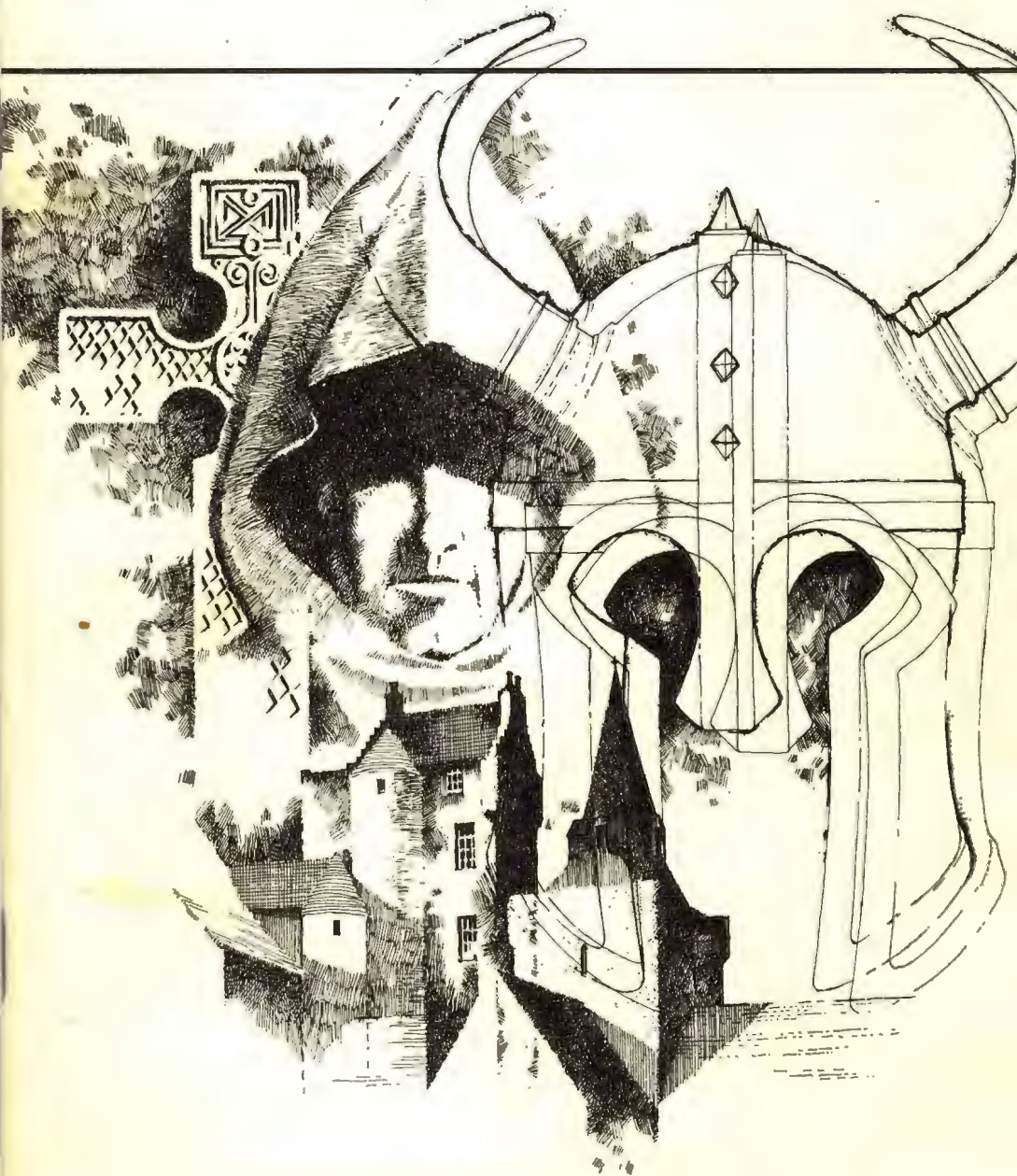
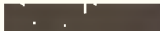


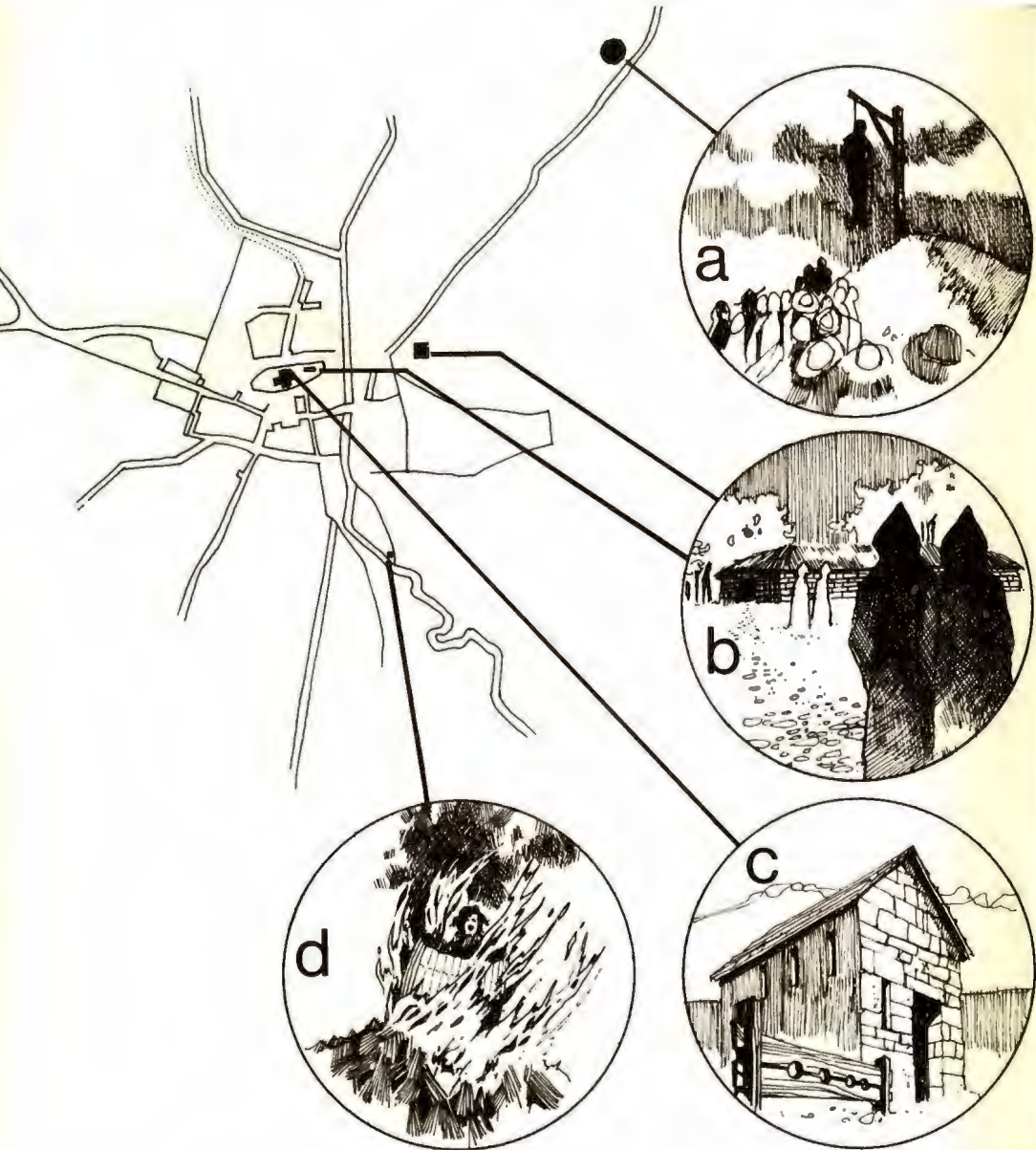
DORNOCH



James F. Bell

DORNOCH

Illustrations by Graeme Nairn Dip.A.D. 
Graphic Design by Town Jail Craft Centre Ltd., Dornoch.
Text by Terence Robertson Hart.
Printed by Moravian Press Ltd., 31 South Street, Elgin. |



