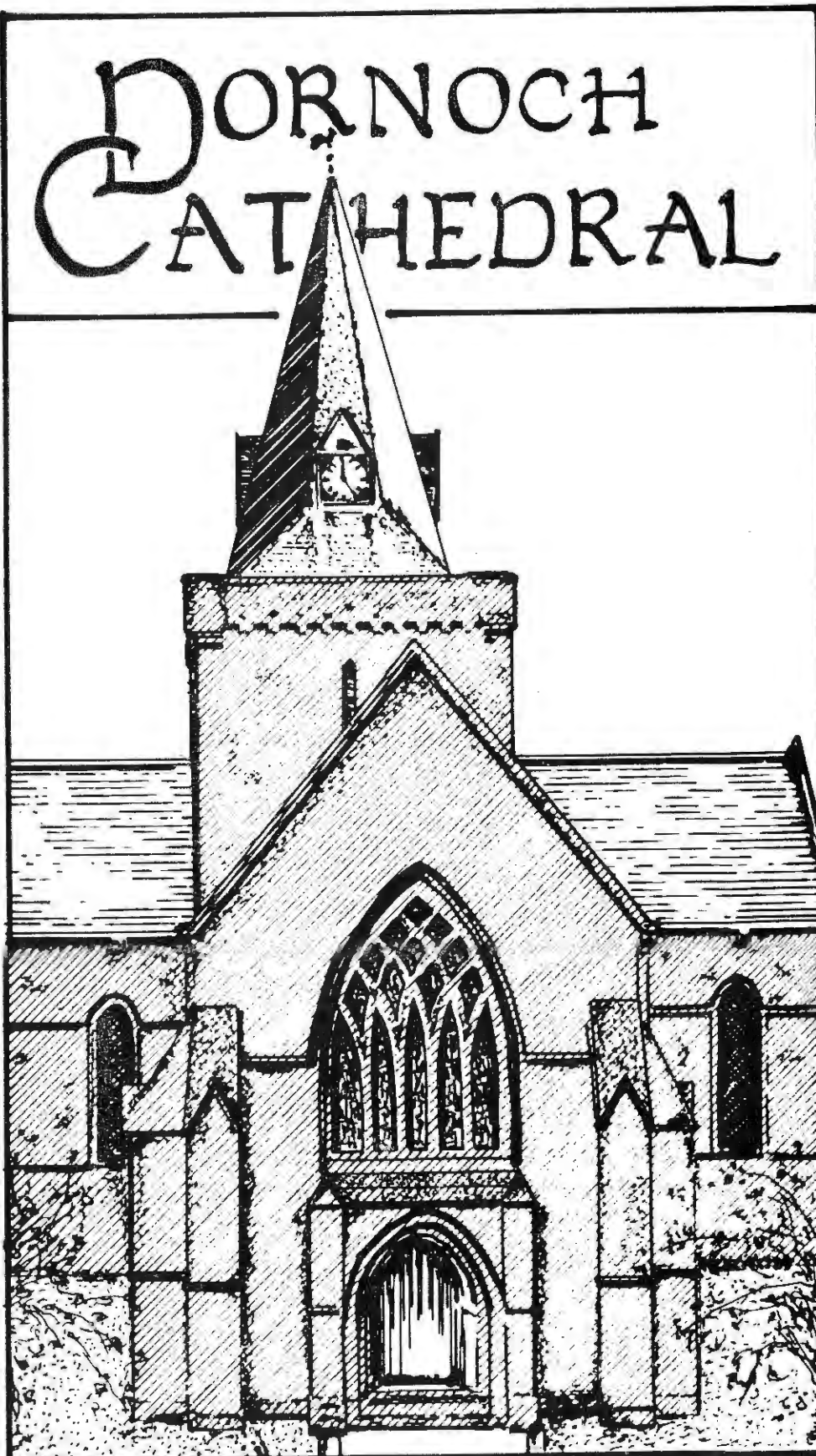


Celebrating 750 Years of Worship

by James Simpson
Minister of Dornoch Cathedral



**750 YEARS
of
WORSHIP & SERVICE
1239-1989.**

NEXT YEAR in Dornoch we are taking our heritage NOT for granted, but for gratitude.

In June and July of 1989 we are going to celebrate the fact that the Cathedral will be 750 years old. Although the building was started around 1224, the first service was not held until 1239. That year the Cathedral, which had been in the womb, or in the making for 15 years, became a living thing. It came alive with the praise of God. What we are in fact celebrating are 750 years of worship in the Cathedral, and 750 years of service by the church to the community.

Dornoch and not just the church will celebrate this historic occasion, for our town literally grew up round the Cathedral. The Cathedral does not dominate the town like Durham Cathedral. It does not soar above it like Salisbury, but it is nonetheless the heart of our town, and I hope also the soul of our town.

It is my hope that these celebrations, which will include special services, pageants, music festivals, floral festivals and outdoor activities like a medieval fair and dancing in the town square, will not attract many visitors, but will unlock the doors behind which some local people hide their potential and capacity for participating.

