

# A Lecture :

## Characters Connected with Dornoch Cathedral

**Gilbert de Moravia** - Bishop of Caithness.

Gilbert was a well-educated churchman, a wealthy nobleman, a widely travelled courtier and a natural leader. He moved the seat of the See from Halkirk in the north to Dornoch in the south. The principal reasons - because of the brutal treatment suffered by his predecessors, the fact that he owned the coastal strip of land in the south and because he would be close to his relative, the 1st Earl of Sutherland, who would protect them all when needed. In 1224 he commenced the building of his cathedral. Having seen the magnificent churches that had been built in mainland Europe, he knew what he wanted and where he could find the masons he needed. By the time of his death in 1245 the cathedral was complete, except for the nave which was not finished until the 15th century. Gilbert completed his task by endowing the cathedral with a constitution based on that of Lincoln. It meant that the future of the cathedral was secured.

His chapter (committee), which organised the life of the cathedral, consisted of the Bishop, who was in charge, supported by ten canons, five of whom were dignified with titles for specific duties. The five dignified canons were the Dean, who was responsible for administration ; the Precentor, who was in charge of the music ; the Treasurer, who controlled the finances and any "church treasures" ; the Chancellor, who had duties of a literary nature ; and the Archdeacon, who was responsible for the well-being of the other churches and clergy in the diocese.

The Dean was expected to be in residence for six months each year, the others for three months each year. All ten were expected to employ a vicar to cover for them whenever they were absent.

Gilbert ended his constitution thus, "Upon those who shall distract and injure them may the Wrath and Indignation of Almighty God be theirs in eternal damnation." The first service was held in 1239 when the body of the murdered Bishop Adam was brought from Caithness and re-interred reverently in the cathedral. For some three hundred years the cathedral would have provided a haven of light, hope and peace in a dark and dangerous world.

Eventually, Gilbert became the last Scottish saint in the Kalendar of Saints. Several miracles are attributed to him :- he restored a burnt account book as good as new, he cured a dumb man by the power of prayer, he washed his hands in a barren pool and the fisherman immediately caught a large salmon, he killed a dragon which was terrorising the neighbourhood, he threw tools up above the cathedral and they began to build the tower. He is said to have translated the psalms and gospels into gaelic for the benefit of the people, but there is no evidence to support the claim. St Gilbert died in 1245.

# Alan de St Edmund

BISHOP OF CAITHNESS 1282 to about 1291

Alan de St Edmund was regarded with favour by King Edward 1 , who rewarded him with the prestigious office of Chancellor of Scotland. As he often acted on behalf of the king there is little doubt that many of his contemporaries would have considered him to be a traitor.

One year he received a gift from the king of 10 stags. The same year he was given “a mourning gift “ of 40 oaks for the fabric of Dornoch cathedral, in memory of King Alexander III and Queen Margaret, who was Edward’s sister.

The bishop was one of a group of influential people who proposed a marriage between Edward’s young son, Prince Edward, and the Maid of Norway. She had already been given the throne and the Scots were eager to meet their Queen but her father was in no hurry to let her go. King Edward approved of the match because it would increase his hold on Scotland. He sent two Commissioners north to meet the Maid in Orkney and escort her south, but when they reached Skelbo Castle they were greeted with the news of her death. The Scots grieved for their young Queen. So, too, no doubt, did Bishop Alan, but he died shortly afterwards.

Due to the lack of information we have, all the bishops who were appointed up to the time of the Reformation remain as very shadowy, fleeting figures. However, Bishop William Mudy, in a petition to the Pope in about 1460, paints a graphic picture of the dreadful dangers that existed in a diocese where pillage and rapine were common.

Taken from a petition to Pope Honorius IV sent by the Bishop and Chapter of Caithness : “ in the wild coast and mountainous parts of Scotland ( in which parts is situate the said church wherein are preserved the relics of St Gilbert.....etc) lawlessness and ambushes by savages are prevalent, so much so that on account of the frequency of their ferocity and depredations, not only are the prelates and clergy of the said church driven away and prevented from residing therein, but also the inhabitants of those parts are plundered and sometimes burned with their wives and little ones and are put to death with the sword.....”

At this petition the Pope made statute that “ no one shall within the bounds of three Scots miles round about the said church to be marked by the above bishop on every side with crosses, commit arson, rob, mutilate, slay or steal, or carry off any goods, which come for refuge within the said bounds and belong to the said church and its chapter and clergy and other persons of the said city and diocese.....under pain of the greater excommunication, interdict, suspension and anathema.....”