DORNOCH & AROUND

Introduction

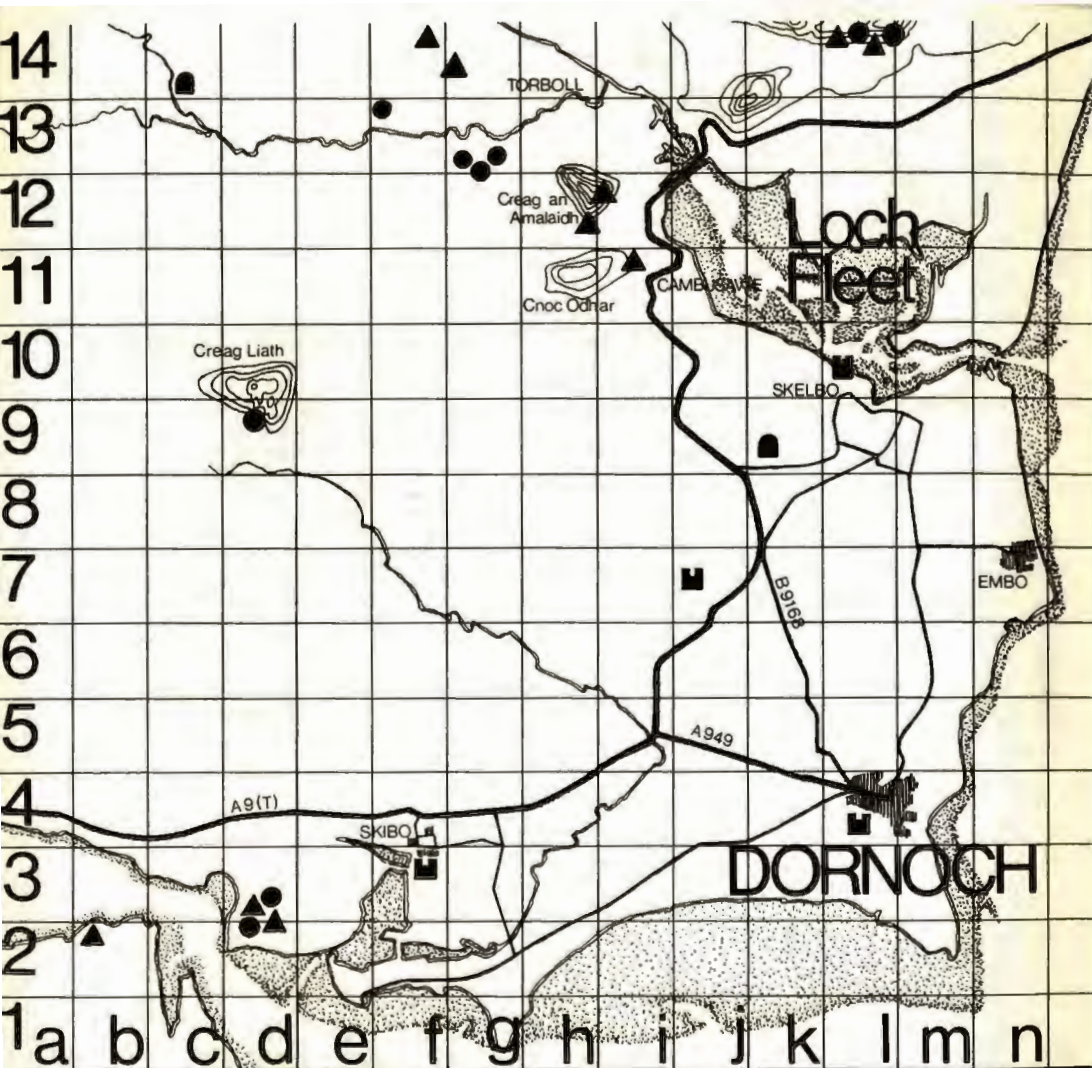
I don't have a lot of space; and if you're on holiday, you do not have a lot of time to read long, learned histories. Our mutual necessities then should merge sufficiently for me to tell you something of Dornoch's long and involved history, and to enable you to obtain more enjoyment from your stay in and around the town. There is clear, visual evidence to show that men have lived in and around Dornoch since the dawn of history. If you can leave your car long enough to remind yourselves that human beings were blessed with a built-in means of transport, you will be able to see some of the traces which the early inhabitants of Dornoch left behind them.

I should point out that some of the buildings or sites, to which I will refer, are on private ground and that before you go tramping all over the place, you should obtain permission of the owner. Highlanders are hospitable folk but they resent people walking in their gardens without so much as a by-your-leave, just as much as you would.

HISTORICAL MAP

a: gallows hill b: St. Barr's community

c: tolbooth d: burning of Janet Horne



PREHISTORIC SITES



cairn



hut circle



broch



castle

Pre-History

CHAPTER 1

So-called "Pre-history" is a very difficult time to write about. This is partly because the historians never seem to agree about it, and partly because it all happened so long ago that the layman finds it difficult to relate himself in his "here and now" to the period.

There are Neolithic remains in Dornoch and sites which cover the Stone, Bronze and Iron Ages. To interpret these "ages" in crude terms I mean that there are the remains of buildings constructed by men when their tools, weapons and other implements were made respectively of stone, bronze or iron. The men who lived in each successive age probably conquered, absorbed or drove off those of a preceding age whose weapons were of an inferior kind—thus bronze swords, arrow heads and spears were sharper than their stone equivalents; while iron swords and spears were sharper than the weapons of the bronze age warriors.

We are talking about thousands of years ago, so perhaps it is nothing short of miraculous that anything survives at all. Cairns there are in Dornoch, and these are of the round-chambered variety. They usually have a single chamber divided into two unequal compartments by two low partition stones set across the chamber on either side, about 2 ft. apart. The inner compartment is generally about 7 ft. x 6 ft., while the outer is rather less. Large flat slabs compose the wall of the chamber, while the roof is formed of converging slabs. Access is gained by a passage about 2 ft. square which leads straight into the smaller compartment. They were probably burial places. Many of the local cairns have "fallen in" or become disturbed, others have been excavated but without cist or chamber having been discovered. Cairns can be seen $\frac{1}{2}$ S.E. of Achinal on the top of Carn Liath, N.W. of Torboll and about $\frac{1}{4}$ mile above Torboll Falls and between the road and the right bank of the River Carnaig, there are cairns in a reasonable state of preservation. A cairn was excavated near the east end of Embo Street during the early 1900's, when a cist was exposed which contained a few remains of bones and a flint head.

Of all pre historic remains hut-circles most abound in Sutherland. It is generally accepted that these relate to the Bronze Age. They are described thus:—"an oval or pear-shaped structure formed with a bank of earth or turf and stones, or sometimes merely of the former, now rarely above 2 ft. in height, enclosing an area measuring some five feet or more in length than in width, the longest axis being in line of the entrance. There is great variety in size, but the variation of the diameter across is usually from 20 - 30 ft. The enclosing bank is some five to six feet in thickness and of a uniform thickness throughout. The entrance which varies in width apparently from $1\frac{1}{2}$ to 3 feet, with rare exceptions, faces the S.E. They can be seen on Crag Amall, at Lochantrillich and at Dalchiel near the River Evelix. There are traces of a chamber about a mile N.W. of Clashmore and others just west of Astle. Torboll is rich in hut circles and mounds.

Brochs are massivé, round, dry built towers, peculiar to Scotland and most numerous in the Northern Counties where over 300 have been located. Their purpose was to provide shelter and defence

for the residents. Given a well of fresh water and a good supply of food the defendants could probably have held a broch indefinitely. There are 67 brochs in the County of Sutherland, 19 of which are "structureless heaps of stone." In the parish of Dornoch there are only two. One is in Skelbo Wood but is hopelessly ruined and covered with moss and trees. The other is at Brae to the east of the burn known as Allt Lochan Iain Bhuidhe, and near where the stream joins the River Carnaig.

A broch of easier access and in reasonable repair can be seen from the road where it runs parallel to the railway line and the coastline, just north of Dunrobin.

So much for pre-history in and around Dornoch. The sites to which I have referred will tell the layman little about the people who occupied the huts and the brochs. We might deduce that their lives were simple and their needs few. They lived in small communities and were presumably inter-dependant. Perhaps they had what many escapees to remote places in the twentieth century are seeking.

CHAPTER 2

St Barr and the Church Communities in Dornoch

Somewhere along the time-span Stone-Age, Bronze-Age and Iron-Age to which I have just referred there occurred the invasions and the mix-up between the Celtic/Pictish people who became the Scots. The Picts were divided into tribes, great tribes, and provinces over which ruled the Ri—the King. "The provinces contributed a portion of territory at their point of junction to form a central district in which the capital of the whole country was placed and the Ri or King, who was elected to be it's Ard—Ri or Sovereign, had his seat of government."

Dornoch seems to have been part of a Pictish Province known as the Land of Cat—Cait having been the name of the Ri—who ruled it. The people who lived here then were called Laugoi — The Raven Folk. They were probably farmers and had obtained to a reasonable level of culture. They were capable therefore of understanding and accepting the Christian message.

I apologise for this mammoth over simplification of a thousand years of history, but one cannot deal with a complex period of Scotland's growth when discussing the history of Dornoch in a small pamphlet. The point about Scotland in the period prior to the departure of the Romans in 410 A.D. is that it was "in pagan darkness" and the history of Dornoch is wrapped up with "the coming of the light of Christianity."

The bringer of 'the message' to Dornoch was one Finbarr, reputedly a native of Caithness and of noble birth, who had attended St Ninian's College at Candida Casa on Solway. There is no written evidence concerning Finbarr's presence in Dornoch, but his name is preserved in folk-lore and in certain local names—Templebar which was the name of the old Celtic Church dedicated to him and which survived until the seventeenth century; St Barr's Fair

which was held until the early 1900's, and the old custom of invoking the blessing of St Barr upon new fishing nets in Embo with the prayer—

O'n fhear ud iar
Beannaich an lion, a Bhairr;
Beannaich an long,
Beannaich, a Dhia Athair.

which translates from the Gaelic—

From that one behind (i.e. The Devil)
Bless the net, thou Barr;
Bless the vessel,
Bless thou it, God the Father.

I have given the Gaelic deliberately because it was spoken here, quite widely until the beginning of the nineteenth century, and because the prayer is associated with the fishermen of Embo, whose villagers still retain some Gaelic.

St Barr brought the light to Dornoch and established a church, part of the Pictish Church which was quite independent of Rome. The monks shaved their hair at the front, observed a shorter Lent, had a different date for Easter and celebrated the mass in the language of the people. They were ruled over by their Abbot and lived on oatmeal bread, milk, fish and eggs. They wore a coarse woollen robe with hood, a white under garment and sandals.

