday they have looked on in good-humoured bemusement as an incredible, no-holds-barred struggle for supremacy has unfolded between the celebrity couple and the media. It is a battle the celebrities appear to have won handsomely.

By late yesterday afternoon, the only solid evidence that the wedding took place in the exclusive Skibo castle estate was a terse statement from the Church of Scotland minister who conducted the ceremony on Friday evening. 'It did happen,' the Rev Susan Brown told reporters camped outside her front door.

Until then, the world's media had been left guessing. Even when the first convoy of sleek saloons carrying guests to Inverness airport slipped out of the castle's gates in the dark at 5.45am, there was no proof a marriage had taken place. No pictures of the happy couple had been released. More tellingly, none of the dozens of paparazzi who had spent the previous 24 hours blacked-up and dressed in camouflage gear, crawling through the undergrowth of

the castle grounds pursued by the security team, had got close enough to grab a snap from the shrubbery.

By the standards of celebrity weddings, such total defeat for the media is unprecedented. The Jones team, from south London, are merely the most spectacular casualties of this failure. Instead of collecting fat pay cheques, they face a New Year of court appearances. 'We were very close to them all and could clearly see the faces of the celebrity guests,' said a dejected James Jones, 33, after his release from custody. 'The whole thing has cost me a fortune and I just want to go home.'

But the incident has blown open the previously hidden lengths the paparazzi will go to in pursuit of a celebrity exclusive. The men, both unemployed from south London, are believed to have been hired by one of Britain's more determined Sunday tabloids to breach the formidable security cordon Madonna and Ritchie threw around their nuptials. They are believed to have managed to make a video recording of the service, using a small, handheld camera.

The men, ex-soldiers who claim to have served in the SAS, arrived at the Royal

the media wedding

Hotel in Tain, near Dornoch, on Monday and booked into Room 36. But 24 hours later one of them disappeared. 'They arrived on Monday, but we hadn't seen one of them since Tuesday,' said Mike Sangster, the manager. 'Then, on Thursday, the police came in and asked for him and he walked out with him.'

It is understood that the tabloid initially denied knowledge of the men, but – after being threatened with

Madonna's minders and Rock Steady, the private security firm they had employed, who were responsible for security in the cathedral and its grounds.

The arrests were a sour footnote to what had been a hugely successful event on Thursday. As the cathedral shimmered in the Highland mist, the entire local population gathered outside, along with a 500-strong media pack to witness the christen-

But after the discovery of the Jones infiltration, the celebrities' tactics changed immediately. A media blackout began, and security was stepped up with more guards brought in to patrol the grounds. The equipment they had to hand was as sophisticated as the techniques being employed by the paparazzi, including thermal imaging devices and infra-red cameras. Over the week at least 30 photographers, all of whom were using camouflage gear and commando tactics to evade detection, were caught and escorted off the premises.

One group of three managed to stay in the grounds for three days before they were picked up by heat-seeking equipment and thrown out. In their bags they had packed Arctic warfare suits for camouflage in case it snowed.

The security operation was not a total success. One British tabloid photographer managed to creep into the grounds in the early hours of Thursday morning and get close enough to snap a clear picture of Madonna standing at the breakfast room window, holding her son. The photographer, who asked not to be named, spent 10 hours lying still in the damp, freezing cold, before making his

escape under the cover of darkness. 'I was thinking that I might lose a couple of toes to frostbite,' he told *The Observer* yesterday. 'But with the money this picture could make, I knew I could easily afford the plastic surgery, so I hung on. I'm going to print up a big copy of the picture and send it to Rock Steady security as a Christmas card from the paparazzi.'

Selling the picture has not been straightforward. On Thursday the Court of Appeal ruled that Catherine Zeta-Jones and Michael Douglas were entitled to privacy and could sue a celebrity magazine which published an illicit picture of their wedding in New York last month. The ruling, under the Human Rights Act, has forced tabloid picture editors to take a cautious approach and turn down pictures which previously would have proved irresistible.