We hope these celebrations will call forth the many talents that there are in people, the talent to sing or act or paint or sew, the talent to make beautiful things. I hope that as a community we will have a happy time together. It is surely significant that in the new Testament there are almost three hundred references to joy, gladness, merriment, rejoicing, delighting, laughing. To celebrate and have a town party is to be in the Biblical tradition.

Has it ever struck you how many of Jesus's parables were about parties? Think of the party given for the returning prodigal. Think of the party which the wedding guests missed because they refused to wear the right clothes. Think of the party which the foolish virgins missed because they had no oil in their lamps.

Let me share with you a little of the thinking of our committee with regard to these 1989 celebrations. Let me, in other words, try and put these celebrations into a bigger context.

In November each year the American people give thanks for the coming of the Pilgrim Fathers. They have not always done this. In fact Abraham Lincoln in his day was concerned that for two hundred years the Pilgrim Fathers had been almost forgotten. This was why there was initiated a National Day of Thanksgiving, a day in which the American nation might stop and recall God's goodness in sending the Pilgrim Fathers to their shores.

I feel we in Dornoch have for too long neglected part of our heritage, the coming of Gilbert Murray in the 13th Century to this part of the world. Within this church which Gilbert designed and built and paid for, there is scant tribute to him. He is essentially without honour in his own church.

The stained glass windows which we have commemorate many others who have worshipped or lived in this area, but not Gilbert the builder, the founder.

We intend therefore as part of our celebrations to rectify this, to instal in Bishop Gilbert's honour a window in which he will figure prominently. What a debt we in Dornoch, and the Church in Scotland, owes to Gilbert. He not only built this church but was involved in building the great Elgin Cathedral — now unfortunately a ruin — and a lovely church in Thurso, now also a ruin.

As well as commemorating this anniversary in stained glass, we plan also to commemorate it in tapestry. Those interested in tapestry are making cushions for the elders' seats, the communion chairs and the choir stalls. The tapestries will bear the dates 1239-1989, but more than that they will celebrate the wonder of the world around us here in Sutherland. The cushions for the elders' seats will, for example, portray the awesome wonder of the wild flowers which God has scattered in such profusion in the fields, the hills and river banks.

As a committee we thought we were striking new ground in choosing the theme "Consider the Lilies of the Fields", but I recently learned that the kneelers in York Minster also celebrate in tapestry the wonder of wild flowers. It must be a case of great minds!

We are also planning a pageant in the Cathedral. The script is by Ian MacKay of the Highland Region Libraries Department. This pageant will involve people of all ages — a pageant which will remind us not only of the peak moments in the history of our Cathedral, like the coming of Bishop Gilbert, but a pageant which will also remind us of the patience of God and His amazing willingness to forgive his church and go on believing in her despite her many shortcomings, for there have been very inglorious chapters in the Cathedral's history, as well as glorious chapters.

Alan Barclay, the deputy rector of Golspie High School, who has produced several fine musicals, has kindly agreed to produce the pageant.

The consecration service in 1239 seems to have been a very moving occasion. During that first service the bones of Gilbert's predecessor, Bishop Adam, who had been murdered in 1222, were brought from Caithness and reverently interred in the Cathedral.

Bernard Levin is surely right when he says, "It would be as surprising to find an era or a culture that did not surround death with elaborate and profound beliefs and rituals as it would be to find a race of men with three legs. The dignity shown to human remains is a mark of true civilisation."

It is surely therefore strangely



Truly the heart of the Royal Burgh, the Cathedral sits squarely in the centre of the town.

Photo: Highland Photographic

appropriate that 750 years after Bishop Adam's remains were brought here, we should as part of our celebrations be planning to build within the North Transept, behind the organ, a little room, which among other things can be used as a resting place for our loved ones from the time of their death until the time of the funeral. This little room should enable us to treat with greater respect and reverence mortal remains that once bore the hallmark of the divine image.

The committee are also very much aware that the church must be more than simply a history book in stone and glass, and more than simply a resting place for the dead. The committee were unanimously of the mind that this historic occasion should be a time when we not only love ourselves and enjoy ourselves, and do things for ourselves, but a time also when we do something for others.