Dornoch's Monks lived on the rising ground where the old school now stands. The remains of the cells were discovered when the foundations for the school were being dug. Their mill and kiln probably stood by the burn near the Masonic Hall. St Barr's Church stood in the east section of the old churchyard.

During the ninth century the Pictish Church was gradually superseded by the Columban Church. King Nechtan who had been converted to the usages of the Roman Church issued an edict in 710 A.D. which told the Pictish Clergy to obey the new regulations or be expelled. His edict took some time to be effective in the far north. Secular clergy began to be introduced during the eighth century and this contributed to the demise of the Pictish Church. In 844 A.D. the Scottish and Pictish kingdoms were united under Kenneth MacAlpin who also favoured the Columban Church. St Barr's monks disappeared from Dornoch and the Culdees took their place. In the early days this order of monks was ascetic and severe in its observances, but they gradually became more lax and thus contributed to their own demise.

As the Church of Rome became more powerful the Culdees were either absorbed into new monastic orders or they died off. The Culdee community in Dornoch seems to have lasted until the Thirteenth Century. This was a remarkable occurrence, not simply because the Roman Church had the support of the Crown and had usurped the Pictish Church entirely in the South of Scotland, but also because the Church in the far north had constantly been at the mercy of the Norsemen.

CHAPTER 3

'A furore Normannorum libera nos Domine'
'From the fury of the Norsemen deliver us
O Lord!'

This prayer must often have been upon the lips of St Barr's Monks and the Culdees who followed them, for the shores of Sutherland are dyed with the blood of monks, Norsemen and those who opposed their landings.

How many times, one wonders, did the long ships drive their keels into the Dornoch sands while the fierce Norsemen leaped ashore to kill and pillage. The monks and the churches were their special targets. At all times the local monks must have been ready to run for the hills when the Raven banners and the square sails came over the rim of the North Sea.

Sutherland's history is bound irrevocably to the Norsemen. Indeed, could we unravel the past completely, we would find that many Sutherlanders have Norse blood in their veins.

The Orkney Sagas, which are the written record of the Norse invasions of Northern Scotland, show how the invasions of Caithness and Sutherland lasted for about three hundred years, from 87 A.D. until the middle of the thirteenth century.

Sigurd the Powerful conquered Sutherland in 887 A.D. and came to parley with the local chief Maelbrigda, somewhere south of the Dornoch Firth. Maelbrigda kept the terms of the parley and came with his forty men. Sigurd brought eighty men. Maelbrigda decided that he had been lured into a trap and at once ordered his men to attack the Norsemen. With odds of two to one they didn't have a chance. Sigurd's forces won and the victorious Norsemen returned to Sidera where they had their headquarters. Maelbrigda seems to have been more powerful in death than in life. For, so the tale goes, as Sigurd was riding back to Sidera with Maelbrigda's head hanging from his saddle-bow, Maelbrigda's protruding teeth chafed Sigurd's leg. The skin was broken and Sigurd got blood poisoning from which he eventually died.

Sidera is the old Norse name for Cyderhall which is on the Meikle Ferry Road. The tradition is that Sigurd the Powerful is buried at Cnoc Skardi on Cyderhall Farm. Alas, no trace has been found of his grave.

After the death of Sigurd the Vikings seem to have ravaged Caithness and Sutherland uncontrolled. The Scottish kings were unable to restrain the Norse chieftains by war, but it would seem that the Pictish women, whom the Vikings took to wife, gradually pacified their husbands. They settled down by the sea and tilled the ground. Their progeny were an amalgam of Celtic and Scandinavian blood, whose language was Gaelic interspersed with Norse.

Before they became "absorbed" the Vikings left their mark on Sutherland. Their names for places along the coast still record their presence on the pages of history, while the local legends recall once famous Viking fighting men; and Dornoch's coat of arms records a great battle at which they were defeated.

The local legends have it that when the mists descend upon Creag Amail, walkers on the hill are likely to encounter Liot, a Norse Warrior, who became separated from his comrades and was killed. His ghost now walks the craig searching ever for his men and his ship.

On Dornoch's coat of arms there is a horse shoe. This heraldic device refers to the Battle of Embo. The Norsemen had landed at



Unes—now Little Ferry and had set up their camp on the dunes between Embo and the ferry. Sir Richard de Moravia saw them from his castle of Skelbo and almost immediately received a message from William Earl of Sutherland who was at Dornoch, to sally forth and attack them. Richard, who had only a small force under his command, obeyed William's orders and a fierce engagement took place. Meanwhile the Earl collected his forces and marched to Embo with great speed. Sir Robert Gordon records the ensuing battle thus:—"The Danes perceiving Erle William coming with the rest of his forces to assist Richard, they fled quicklie, and mak held towards ther navie." They did not make haste quickly enough however. Earl William's men killed a great number of the Danes while he engaged the Viking Chief in personal combat. He became disarmed during the fight and searching round for a weapon, took up the severed leg of a horse with which he proceeded to kill the Viking Chief. The rest of the Danes fled to their ships and away. Sir Richard was killed during the battle and was buried in Dornoch Cathedral. His memorial—or what remains over the centuries—can still be seen.

CHAPTER 4

As we have seen from the preceding chapters, being a priest in Dornoch in these early days of the Church was no sinecure. The monks were likely to be attacked by Vikings and just as likely to be robbed by the local chieftains. In 1136 King David of Scotland issued a mandate to the Earl of Orkney and Caithness, "To respect and maintain free from injury the monks at Durnach, their servants and property."

One doubts that the mandate was very effective. During the twelfth century however a new nation appeared upon the scene of Scottish History—the Normans. The Normans were Norse in origin, and still retained the ruthlessness of their ancestors. In other respects however they had moved far away from their origins. They could count and record and administrate. They were civilised and intelligent by comparison with the Norsemen and possibly even with the English and the Scots.

Hugo Freskyn, the head of the great De Moravia family (who later became the Murrays), was granted huge tracts of land in Northern Scotland. He in turn made grants of this land to his relatives and supporters. Thus in 1211 Gilbert de Moravia was given "the land of Skelbo in Sutherland and of Fernabuchlyn and Invershin, with the land of Sutherland towards the west which lies between these lands before-named and the boundaries of Ross."

In 1222 Gilbert de Moravia became Bishop of Caithness. The church in Dornoch now had a leader who was unlikely to be deterred by Norsemen or by local chiefs. Like the Bishop of Durham, the Bishop of Caithness was Lord Spiritual and Lord Temporal. He could throw off his cassock and don armour as the occasion demanded.

Doubtless there were times when Gilbert did take up his sword but he is remembered in Dornoch as a saintly man. He it was who built the original Cathedral in Dornoch. There is considerable evidence that he was also a statesman of some stature and a writer. He died in 1245 at his Palace in Scrabster and was buried in Dornoch Cathedral. He was canonized after death and appears

in the Kalendar of Saints—the last Scotsman to be given a place. His festival is April 1st.

After the death of "Holy Gilbert" our story shifts its emphasis away from the Church. Dornoch's history become involved with the broader tapestry of the history of the Scottish nation.

For hundreds of years Scotland's history is an account of bloody squabbles between its great families and their factions; of rivalries between king and courtier, and between Norman-Scottish families and Scandinavian-Scottish families, and the more indigenous clans. There was, if you like, a continuous struggle for power. Dornoch was constantly affected. In 1296, John Balliol abdicated in favour of Edward I, King of England. In 1300 Edward invaded Scotland to claim his throne. He was staunchly supported in his efforts by William, Earl of Sutherland. While Edward I continued his depredations the struggle for power in Scotland was resolved by the head of a Norman-Scottish family, Robert Bruce, who became King of Scots in 1306 "and without delay began his attempt to liberate Scotland from the English yolk." His "liberation" began with a spirited attack upon the three Northern counties of Scotland, and for a fortnight his troops laid waste these lands. His show of force must have been impressive for William, Earl of Sutherland, with the perfidy of the nobles of his day, joined Bruce at the Battle of Bannockburn "and failed not his king and cuntrie in so great and imminent danger."

In the middle of the fifteenth century Dornoch and the Sutherlanders were attacked by MacDonald of the Isles who, with 600 men, encamped near Skibo Castle. The Sutherland men defeated the MacDonalds, who were pursued beyond Bonar. The historian records that the battle continued from Skibo and "on the sands of Strathfleet, wher ther falloed a sharp and cruell skirmish, foughten with great courage on either syde."

This particular plice of inter-clan mayhem was finally resolved when John, 12th Earl of Sutherland, married the daughter of the Lord of the Isles.

There is a tragic tale told of this lady, which perhaps casts even further light upon the violence of the times. It seems that she was crossing the ferry at Unes (Little Ferry) and that the weather was rough and stormy. The boat she was in overturned and the people in it drowned. She alone was cast, still alive, upon the shore. Seeing her body cast up, one John Dairg, an outlaw, grabbed her and murdered her, presumably for her jewels. Dairg was later captured and executed for her murder.

CHAPTER 5

When Hugo Freskyn gave the land of Dornoch and round about to his relative Gilbert, and when Gilbert became powerful as Bishop of Caithness, the people had some reason to be pleased that at last they had a protector.

