

Thrilling jail break by ladder and rope

A COLLECTION of documents relating to Dornoch, which was made a Royal Burgh in 1628 by King Charles I, is held at the Highland Archive Centre and includes town council minutes from 1729 onwards, abstracts of accounts, assessment roles and electoral registers.

Of particular fascination are the Dornoch Jail Books and lists of prisoners, dating from 1814-1840.

They give an insight into the types of crimes committed and the penalties meted out.

In the earlier of the two volumes, a list of prisoners is split into two sections.

Those who have been arrested for civil debts and excise penalties appear on the left while prisoners for



From the ARCHIVES

crimes appear on the right. The criminal prisoners' list opens with one Robert Mackay of Cranich, parish of Durness, who was arrested on a charge of "clandestinely working horses" and held for 12

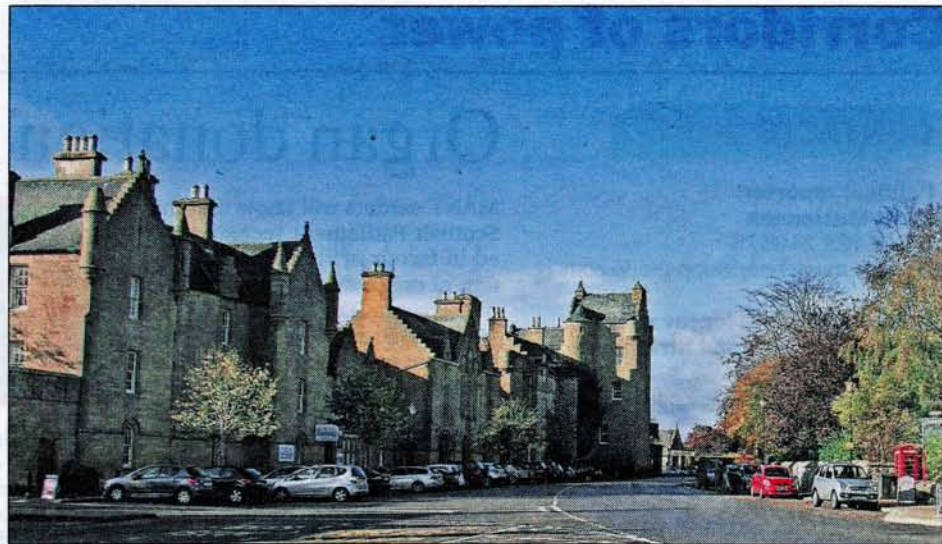
hours until a fine was paid. Then there was John Ross of Claggan, who was found guilty of sheep stealing and exiled for 14 years!

Other crimes include deforcement of sheriff officers, uttering (using) base coin, and theft of turnips.

One Adam Mackay of Elderable, Kildonan, was acquitted after trial in Inverness for murder in 1817 on the score of "insanity".

He later appears in the list of prisoners with his crime recorded as "maniac". A note from January 1818 records: "Early this morning Adam Mackay from Ederable and Alexander Macdonald from Tomich, both in the parish of Kildonan, effected their escape from the jail of Dornoch, by one of the open turrets in the attic room, and from there by means of a ladder on the top of the adjoining house and a rope fastened to it, came to the ground."

Perhaps the most renowned person to appear in these volumes is infamous Sutherland Estates factor Patrick Sellar, who appeared in



Dornoch's historic town square with its former town jail, now taken over by retail.

1815 under a charge which included "wilful fire-raising, culpable homicide and oppression" for having set fire to the house of a tinker in Rosal, Strathnaver.

A note next to the entry records his liberation by warrant of the High Court of Justiciary, trial in 1816 at the Justiciary at Inverness, and honourable acquittal.

The Dornoch jail books are freely available for viewing and consultation during opening hours. Why not come and immerse yourself in the Sutherland of 200 years ago?

■ The Highland Archive Centre holds a drop-in event from 11am-3pm on Saturday, July 27. Historic documents relating to churches, schools, businesses and families will be on display along with family trees.

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HIGH Life Highland's Archive Service is responsible for collecting, preserving and making accessible historical records in relation to Inverness-shire, Nairnshire, Sutherland and Ross and Cromarty.

The collections are



stored at the Highland Archive Centre and date from the 14th century.

They contain more than 100,000 items and include charters, minute books, correspondence, accounts, maps, photographs and films.

The centre is open from 10am to 5pm and until 7.30pm on Wednesdays.

If you would like to contact the service, phone 01463 256444 or email: archives@highlifehighland.com

Na h-àirean a' bha ann an Dornoch	Na h-àirean a' bha ann an Dornoch
<p>Clan Mackay Robert Mackay Cranich parish of Durness 1815</p>	<p>Clan Mackay Robert Mackay Cranich parish of Durness 1815</p>
<p>Sheep stealing William 1815</p>	<p>Sheep stealing William 1815</p>
<p>Widow 1815</p>	<p>Widow 1815</p>

An extract detailing a list of prisoners at Dornoch jail.