



# The Book of Ross

---

BY

D. MACDONALD, L.R.I.B.A., F.R.I.A.S.

AND

# Sutherland and Caithness

---

BY

A. POLSON, F.S.A. Scot., F.E.I.S.

Descriptive, Historical, and Antiquarian Notes

NUMEROUS ILLUSTRATIONS.

PRICE ONE SHILLING AND SIXPENCE.

Dingwall: GEORGE SOUTER.



the canny Sutherlanders in battle array in a favourable position. The hardy sea-rovers accepted fight, and a desperate struggle between heroes ensued. Though driven down the slope, they continued to fight on the plain. Several ships were burnt, others escaped, but the cairns still there attest to the great number slain.

Further on is the village of Spinningdale, so called because at one time there was a cotton factory here, established by an English company, and the place was becoming important when it was destroyed by fire in 1809 and never rebuilt. The gaunt ruins still stand.

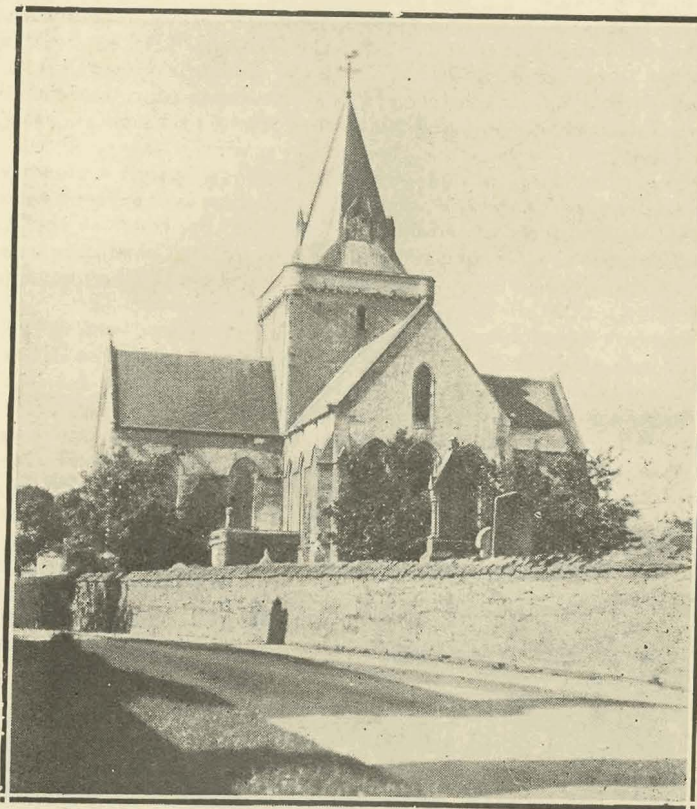
The next object of interest is the historic and now palatial Skibo Castle, which was largely rebuilt by the late Andrew Carnegie at a cost of about £100,000. It was plundered and destroyed by the Mackays in 1545. Since then it has had many proprietors. Montrose was brought here on his way from Assynt to Edinburgh. At that time Jane Seaton, a niece of the Earl of Winton and Eglinton, was chatelaine. She took pity on the prisoner in his woebegone condition and at once prepared a sumptuous repast, and requested Montrose to take the seat of honour. Before he could do so, the officer in command of the party coolly appropriated the seat. Jane Seaton promptly ordered him to get up and give way to his betters, but he demurred, mumbling about his lordship being a State prisoner. Then the lady of Skibo arose in her wrath, exclaiming, "Certes! if ye dinna ken ye're ain place an' mainers at my table, faith I'll teach ye." She thereupon seized a leg of mutton from a dish and flung it at the officer's head. Of course he retired in high dudgeon, leaving Montrose and his companion to finish the repast. After the Restoration, Robert Gray of Skibo was fined £1,200, Robert of Creich £2,400, and Robert Gray of Arbol £4,800. There are now Montrose and Sigurd rooms in the castle.

### DORNOCH.

Three and a half miles further east, Dornoch, the county town, is reached. At the tercentenary celebrations in 1928 a pageant beautifully staged showed from episodes in its history how old and important a place it has occupied in the history of the north. In July, 1628, Charles I. erected Dornoch into a free Royal Burgh, though for many years before then the city of Dornoch was incorporated as a Burgh of Barony, with the Bishop of Caithness as feudal superior. The superiority passed at the Reformation from the Bishops to the Earls, and then from the Earls to the Crown.