In later years, however, when the successors to Gilbert's Bishopric rivalled in power the Earls of Caithness and Sutherland, they may well have considered their position to be invidious. During the fifteenth century Dornoch and the surrounding countryside was the scene of constant battles between the Bishops of Caithness



and the Earl of Caithness, between the Mackays and the Earls of Sutherland.

Sometimes these battles were the result of national problems. On other occasions the fights were entirely local and usually concerned the ownership of land or property.

In the mid fifteen hundreds a battle was being fought in Scotland for the supremacy of a form of worship. The argument resolved itself into a struggle for power between the "Lords of Congregation" and the Queen Regent and her followers. This struggle finally broke into armed conflict and civil war. John, Earl of Sutherland, had been elected one of the "Lords of the Articles," and he took the field against the Queen Regent. At the Battle of Kinghorn the Earl was wounded in the arm by the Queen's French troops and had to flee to Dunrobin to recover. The Queen Regent died in 1560 as a result of which the Protestant Party became supreme. Earl John was free to breathe again—but not for long. In 1561 Mary Queen of Scots returned from France and John was sentenced to lose his estates and be exiled for treason and lese-majesty. Thanks to friends at court, this sentence was never carried out and "his lands and honours and goods" were restored to him. He seems to have led a charmed life. Unfortunately his luck ran out. On a visit to Helmsdale Castle, Earl John and his wife were poisoned by John's aunt, Isobel Sinclair!

The death of the Earl was the signal for a reign of terror to begin in and around Dornoch. The Earl of Caithness at once occupied the position of power in the diocese which he had long coveted. Meanwhile the Mackays of Strathnavar, barely held in check by the Earl of Sutherland, seized their opportunity to raid Sutherland. It is recorded that Mackay of Strathnavar "wasted the barony of Skibo and then came to Dornoch where he fought with the Murrays and burned the town." 1570 was a black year for Dornoch. The Cathedral was burned and pillaged and most of the houses in the town were destroyed. The Murrays held out in Dornoch Castle for a week, besieged mainly in the large tower. They were finally forced to surrender and give hostages. These men were brutally murdered later by the Earl of Caithness.

Sutherland of Evelix, a leader of the attacking party is reputed to have desecrated the tomb of St Gilbert, scattering the relics which it contained with his foot. Local legend says that this same Sutherland afterwards got his comeuppance—"for that same foot that burst St Gilbert's coffin did afterwards rot away and consume, to the great terror of all the beholders, whereby this William Sutherland grew so lothsum that no man was able to come near him, and so he died miserable."

Sir Robert Gordon records a bad end for the others concerned in the sack of Dornoch. The Laird of Duffus, who beheaded the hostages at the instigation of the Earl of Caithness, became sick and a victim of terrible hallucinations. He took to his bed and died. The Earl of Caithness was punished by his father—"Whom God, in His just judgement had appointed to be his scourge . . . by famishing him to death in wofull captivity." The Earl was imprisoned for seven years in Girnigol where at last he died from "famine and vermine." Mackay of Sutherland died "pairtlie through grief and pairtlie through the torment and truble of

conscience which he had conceived for his bypast actions." Thus was the curse fulfilled which St Gilbert, at the close of his deed of constitution solemnly invoked "upon those who shall destroy and injure" the fabric then set up. When the Earl and his wife were poisoned, the young Earl Alexander was taken, for safety, to Skibo Castle. It cannot have been much protection to him, for the records indicate that Skibo in 1567 was "a thatched house in need of repair" and under the wardenship of Gray of Swordell. Whatever the state of Skibo, Alexander was taken to Dunrobin virtually as a prisoner. His friends determined to rescue him. Alexander Gordon of Sidera disguised himself as a pedlar and obtained access to Dunrobin, where he was able to see the Earl and prepare him for rescue. The Earl took his morning walk in Dunrobin Glen escorted by a bodyguard of Caithness men. His friends set an ambush for this group and successfully got him away. They fled with the young Earl to Meikle and crossed the water, despite stormy conditions. They went to Strathbogie and placed Alexander under the protection of the Earl of Huntly, with whom he remained until he was of age to claim his estate in 1573.

CHAPTER 6

Riots and Affrays, Storms and Whales

In 1600 a remarkable event occurred of which the citizens of Dornoch were quick to take advantage. Fourteen large whales were left by the tide on the sands of Dornoch. Sir Robert Gordon reports that some whales were ninety feet in length. The people killed the fish and "reaped some commoditie thereby." It is interesting to note that many seaside places have stories about whales being left by the tide in days gone by. The likelihood of such great fish as the ninety footers thrown up by the sea at Dornoch, appearing on these beaches again is remote, such has been the ferocity with which whales have been hunted in the last two hundred years. Sir Robert Gordon also records two shipwrecks from which the people of Dornoch benefited. These occurred in the neighbourhood of Little Ferry. The ship which was driven ashore at Unes (Little Ferry) was a ship full of timber from Norway. None of the crew survived. Apparently they were all washed overboard before they could make harbour. The second ship was a Dutchman which was cast ashore on the coast of Clentredale (Kintradwell, just north of Brora)? The fate of the crew is not recorded but the general cargo was eagerly seized. There was a controversy about who owned the whales and the cargoes of these ships between the Lord Admiral and the Earl of Sutherland. This seems to have been resolved by the simple expedient of removing that which was in dispute, right sharply. At this point the Lord Admiral had sufficient discretion to drop his claims. While we are talking about the sea it is appropriate to mention the Dornoch Firth and the coastline immediately adjacent to Dornoch. Visitors often seem to be amazed that the sea is not more widely 'used' locally. The problems are that the coastline is exposed to winds of an easterly direction and that the shores

tend to shoal and are beset by shifting sand banks. Off Dornoch lie the Gizzen Briggs, named from the Norse gisnar (leaky) and brygga (bridge). The Gaelic name is 'Drochaid an Aobh' (Water Kelpies Bridge). Tradition has it that the fairies built it of sand. A glance at the chart for the area will show that it is a substantial ridge of sand situated at the mouth of the Dornoch Firth and stretching some distance out to sea. In bad weather the seas break on the Briggs with great ferocity, and even in moderate conditions with wind over tide, the position of the Gizzen Briggs is shown by the white water above them. The Dornoch Firth west of Dornoch Point to Bonar Bridge is beset with sand banks which are constantly shifting. The beach at Dornoch can be used safely for small boat sailing, as a recently opened local enterprise reveals. But local knowledge of tides, wind shifts and other sea conditions is essential, as is expert supervision, before people put out in small boats. As this story has shown, the sea is dangerous here. There have been numerous shipwrecks on the coast, and at the ancient ferries of Unes and Meikle there have been disasters. At Meikle in 1809 the overloaded ferry-boat, which was bound for Tain Market, sank with considerable loss of life. The boat contained over a hundred people. It was rowed away from the shore and then the sail was hoisted. Here is the account given at the inquest by a survivor, Mr Dempster of Skibo. "The wind dying away and there being a considerable swell of waves in the Kyle the sail was taken down—at this time the waves were breaking over the gun-wales of the boat and adding to the quantity of water already in the boat, which was now become about a foot in depth; they endeavoured to row but could not get her on—upon this the people began to be alarmed and called out to put about and return to the shore—this they did accordingly endeavouring to do, when she sunk by the mere weight on board; in sinking, the people ran to one side which occasioned her turning over, bottom upwards; I being able to swim, swam ashore." Ninety-nine people were drowned in the tragedy of whom one was Sheriff McCulloch of Dornoch. Because of Dornoch's exposed position, no fishing was carried on from here. Embo, with its rows of cottages at right angles to the sea, was where the fishermen lived. School records indicate that the fishermen left home for long periods at sea and were seen off at regular intervals by their families. They sailed from Little Ferry, which must have been somewhat different in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Getting away from Little Ferry must have been tricky—and coming in even trickier, for the tide ebbs swiftly from Loch Fleet and there is a treacherous bar seaward of the narrows. Tradition has it that the women of Embo followed the herring fleets down the east coast of Britain and formed part of the hardy crew of women who gutted and barrelled the fish. As I have mentioned earlier, some Gaelic is still spoken in Embo, and in other subtle ways the villagers retain their individual character and independence of spirit. While storms were occurring at sea round Dornoch in the early sixteen hundreds, there were human storms erupting in the streets of the town and around the area.



In 1607 there occurred the Pape Riots, so called because it involved three brothers Pape. The oldest was William Pape, schoolmaster and then resident minister in the town. He had invested his money wisely and became wealthy. Perhaps encouraged by their elder brother and his success, William was joined in Dornoch by his two brothers, Thomas and Charles. They both did well. Thomas was appointed minister at Rogart, while Charles became Sheriff Clerk of Sutherland. It would seem that they were too successful; and in time over-reached themselves by endeavouring to buy up the older tenements of the town and turn out the local inhabitants. Nevertheless, they might have continued to prosper but for a combination of circumstances which occurred on an evening in July, 1607.

