

# Bridging the Firth with Royal Smiles

Although it was a historical moment in the crossing of the three firths, the visit of HRH Queen Mother will be as much remembered as the day she brought sunshine, roses and smiles to the Dornoch Firth community.

The day began in unpromising cloud as she flew by helicopter from the Castle of Mey to the North end of the Dornoch Bridge.

After the presentations of dignitaries on her arrival, the 91-year-old great grandmother made a special point of talking to pipers and drummers of Sutherland Schools Pipe Band, Girl Guides and army cadets, and young soldiers of the 51st Highland Volunteers who formed a guard of honour under the command of Lieutenant Alan Mackintosh of Embo Mains.

She showed great interest too in the old folk brought specially from Craig Dunain.

Mr Denis Bremner of Tower View, Golspie, works manager on the bridge project for the Christiani-Morrison consortium presented Her Majesty with a gift of Caithness Glass on which a replica of the bridge had been engraved. "She told me it was a most magnificent gift for which she was most appreciative", said Mr Bremner.

Schools Pipe Band drum major 13-year-old Lisa Mackay from Golspie Tower handed over a gift of the band's cassette, in a remarkable piece of good public relations!

Piping instructor George Stewart said he was very pleased at how complimentary the Queen Mother

had been on his band's appearance and musicianship.

The sun appeared, to set the seal on the occasion and, after she had cut the tape and unveiled a plaque, Scottish Office minister Lord James Douglas-Hamilton invited the Rev Leslie Goskirk, Laig, clerk to the Sutherland Presbytery of the Church of Scotland to say a prayer of dedication.

During her walkabout, she spoke with Union Jack-waving children of Dornoch and Golspie primary schools. But it was two English children on holiday at Rosehall who grabbed the limelight by handing her a bunch of white heather. Four-year-old Jamie Emslie and his "almost seven" sister Katie from Forest Row, Sussex said: "We gave her white heather because we were told it was lucky."

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton said this was a "wonderful occasion" marking the final crossing of the three firths. Her Majesty had opened the Kessock Bridge in 1982. It was particularly fitting that she had come to open the Dornoch Firth crossing because she always had the welfare and wellbeing of the Highlands uppermost in her mind.

"The admiration and affection the whole nation feels for her was expressed in the celebration of her 90th birthday last year. I was present when Sir John Mills said that the instruction that she "didn't want any fuss" was the only order she had ever given that was disobeyed!"

He went on to say that the bridge had involved the skills of builders, engineers, consultants and designers.

Local communities had been very closely associated with its progress, not least because 70 per cent of the workforce was drawn from the local area.

"I am delighted to see that so many of you have gathered here together on this great day when representatives of all those involved in this project have come together to celebrate the fulfilment of a dream held by so many to bridge the three firths of Beaulie, Cromarty and Dornoch."

The Queen Mother opened her speech by saying how glad she was to be involved in the opening of the Dornoch Firth Bridge: "It is a special pleasure to me, a neighbour fortunate enough to spend part of the year in Caithness and part in Aberdeenshire. Today sees the fulfilment of this great North of Scotland enterprise."

She was interested to note that the modern "cast and push" technique used in the bridge's building made it the biggest bridge of its kind in Britain. "The shorter journey from Caithness and Sutherland will, we hope, help foster closer ties between local communities on either side of the firth."

"To all who have been involved in this venture I would like to offer my very warmest congratulations."



Everyone was greatly impressed by the smart turn-out of the Guard of Honour, comprising a detachment from the Caithness and Sutherland company of the 51st Highland Volunteers, under the command of 2nd Lieutenant Alan Mackintosh of Embo House. He is seen here with sword escorting the Queen Mother, the Lord Lieutenant and an aide down the front rank.

As she left the bridge, the Queen Mother told Lady Gilmour, wife of Sutherland's Lord Lieutenant Col Sir Allan: "It was so nice of you to ask me to open this bridge." "And it was so nice of you to come and honour us with your presence", Lady Gilmour replied.