The Pope indicated that he was aware already of the uncivilised conditions that existed in the bishopric and he replied speedily in granting the petition.

## **Robert Stewart** - Earl of Lennox, Earl of March, Bishop of Caithness

Robert Stewart was appointed Bishop of Caithness in 1542. As he was implicated in his brother's rebellion he fled to England in 1544, thus forfeiting his bishopric. His Church lands and property were plundered by the Earl of Caithness and Mackay of Strathnaver on the pretext of looking after them for the bishop.

In 1545 he faced charges of treason, but Cardinal Beaton argued successfully that civil courts could not try a bishop, so all charges were dropped. In 1547 his bishopric was restored to him, but, to the surprise of nobody, the Earl of Caithness and Mackay of Strathnaver refused to return a single penny. At length they were forced to return everything by Earls of Huntly and Sutherland.

This was the time of the Reformation when there was war between Catholics and Protestants to determine which religion should reign supreme. Once it was clear that the Protestants were going to win the landed gentry stood ready to plunder the rich church lands that were in the possession of the Catholic Church. Their dignities fell to temptation, swallowed their principles, and were keen to sell. As soon as the Reformation became established fact a great plundering of church lands took place. Bishop Robert was keen to join in.

In the decade ending in 1560 he sold all his lands, and any others he could claim, to the Earl of Sutherland, mostly. He was careful never to resign anything, thus, he was always in favour. He was Catholic twice, a Protestant twice. He married off his only sister to the, Earl of Sutherland, to cement the bond between them. He ignored his vow of celibacy and took himself a wife.

He was appointed Commendator of St Andrews Priory. The holder of this temporary post was expected to fill the vacancy, maintain the life of the Institution, and hand it over to the permanent appointee in good condition. Bishop Robert refused to allow a permanent appointee and he lived the rest of his life in St Andrews, in luxury, on the income from the Priory and his bishopric, "at the goff, archerie and gude cheir." He was living a life of indulgent luxury while his flock in the north had need of his help. Those not killed were scattered in helpless and homeless starvation.

He died in 1586. His peers were unable to find anything good to say about him.

## Sir Robert Gordon

He was the son of one Earl of Sutherland, brother of the next and guardian of the next. His father was the Earl Alexander who, when 15 years old, was nearly poisoned in Helmsdale Castle. He then lived, a virtual prisoner of the Earl of Caithness in his home castle of Dunrobin. The Earl then married the boy to his 32 year old daughter. The Murrays of Dornoch were infuriated at this mistreatment of their now 18 yearold Earl. Against all the odds they succeeded in rescuing him and placed him under the protection of his powerful relative, the Earl of Huntly.

The Earl of Caithness was enraged and resolved to teach the Murrays a lesson they would not forget. He assembled a huge army composed of the riff raff of the diocese, supported by the Sinclairs of Caithness, Mackay of Strathnaver, Sutherland of Duffus and his brother, William Sutherland of Evelix. The Master of Caithness was appointed Commander in Chief. This army scattered the Murrays, most of whom fled, many were killed, the rest retreated up the tower where the army could not get up and the Murrays could not get down. The frustrated army set about a thorough sacking of the cathedral. They set fire to the roof so that the entire roof fell in. It must have been very hot and smoky for the Murrays but they seem to have survived. The principal leader in the sacking was Sutherland of Evelix, who burst open the tomb of St Gilbert and kicked the bones about. Impasse had been reached so passers by were forced to act as go betweens. A truce was declared. Three Murray hostages were sent down and the rest were allowed to follow out safely. Earl of Caithness was furious as he had wanted them all killed. He gave orders and the three hostages were killed by Sutherland of Duffus.

Sir Robert tells what happened to the leaders. Of William Sutherland he says "Almighty God did most justlie punish him ; for that same foot that burst St Gilbert his coffin did afterwards rot away and consume, to the great terror of all the beholders, whereby this William Sutherland grew so lothsum that no man was able to come neir unto him, and so he died miserable." Of Sutherland of Duffus he says "the laird of Duffus seikned, and never rose again out of his bed.....thro' the strange visions which appeired unto him." The Master of Caithness" wes shortlie therefter punished by the hands of his owne father by famishing him to death in wofull captivitie." Shortly afterwards Mackay of Strathnaver died "pairtlie through grieff and pairtlie through the torment and truble of conscience which he had conceaved for his bypast actions." Sir Robert would have us believe that they all paid dearly for their behaviour.