The rivalry between the Earls of Caithness and Sutherland was profound, and when the Earl of Caithness came a-hunting on the borders of Sutherland, the Earl of Sutherland called out his men to bar their way. The men of Dornoch hurried off to join the Earl's host—except for a small group who had drunk too much to march with them. These met up with the Papes. Here is Sir Robert Gordon's account, for which I have used modern spelling. "Every man being departed from the Town of Dornoch unto this convention at Strathully, the year of God, 1607, except William Murray, a bow-maker, and some few others, who were also ready to go away next morning. Mr William and Thomas Pape, with some others of the ministry, had a meeting at Dornoch concerning some of the church affairs. After they had dissolved their meeting they went to breakfast to an inn of the town. As they were at breakfast one John McPhail entered the house and asked some drink for his money, which the mistress of the house refused to give him, thereby to be rid of his company, because she knew him to be a brawling fellow. John McPhail, taking this refusal in evil part, reproved the woman and spoke somewhat stubbornly to the ministers, who began to excuse her; whereupon Thomas Pape did threaten him, and he agame, thrust into Thomas his arm an arrow with a broad forked head, which then he held in his hand. So being parted and set asunder that time, William and his brother Thomas came the same evening to the churchyard, with their swords about them, which John McPhail perceiving, and taking it as a provocation, he went with all diligence and acquainted his nephew, Houcheon MacPhail, and his brother-in-law, William Murray, the bow-maker, therewith who, being glad to find this occasion whereby to revenge their old grudge against these brothers, they hastened forth, and meeting with them in the churchyard, they fell to a quarrelling and from quarrelling to fighting. Charles Pape had been all that day abroad and at return, understanding in what case his bretheren were, he came in preposterous haste to the fatal place of his end.

"They fought a little while; in end Charles hurt William Murray in the face; and whereupon William Murray killed him. William and Thomas (Pape) were both extremely wounded by John MacPhail and his nephew Houcheon, and were lying there for dead persons, without hope of recovery, but they recovered afterward beyond expectation. The offenders escaped because there was none in the town to apprehend them (except such as favoured

them), the inhabitants having gone to the assembly at Strathully. John MacPhail and his nephew Huchean have both since ended their days in Holland. William Murray yet lives (reserved as should seem) to a greater judgement. Mr William Pape and his brother, Thomas, thereupon left the County of Sutherland and settled themselves in Ross, where Thomas now dwelleth. Mr William died in the town of Nigg where he was made minister. Thus did these bretheren begin and end in this country; which I have declared at length to show us thereby, that man in full prosperity should never think too much of himself, nor condemn others upon whom it hath not pleased God to bestow such measure of gifts and benefits."

So much for the Papes. Some years later in 1620 there occurred another affray. The protagonists on this occasion were local aristocrats and the fight epitomised the deep-seated rivalry which existed between certain local noble families. The Gordons of Embo, and Sutherland of Duffus, who owned Skelbo Castle, were constantly quarrelling over the boundaries of the land between Coull and Skelbo. Sutherland of Duffus and seven others sent for young John Gordon of Embo to talk about the boundaries. John Gordon agreed to meet Duffus and his friends at the disputed boundary for talks. The talk swiftly degenerated into harsh words and then into violence. Before Gordon could draw his sword one of Duffus's party wounded him, then they all galloped off. Young Embo made his painful way home. News of his wounding quickly spread around the county and in no time there was a gathering of Gordons, Greys and some of the Earl of Sutherland's tenants, all intent on avenging the insult to Gordon of Embo. They all dashed away to Skelbo where they paraded around the castle challenging Duffus to come out and fight. At this point the Sheriff of Sutherland, Sir Alexander Gordon, appeared on the scene, together with John Gray, "Dean of Cathenyes." They prevailed on the besiegers to go home, and bound everybody to keep the peace. The peace seems to have been kept, briefly; but four years later some twenty-two men, all armed to the teeth, lay in wait for Duffus returning from church at Dornoch. Their ambush was frustrated however because on that Sunday Duffus decided to stay at home.

An uneasy peace settled over the area for a while and the arena for the Duffus/Gordon quarrel became the court-room, where at last the disputed boundaries were sorted out. The Laird of Duffus obviously revelled in trouble however. He was not content to quarrel with the Gordons of Embo; he also took issue with the Earl of Sutherland. The Gordons of Embo were allies of the Earl whose quarrel with Duffus re-opened old sores.. In 1625 John Gordon of Embo met John Sutherland of Clyne, brother to Sutherland of Duffus, on the road between Cyderhall and Skibo. They were both on horseback and both accompanied by a friend. There was a fight. John Gordon had a stick in his hand with which he proceeded to belabour the unfortunate Clyne. After thumping him with his stick Gordon drew his sword and in the ensuing duel wounded Clyne in the head and the hand. Clyne got away with his life but John Gordon was apprehended and imprisoned in Edinburgh. Thanks to his friendship with the Earl of Sutherland,

he was fined and then released. Duffus was more angered at the beating of Clyne than at his wounding and thus the quarrel continued until the death of the Laird of Duffus when a reconciliation between the families was arranged.

CHAPTER 7

"For God, For the Cause, For the Church, For the Laws"

While these parochial events had stirred the life of Dornoch, on the broader canvas of Scotland violent events were being presaged. During the seventeenth century the struggle for supremacy between Romanism and Protestantism continued and grew apace. Again, this quarrel reflected the differing views of sovereign and people. Episcopacy was enforced by the King while the people embraced Presbyterianism. This does not seem to have been true in the North however, where, in the Diocese of Caithness the Roman Church still retained its hold, "although for his own ends the Bishop had professed to espouse the new faith." Throughout the rest of Scotland cathedrals were defaced, the abbeys were wrecked and the parish churches were denuded of their images.

John Knox's "Book of Common Order" was in general use in Scottish Churches but James VI was determined that the Episcopacy should triumph. This was also the wish of his successor, Charles I, who tried vigorously to impose an Anglican Liturgy upon the people. The result was the Signing of the Covenant in Greyfriars' Churchyard, Edinburgh, on February 28th, 1638, and the first signature was that of the Earl of Sutherland.

For the next few years high drama fills the pages of British history books. In England, Civil War broke out. Royalists fought with Roundheads. Charles I was captured, tried and executed. Cromwell and the Commonwealth lasted until 1660. To a very great extent the citizens of Dornoch reviewed these happenings from afar. Three events are worth recording prior to the restoration of Charles II.

In 1649 the Earl of Sutherland was ordered by the Estates "to bring into subjection the Mackays of Strathnaver" who were adherents of the Royal cause. No doubt the Earl carried out his task with considerable energy, since he could in the name of duty, sort out his old enemies.

The second event concerns the great and tragic Earl of Montrose, one of the few honourable men to shine through a period of dark treachery and cowardly vacillation. Montrose came to the North near the end of his campaigns and as it transpired, his life. He landed in Caithness in 1650 and marched to occupy the Ord. The Earl of Sutherland hastily garrisoned Dunrobin, Skibo, Skelbo and Dornoch and then crossed the Meikle Ferry to a council of war in Tain, taking with him 300 men.

Montrose marched South, passing Dunrobin and Skibo. He inflicted no damage upon the lands of his former friend but kept his troops in hand until he came to the Ross-shire border. The defeat of Montrose at Carbisdale, his escape, pursuit and capture in the wilds of Assynt and his shameful trial and execution cannot be told in this history. An incident which followed his capture may amuse readers however. Montrose was brought back to Skibo Castle where he was kept for two days. The Warden of Skibo



was Mr Gray whose wife was a woman of spirit and some breeding. She prepared a dinner for Montrose and his guards, and sat her down at the head of the table, proposing that Montrose should sit at her right hand. Holbourn, who was the officer in charge of the escort, decided that this could not be, and took the right-hand chair himself. Montrose was placed between Holbourn and another officer. Seeing this, Mrs Gray flew into a rage, and seizing the centrepiece of the dinner—a roasted leg of lamb—hit Holbourn over the head with it. Holbourn was knocked from his seat and his uniform ruined by gravy and mutton fat. His fellow officers were shattered at this incident and were concerned that this was a rescue attempt. In fact, Mrs Gray felt that the proprieties had not been observed and that though Montrose might be a prisoner, yet he was still a Marquis, and therefore superior in rank to all the others. Once Mrs Gray had made her point all were seated again and the roast consumed. Holbourn did not forget the attack. He reported the occurrence to the Privy Council and Gray was heavily fined for his wife's conduct.

Less humorous was the third event in our seventeenth century saga—"The Rising of Glencairn," 1653.

After the death of Charles I a number of attempts were made to restore his son Charles II to the throne. Cromwell thwarted these efforts and in the process captured one of Charles II's commanders, General Middleton. Middleton was imprisoned in the Tower of London, but he escaped and was able to join Charles in France. In August, 1653, the Earl of Glencairn raised an army for the King at Lochearn and led it, by Badenoch and Aberdeenshire, to Elgin. General Middleton was ordered by Charles II to go to Scotland and take command of this army. He landed at Little Ferry in February, 1654, and brought with him a large supply of powder and arms, which he stored in Skelbo Castle. Then he and his officers removed themselves to Dornoch, which they made their headquarters, to await the arrival of Glencairn's army.

On a Saturday in mid-March the army, consisting of 3,500 footmen and 1,500 horse, were drawn up in review on Dornoch Links. After the inspection, Middleton's officers and Glencairn's—between whom there was intense rivalry, were invited to take wine with General Middleton. The General had had a "windfall" in the form of an English ship, loaded with about 40 tuns (barrels) of French wine, which had been wrecked locally. Glencairn contributed a tun of his own wine and there was quite a party.

In the course of the party, Glencairn made a speech commending them all to their new commander and wishing them well. Full of good wine and doubtless having arrived at the stage of inebriation where maudlin sentimentality takes over from bonhomie, several of Glencairn's officers were in tears and vowed to follow their old commander wherever he should lead them.

