

Remembering the night popular hotel was destroyed by fire

The following is an extract from our old files from 75 years ago

THE Sutherland Arms Hotel, Dornoch, one of the oldest established hotels in the county, was completely gutted by a destructive fire which broke out on Saturday morning (January 4, 1941) and all that now remains of this magnificent building is but a grim and gaunt spectacle of its former self.

The devastation caused by the blaze is estimated at several thousand

pounds while the loss sustained by the Royal and Ancient burgh through the destruction of one of its most imposing structures is tremendous. It was one of the most serious outbreaks experienced in the county during recent years.

Situated in the most convenient part of the town, both for railway station and golf course, the hotel was some years ago enlarged by its proprietor, Mr Hector M Ross. Commodious and well managed, the premises were excellently furnished throughout and were replete with all modern conveniences for the comfort of visitors, the great majority of whom were golfers.

Fortunately there were few guests in residence at the time of the fire.

First indication of the outbreak was observed by Mrs I Melville, a visitor staying at the hotel. Mrs Melville, who is over 60 years of age, awoke about six in the morning with a choking feeling. She gargled her throat, but half an hour later she smelt burning and ran for her maid, who was later sent to apprise the proprietor.

The fire began in the dining hall and by the time the conflagration was noticed, the wing under the maids' quarters was burning fiercely. The flames shot out with amazing rapidity and ferocity. They spread from end to

end of the hotel, leaving in their wake a trail of destruction.

The whole place was a raging inferno and no human effort could stay its progress, much as willing helpers would have liked to see their efforts successful.

It was impossible for some maids to descend the blazing staircase. They climbed on to the roof and were only prevented from leaping to the ground through the timely arrival of a ladder. Some servicemen propped the ladder against the wall and bore the hysterical maids to safety.

The Duke of Sutherland's Fire Brigade from Dunrobin, who were



The Sutherland Arms Hotel in Dornoch Square in its heyday.

Photo courtesy of Dornoch Historylinks Museum



The site is now occupied by private apartments.

summoned to the scene, assisted by a number of the military, fought the flames for about three hours.

They were, however, hampered in their valiant attempts at subduing the fire through the lack of an adequate water supply.

An eye-witness, who arrived on the scene shortly after the alarm was raised, vouched the information that the building caught such a hold that even with a copious supply of water, it would

be practically impossible to do little more than avert the flames spreading to buildings adjacent to the hotel.

He said: "The flames soared to a great height and expanded so fiercely and rapidly that no fire-fighters could possibly stay the destruction which resulted."

Another citizen, who assisted with the work, stressed the danger arising from lack of adequate facilities for fire fighting in rural districts such as in Sutherland.

He remarked: "The danger has now manifested itself. I wonder what steps will be taken to remedy the defects?"

The general public and especially the hundreds of visitors who made the hotel their summer rendezvous will record their genuine sympathy with Mr Ross in the serious loss he has sustained at a time when it is impossible to rebuild an establishment of such substantial, spacious and comfortable proportions.