Arriving in the Royal Burgh of Tain, she was greeted by cheering crowds lining the pavements. Both primary schools had been closed for the day, and many flag-waving children were among the spectators as her Daimler drove up the High Street.

After being presented to representatives of the district, regional and community councils, she paused for a brief walkabout speaking chiefly to residents of two local nursing homes. Among those delighted to shake her hand were Mrs Christine Mackay (94) of Duthac House, Tain, and Mrs Alice Ferguson (92) and Mrs Peggy Mackay, both residents of Redwoods Home, Aines.

All 15 residents of Redwoods had

travelled to Tain with their matron Mrs Elizabeth Haugh, and spent the rest of the day enjoying a picnic before crossing the bridge for an ice-cream in Dornoch.

Then, the Queen Mother entered the rose garden which she had last visited 25 years earlier. She was cheered by members of the 1st St Duthus Beaver Scouts, Cub Scouts, Venture Scouts, and 1st, 2nd and 3rd Tain Brownies and Guides (whose "new look" uniforms she admired).

George Smith, district council architect, and Michael Checkley, area supervisor of Ross & Cromarty's landscape services section showed her a plan of the garden. Mr Checkley explained that the garden had been "revamped" in the Springtime, with planting of new roses including the new "Queen Mother Rose", to complement the Elizabeth of Glamis bushes in the garden.

Then it was the turn of little Mairi Mackenzie, a pupil of Craighill Primary School to present a bou-

quet before the Queen Mother's departure from the gardens. Mairi wore a dress (designed by Janet Walkington, Edderton) of white satin trimmed with a blue Mackenzie tartan flounce. She owned to nerves beforehand, but mum and dad (Lyn and Ruairidh Mackenzie, Heathmount) and sister Kirsty (8) were all on hand, and Mairi performed her duties gravely and with two curtsies, obviously pleasing the Queen Mother.

After lunch at the Morangie House Hotel, where she was presented with a piece of Tain silver by Mr George Finlayson, convener of Ross & Cromarty District Council, she arrived, to the sound of the town bells, at the St Duthus Memorial Collegiate Church.

She was introduced to Mr Graham Offin, Edderton, of the British Legion, then greeted a line-up of 28 members, all ex-Servicemen except Mrs Elizabeth Florence, Tain, a member of the Queen Alexandra Nursing Service during the Burma campaign, and Mrs Priscilla

Gilmour, a WREN for six years at Condor, Arbroath.

The Queen Mother entered the church with Mrs Jane Durham, chairman of the Tain Custodian Trust, to see restoration work, there was given a book on the history of the Royal Burgh presented by Miss Rosemary Mackenzie, Tain Museum curator.

For her last visit, the Queen Mother toured one of the houses in Quarry Lane designed by Ross & Cromarty District Council for the elderly. She spent some time in the home of Mrs Marjorie Ross (63), retired canteen worker at Tain Royal Academy and a native of Edderton.

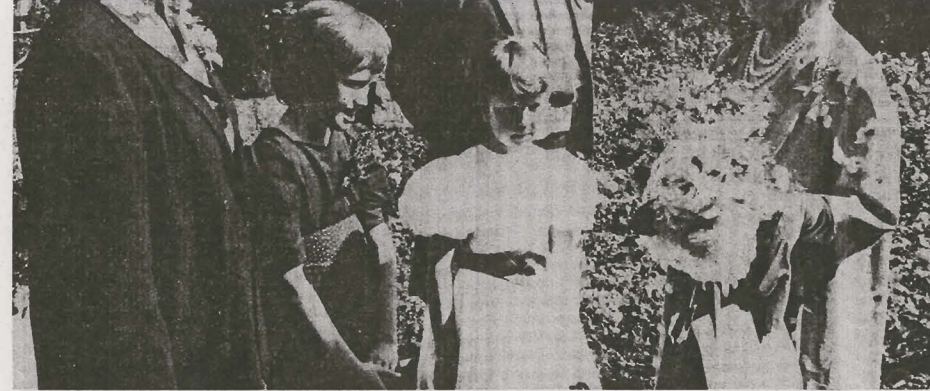
She then spoke with some other residents and friends in the Quarry Lane courtyard. Happily, one of these was retired shop assistant Mrs Jessie Short, now the only original tenant left in the first homes built in Quarry Lane 22 years ago. Miss Short, who occupies No 1, was born at Lochslin Farm, but has lived in Tain for 56 years.