In the first instance he did not lead them very far—just down the Meikle Road in fact, to dine at the Laird of Kettle's house (i.e. Cuthill just beyond Cyderhall). They sat themselves down for dinner, after which Glencairn felt himself impelled to make another speech. In this he commended his officers to Middleton's care and told him what a splendid body of men he had inherited. At this point one of Middleton's officers, Sir George Monro, leaped

to his feet shouting "By God, my Lord, the men you speak of are nothing but a number of thieves and robbers and ere long I will bring another sort of men into the field."

The Laird of Glengarie thought the words were aimed at him and staggered to his feet, his Highland honour outraged and his hand grasping his broadsword. Glencairn stayed Glengarie's anger and said to Monro, "You, Sir, are a base liar, for they are neither thieves nor robbers but gallant gentlemen and good soldiers." At this point Middleton intervened and commanded them both to keep the peace. "My Lord and You, Sir George, this is not the way to do the King's service; you must not fall out among yourselves, therefore I will have you both to be friends," and immediately calling for a glass of wine, said, "My Lord Glencairn, I think you did the greatest wrong in giving Sir George the lie, you shall drink to him and he shall pledge you." Glencairn drank his glass to Sir George who muttered surly words but did not pledge Glencairn.

Middleton then returned to Dornoch, leaving Glencairn at Kettle. While Glencairn was at supper Alexander Monro arrived—Sir George's brother. He was made welcome and departed finally, having spoken privately with Glencairn. Monro had come on his brother's behalf to challenge Glencairn to a duel. No one knew except Glencairn's servant, John White, who crept out with Glencairn into the night to meet Sir George Monro.

They met at dawn near Cyderhall on the Dornoch road. The first exchanges were from horseback with pistols. The pistols were ineffective so they set to with swords. Monro was cut on the bridle-hand. They then dismounted and attacked each other on foot. Glencairn slashed Monro above the eyes which blinded him with blood. His Lordship moved in to run him through but was prevented from doing so by his man, John White. Glencairn returned to Kettle and Monro was taken into Dornoch by his brother. By 6 a.m. Glencairn was under arrest, his sword taken from him by General Middleton.

Meanwhile junior officers were also involved in duelling. One of Monro's friends, a Captain Livingstone, challenged a gentleman named Lindsay over "who had been in the right," Glencairn or Monro. Lindsay killed Livingstone on Dornoch Links, by stabbing him through the heart. The duel took place on a Sunday morning. By Sunday afternoon Lindsay had been arrested, tried by court-martial, found guilty and shot at the Dornoch Cross.

Middleton's summary justice may have prevented further bloodshed but it didn't heal the breach. Glencairn took his own troop and escaped through Assynt, coming at last to safety in Killin though pursued by Middleton's men.

Middleton's troops remained briefly in Dornoch but departed, much to the relief of the townsfolk, when General Monk's army, whom they had actually come to fight, marched north. The two armies met later at Dalnaspidal, when Middleton's troops were defeated and dispersed, and Middleton himself escaped only with great difficulty.

Dornoch and The '45

CHAPTER 8

One could argue that organised violence and the rivalry between clansmen, and between one noble house and another, began to diminish in Scotland after 1745, when the attempt to restore a Stuart king had failed, and when Cumberland's troop patrolled the Highlands. An account of Dornoch's part in the '45 will complete the tale of bloody warfare and strife which was the town's regular diet from the time the first Viking ship hove over the horizon.

Bentinck's words set the scene and indicate where local allegiance lay: "Dornoch, notwithstanding its remote situation, played its own part in the stirring events of the Forty-Five and contributed its own share towards the suppression of the Rising in favour of Prince Charles Edward Stuart."

What happened here after Bonnie Prince Charlie raised his standard at Glenfinnan is complex, and involved a great deal of to-ing and fro-ing without much action. I will confine my account to the occasions when shots were fired, or almost fired in anger. On the 5th August, 1745, the Earl of Sutherland received a letter from the Lord Advocate warning him of the Prince's intended landing, and asking him to use his influence in the North "for the safety of the Government and for the preservation of public peace." The Earl promptly raised a force of 2,000 men, 373 of whom came from Dornoch—larger than any other Sutherland contingent. The Earl of Loudoun, who commanded the King's (George) forces in the North, complimented the Earl on the quality of his men and asked for a company to join Cope's army at Inverness. A Captain Mackay and 150 picked men were sent. They must have been good because Loudoun soon asked for another company. They were not so good apparently, for the records show a regular pattern of desertion. Prince Charles had the same trouble with his Highlanders and the reason is simple. The Highlanders loved their homes, their land and their cattle. When they felt that they were wasting their time, hanging about between battles as it were, the call of home became irresistible and they went 'over the hill'. In the early days the war went badly for King George's men. Johnny Cope was sent packing at Prestonpans and Prince Charles' star seemed to be in the ascendant. Loudoun's army in the north very quickly had to abandon Inverness. He fled towards Tain and asked the Earl of Sutherland to have boats ready to ferry his army across the Dornoch Firth at Meikle. Loudoun's army crossed the Meikle Ferry on 23rd February, 1746, and marched to Dornoch.

Loudoun was pursued by the Earl of Cromartie whose army seems to have kept its movements very secret during the early stages of the campaign. Loudoun expected to be attacked from the west, but on or about February 25th, Lord Cromartie's army appeared on the south bank of the firth at Tain.

They crossed on March 20th under cover of dense fog. Loudoun was taken completely by surprise. He made no effort to oppose the landing at Meikle. Two hundred of Loudoun's men under a Major Mackenzie were captured by Cromartie's men as they marched on Dornoch. Loudoun abandoned Dornoch and hastily retreated west pursued by the Earl of Perth who gave up the

chase at the head of Loch Shin. It is said that Loudoun himself kept going west and eventually disappeared into the mists of Skye and was never heard of again. The Sutherland Militia meanwhile took to their native hills. The Earl of Sutherland escaped by boat. Four ships lying at Little Ferry, full of arms, were taken by the Jacobite troops.

The Earl of Cromartie made his headquarters at Skelbo Castle from where he sent out his son, Lord MacLeod, to raise men and money for the Prince's service. Once MacLeod had left on this mission to Caithness, Cromartie moved to Dunrobin. From Dunrobin he was ordered to march post-haste to Inverness in order to strengthen the Prince's army which was gathered on Culloden Moor. He hurried to obey the Prince's orders. In doing so, he did not take into account the Sutherland militia who had been receiving food and ammunition brought to them by their wives, who concealed the supplies under their petticoats.

When Cromartie's forces reached Culmally they were ambushed by a force under the command of Ensign Mackay. Mackay's attack was highly successful. Cromartie's force was dispersed. Some fled back to Dunrobin while others made for Little Ferry where they were killed on the shore. A group seeking to escape across the ferry were drowned.

The militia, following up those who retreated to Dunrobin, forced entrance to the castle, whose cannon had been removed to Gallows Hill in Dornoch in order to repel any landing from the sea. The Earl of Cromartie was found concealed under the hangings of a chair in the Countess of Sutherland's apartments — she being secretly in sympathy with the Jacobite cause.

Thus ended the Battle of Golspie, April 15th, 1746. On April 16th the Prince's Army was shattered by the Duke of Cumberland's troops on Culloden Moor and the '45 was over save for the excesses and the bitterness which followed.

CHAPTER 9

The nineteenth century in Dornoch was quiet compared with those eventful centuries which preceded it.

The town was apparently very down at heel and decrepit in the late 17 and 1800's and this was due in no small part to the depredations of the "drunken and licentious soldiery" who had occupied the place at various times, and to the activities of the local clans.

As I have described in another book ("The Story of Town Jail, Dornoch"), the Tolbooth fell down, the Dornoch Castle Tower was in a bad way and the Cathedral in ruins.

The Church Sessions were active and in an earlier time had been deeply concerned with the suppression of witchcraft (again see "Town Jail" booklet).

After Culloden the major events in Dornoch concerned the rebuilding of the town by the Duchess of Sutherland, who was also responsible for the major restoration of the Cathedral in 1835.

Prior to 1807 there had been no roads in Sutherland and most of the communications with the South had been by sea. The Sutherland portion of the road from Inverness to Thurso (which traverses

the east coast from Bonar to Evelix and the Mound to the Ord) was completed in 1812 - 13, when the Kyle was spanned by Bonar Bridge. Within 20 years from that date, upwards of 400 miles of road were constructed throughout the county. In 1819 a mail coach began a daily service from Tain to Thurso.

There was an outbreak of cholera in 1831 - 32 which had its sad implications for the town but probably did more for Dornoch's sanitation than years of council minutes could have done.

The Golf Course, the second oldest in Birtain, was given the title "Royal Dornoch" by Edward VII—an excellent history of "The Royal Dornoch Golf Club" by Donald Ross is recommended to readers.

I have given here a brief history of the town and the area around, which I hope will add to visitors' interests as they view the places which I have mentioned. My writings are deeply indebted to the book by C. D. Bentinck, "Dornoch Cathedral and Parish." Bentinck drew heavily for his material on the Charter-room at Dunrobin Castle, where a priceless collection of letters, deeds and other documents, some going back to the twelfth century, are kept. He also had access to the Skibo Castle library, the Royal Burgh of Dornoch records, and the work of various academics.