During his stay with the Earl of Huntly the young Earl of Sutherland met the Earl's sister , Lady Jean Gordon. She had been married to the Earl of Bothwell, who had divorced her so that he could marry Mary, Queen of Scots When he was 21 years old he left to take over his Earldom, and he took Lady Jean with him. He married her after divorcing the existing "wife." She was a tough old bird who outlived 3 husbands before she died aged 84. Sir Robert ( her second son ) was a firm Protestant whereas the rest of the family were just as firm in their Catholic belief, but they kept quiet and tried to live a normal

peaceful life with only moderate success. Sir Robert makes it clear that he was very fond of his mother, who was a woman of great character.

In the early years of the 17th century Sir Robert was able to find enough money from the estate and other interested parties to rebuild part of the ruined cathedral. He restored the chancel and the two transepts but then he had to partition off the nave and leave it to moulder. It was not perfect but it would have to do.

In 1628, as a result of Sir Robert's considerable influence at Court, Dornoch was granted the great honour of royal burgh status. The principal benefit, according to the document itself, lay in "reducing the barbarous and uncultivated mountaineers to a state of civilisation." Power was given to elect a Provost, four Bailies, a Dean of Guild, a Treasurer and twelve councillors, they had the authority to elect Commissioners to Parliament, they had full power to make laws, create burgesses and brothers of guild, they were empowered to appoint all other members and officials of court, to erect a market cross and a tolbooth within the burgh, to hold a weekly market, and they were granted full power to erect a free harbour and port of Dornoch.

Once again Sir Robert used his considerable influence on Dornoch's behalf when, in 1631, Dornoch was further honoured by being made head burgh of the new Sheriffdom of Sutherland. It meant that the County Court would meet in Dornoch.

Sir Robert Gordon died in 1656 at the age of seventy six and Dornoch lost a very good friend.

## Earl of Loudoun, C in C King's Forces in the North. 1746.

Loudoun wrote regularly to the Earl of Sutherland on army matters and, on each occasion, he ended the letter in a tender, gentle, unwarlike manner. Here are the endings of five letters, written in late February and early March, 1746, a month or so before the Battle of Culloden.

### Extract no. 1

"My complements to my lady. I ever am, my dear Lord, your lordships most humble servant, "

Loudoun

### Extract no. 2

"I beg your lordship will be so good as to make my complements acceptable to my Lady Sutherland, and my love to my wife, and my complements to the major. I ever am etc etc, "

Loudoun

### Extract no. 3

"Please make offer of my compliments to my Lady Sutherland, to my little wife, and to Major McKay. I ever am etc etc.

Loudoun

I ask pardon for using an other hand. I have had so much writting today that I am almost blind. "

### Extract no. 4

"I beg your lordship will make my compliments acceptable to my Lady Sutherland and the major, and give my love to my little wife, and tell her I beg she will remember that a man that neglects his duty never yet was prised by the women. I ever am etc etc. "

Loudoun

( It is possible to detect signs of a bored "little wife" sulking. )

### Extract no. 5

"I beg you will make my compliments to my Lady Sutherland, and my dear unfaithful wife, and to the major. I ever am etc etc. "

Loudoun

Shortly after this te Earl of Loudoun was caught napping by the Earl of Cromarty and the Jacobites. He and his army left Dornoch hurriedly. They fled to the west so quickly that their pursuers never caught them. It is to be hoped that the " dear unfaithful wife " was able to go with them, and kept up with them, and was not too saddle sore.

Sage describes the Rev Bethune as “ an elegant classical scholar, a sound preacher, and one of the most finished gentlemen I ever remember to have seen. His manners were so easy and dignified that they would have graced the first peer of the realm , and his English sermons, which he always read, were among the neatest compositions I ever heard. In preaching in the Gaelic language he used very full notes, as his mind was of that highly intellectual character that it could not submit to, nor indeed be brought to work in, mere extempore or unconnected discussions.”

When he arrived in Dornoch he found the cathedral in poor condition and in part ruinous, particularly the nave which had been ignored and untouched for two centuries. All this was the responsibility of the heritors, but Dr Bethune appealed directly to the young Countess Elizabeth. Her affairs were administered by curators who promptly referred him back to the heritors. He had told the Countess that the cathedral was “ so vastly spacious, lofty and irregular, as greatly to exceed the utmost exertion of the human voice.” Each Sunday Dr Bethune preached a two-hour sermon in Gaelic, a two-hour sermon in English and followed them up with an hour's Sunday School. The congregation must have been made of tough stuff, but, for Dr Bethune, it must have been a very severe test of voice and stamina.