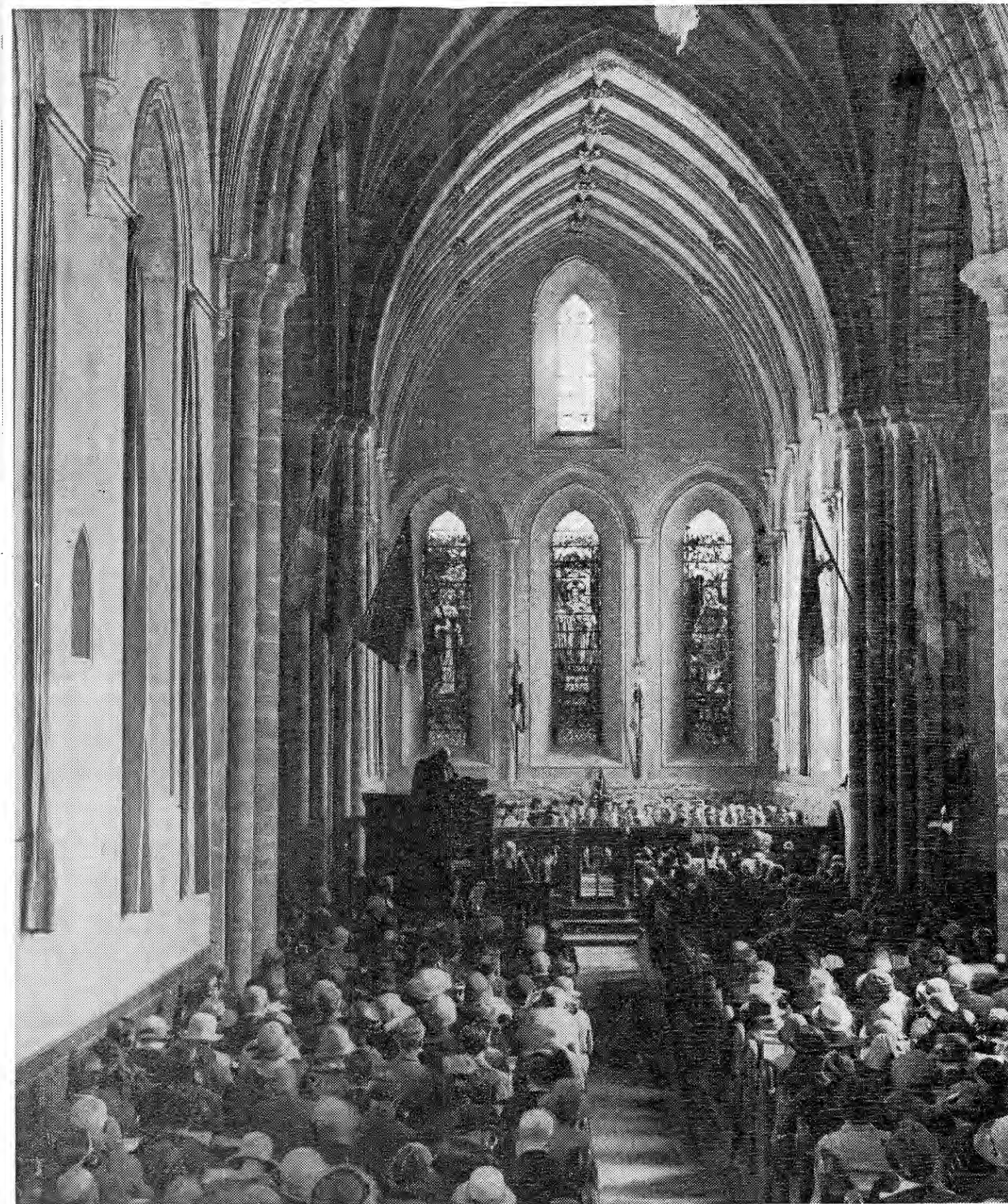
It is our intention therefore to undertake several projects for others, some at home and one abroad. We have already initiated discussions concerning what we might do for the Sutherland Society for the Mentally Handicapped, and for Oversteps, our local eventide home.

The overseas project involves supporting a children's hospital in Malawi in Africa. The hospital at Mulanje was started by the Church of Scotland many years ago. More and more the staff there are having to deal with problems stemming from malnutrition.

We have written to the various organisations in the town asking for their practical help with these celebrations. We are also soon going to be writing to people throughout the length and breadth of Britain for whom Dornoch is still home, or perhaps "a second home", and those in other lands who have warm memories of Dornoch and the Cathedral. With the letter we will enclose a printed pamphlet listing a few of the special events we are planning and the projects we would like to undertake.

We hope that as a result of this advance notice many of the people will make arrangements to visit us next year, to come and holiday in Dornoch and join in our celebrations. We hope they will also respond to our appeal to raise £50,000 so that as well as making these celebrations memorable and joyful, we might once again be seen as a church to be "loving our neighbours as ourselves".

Should any readers who have



This was how *The Bulletin* photographer saw the scene in Dornoch Cathedral at the 700th anniversary service, which was jointly conducted by the Right Rev Dr David Cathels, Moderator of the Church of Scotland, and the Right Rev Dr Alexander Inch, Moderator of the United Free Church.

Worldwide Appeal for Assistance

To finance these celebrations and projects the committee, under the chairmanship of Lord Strathnaver, are launching an international appeal for £50,000.

With all the goodwill that already exists for the Cathedral, the committee feel certain this target can be reached, and that these celebrations will be truly worthy of this very special anniversary.

Correspondence and contributions should be sent to: Rev James Simpson, Cathedral Manse, DORNOCH IV25 3HN, Scotland, UK. Cheques should be made payable to "Dornoch Cathedral 750th".



This was the county booth at the colourful medieval fête to celebrate St Barr's Fayre in the septcentenary year. Stall-holders Mrs James Menzies of Blarich, Rogart, hands over a capon to Dr MacLachlan, one-time Provost of Dornoch. Miss Tita Sutherland, still alive today, is on the right of the picture.