Sheet 22 Ordnance Survey, Dornoch, 1 inch to the mile, is essential to discovering some of the places which I have mentioned.

Skelbo Castle

"A fine example of an early Norman fortress of the Motte-and-Bailey type"—Dr Simpson, Aberdeen.

More ancient ruins are of square keep of which only N. wall remains.

Two storeys, neither of which is vaulted.

Annexe outside wall, access by a door from basement, and by a door from annexe into a "mural garderobe" on 1st floor of keep. Gatehouse, at S.E. corner, and traces of a round tower here.

S.W. corner ruins of a plain oblong building two storeys high, dating from the seventeenth century.

Original masonry very ancient and difficult to date.

Keep-towers and barmkin walls came in during the fourteenth century after the "War of Independence."

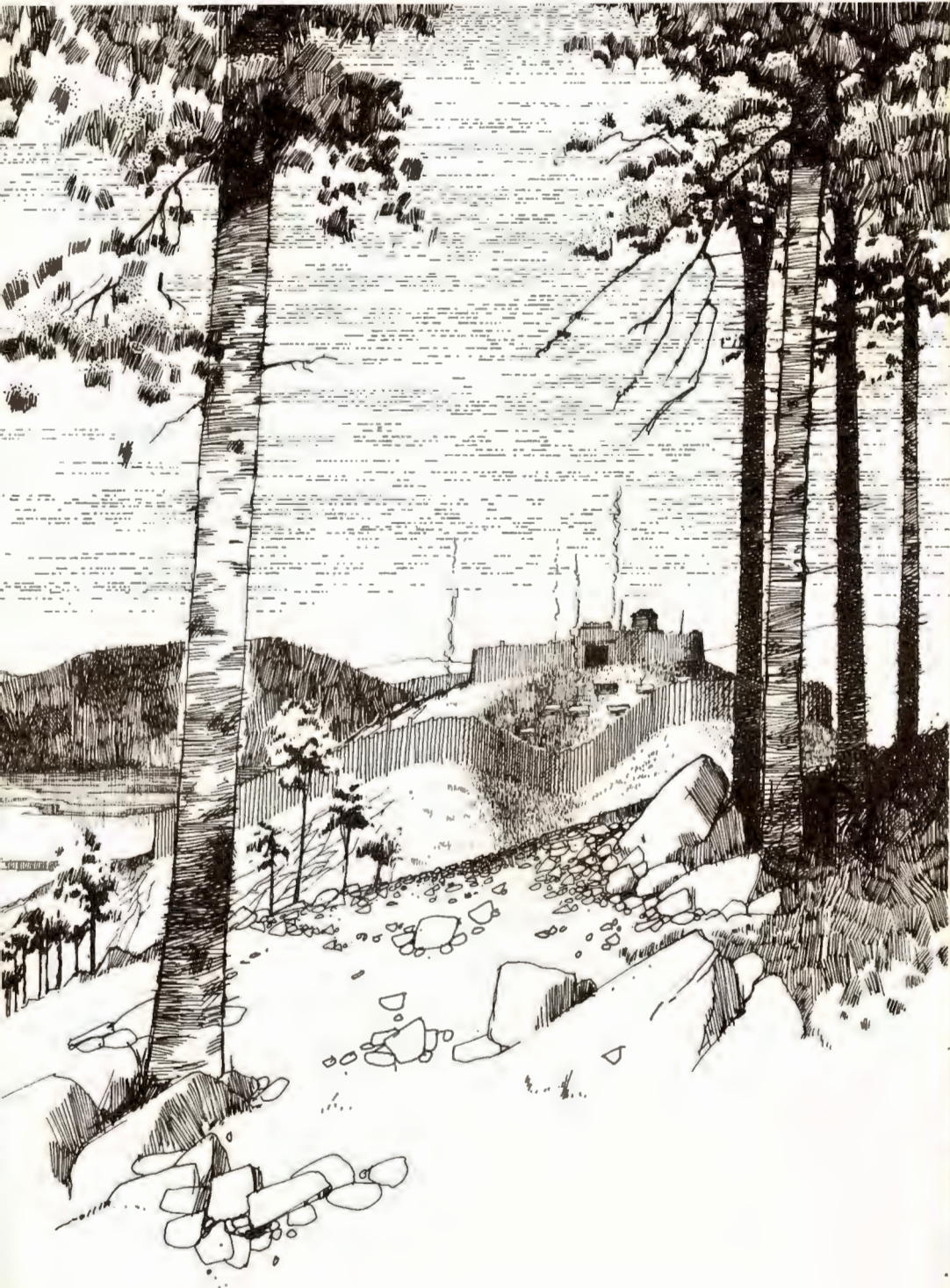
First mention of Skelbo occurs in a charter by which Hugo Freskyn in 1211 granted his lands of Skelbo to his kinsman, Gilbert de Moravia, Archdeacon of Moray, who became Bishop of Caithness in 1223 and then made over Skelbo to his brother Richard. Richard in residence at Skelbo in 1245 when the Norsemen landed at Unes (Little Ferry) and he had the task of containing them. This he did but was slain in the ensuing battle of Embo. Skelbo then probably earth and timber.

1290—Sunday, October 1st. English and Scottish Commissioners appointed to meet the Maid of Norway received news of her death during voyage from Norway to Orkney.

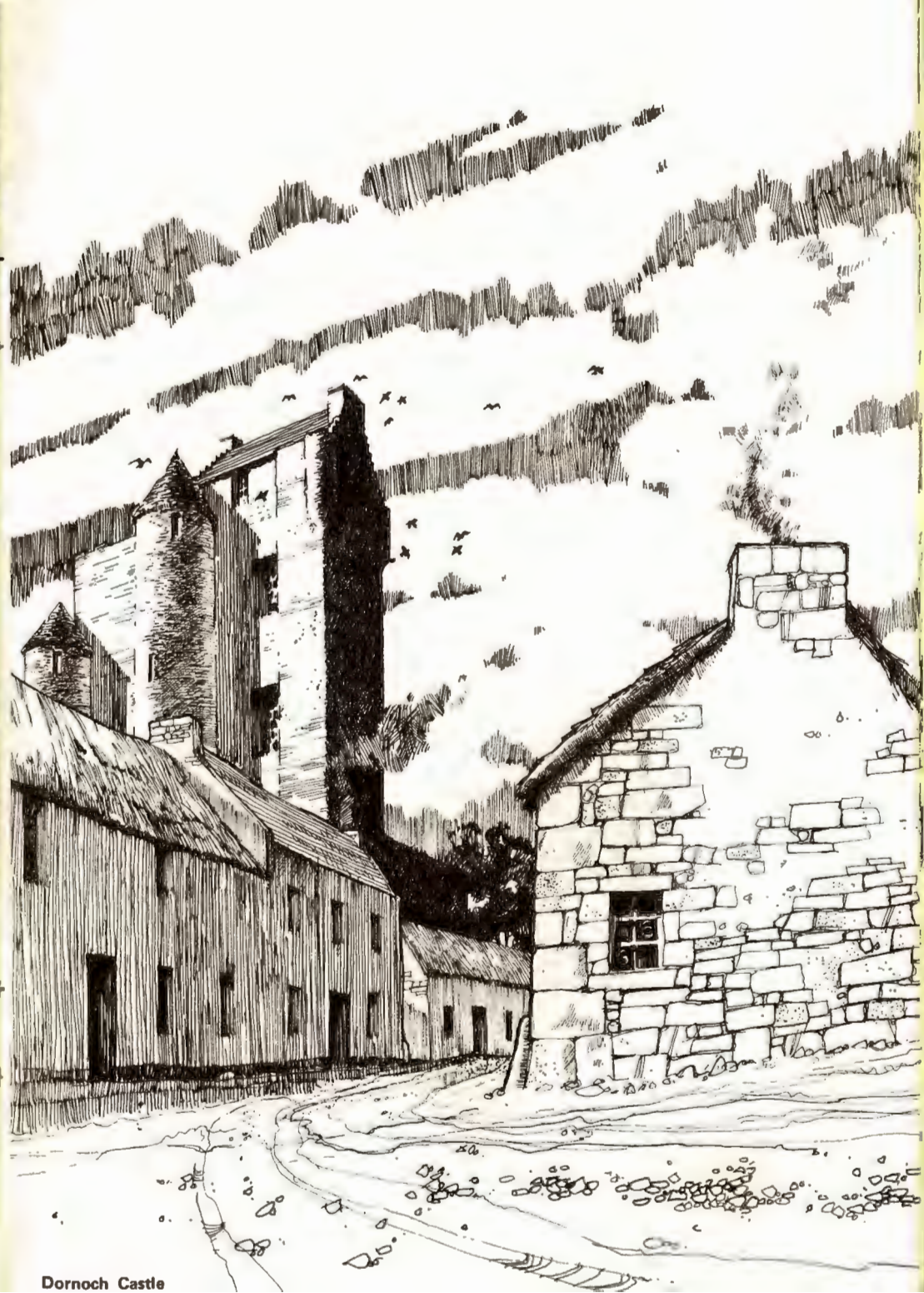
1330—Kenneth, Earl of Sutherland, gave Skelbo to Reginald Moray of Culbyn.

1440—Became property of the Kynnard family.

1494—Castle taken by John, Earl of Sutherland, who was ordered to give it back to Thomas Kynnard plus the two children of John of Moray who were held captive.