Many heritors were taking advantage of their right to burial in the cathedral, as a result of which Dr Bethune was prompted to complain that the cathedral was “rendered nauseous and unhealthful. He pursued all these matters with Presbytery and certain improvements were carried out, including the raising of the floor by seven feet and the provision of a new pulpit and pews.

Dr Bethune reminded the heritors of the poor state of the graveyard. His predecessor had complained that wandering pigs “ digg up the Graves and Bones of the Defuncts, which of itself is Shocking to Nature and Disconsonant to good policy.” Nothing was done at the time but it was all dealt with during the restoration of 1835 - 37.

In 1793 he contributed an article on his parish to the “ Old Statistical Account of Scotland. “ Of the cathedral he says, “ the church is, from its vast extent and stupendous height, a very incompetent place of worship, being extremely cold, and beyond the powers of an ordinary voice.” He informs us that , “ all attend the parish church with the exception of one man, not a native of the parish. “ His description of the burgh suggests poverty. It had “ no landed property nor any other source of revenue beyond the customs levied at six annual fairs held here, and which are on the decline, as indeed the place itself is in the last stage of decay. There is no other town or village in the parish and this hardly deserves the name. It contains only four shops, such as they are. “

The Rev Dr Bethune died in 1816 after a long and eventful ministry.

## Duchess / Countess of Sutherland 1765 - 1839

When she was just thirteen months old both her parents died of typhoid fever while taking the waters in Bath. A tremendous legal battle took place to ensure that the title went to her. It went all the way to the House of Lords which eventually ruled in her favour. Her early years were spent in Edinburgh under the care of her grandmother, Lady Alva. She received a good education and showed an early liking and talent for literature and artistic subjects. She married Lord Gower in 1785. She was the Head of Clan Sutherland but her upbringing, and her situation after her marriage, was very different indeed from the traditional form of Chieftainship. Normally, the Clan Chiefs were virtually penniless, and were looking for ways to maximise their income, but she had married the richest man in Europe, so money was not a problem at all.

He wished to introduce agricultural reform of the vast areas of the county using the modern methods of the time. It soon became clear that large numbers of people would need to be moved if the reform was to be successful. It would become famous as The Clearances.

It is difficult to blame them for the easy cruelty of some of their harsher officials. Difficult but not impossible. It is much easier to make the charge of unwitting cruelty stick because the whole concept of moving large numbers of people about, against their wishes, and without any form of consultation taking place, is chilling in the extreme. It is cold, heartless, inhuman and treats people as though they were pawns on a chess board. Such a thought never seems to have occurred to them. And yet her letters reveal a warm and rather attractive personality - much different from the accepted opinion.

The people of Dornoch are much more grateful for the restoration of the Cathedral which she funded. She did think she owned it, mind you, and she wanted a stained glass window erected in memory of the 1st Duke, but was forced to settle for a 15ft statue. We are very glad that she dismissed Burn and his "mock gothick" plans, and we are delighted with the sound, attractive building she left us

She died in 1839 at the age of 74



## The Rev Donald Sage

The Rev Donald Sage spent a lifetime writing his book, "Memorabilia Domestica." He died in 1869. His son edited the book and published it in 1889. Sage was at school in Dornoch from 1801 to 1803

### Sheriff MacCulloch's house

Sage describes how, early one morning, in 1801, in the company of his father and brother, he rode from Embo to Dornoch. "As we approached it I was almost breathless with wonder at the height of the steeple, and at the huge antique construction of the church."

He comments approvingly on the alterations of 1835-7 and then goes on to describe Sheriff MacCulloch's house, where he was going to lodge. "His house was situated to the south of the town, and at the foot of the vennel leading from the churchyard. The house was of an antique cast. The dining room had three windows, and on its wall hung several prints.....near the door stood a handsome eight-day clock - a present from the Sutherland Volunteers, of which he was Major. A large sofa stood on the opposite side near the fire-place. The study was a small room upstairs, which was crammed with books and papers."

Describing his own bedroom, Sage says, "it was at the top of the house, an attic above an attic - a dreary, cold place, having all the rude finishings of a coarse loft." On Sabbath evenings the sheriff examined all the inmates of his household in their scriptural knowledge, concluding with an exposition of the chapter which he had read. He was a regular attender at church. Even though he found Dr Bethune's sermons to be dry enough, he would not be an absentee. However, a restlessness of manner indicated when he did not feel he was being edified.