The successful Madonna snapper is still expecting a bumper festive season, though. 'I've already sold it abroad,' he said. 'It's going for about £5,000 a time, so it's going to be a jolly Christmas.'

He will not be the only person to profit from Madonna wedding fever. In Dornoch, hoteliers and retailers have enjoyed an unprecedented

windfall. At the Dornoch Castle hotel, opposite the cathedral, owner Colin Thompson has pocketed about £5,000 from selling camera positions to broadcasters alone. 'It has been cracking,' he said.

One Sunday newspaper photographer was charged £10 by a barman at the hotel for the privilege of standing on a beer crate for a better view of the cathedral.

As the Madonna camp pulled out of the town yesterday relations remained warm – with locals at least. The media were not so happy. So successful was the news blackout that it was not even clear if Madonna was still at Skibo. Her private jet was seen taking off from Inverness Airport, but only Sting was seen getting on board and the media, who have been camped outside every exit from the castle since dawn, swore blind that she had not gone past them.

Then, at 3.30 pm yesterday, a fleet of three limousines swept out the main entrance, carrying Madonna, her new husband and their minders. They were rumoured to be heading to spend Christmas at Sting's house in Wiltshire.

But nobody really knows the truth. Not for sure. stuart.millar@observer.co.uk

'Dozens of photographers had spent hours, blacked up and dressed in camouflage gear, crawling in the undergrowth'

police action – eventually settled their room bill.

The organ incident was a major embarrassment for Madonna's security team, in particular Jackie Jackson, her deputy head of security who was in charge of the christening operation at the cathedral. An investigation into the breach has now been launched. As local police were quick to point out, it was

ing. They were not disappointed; Range Rovers delivered a glittering display of Hollywood's finest, including Gwyneth Paltrow, Rupert Everett, Sting and his wife Trudi Styler. Madonna and Ritchie had even played the PR game, stopping to give the crowd a wave and an eyeful as they entered and left the cathedral with their son. Everybody went home happy.



2007_194_29 Press photographers' stepladders on Cathedral Green Dornoch

PROFILE

Some have greatness thrust upon them and don't like it very much. **NICOLA BARRY** talks to Dornoch Cathedral's minister, the Rev Susan Brown

Yes, minister

■ The Rev Susan Brown faced massive media scrutiny over Madonna's wedding.

HAVE you ever wondered what it was like to be at the eye of a storm, or rather a full-scale hurricane? There you are, slap bang in the middle. That is how Susan Brown felt the week before Christmas. As the Church of Scotland minister who wed Madonna and Guy Ritchie at Skibo Castle, she has had her 15 minutes of fame.

TV crews from around the world, a multinational press corps, managed to turn poor old Dornoch, "Door-Knock" as the London press like to call the old town, into the centre of the universe as we know it.

The Reverend Susan Brown has spent about 20 years officiating at weddings, funerals and christenings, serving her calling. Suddenly, the woman's face was plastered over every front page, on all our television screens, for no reason other than the Madonna nuptials.

Performing marriages and officiating at funerals is what Susan does. She is not a one for courting celebrity. She would be just as happy marrying Joe Bloggs and Jane Smith as Madonna.

She is thankful it is all over, and I mean thankful. Her last word to the media at the end of the wedding was that she was going to go and "lie down in a darkened room".

In the event, with Christmas following hot on the heels of Madonna, Susan has not had time to slow down. It has been go, go, go, with her twin sister from Edinburgh and members of her family joining her in Dornoch for Christmas Day.

Mr and Mrs Guy Ritchie have gone and the world's media have at last removed themselves from her doorstep. Things are slowly but surely getting back to normal.

Susan says she signed "something like a secrecy agreement", meaning she must never discuss what Madonna said during her visit to Dornoch, what *that* dress looked like and how the couple conducted themselves at the ceremony in Skibo Castle.

In fact, Dornoch Cathedral's minister was famous before, but more for the fun and care she has brought into the lives of those who attend her church.

Being known as "Holy Spice" by some of the young in the parish is somewhat different from the fame which sprang from Madonna and her entourage. Susan was not comfortable in the media spotlight.

