

Cathedral Characters

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Thank you very much.

I have to tell you, if you don't already know, that eight days ago when I was working on this, I was on page eight and every single word was wiped off the computer. I had saved regularly, I had done everything that one is supposed to do, but nonetheless it disappeared in front of my eyes, the whole lot, every single word. And I've been up to about midnight every night since, every day since, trying to remember it, because I hadn't taken a copy which I normally do, and it was totally gone. So, if I clam up all of a sudden or I don't display the usual liquid speech that I normally have, however liquid or not that is, you'll know the reason, because I'm stumbling over what on earth my hieroglyphics mean.

I apologise in advance to anybody that will know every word I say because they know the history. There are plenty of people, I feel, who don't know and may be interested.

Characters - I don't necessarily mean people who do a song and dance act and crack jokes. What I mean about that is somebody that had an effect on the life of the cathedral, one of the characters that has affected it.



And we start of course with Gilbert, starting at the beginning, and he was a rich, well-educated man. He was a courtier, he had travelled abroad on the king's business, he had seen all the buildings going up, all the churches and cathedrals going up on mainland Europe so, when he came to build his own cathedral, he knew what to expect. He knew what to ask for and he knew where to get labour.

He was a leader who was used to giving orders, used to being obeyed and knowing what he wanted. And the first thing he did was to move the capital of the bishopric from Halkirk in Caithness down to the comparative safety of Dornoch in the far south, of the diocese that is. The diocese of Caithness occupies present-day Sutherland and Caithness put together.

And the reasons for that are obvious, one is because it was safer, blunt as that. The second one is that he owned the land along the strip of coastline from Skelbo to Invershin and he was building the castle on his own land with his own money. When he built it, he gave it a constitution based on that of Lincoln Cathedral with which he had been connected in some way or other.

And there was the normal chapter, and the head of the chapter was the bishop himself. That seems obvious to us, but it didn't always happen. Sometimes he stood to one side and let the canons get on with it.

So, there was the bishop to begin with and then ten canons, five of whom were titled and had specific jobs to do. There was the dean who lived in the deanery, and it was his job to be in charge of the administration. He was the most important of the other canons. He was in charge of all admin. Anybody in charge of admin is always important. You know you can invent posts to make sure the old department is bigger than anybody else's.

There was the precentor in charge of music, the treasurer in charge of finances and church treasures, whatever they may have been up here in Dornoch. The chancellor had duties of a literary nature. I like that, duties of a literary nature.

And the archdeacon was very important because he was in charge of the well-being of the other churches and ministers in the diocese, which is just as well because they in their turn were supposed to support the cathedral clergy in their existence. They supported them. They were divided up when there were so many churches to each canon so that once the bishop had died his cathedral would function perfectly adequately without him because he'd got a good constitution in place.

That's the theory and in practice it appears to have worked out. The dean would have to be in residence for six months each year, the other canons just for three months. All ten employed a vicar to cover them when they were absent.

Gilbert ended his constitution with, 'Upon those who will distract and injure them,' - that is the clergy, - 'may the Wrath and Indignation of Almighty God be theirs in eternal damnation.' Very good. And one of the local historians points out that the four principal families who were involved in the sacking of Dornoch when the cathedral was burnt right down to the ground, not one of them now owns a single acre of land in the diocese of Caithness, whereas before they were very important and wealthy landowners or, in the case of the Earl of Caithness, he was a landowner because he'd pinched it sometime or other.

And when you think about it, it must have been a beacon of light and hope in a very dark and dangerous place.

He became the last Scottish saint to be mentioned in the Kalendar of Saints. And to get there, among other things, this was what he stood

accused of doing. He restored a burnt account book. It had been burnt to a cinder and he restored it. Good for him.

He cured a dumb man through prayer. He was walking outside in the fields when he passed a man, a fisherman, who complained that he had been fishing and getting absolutely no luck. Join the club, boy, join the club. No luck at all. So, he washed his hands in the water and fish immediately began to jump into the net.

