

Sutherland took a particular interest in the dedication of the new Scots Kirk in Paris last Sunday because its minister, the Rev Donald Caskie, known as "The Scarlet Pimpernel" during the last war - he worked with the French underground movement - was in his student days preaching for a few months at Rogart Church of Scotland.

Mrs Margaret Macdonald, Broomfield, Rogart, recalled to "The Northern Times" on Wednesday that Mr Caskie was at Rogart in the spring of 1927. At that time there was a vacancy - the Rev Alexander Macleod had left to take over a charge at Portmahomack. Incidentally, Mr Macleod died last year at the age of 92 at Tarbetness.

"Indeed, Mr Caskie," said Mrs Macdonald, "would have been our minister at Rogart if the congregation had been prepared to wait until he had finished his studies in a year's time."

During his three months' stay in Rogart Mr Caskie was in lodgings with Mrs Donald Sutherland, of Incheape.

Dornoch Town Council, and the burgh butchers in particular, are up in arms at British Railways' proposal to close the Dornoch passenger freight branch line as part of their comprehensive plan to remodel and speed up the main line service between Inverness and Wick.

The closing of this line would affect the Cambusavie passenger halt, the Skelbo passenger halt and goods station and the Embo and Dornoch goods and passenger stations.

Passenger train services would also be withdrawn from The Mound, Rogart and Loth, and the goods station at these places would be reduced to the status of unstaffed public sidings. Where stations were closed and no other transport was available, say British Railways, bus services would be provided.

A British Railways spokesman said in Glasgow last Monday night that the proposals would be submitted to the Transport Users' Consultative Committee. They affected the Inverness-Wick-Thurso line and the Mound-Dornoch and Muir-of-Ord-Fortrose branch lines.

The Rev William Macleod, provost of Dornoch, said it was his opinion that the economics of British Railways' system had gone "haywire." To put more heavy traffic on the roads which were not up to standard was

sheer nonsense from the point of view of an ordinary motorist. This will create chaos," said Mr Macleod.

Mr Macleod told "The Northern Times" that closure of the Dornoch branch line was "in the wind a number of years ago, and it seems that it is being revived."

He reaffirmed that Dornoch Town Council would oppose closure of the line, which he said would prejudice the local tourist industry, perhaps to the extent that hotels would have to increase their tariffs.

To bring in certain commodities by motor transport would be much more expensive, he said.

It would prejudice not only the tourist industry but also the butchery industry, which was very important to Dornoch, he said. He feared that closure of the railway line would lessen the Transport Commission's interest in the local railway hotel.

Captain Bob Grant, a member of the Dornoch butchery firm Grant and Sons, said last Tuesday night that if the Dornoch line were closed it would be "a most retrograde step and might be disastrous for the town. "My firm would be handicapped perhaps more than anyone else in Dornoch. We do not buy everything by rail, but we pay to Dornoch railway station upwards of £5000 every year in carriage for sending beef and lamb to England. If this goes through we shall have to deliver by road to the main line somewhere. We have motor transport, but we shall require more and the cost may handicap our ability to compete with the south producers. And Dornoch is progressing, so much so that if the slaughterhouse is extended by the council, as we hope, visualise our doubling that amount of carriage with the railway people. At the moment we are retarded - we cannot meet the demand since we do not have the slaughterhouse facilities to help us on. We have a staff of 30, and this proposed closure might affect the employment position, for our costs would be increased."

Mr R J Mackay, Embo, chairman of the District Council, said on Wednesday: "I protest against such action. The people of Embo do make good use of the train service, with our people going north and south, joining the main-line train at the Mound station. If the Mound station is closed we, in Embo, will be cut off altogether. Embo is more or less isolated as it is, but matters are to be made worse now that the train service is to be withdrawn.

"How about our coal traffic? It will simply mean that we have to take delivery of our coal at Bonar-Bridge station, some 12 miles away and all this will mean an increase over the normal price to the consumers.

"I have for long enough been trying to attract a light industry to this part of the country, in order to prevent further depopulation and now this latest news from British Railways would mean a knockout blow."

The Dornoch light railway was opened on Monday, June 2, 1902, at a ceremony performed by Mr Maclean, factor for the Duke of Sutherland, and about 1000 people were assembled on the railway platform.

The then Duke of Sutherland took a great interest in the founding of the Dornoch light railway. He had surveys made with a view to forming a private company, but in 1891 the Light Railway Act was passed, and this made it easier and secured the support of the Government.

The Duke of Sutherland gave a free grant of land, £5000 and a guarantee of £3000 to the Highland Railway Company.

The total cost of construction of the railway was estimated at £30,000.

Incidentally, the engineer-in-chief at the building of the railway was the late Mr William Roberts, whose daughter, Miss M F Roberts still lives in Dornoch. Mr Robert's son, Donald was resident engineer under his father.

Miss Roberts told "The Northern Times" that the branch line was built to benefit mainly the fish traffic from Embo which went direct to Billingsgate.