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THE LATE PROVOST FRASER,
DORNOCH.

Mr William Sutherland Fraser, Procurator-Fiscal of Sutherlandshire, and Provost of the Burgh of Dornoch, died at his residence here on the evening of Friday last, the 18th October, after an illness of only a few days, at the advanced age of 89 years. Although more or less confined to the house for the past 18 months, Mr Fraser had the enjoyment of excellent health, and until quite recently was able to take an almost daily walk in his garden. Until within the past few days he retained that keen interest in his business affairs which has characterised his long and active public life. His memory was, to the end of his career, of surprising acuteness, and up till the hour of his death he possessed great vitality.

Mr Fraser was appointed Procurator-Fiscal of Sutherland in 1832, thus holding the office for more than half-a-century. We suppose him to have been the oldest Procurator-Fiscal in Scotland. Although a solicitor and notary public, it may be stated that for probably a period of 15 years back he had taken little or no interest in Civil Court business. He, however, paid the strictest attention to his duties as public prosecutor. No later than the month of December 1887 there was an instance of this. At that time some investigations had to be made in connection with the Assynt crofting disturbances. The late Mr Hoyes, the Procurator-Fiscal Depute, was confined to his house through illness, and, notwithstanding his advanced age and the very inclement condition of the weather, rather than neglect such an important duty, Mr Fraser determined to accomplish the journey himself. Accordingly on the 16th of December, at the early hour of 6 A.M., he, accompanied by his clerk, started for Lochinver, on the west coast of the county, driving the whole distance, 66 miles, and arriving

there at 5 o'clock P.M. When about midway he was overtaken by a snow-storm, yet he pursued his course with the spirit of a man half his age. Four days later he returned home, not arriving till midnight on account of snow-blocked roads, and other inconveniences which have to be experienced by travellers to the West Coast of Sutherland during the winter season. He felt none the worse of his experience on that, the last occasion on which he had to leave his home on public business. Rather on the contrary, for a fortnight later we recollect his attending personally to duties of an important public nature.

Up till the spring of 1888 Mr Fraser attended to every criminal case which came before the Court, and of all the members at the Bar he was the most regular attendant, whether his duties brought him there or not. He was a precise and accurate speaker, and acquired in early life a style well fitted to impress a jury, as well as to command an attentive hearing from his listeners at all times.

Besides the Fiscalship, he held other two public appointments for more than half a century. First, that of agent for the Caledonian Bank in Dornoch, to which he was appointed at the opening of the office fifty-one years ago. The second was that of Commissary Clerk of the Commissariat of Sutherland, which office he held under commission granted by King George IV. on 23rd February 1830, fifty-nine years ago. This office now passes by Act of Parliament to the Sheriff Clerk of the county. In addition to these Mr Fraser held the offices of clerk of Supply and collector of county rates for forty-three years, and for a long time he has acted as treasurer to the Sutherland Road Trust. In 1887 he resigned the factorship of Achany and Balloan, both estates belonging to Lady Matheson of the Lews, which appointment he held for about forty years, and up till two years ago, when he tendered his resignation, he occupied the position of Chairman of the Dornoch Parochial and other local Boards.

Lastly, Mr Fraser held the honourable position of Provost of the Royal Burgh of Dornoch. In 1868, on the Duke of Sutherland's retirement, Mr Fraser was created Provost, and he has ever since held the office continuously. Three years ago his seat was contested, but he was returned by the inhabitants with an overwhelming majority. No one, perhaps, had the general interests of his native burgh more at heart than the late Provost, but, in particular, it falls to be recorded that to him entirely is due the retention of the more important institutions of this small but ancient burgh.

He was the most enthusiastic volunteer in the county, and, besides being the founder of the Dornoch corps, his influence went a great way in bringing the volunteer movement to such proficiency in Sutherland. A number of years ago he was justly promoted to the rank of major for his valuable volunteer services, which title he held till his death.

In politics he was held to be a Conservative, but during political contests he never failed in readily assenting to preside over meetings, whether of a Conservative or Liberal nature.

As already stated, his memory was of great strength, and he has long been regarded as an undoubted authority on historical events which occurred early in the present century, and he always found great delight in the recital of these occurrences.

His sobriety in all departments of life was a prominent feature in his character. Although not in a public way, he was a constant advocate of the temperance cause, and nothing served to irritate him so much as the conduct of people (no matter to what class they belonged) of intemperate habits. The following extract from a letter written to the late Provost by the deceased George Dempster of Ormiston Hall, Traent, and formerly proprietor of Skibo, and Convener of the County of Sutherland in July 1882, is not unworthy of notice. Mr Dempster says:—

"As for yourself, I hear you carry your years very lightly. I have often named you to my friends here as a man who owes everything to a temperate life, and a strict avoidance of 'whisky toddy' whereby you have seen a more complete clearance of your contemporaries in Sutherland than any other of its residents."

Provost Fraser was born in Dornoch on the anniversary day of the battle of Waterloo 1801. He was as a boy educated at Dornoch and Tain, and thereafter in Inverness, finishing in Edinburgh. He was descended from a very old Sutherland family, his ancestors all living to long ages. Provost Fraser was unmarried, and is survived by two sisters.

The late Sheriff Fraser of Fort-William was Mr Fraser's brother.