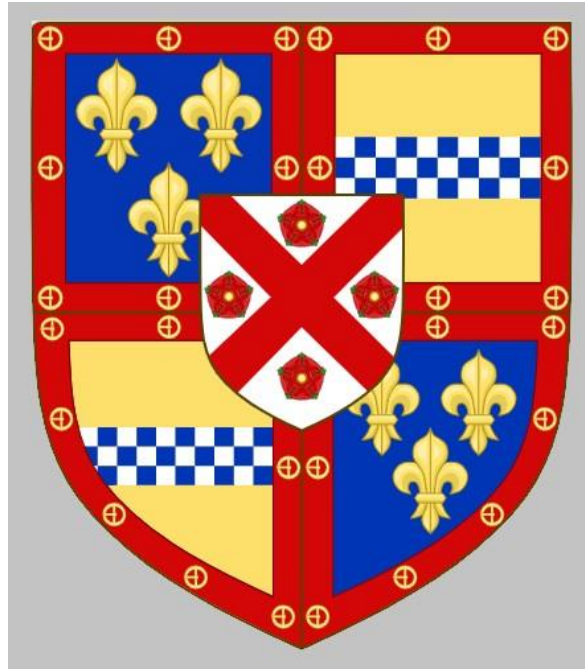
He had to kill the statutory dragon. Did you know that everybody that's made a saint has to kill a dragon? It seems that way when you read it, doesn't it? The world must have been populated with fearsome dragons rampaging up and down and eating fair maidens and waiting to be killed by somebody who was on his way to becoming a saint. Anyway, I don't want to appear cynical, but he killed the statutory dragon. I didn't know they had any in Scotland.

He couldn't build the tower, they said, because it's so high up in the air he couldn't get there, so he threw up all the tools necessary and the tools got to work and built the tower for him. How he got the strength to hurl the tools that distance, I don't know.

It is said, too, that he translated the Psalms and Gospels into Gaelic for the benefit of his congregation. But there's very little evidence for that, very little.

And he died in 1245.

That's the first page.



Second one, Robert Stewart, the infamous Bishop Robert, who lined his pockets while his flock were killed and starving. You'll hear all about him.

Earl of Lennox, Earl of March, Bishop of Caithness. 'Why was he two earls?' you will say to me. And the answer is that he was the Earl of Lennox because he inherited after his brother died. And he was the Earl of March because when he inherited the Earl of Lennox title, he gifted it to his nephew. I don't know why. Once he had done that, the King promptly ennobled him as the Earl of March. There must have been something fishy somewhere, but that's what it is.

And Bishop of Caithness. He was appointed in 1542. He had attended college to go to get his degree, but he had never taken holy orders.

Having been appointed in 1542, he then fled to England in 1544 because he was involved in his brother's rebellion. And it sounds as though he got across the border one step in front of the pursuing army. And of course he forfeited the bishopric he had just got.

But he came back again into Scotland to try and organise a peace between the two countries. This is the story. Once he'd got back, they had peace anyway. So, they restored him to his bishopric in 1547. He got it all back again. Now, when he had been in England, the Earl of Caithness and Mackay of Strathnaver had plundered all his church properties and taken charge of all the church lands and all the revenues coming in on the pretext that they were going to look after it all for the bishop. And when

the bishop returned, they would hand him back the whole lot in an account made out of profit and loss and the rest. But you won't be surprised to learn they flatly refused to cough up with a single penny until they were leaned on by the Earl of Huntly and the Earl of Sutherland, who together were far too weighty for the Earl of Caithness. It's nice to know he got his comeuppance sometimes.

It was the time of reformation, the struggle between the Catholics and Protestants to see which was to be the dominant religion. Once it was clear that the Protestants were going to win, the landed gentry in this country, as in every other country, stood by waiting to plunder the rich church lands and goods when they came available. And as soon as the reformation was established fact, a great plundering of church lands took place.

Bishop Robert was keen to join in. In the decade ending about 1560, he sold all his land, all his church lands and any other land he could claim, to the Earl of Sutherland. He was careful never to resign from anything, so that whichever political party was in power, he was able to say, 'Oh yes, I'm a member of...' so-and-so. 'I'm the Bishop of Caithness,' when he was a Catholic, and when the Protestants were in power, he could say, 'Yes, well, I am the minister for...' so-and-so.

