


Some facts about Dornoch Cathedral

 **G**ilbert de Moravia (Moray) became Bishop of Caithness in 1222. He moved the seat of his diocese from Halkirk, in the north, to Dornoch, and this is where he had his Cathedral built, at his own expense. Work started in 1224.

The Church had a nave with side aisles, transepts, a quire and a tower supported by four clusters of pillars built of local stone. By 1239 it was sufficiently completed for it to be consecrated, and receive the bones of a previous Bishop, Adam, who had been assassinated. Bishop Gilbert was the last Scot to be given a place in the Calendar of Saints.

In 1570 the Church was burnt during a clan battle and it was left with only the four clusters of pillars, the tower and the quire. In 1616 the quire and transepts were restored by Sir Robert Gordon but the nave and side aisles remained untouched. A wall was built to shut off the ruined nave, and the resulting T-shaped Church was used as the Parish Church of Dornoch, which it still is today.

In 1835-37 the Cathedral was renovated thanks to the generosity of Elizabeth, Duchess of Sutherland. The architect, William Burn, demolished the ruined nave and side aisles and rebuilt only the nave. Here it is only the large west window which is a copy [shorter than the original]. The stonework of the ancient Church was covered in plaster. In 1924 there was further renovation when the plaster was removed to reveal the ancient beauty of the 13th century stonework. Two old pillars of the side aisles were discovered at the same time and one can see them in two niches cut out near the pillars west of the tower. If the visitor stands here to look at the quire and the transepts, all the stone work to be seen dates from the 13th century.

The pillars of the tower are 8m high and the arches rise to 14m in the centre. Under the central point lay the tomb of St Gilbert until its desecration during the pillage of 1570. Above, the tower itself rises to a height of 37m and contains a bell which dates from 1785.

At the end of the nave lies the sarcophagus of Sir Richard de Moravia, brother of St. Gilbert. He was killed during a battle c.1240. It is a fine example of funereal art of the 13th century. The piscina, in the south wall of the quire, indicates that the Cathedral was Roman Catholic for 350 years.

In the west wall of the south transept, near the south-west pillars, one can see the lintel of a doorway. In the 19th century a family crypt was made under the quire for the Dukes of Sutherland.

Some "mortality stones", which depict the symbols of death, are found in several walls of the church ~ these mortality stones were originally found in the ruined nave and have been incorporated in the walls for historic interest.

Among the 28 stained-glass windows there are three in the north wall of the quire which are of great interest to visitors. They commemorate the steel magnate and philanthropist Andrew Carnegie who stayed each year at Skibo Castle, 6km from Dornoch. The organ, which was installed in 1893, was renovated thanks to his generosity in 1908, and then completely rebuilt in 1979 by the generosity of his daughter, Margaret.

The modern stained glass window in the south wall of the quire was installed in 1989 on the occasion of the 750th anniversary of the consecration of the Cathedral and represents the founder, Bishop Gilbert. It was consecrated in the presence of H.R.H. Charles, Duke of Rothesay.