

The Scotsman, 1 January 1934

Letter to the Editor:

December 28, 1933.

Sir: A curious story, handed down in local tradition, about the dragon of Dornoch ought really to be tested. According to the tale, the dragon was slain by Gilbert of Moray, Bishop of Caithness. But first let me explain about the Bishop's connection with Sutherland.

Gilbert of Moray was son of Murdoe of Newton and Culbin, who was son of Alexander of Newton. This Alexander was son of Richard of Moray, who got the lordship of Newton in 1129 from his father Angus, the last Mormaer of Moray, killed at the Battle of Stracathro in 1130. Gilbert of Moray became Archdeacon of Moray about 1203, and between this date and 1211 he received a charter of the lands of Skelbo, which in those days embraced nearly half of Sutherland. This charter was confirmed by King William the Lion on 29th April 1212. (Sutherland, Book 3, pp1, 2.) Gilbert the Archdeacon of Moray became Bishop of Caithness in 1222, and he died on 1st April 1245. This gives us a limit of dates for the era of the dragon.

Gilbert of Moray is said to have built the castle of Skelbo before he gave the lands of Skelbo to his brother Richard of Moray, who had a charter of confirmation from King Alexander II, on 26th December 1235. (Sutherland Book, Vol 3, p6.) Richard of Moray was ancestor of the Murrays of Skelbo and Culrossie. According to the story, Gilbert must have been residing near Dornoch when a terrible dragon, which infested the woods and lochs of the muirs to the west, created great alarm in the little city. The dragon had a penchant for plump little girls; he was a lengthy brute, with a long neck, and as he lumbered along the street he would put his head in at a window, and gobble up a fair maiden. No one dared to attack the beast, for he could spout flames.

When Bishop Gilbert heard about the doings of the beast he determined to kill it. The dragon usually came along a well defined path from the woods of Camore, by Loch-an-Treel, where it used to slake its thirst preparatory to its raid on Dornoch. St Gilbert hit on a plan to destroy the beast, which was called "Dhu Guische"- the meaning whereof I leave to some kindly Gaelic scholar. Gilbert caused a long shallow tunnel to be dug in its path, having peepholes at intervals. Soon afterwards word was brought to Gilbert that the dragon was seen in the woods on its way to Dornoch. So Gilbert sallied forth with bow and quiver, and popped into the first hole to await the beast. When the dragon came within range Gilbert let drive an arrow, and then scuttled along the tunnel to the next hole, blocking the entrance after him. He peeped out of

the hole number two to see the dragon spouting fire into hole number one. Gilbert let drive more arrows, and scuttled along to the next hole. He followed this method of attack until looking out of the last hole he saw the dragon weltering in its gore. They buried the dragon at the 'Stone of the Beast' which still exists near Loch-an-Treel in Camore Wood.

Now, I venture to suggest the story ought to be tested by experts making excavation at the "Stone of the Beast". Amateurs ought not be allowed to make search. A mere fragment of the remains would give a clue as to the species, and anyway it would be of interest to discover the reason for the existence of the "Stone of the Beast". If the remains of the "Dhu Guische" or dragon, be found and reconstructed it would prove a gold mine for the burgh of Dornoch, if they placed the figure of the dragon in the centre of a maze, and made a small charge for inspecting it- I am &c.

D. Murray Rose.