He made sure he never resigned from anything, thus he was always, if not in favour, accepted or acceptable. He was a Catholic twice and a Protestant twice, and he married his sister, his only sister, off to the Earl of Sutherland to cement that relationship even more tightly together, and he took himself a wife, even though he was a confirmed celibate.

He behaved in exactly the same fashion when wars were between Presbyterians and Episcopalians, as you all know, of course, both Protestants. He was appointed Commendator of St Andrew's Priory. Now that post, Commendator, was a temporary appointment in which you were appointed to look after the institution, whatever it was, an abbey, and to ensure that it functioned properly, so that when the permanent appointee arrived, it was in full working order, and you hand it over.

That was the job of Commendator. It also meant, of course, that you were in charge of the finances, and as he'd been appointed Commendator of St Andrew's Priory, and he refused to allow a permanent appointee – 'no fear!', he thought – so he lived the rest of his life in St Andrew's, nowhere near Dornoch.

Bishop of Sutherland, nowhere near Dornoch; St Andrew's, living a life of luxury on the income from the Priory and his bishopric, as a local diarist said, at the gowf, archery and good cheer, wine, women and song. Well, we'll forgive him the women, but the wine and the song, certainly.

He was living - this is what sticks in the throat - he was living a life of indulgent luxury, while his flock in the north had desperate need of his help. Those not killed were scattered in helpless and homeless starvation. He died in 1586, and when he did, his peers were not able to find anything good to say about him.

Swindler and cheat, he certainly was, but I don't think he was worse than a good many others, at the same time, who could not resist the temptation to line their pockets when the opportunity arose, and I suppose dishonesty is 90% chance, isn't it, and 10% theory. Anyway, just a thought, a positive thought about him.



Now Sir Robert Gordon, and Sir Robert Gordon is a very important part of Dornoch Cathedral's history.

He was the son of one Earl of Sutherland, the brother of the next Earl and guardian of the next, so he did his ration alright. His father, the Earl Alexander, was nearly poisoned in Helmsdale Castle when he was 15 years old. If you remember, his parents and he were invited in by Isabel, Sinclair, in Helmsdale Castle, and the poison was taken by the Earl and his countess, and we are told that the Earl, realising what had happened, turned the table over, spilling the food and the drink, so that the 15 year old boy would not partake, and he, whatever the justice or truth of that, he didn't.

But what it did mean was that the Earl of Caithness had free run. There was no other power-blocking Sutherland to keep him out, and he got the

young lad, 15, married him off to his 32 year old daughter, to make sure he was tightly bound to the family, and then he would think about what he was going to do and how he was going to improve his grip on Sutherland as well as Caithness, on the North in general, and I wouldn't have liked to have been in that boy's shoes either, because in an age of ruthless men, he was a king, Earl of Caithness, he really was.

Now, the Murrays of Dornoch - we called them the Murrays, there were other names as well of course, as there are now, it's easier to say the Murrays of Dornoch - the Murrays of Dornoch were infuriated at this mistreatment of their now 18 year old Earl, and they succeeded in rescuing him against all the odds, and placed him under the protection of his powerful relative, the Earl of Huntly.

The Earl of Caithness was absolutely enraged, all his plans had been ruined. He resolved that he would teach the Murrays a lesson they would not forget. So, he assembled a huge army composed of the riffraff of the diocese, supported by the Sinclairs of Caithness, by Mackay of Strathnaver, by Sutherland of Duffus from Skelbo Castle, and allied, but to William Sutherland of Evelix, two miles down the road, how close your implacable enemies could be, and William Sutherland of Evelix was an implacable enemy of all things to do with Dornoch.

The army of course scattered the Murrays. Most were killed. Of the remainder, most fled, and the rest retreated up the castle, where they couldn't get down and the army couldn't get up, so they traded insults for a while until the army grew bored and set fire to it so thoroughly that every roof fell in. I don't think the people up in the tower felt very comfortable either, but eventually passers-by were persuaded to act as intermediaries, and before they were allowed out, William Sutherland of Evelix desecrated the tomb of Saint Gilbert and kicked the bones about. Three Murrays were sent down as hostages, the rest were allowed to follow out safely.