Fairs. From every corner of the county, almost every man, woman and child attended the Dornoch market, says Sage. The evening previous to the market was a busy one. A long train of heavily-laden carts might be seen wending their weary way into town, more particularly from Tain, by the Meikle Ferry. The booths or tents were set up made of canvas stretched upon poles which were inserted several feet into the ground, even into graves and deep enough to reach the coffins.

The fair started at noon the next day and lasted for two days and a half. Every sort of saleable article was bought and sold whether of home or foreign manufacture.

### The School.

1st dunce of the day wore a smelly old hat and was named General Morgan  
2nd " " " " Captain Rattler  
3rd " " " " Sergeant More  
4th was given a broken wool-card and stick and named The Fiddler  
After school they had go outside and dance to the music of the woolcard.

Shinty and bools were played on Old New Years Day

Cock-fighting was practised on Shrove Tuesday. A ring was formed in the court room and the Schoolmaster and his friends acted as judges . Birds were borrowed by the boys from their owners. The boy whose bird gained the most victories was crowned King, the next best was crowned Queen and the Coronation took place in school. Crowns made by the ladies of the town were placed on the heads of the King and Queen, to whom the master addressed a few words in Latin. Then a procession of scholars paraded through the streets. The day's proceedings closed with a ball and supper which were held in the evening.

Rev **Angus Kennedy** Minister Dornoch Cathedral 1817 to 1843

The Rev Kennedy , from Lairg, was appointed to Dornoch Cathedral in 1817. It is very likely that he was well-known in Dornoch

There was great alarm, bordering on panic, throughout Scotland as a result of the cholera epidemic of 1831 - 2. The cholera scare did more to improve the sanitation of the burgh than any official order. The people were so terrified of infection that, of their own free will, they did their best to follow recommended procedures.

They instituted their own "system of guard " which ensured that a check was made on every visitor coming in to Dornoch. If they came from a known infected area the guards would not let them in. Golspie and Brora were infected areas and the guards refused entry to the Procurator Fiscal for the County, who was coming to Dornoch on official business, because he lived in Golspie. The guards refused entry to a corpse in a coffin because, they said, it had probably come from an infected area, the man may have died from the disease and his coffin had certainly passed through infected areas to reach Dornoch. The mourners were forced to bury the man outside the burgh boundary, near the far boundary fence of Ambassador House, better known as the Earls Cross Hostel. It can still be found there today. The guards may have been unnecessarily strict but they were successful. Dornoch remained free of cholera.

A committee, chaired by the Rev Kennedy, was appointed to see that the poor were abiding by the official minute on basic hygiene. Having completed their task they submitted a report of their own, signed by the Rev Kennedy, regarding poverty in the burgh. Among the poor there are many " whose houses are so ill roofed and thatched as to admit the rain through in every quarter, insomuch that at the present wet season the inmates can scarce find a dry corner in which to place their beds. The streets are deficient in cleanliness, many persons from want of suitable ashpits throwing ashes and water upon them.....Very many Widows and old and infirm people are destitute of the necessaries of life and the privations they endure are only equalled by the patient and becoming manner in which these are borne."

In an article written in 1834 for the New Statistical Account he commented that the climate was milder than it had been because, recently, there had not been the same heavy falls of snow or the same intense frosts. The population of the parish had increased to 3380 in 1831 despite there being two emigrations to America. The situations left were quickly occupied by others. He was at pains to stress that this emigration was purely voluntary and that most of them left the parish in comfortable circumstances. One wonders !

He reported a big increase in English speaking in the area and he thought that Gaelic might well become extinct within this, the 19th, century.

There had been a marked improvement in housing and in the general appearance of the burgh. The old feal houses with their turf roofs, fireplaces in the middle and with smoke exiting through the door, turf roof, or wherever, had all been replaced by neat, comfortable , two storey stone cottages. The streets were clean and the approach roads to the burgh had been much improved.

The Rev Kennedy reported that there were seven schools in the parish, of which three were in the town - the parochial school, a female school supported by the SPCK and another female school without salary, the teacher depending on the school fees. In the landward parish were two schools supported by the General Assembly's Scheme and two supported by the Glasgow Auxiliary Gaelic School Society. Even then people thirsted for a good education.

When the Disruption occurred in 1843 the Rev Kennedy and his son, who assisted him, left the cathedral and joined the new Free Church, along with the bulk of the Dornoch congregation and all the elders except two.