The most striking building in the town is the Cathedral, which was founded by Gilbert Murray, who was consecrated in 1223. In 1570 all but the tower and steeple was burned down by the Master of

Caithness and Mackay of Strathnaver. On 5th November (Gunpowder Plot Night) "the inner stone pillars of the north syd of the body of the Cathedral Church at Dornough (laiking the rooff befor) were blown from the very roots quyt clein over the outer walles of the church; which walles did remain nevertheless standing, to the great



DORNOCH CATHEDRAL.

astonishment of all such as hath seen the same." This cathedral ultimately became, and still is, the parish church. It was restored in 1835, and again a few years ago. The bodies of sixteen Earls of Sutherland repose in the vault below the chancel, and there is a sarcophagus, surmounted by the carved figure of a cross-legged knight,



which contains the relics of Sir Richard de Moravia, the brother of the founder. There are beautiful stained glass windows, and altogether the interior is well worth seeing.

The Bishop's Palace—now Dornoch Castle—stands close by, a quaint, stately, turreted pile, which adds to the dignity of the town. The upright stone on the links, called "the Earl's Cross," has probably taken the place of a more ancient one erected to commemorate the victory of the Sutherlanders over the Danes in 1248, at which fight, according to tradition, the then Thane of Sutherland seized a horse's leg and with it slew his adversary, the Danish leader; and hence the apocryphal story of how the horse-shoe came to be in the Dornoch Town Arms.

In a garden near the Ladies' Golf Club-house stands a bluish whinstone bearing the date 1722. This is said to be the spot at which Janet Horne, a reputed witch, was, with the approval of the crowd, burned to death, after a trial before the sheriff. The charge was that she had transformed her daughter into a pony and had her shod by the devil.

There are many beautiful houses in this clean and well kept town, and several good hotels. There are excellent bathing facilities, but it is for its wonderful golf courses that Dornoch has for many a long year been most widely famed. More than two hundred and fifty years ago the Sutherland historian wrote: "About this town, along the sea coast their are the fairest and largest links or green fields of any part of Scotland fitt for archery, goffing, riding and all other exercises; they do surpass the fields of Montrose or St Andrews."

The climate is dry and bracing, and altogether this is an ideal place for holiday-makers. The surrounding district teems with interest for those who can enjoy walking or motoring trips, or take an interest in archæology or ecclesiastical history. (See Dr Bentinck's "Dornoch Cathedral and Parish").

### DORNOCH TO THE MOUND.

Dornoch is connected with the main line of the L.M.S. Railway by a branch line  $7\frac{3}{4}$  miles long, and which traverses a district as rich in historic interest as any in the Highlands. It passes the purely fishing village of Embo. Years ago the health conditions of this place were far from satisfactory, but the problem has been tackled in good earnest by the County Authority. Now it is well kept, and the inhabitants have risen to the occasion and have taken ample advantage of the railway connection. Where there were once pigstyes there are now garages. Further on, on the left, are the ruins of Skelbo Castle, which is linked with many a local legend and historic fact. It is

believed to have been built by Sir Richard de Moravia about 1245, and soon after was so important and commodious a place that the commissioners sent from Scotland and England to meet and escort south the Maid of Norway stayed here, and here heard the tidings of her death. About the close of the sixteenth century the place was occupied by a certain Marjory Mowat, who, when the owner, Allan Kinnaird, died, produced a duly signed will showing that the place had been left to her; but old Allan's heir showed in the law courts that the will was sealed after the proprietor's death, and then bitterly she cursed him and prophesied evil to himself and his lands here and in Morayshire. Her prophecies were remembered when his fertile Culbin lands were converted into a wilderness of sea sand, and this made "The curse of Culbin on you" for many a day as great a terror to Highlanders as "The curse of Cromwell on you" was to Irishmen. When the Jacobites were on their northward march working havoc on Royalists' property, they held high revelry in this castle soon after dispersing Loudon's troops, but some little time afterwards they had to surrender to a small body of Sutherland Militia within sight of it but on the other side of Loch Fleet, which in comparatively modern times was known as the Ferry of Unes. According to Sir Robert Gordon, who wrote in 1630, it was at this spot that the Cattean Germans—the Murrays—landed in 91 A.D. to take possession of the land given them by King Corbet. After anchoring, the leader went ashore to recreate himself and spy out the land, when he was suddenly invaded by a body of monstrous large cats. The fight was fierce and long continued, yet in the end he killed them all. From thence the Thanes or Earls of Sutherland carry as their crest a cat with one foot up ready to pounce upon its prey.

At Cambusavie there is a platform but no station. Before the junction is reached, "The Mound," so called from the famous mound built across Loch Fleet at this point, and completed in 1816, has to be crossed. Exclusive of the bridge of four arches with its valve gates, this mound is 995 yards long, 60 yards broad at the base, and 20 feet wide at the top, and about 18 feet in perpendicular height. After much difficulty the work was duly completed, and several hundred acres of splendid pasture land were recovered from the sea, and now sheep graze where ships were wont to ride. The total cost, even in the days of cheap labour, was £9,600. Along the side of this embankment the train now speeds.

### FROM BONAR TO THE MOUND VIA LOCH BUIE.

This is a drive of thirteen and a half miles through a bare and uncultivated country. It skirts the shores of Loch Buie (two miles in