The Earl of Caithness was not pleased, he never did seem to be very pleased, the Earl of Caithness was not pleased because he'd wanted everybody killed. He'd wanted a real lesson taught, and he knows what every Hitler knows, the dead enemy is no longer anybody to worry about, not until his relatives grow old enough. He gave orders, and the three hostages were beheaded by Sutherland of Duffus.

Sir Robert Gordon, who of course is known as the historian, that's why we're writing about him, history of the genealogy of the earls of Sutherland, lovely history book.

This is what he tells about what happened to the allies. Of William Sutherland he says, 'Almighty God did most justlie punish him; for that same foot that burst St Gilbert his coffin, did afterward 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 neir unto him, and so he died miserable.'

The odd thing about that is that Helen Fairgreave was doing some research and she discovered he's still there 12 years later, so he must have probably died of old age anyway in the end.

Of Sutherland of Duffus, the one that did the beheading, he says, 'The laird of Duffus seikened and never rose again out of his bed... thro' the strange visions which appeired unto him.'

The master of Caithness, eldest son of the Earl, 'wes shortlie thereafter punished by the hands of his owne father by famishing him to death in wofull captivitie.'

You may believe that difficult to credit but Duffus' cousin owned the farm on which Girnigoe Castle stands and that is the actual history. The Earl of Caithness suspected that his eldest son, the master, was plotting against him with Mackay of Strathnaver and so he took the boy and plunged him in the dungeon, fed him on salt meat and gave him nothing to drink. That's how it happened.

That's a father for you. As I said, he was an evil man and the king of all in that land, that area. Shortly afterwards, Mackay of Strathnaver died, partly through grief and partly through the torment and trouble of conscience which he had conceived for his bypast actions.

Sir Robert would have us believe that they had paid dearly for their behaviour.

A bit of history now. During his stay with the Earl of Huntly, the young Earl of Sutherland met the Earl's sister, Lady Jean Gordon. She had been married to the Earl of Bothwell but the Earl of Bothwell wanted to divorce her so he could marry Mary Queen of Scots and Mary Queen of Scots wanted to marry him, but there was Lady Jean in the way and they knew that a prickly person like the Earl of Huntly would not be at all pleased at this insult to the family name, an insult to his sister and they also knew

that nothing sweetens a nobleman like a gift of land, because land means power and it means money. And it worked, they gave him the land and he allowed his sister to be insulted by being divorced. When the Earl was 21 years old, three years after he got there, he returned to take over his earldom and he took Lady Jean with him and married her.

She was a tough old bird because she saw off three husbands, maybe even four, I'm not quite sure, before she died aged 84. Sir Robert Gordon, her second son, was a firm Protestant whereas the rest of the family were just as firm in their Catholic belief, but they kept quiet about it in hope to live a peaceful life, with moderate success. Sir Robert makes it clear that he was very fond of his mother who was a tremendous character.

In the early years of the 17th century, he got enough money together to rebuild part of the ruined cathedral. He restored the chancel and the two transepts but then he had to partition off the nave and leave it to moulder. It was not perfect, but it would have to do as the money had run out.

In 1628, as a result of Sir Robert Gordon's influence at court, - he was a great courtier and a great favourite of Charles I - As a result of his close contact at court, Dornoch was granted the great honour of being given royal borough status. The principal benefits, and this is from the introduction to the grant, it 'reduced the barbarous and uncultivated mountaineers to a state of civilisation,' or they hoped it would reduce the barbarous and uncultivated mountaineers, you people in other words, to a state of civilisation. He gave you the power to elect a provost, four baileys, a dean of a guild, a treasurer and twelve councillors.

He gave you authority, to Dornoch, to elect commissioners to parliament. He gave them full power to make laws, create burgesses and brothers of guild. It empowered them to appoint all other members and officials of court, to erect a market cross and a toll booth within the borough, already there, to hold a weekly market on Saturday.