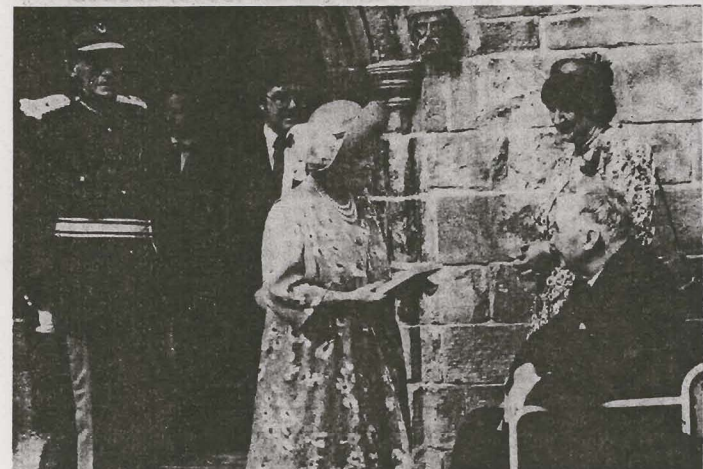
The Queen Mother had a word with 14-year-old Girl Guide Margaret Booth from Helmsdale, who with other guides and members of the local company of Army Cadets lined the route to the speaking dais.

Below — Mairi Mackenzie, a pupil of Craighill Primary School, celebrated her seventh birthday by presenting a bouquet of roses from the Rose Garden to the Queen Mother. Looking on are parents Lyn and Ruairidh Mackenzie, Heathmount Farm, and sister Kirsty.





All eyes to the west as a Nimrod from RAF Kinloss begins a fly-past over the newly-opened bridge to mark the historic occasion.



#### GUILDRY TRUST

The St Duthus church has recently been reroofed and had electricity installed thanks to work by the Tain Guildry Trust.

Chairman Mr David Robertson said the trust had been created during the last century to restore and maintain the church, a place of pilgrimage, and its grounds.

Among the works is the protecting of a medieval statue of St Duthac, which has now been brought inside to prevent further deterioration. This sculpture previously stood in a niche on the outer wall — but a completely convincing replica now stands there, made from fibreglass by Alison Simpson, Golspie.

It features extra details, such as a calf at the saint's feet, not now distinguishable on the original.

#### VILLAGES WILL FLOURISH

Scottish Office minister Lord James Douglas-Hamilton (pictured right during the Queen Mother's bridge walkabout), had a word of encouragement for the bypassed communities of Bonar Bridge, Ardgay, Spinningdale and Edderton: "Our experience elsewhere in Scotland is that, if attention is paid to advertising, bypassed communities will flourish in future as they did in the past."

"I know that concern has been expressed but it is the case that, in general, they do flourish in Scotland."

He considered that increased tourism was the answer.



The Queen Mother is pictured with the Lord Lieutenant of Ross & Cromarty, Captain Roderick Stirling, Mr David Robertson, chairman of Tain Guildry Trust, Mrs Robertson and Mr Philip Durham whose wife, Jane, is chairman of Tain Custodiers Trust, after a tour of the St Duthus Collegiate Church.



Smiles from the Queen Mother and North Tain district councillor Mr Harry Miller at the Quarry Lane development.



Members of the British Legion lined up to meet the Queen Mother as she arrived, to the sound of bells, at the St Duthus Church.

Outside the locality office in Tain's High Street The Queen Mother was introduced to representatives of the community, district and regional council, and of Tain L'Hermitage, Tain's twin town.