"I hated being thrust into the limelight in that way; having so many people question what I was doing and why. I was asked to do it and that was that. Admittedly, my initial reaction was 'I wish someone else would do this'.

"It was scary. At times, I wished I was a million miles away. Nothing like the stampede surrounding Madonna's wedding has ever happened to me before, and I hope it never happens to me again."

Enough said.

Fortunately, Susan Brown is not the kind of person to be cowed by celebrities getting married in her bailiwick. For support, she relied on her husband, Derek, who is chaplain at Raigmore Hospital in Inverness.

"Derek has been fantastic," Susan said. "Every so often, when I imagined I was about to have a heart attack, he would tell me I was coping perfectly well, and that made a huge difference."

The Browns are a match made in heaven. The pair met at Sunday school when they were both just 10. They did not go out on a date until they were 17.

At the time, Derek was heading straight for the bank and had been studying accordingly. In 1980, when they decided to marry, Derek made his momentous decision to enter the ministry.

Her influence, I wondered?

"You'll have to ask him," she replied. "I probably put him off."

The Browns have two children, Simon, 13, and Hannah, 10.

Born and brought up in a mining family in Penicuik, Midlothian, Susan was one of three girls, none of whom was particularly "churchy".

"We were sent to church, rather than taken," she said.

Susan wanted to become a minister from the age of 14. She stayed on till sixth year at school then progressed to study theology at Edinburgh University.

"It wasn't a Road to Damascus conversion," she said, "nothing dramatic like that. I was called to the ministry. That was that.

"Being a minister is about communication and the message needs to be comprehensible. There's no point in speaking Double Dutch."

Comprehensible this woman most definitely is, according to those who

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attend Dornoch Cathedral. Susan is well known for being able to relate to her parishioners. She once, famously, rolled down the aisle on in-line skates during a service, to illustrate a point.

Last year, during Holy Week, she and some parishioners were going through the last seven days of Jesus's life.

"It was the 3D version and we put on something different every day in the cathedral. This particular day, we were illustrating the actions of Jesus showing his anger at the moneylenders in the temple. One table was overturned and some coins scattered over the floor.

"In context, it sounds perfectly humdrum," she said, "But, when it became public, the story was not told in context."

In essence, such "happenings" at Dornoch Cathedral are about audience participation.

"The point is to involve as many people as possible in the act of worship," Susan said. "As a result, they will get far more out of it.

"Some folk like to just sit quietly and pray. There must be room for that, too. A minister's job is to get people to worship in a way that will be meaningful to them."

Susan Brown's career began as an assistant at St Giles Cathedral in Edinburgh. She moved from there to Killearnan Parish Church on the Black Isle, where she managed to treble the congregation. She then took on what is seen as one of the most coveted jobs in the Church of Scotland, at Dornoch Cathedral.

She describes the former incumbent, the Very Reverend Dr James Simpson, former Moderator of the General Assembly, as an "extremely hard act to follow".

What has it been like working as a female minister within a male-orientated Church?

"I joined in 1974," she said. "I have never been put off by the attitude towards women.

"I have been accused of being naive. Perhaps I am just downright thick, but the way I saw it was that God was calling me and I just happened to be female.

"Prejudice has always been there. I remember my first day at university, a male student turned to me and quoted St Paul, saying: 'Women should be silent in church.'

"Generally, I respect people's views and expect them to respect mine. As far as the ordinary punters are concerned, usually they overcome their prejudices once they give me a chance.

"The whole point of the gospel is that Jesus can and does use anyone. I don't know why people refuse to see it this way.

"There is a way of interpreting the Bible which makes it very fixed. I believe the word of God must live and breathe."

You begin to get a flavour of the popular sermons she gives to some 300 people every Sunday morning.

Any more weddings this year?

"We always have one or two weddings in December," she said. "People are attracted to the romance of Christmas in the Highlands and all that.

"Sadly, there tend to be more funerals, although that brings me into contact with families, which is the most important part of my job."