Full power to erect a free harbour and port of Dornoch, even though there was nowhere where you possibly could. But it was very important, as you can imagine, and it changed the life of Dornoch considerably. And once again, Sir Robert used his influence on Dornoch's behalf in 1631, when Dornoch was further honoured by being made head borough of the new sheriffdom of Sutherland.

Sutherland got a new sheriffdom because the original sheriffdom was the whole of the north from Inverness northwards, including Caithness, which was far too unwieldy. It would have been logical to take off Caithness or Ross-shire, but he'd got the ear of the king and they made him head borough of Sutherland, the new sheriffdom of Sutherland. And it meant that the county court would meet in Dornoch, which meant more work for local people.

He died in 1656 at the age of 76 and Dornoch lost a very good friend.



Now we move on. I hope you'll enjoy this, because this is the Earl of Loudoun.

Now the Earl of Loudoun has got no direct benefit to the cathedral, but he did stable his horses and men in it when they were fighting the religious wars. And he writes business letters, army letters, to the Earl of Sutherland regularly. And I just want to read you the last bit, and it is a bit, a sentence or two, of each letter.

'My compliments to my lady. And ever, my dear lord, your lordship's most humble servant. Loudoun.'

That's the first letter. The second letter, four days later, he goes through all the army business and then at the end, 'I beg your lordship would be so good as to make my compliments acceptable to my lady Sutherland and my love to my wife and my compliments to the major. I am etc etc.'

About a fortnight later, another letter, final paragraph, 'Please make offer of my compliments to my lady Sutherland, to my little wife and to Major Mackay. I am etc etc.'

Next letter. is a day later. And at the end it says this.

'I beg your Lordship will make my compliments acceptable to my Lady Sutherland and the Major and give my love to my little wife and tell her I

beg she will remember that a man that neglects his duty never yet was prized by the women.'

I think I detect there a sulking girl, don't you? You can imagine her saying, 'how can't you come home, the Countess is here all the time, why are you...,' so he has to get an excuse to give to 'my little wife.'

And then we have letter five and at the end, believe it or not, 'I beg you will make my compliments to my Lady Sutherland and to my dear unfaithful wife and to the Major. I am with great truth and friendship, my Lord, your Lordships, etc.'

There's only one more letter and she comes down quite considerably, 'and the young lady.'

Those letters were written just before the Earl of Cromarty came and surprised the forces in Dornoch completely and Loudon retreated so fast and so quickly that the Earl of Cromarty's forces couldn't catch up with him.

He disappeared into the mists of Skye in no time at all and one hopes that his unfaithful little wife was with him. You can hear her complaining about the horse. 'So uncomfortable, dear, can't you sort it out for her? Major's wife, so and so's wife's got this and those and the other thing.'

So that's the Earl of Loudon,



The Duchess Countess. Now she's incredible, she had a tremendous effect on Dornoch Cathedral one way or another. Both parents died when she was 13 months old and those of you that have seen the wall plaque up in the Chancellor's corner there, that's it.

Both parents leaving her at 13 months old. There was a tremendous legal battle then started to ensure that the title went to her, and you'd be well aware that normally speaking the title goes down the male line so it wouldn't have gone to her, it would have gone to the nearest male relative, I don't know who that was. Anyway, the battle was taken to the House of Lords who eventually ruled in her favour so the title would come to her.

Her early years were spent in Edinburgh under the care of her grandmother Lady Alva. She received a good education and showed an early liking and talent for literature and artistic subjects. She married Lord Gower in 1785.

She was the head of Clan Sutherland, but her upbringing and her situation were miles away from a traditional form of chieftainship. Sutherland was different from all other clans too. Normally clan chiefs were virtually penniless, but she had married the richest man in Europe so as far as Sutherland was concerned money was no problem.

He wished to introduce agricultural reform into the farming areas of the county using modern methods of good practice, but it soon became clear that it wouldn't work unless people were moved to make more room. This policy would become famous as the clearances. It's difficult to blame them for the easy cruelty of some of their harsher officials, difficult but not impossible.