Skelbo Castle



Dornoch Castle

1529—John Kynnard sold castle to William Sutherland of Duffus. Held subsequently by successive Sutherlands.
 1621—Sunday, June 10th—Skelbo surrounded by Gordons of Embo and their supporters, gathered to avenge the wounding of young Embo by Sutherlands of Duffus.
 1654—General Middleton lands Little Ferry and stores arms and ammunition in Skelbo.
 1746—Occupied by Jacobite troops under Earl of Cromartie.
 1769—Skelbo was, according to Pennant, "a great pile of building surrounded with a rampart. The present house is still habitable. The situation is most beautiful and a fine house there would have a noble effect."

Dornoch Castle

Built in the sixteenth century as residence for the Bishops. Earliest documentary evidence in Charter of 1557 when Bishop Robert Stewart appointed the Earl of Sutherland and his heirs hereditary constables of the Palace of Dornoch. Besieged in 1570 by the Mackays when the Castle held out for a week. Castle burned but not destroyed. John, Earl of Sutherland, entertained Earl of Orkney there in 1604 and died there in 1615. Earls of Sutherland were custodians but Bishops reserved their rights to occupy it when visiting their diocese. Repairs in 1720 by Lord Strathnaver. 1746-1760—It was ruinous, possibly due to its occupation by the Earl of Cromartie's troops. Still in ruins in 1769 and seems to have remained so until 1812 when extensive repairs were carried out under the direction of Mr Young of Inverugie, Marquis of Stafford's Commissioner.
Court House and Jail from 1813 to 1850—See other Booklet
 1922—Purchased by Mrs Sykes of Borroboll who made extensive additions and alterations. Now an Hotel.

Skibo Castle

Included in the grant of lands made by Hugo Freskyn in 1211 to his kinsman, Gilbert, Archdeacon of Moray, who probably made it his home after his appointment to the Bishopric of Caithness in 1223. Residence of the Bishops even after erection of the Bishop's Palace at Dornoch in the sixteenth century. 1544—Captured by Mackay of Strathnaver and retaken by Captain James Cullen. 1601—Referred to in the new grant of the Earldom of Sutherland. Sixteenth Century—Thatched dwelling in a sorry state of repair. Seventeenth Century—Skibo and Dornoch Cathedral, first buildings to be roofed with new slate found in the neighbouring quarries. 1760—Bishop Pococke on a visit says: "It was a castle and county seat of the Bishops of Caithness, very pleasantly situated over a hanging ground which was improved into very good garden, and remains to this day much in the same state, except that there are walls built, which produce all sorts of fruit in great perfection, and I believe not more than six weeks later than about London." Associated with the Gray family—progenitor Sir William Gray, Chantor of Ross, whose eldest son, John, became hereditary constable, 1565.



Skibo Castle

1651—Montrose entertained there by Jean Seton, niece of Earl of Winton and wife to Robert Gray. Gray connection ended in 1776 with death of Robert Gray, a soldier who lost his inheritance through legal proceedings instituted against him by his two half-sisters, Isobel and Jean, in 1740. 1751—Sir Patrick Dowall of Edinburgh became owner and whose nephew, Hon. George Mackay, son of Lord Reay, became Laird of Skibo in 1751. He made extensive improvements but got into debt and had to sell the property. 1769—Skibo had been purchased by William Gray, a member of the old Skibo family, who had made his fortune in Jamaica. He restored the castle to "a house built in very elegant taste." 1786—Acquired by George Dempster of Dunnichen, Forfarshire, whose brother purchased the adjoining estates of Pulrossie and Overskibo at the same time. They appear to have been well liked by all and sundry. George Dempster died in 1818 at the age of 86. The house remained in the possession of his family until it was purchased by Mr Evan C. Sutherland who renovated and enlarged the castle and made other improvements on the estate. 1895—Bought by Andrew Carnegie whose family still own it.

Proncy Castle

"The earliest history of Proncy Castle, like the origin of its name, is wrapped in obscurity." Part of lands granted by Hugo Freskyn to Gilbert de Moravia and then given by him to his brother Richard.

Seems to have been an early Norman motte—a fortified site on a mound. The mound was later crested by a small stone castle—now just mossy foundation stones. The mound was probably natural, scarped to uniform slopes 12 - 15 ft. high above the ridge to the south, from which it has been isolated by a ditch of which traces remain.

No mention of Proncy pre 1525 when Adam Gordon, Earl of Sutherland, granted the lands and lordship of Proncy to William Sutherland of Duffus in succession to the deceased Hugh Sutherland.

1562—Alexander Sutherland inherited the lands and barony of Proncy, which included "Proncy Castletown, Tower and Fortalice thereof."

Embo House

The old house is said to have been destroyed by fire towards the close of the eighteenth century. The present building was erected by Mr Robert Hume Gordon.

Home of the Gordons of Embo. Friends of House of Sutherland initially but later supported Mackays of Strathnaver.

Fierce arguments between lairds of Embo and Skelbo regarding the border line between Coul and Skelbo which developed into a vendetta and led to bloodshed and disorder.

Purchased in 1835 by 2nd Duke of Sutherland when its association with the Gordon family ended.

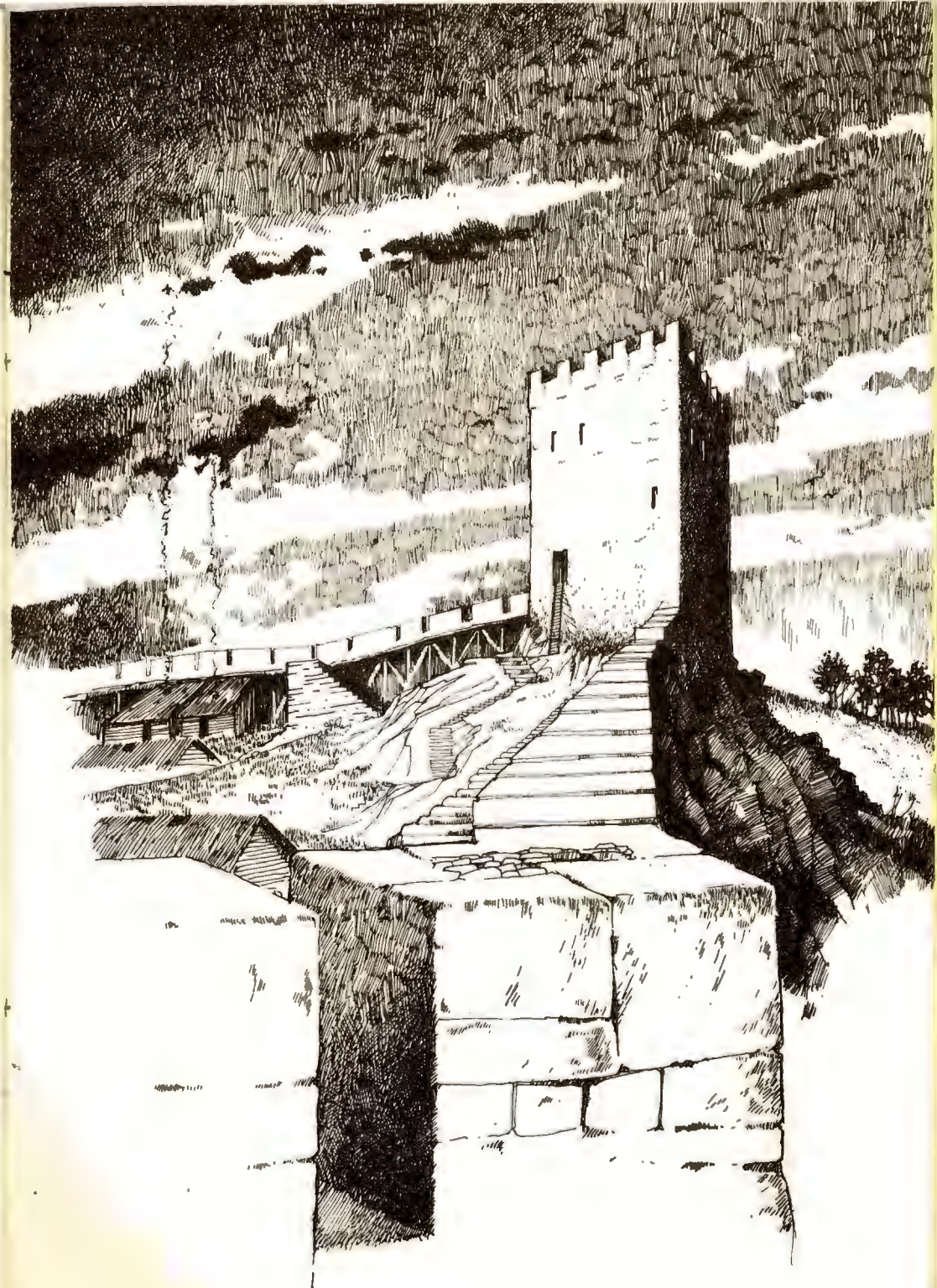
Now the home of Mr John MacIntosh.

Cyderhall

Sinvarthoch, i.e. Sigurd's cairn or burial mound.

Residence, according to tradition, of Sigurd Eynestein, a Viking jarl who is supposed to be buried on Cnocskardi.

Now farmed by Mr Gordon Munro.



Proncy Castle