Madonna and Guy were just one more couple who found Susan Brown to be an oasis of calm in the storm surrounding their nuptials.

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Sheriff hears the footage could have earned him a fortune

by Willie Morrison

A MAN who filmed the christening of Madonna's baby son from the inside of a massive church organ nearly escaped with a coup which might have earned him a fortune, Dornoch Sheriff Court heard yesterday.

Robert Podesta was caught only after being challenged by two security guards checking Dornoch Cathedral prior to its closure, half an hour after the pop star, her film director fiancé Guy Ritchie and their newly christened son Rocco left with their guests for Skibo Castle.

Podesta's motive, according to his defence agent Alasdair MacDonald, was mainly "for a bit of fun and a bit of excitement", although he was to receive a share of any money the illicit movie might fetch on the international market.

Even after pretending that the game was up, the security adviser from the West of England almost double-bluffed his way out with a cassette showing baby Rocco's christening ceremony, after surrendering a blank tape, the court was told.

Podesta allowed the security men to search the rucksack he was carrying, and found an empty camcorder. He then admitted he had filmed the private ceremony from behind the organ, and claimed he had dropped the film down an organ pipe, said the fiscal.

When the pipe was searched, a film cassette was found, but Podesta was spotted trying to conceal another cassette behind a pew cushion.

This was found by police to contain 24 minutes of film and a recording of the entire ceremony - including superstar Sting singing Ave Maria. The



Madonna with husband Guy Ritchie and baby Rocco

cassette hidden in the organ pipe proved on examination to be blank, said Mr MacDonald.

Podesta, 51, of Bagwyllydiart House, Orcop, Garway, Herefordshire, who was not present in court, yesterday admitted through his solicitor a charge of breaking the peace in Dornoch Cathedral on December 21 last year by hiding behind the organ and spying upon and "furtively videoing" a private religious ceremony in a manner likely to cause annoyance.

His not guilty plea to a charge of trespassing in the church by lodging there between December 19 and 21, without the consent or permission of its owner or legal occupier, was accepted by Mr MacDonald.

Mr MacDonald also accepted not guilty pleas by Podesta's colleague, James Bufton, 33, of Llanarth, Usk, Monmouthshire, Wales, to breaking the peace,

trespass and attempting to defeat the ends of justice by giving police a false name.

The fiscal said Rocco's parents, as international celebrities, were sufficiently concerned by media interest to inquire if the baptism ceremony could be conducted privately.

The Church of Scotland's practice and procedures committee gave approval for the baptism to be held in private, attended only by immediate family members, 40 guests, three church elders, parish minister the Rev Susan Brown, who conducted the ceremony, and another cleric, Father Seed.

As the ceremony was expected to attract "a fair amount of media attention and coverage", private security arrangements were made for the child's immediate family by a firm called Celebrity Protection.

Security within the venue it-

self was the responsibility of another company called Rock Steady Security, and police took responsibility for crowd and traffic control outside the cathedral precincts.

The ceremony went without a hitch, said Mr MacDonald, and the guests left the church at 7.30pm.

Half an hour later one of the security guards checking the church saw Podesta with a rucksack. Police later found bin liners containing waste behind the organ, and Podesta explained he had concealed himself there with supplies and arrangements to dispose of rubbish, 24 hours before the ceremony began.

"He did subsequently make a full confession and was fully co-operative," added the fiscal. "His intention was to sell the video recording, which is believed to have relatively considerable commercial value.

"I would move for an order for destruction of the film and video cassette, which seems to be the proceeds of crime."

Agent Mr Wood said his client had indicated his willingness for the cassette to be destroyed.

The lawyer said Podesta and his co-accused, who was thought to be a reporter, had met up about a week before and went round Dornoch Cathedral to consider what they might do. It fell to Podesta to film the ceremony, and he secreted himself in the church overnight.

Mr Wood said his client earned about £4,000 a year from his job as a security adviser and £6,000 from a pension.

Sheriff Ian Cameron deferred sentence until March 29 for a personal appearance by Podesta. He also ordered the destruction of the cassette.