It is much easier to make the charge of unwitting cruelty stick because the whole concept of moving large numbers of people about against their wishes and without any form of consultation taking place is chilling in the extreme. It is cold, heartless, inhuman and treats people as though they were pawns on a chessboard. Such a thought never seems to have occurred to them.

The people of Dornoch are much more grateful to her for the restoration of the cathedral which she funded. She did think she owned it. She said that the cathedral was owned by her family, the Sutherland family.

They were stunned. You don't own a church, that's everybody's. Anyway, she did agree that provided everybody else would allow her to have the chancel in her name and in perpetuity, she would allow the others to take the normal law and knowledge. The normal practice to divide up the occupation.

She wanted a stained-glass window of the first Duke but there was such an uproar because colour, the use of colour was sinful and they weren't going to have it. They didn't have it. She had to back down, something that she wouldn't be used to I don't suppose. She settled for a 15-foot statue where the communion table now is. So those who sit in the nave will know that on Sunday, when you sat in the nave before, all you would see was a 15-foot statue glowering at you, but that's gone now.

We are very glad that she dismissed William Byrne and his mock Gothic plans because she saved us from an absolute monstrosity of a cathedral, and she of course was a product of the age of elegance. Born in 1765, her entire education would have left her a product of the age of elegance, which is something that William Byrne was not going to take into account. And we are very pleased with the sound attractive building that she has left us.

She died in 1839 at the age of 74. There's a very brief description of the Duchess Countess and the effect she had on us.



Next one is the Reverend Donald Sage who was at school in Dornoch 1801 vintage, and he would have gone to worship in the cathedral.

He described Sheriff McCulloch's house where he stayed, and Sheriff McCulloch by the way is the one that lost his life in the Meikle Ferry disaster shortly afterwards. 'The study was a small room upstairs which was crammed with books and papers.' Describing his own bedroom, Sage says 'It was at the top of the house, an attic above an attic, a dreary cold place having all the rude finishings of a coarse loft.'

'On Sabbath evenings the sheriff examined all the inmates of his household in their scriptural knowledge concluding with an exposition of the chapter which he had read. He was a regular attender at church even though he found Dr. Bethune's sermons to be dry enough he would not be an absentee, particularly not as he was sheriff. However, a restlessness of manner indicated that he did not feel he was being edified.' Who'd be a minister in those days.

Fairs: 'From every corner of the county, almost every man, woman and child attended the Dornoch market,' says Sage. 'The evening previous the market was a busy one. A long train of heavily laden carts would be seen wending their weary way into town, more particularly from Tain by the Meikle Ferry.'

'The booths or tents were set up made of canvas stretched upon poles which were inserted several feet into the ground, even into the graves and deep enough to reach the coffins. The fair started at noon the next day and lasted for two days and a half. Every sort of saleable article was bought and sold whether of home or foreign manufacture.'

The School: 'The dunce of the day wore a smelly old hat, and he was named General Morgan. The second dunce of the day was given a smelly old hat and was called Captain Rattler.'

'The third' - this is how he kept his discipline - 'the third dunce of the day wore a smelly old hat, and he was called Sergeant Moore. The fourth was named the Fiddler and he was given a broken wool cart and a stick and after school they had to go outside and dance to the wool cart.'

'On the old New Year's Day shinty and boule were played. And this is for the boys.' Boule is that kind of French game where you throw, what's another word for it? That's right, Petanque. So, they played that. It's not just the French you see, we were playing it long before that.

And this also is for the schoolboys. 'Cockfighting was practiced on Shrove Tuesday. It was held in the courtroom and the schoolmaster, and his friends acted as judges. The boys borrowed birds from their owners and the one who owned the bird that got the most victories was crowned king. The second was called the queen and there was a coronation held in school and crowns made by the ladies of the town were placed upon the heads of the king and queen to whom the master then addressed a few words in Latin.' - Poor boys, Latin.

'Then followed a procession of scholars through the streets and the day's proceedings closed with a ball and supper in the evening.' I can't imagine the boys want a ball and supper, would they? No, it must be their parents. Anyway, there we are, cockfighting, boys.

That's Sage and his book would have sunk without trace now, there wouldn't be a mention of it, but for the fact it was a time bomb. It was published in 1869 or something like that, long after the Sutherland family thought the whole kerfuffle about the clearances had disappeared.

But it's all in Sage's book. He was not published until after his death. He kept it for years.

It's all there, all about the grief and the hardship, the whole thing. It's just like a bomb exploding as far as they were concerned.



The next one I call Widow Twankey.

I don't know what her real name was. She was a widow. This was the time of the disruption, and she lived where the lodge building now is.

She kept hens, to each one of which she had given the name of one of the elders, all of whom she respected very much as guardians of the faith. When the disruption occurred and all the elders except two, George Dempster of Skibo and Duncan Ross of Birichen joined the free church, she was outraged. They had let her down.

They had betrayed their faith. There's only one thing she could do. She rang their necks and ate them.

The hens, I mean, not the humans. Not all at once, of course. And she must have been sick of the sight, taste and smell of chicken by the time the exercise was at an end.

And one wonders whether any of the guilty elders felt peculiar in any way when the slaughter was in full swing. That was just a tidbit thrown in there for you.



Dr. Bethune:

Bentick quotes Sage on the subject of Dr. Bethune. And I had written it all down before the wretched computer went on the blink, so I've now got to read it. It says, 'Sage describes him as an elegant classical scholar, a sound preacher and one of the most finished gentlemen I ever remember to have seen.'

'His manners were so easy and dignified that they would have graced the first peer of the realm. And his English sermons, which he always read, were among the neatest compositions I ever heard. In preaching in the Gaelic language, he used very full notes as his mind was of that highly intelligent character that it could not submit to nor indeed be brought to work in mere extemporary or unconnected discussions.

'With all his other qualifications, he had a delicate sense of propriety. And for anything, even the slightest word come from what quarter it might that touched upon this Terra Sacra, he shrunk back as from something positively loathsome. Because he used to preach a two-hour sermon in Gaelic and a two hour sermon in English and then an hour's Sunday school.'

Poor man. Can you imagine it? He must have been absolutely exhausted. And he passed to his rest at the advanced age of 71. I'm surprised he got that far.

He had a well-developed instinct for reform. He did a great deal in the cathedral, sorted out the flooring out and the stench from the fumes from the bodies being buried below, sorted it all out. He obviously was a man of considerable drive as well. He was very popular, very well liked.



Dr. Bentinck:

Now, I couldn't get anything for Dr. Bentinck. I couldn't find anything that wouldn't make him wooden. He sounded so wooden. And he wasn't.

Anyway, I got some help. I rang up Jessie Bell. Brilliant move that was, both Jessie and you.

During his incumbency, he did much to restore the ancient building to some semblance of its former glory. As a result of his active encouragement, the organ was renovated and relocated. The pulpit was donated by Mrs. Barrow of Northfield, now the Burghfield Hotel. The communion table was gifted by Miss Haldane of Skelbo. And the pews were provided.

In 1924, he arranged for the removal of the lath and plaster of 1835. And he had the harling chipped from the outer walls so that Dornoch Cathedral stood resplendent once more in its magnificent stonework. Most important of all was his meticulously researched history of the area entitled Dornoch Cathedral and Parish, which is widely recognised as the definitive book on the subject.

When you think about it, he had a very small congregation because they'd all gone off to join the free church a few years before, which left him plenty of time to write his books.

Now then, oh yes, Jessie said that every year he had a fete in August, which was eagerly awaited and well supported. Although it was a small congregation, Bentinck was very well liked and he got the full support of all the other churches in the area, UF principally, and the free church, and anything else, FPs as well.

There used to be, that the streets were decorated down to the manse with streamers and things. And in the manse, there would be a whole horde of huge tables and stalls right the way around the manse gardens. And as I say, it would be very well supported, and no doubt would make a deal of money.

'He had a large and lively family,' she said, and it was a very happy family. For example, every Sunday he went with his wife and with all his nine children into the vestry so that they wouldn't be out in the cathedral creating mayhem before the start of the service. And on one occasion he dismissed them all, they all trooped out and the last one was a boy. He slipped the catch and locked the minister in. So 11 o'clock came and no minister came, and no minister arrived, and no minister came, and his wife was looking at the boys and eventually the boy concerned slipped out and released his father. And he got away with it.

Jessie says that this story concerns Bentinck, my wife says it concerns Mr McLeod. I don't know which one is right but I'm putting it in anyway.



Sandy Bobbin:

Very few of you are old enough to remember Sandy Bobbin.

He used to go and see Dr Bentinck for food and clothes, he knew he'd get something. And he went down one day, and Dr Bentinck took the opportunity of saying 'Sandy, they're telling me up in the town that you've been swearing a lot. 'Huh, that's nothing says Sandy, they're telling me up in the town that you're drinking a lot.'

Anyway, oh yes, she says 'Dr Bentinck was a gentle kind old man, and he was very well liked because he would walk miles to bring comfort to a grieving family.' And they said on one occasion he walked to Birichen to comfort a family, an FP, a Free Presbyterian family who had had two bereavements, even though it was nothing to do with his church, they weren't members of his congregation. He felt that they needed comfort and consolation, and he provided it as an old man walking all the way up to Birichen and back. So, I think I got a bit more about him, it doesn't sound quite as wooden. Now he's frustrated in his vestry and unable to get out.



The Very Reverend Dr James Simpson:

He was the very first, well he was the first Dornoch minister ever to become Moderator of the General Assembly. We all know that of course. But apart from representing the Church of Scotland during the Assembly week, being Moderator entails speaking and acting on behalf of the Church of Scotland here and all over the world for the following year until the next General Assembly. It demands a year of unremitting hard work, but the experience is humbling and very rewarding.

Golf was his hobby. He retained his sanity by playing golf and he'd be playing with his three sons and as you passed him, he'd say, this is war, absolute war, which it was when they played, no quarter asked or given, and he usually won. He organised the Church of Scotland golf team playing the Church of England team. Whenever he was captain, they won handsomely and he enjoyed playing with Prince Andrew and Peter Alliss, just name dropping there. He was made club captain, and he would have been club captain for two years but in the end, it was only one because he then became Moderator and I suppose you could call that slightly more important, slightly. But golf was important to him as a method of relaxing. I must be fair to him; he would not play for months on end because he couldn't find the time but the moment there was a slot he'd be out playing golf.

He did a lot for the church too. He got the statue removed; that's a big thing. The elegant porch and the ante room were constructed, the organ was rebuilt, and the Gilbert window installed. He's remembered for his warm gentle ever-present sense of humour and since the worshipping congregation tripled in size during his stay there could be no better testament to his ministry.



And I have a brief, finally a brief, thing on the Reverend Susan Brown. I was dubious whether to include her or not and I thought well, why not?

When Reverend Brown came to Dornoch she achieved the immediate distinction of becoming the first female minister in the country to take charge of a cathedral. Therefore, as soon as she arrived, she became part of the long and turbulent history of the cathedral. She created even more history with the baptism of Madonna's child. Nothing had prepared Dornoch for the media interest that was displayed, and the congregation was proud of, and most impressed by, the seemingly cool manner in which she responded to the intense media pressure that never left Madonna for a second.

The Reverend Brown plays the trumpet, and she is a fifth cup in Taekwondo. She's a member of the local inshore rescue lifeboat crew.

She has a well-developed sense of humour. She is lively, active and quite uninhibited in church, especially with the children. She displays a great sense of drama in the way she presents her services, and they catch the immediate attention of all present. Although her services are always great

fun, they are very moving too, and her sermons confront the congregation with a powerful message of Christ's teaching. The Reverend Brown is not content to let the church rest on well-earned laurels, but she is determined that it shall move forward to meet the needs and challenges of the 21st century. Under her careful guidance, the congregation looks forward to the future with confidence and anticipation.

It's a slightly different treatment than the others because she's still with us and is our present minister.

If anybody has any questions, and I can't imagine that you will have, if you have, I'll do my best to answer them.