Dr Bentinck said of the Rev Kennedy, " he was greatly esteemed for his goodness and kindness, and devotion to the best interests of his people. "

**Widow Twankey** lived where the Masonic Lodge building is today.

She kept hens to each one of which she had given the name of one of the elders, all of whom she respected very much as guardians of the faith. When the Disruption occurred, and all the elders, except two, joined the Free Church, she was outraged.

They had let her down, they had betrayed her trust, and they had betrayed their faith. There was only one thing she could do. She rang their necks and ate them. The hens, of course, not the humans. Not all at once, naturally, and no doubt she invited friends and relatives to join in the feast, but, by the end of it all, she must have been sick of the sight, taste and smell of chicken.

One wonders whether any of the guilty elders felt peculiar in any way - shivery, sore, tender or whatever - when the slaughter was in full swing, particularly when it was their named hen that was being cooked and eaten.

What is certain is that this period has become known as a time of great bitterness and much unhappiness. Religion was a very important part of every day life at that time, and the split was felt very keenly and debated passionately. It ruined life-long friendships, set brother against sister and divided whole families, one against the other. It was many years before things settled down, but, even now, one can still experience echoes of it.

THE REVEREND DOCTOR  
**CHARLES BENTINCK**  
MINISTER OF DORNOCH CATHEDRAL  
1907 TO 1934

Dr Bentinck was born at Kingussie on 24th January, 1866. He graduated M.A. at Edinburgh University in 1886, took the degree of B.D. at St Andrews University in 1888, and was licensed by the Presbytery of Abernethy in that year. He became assistant at St Columba's, Glasgow, was ordained to Kirkhill in 1889 and moved to Dornoch on 7th June, 1907. The University of St Andrews conferred on him the degree of Doctor of Divinity in June, 1925.

In 1891 Dr Bentinck married Helen Green, daughter of James Fraser, Minister of Erchless, and their marriage was blessed with four sons and five daughters. Mrs Bentinck died in 1932 and, in 1936, Dr Bentinck married Ann Henderson, the widow of George Robert Maclellan, Minister in Thurso. The Rev Dr Bentinck retired from the Cathedral in November, 1934, and died in Edinburgh on 27th January, 1941.

Dr Bentinck published several minor works in "The Transactions of the Gaelic Society of Inverness" but his reputation as an author rests squarely on his scholarly work, "Dornoch Cathedral and Parish," which was published in 1926. This meticulously researched history of the parish and cathedral, from earliest times to the restoration of 1835-37, is widely recognised as the definitive book on the subject.

The cathedral was erected when church architecture was at its zenith, but, through the centuries, it suffered from fire deliberately set by warring clansmen from the north, the ravages of storm and tempest, the careless abuse of armies quartered in the burgh, the neglect of heritors, the unthinking misuse of parishioners, and finally, the restoration of the cathedral fabric during the renovation of 1835-37, at a time when church architecture had reached its nadir.

During his incumbency Dr Bentinck did much to restore the ancient building to some semblance of its former glory. The organ was renovated through the generosity of Mr Carnegie of Skibo, the beautifully carved pulpit was donated by Mrs Barrow of Northfield (now the Burghfield Hotel), the communion table was gifted by Miss Haldane of Skelbo and the attractive pews were installed. Prior to the 700th anniversary celebrations in 1924, Dr Bentinck arranged for the removal of the internal plaster work in order to reveal the hidden splendour of the interior walls. By the time of the 300th anniversary celebrations, in 1928, of the 1628 granting of Royal Burgh status, Dr Bentinck had completed his task by organising the stripping of the harling from the outside walls so that, once more, Dornoch Cathedral stood resplendent in the warm beauty of its magnificent stonework.

The older parishioners remember the August fete with considerable affection. The roads around the manse ( now Area Offices ) were decorated with bunting and there were large stalls all round the garden, which was crowded with people bent on having fun. The cathedral congregation was small but Dr Bentinck was very popular and his fete was supported by all the churches

Dr Bentinck himself told this story. Sandy Bobbin, who lived in Gilchrist Square, was blind and a little “touched.” The boys found that if he was teased he would swear wildly and lash out violently with his stick. Sandy was in the habit of going to the manse for clothing and food. He was never refused. One day Bentinck said to him,

“Sandy, they are telling me up in the town that you are swearing too much.”

“Huh,” said Sandy, “that’s nothing. They are telling me up in the town that you are drinking too much.” Dr Bentinck who was virtually teetotal found this very amusing.

He had a large, mischievous, lively and happy family, all of whom assembled in the vestry each Sunday and went to their pews just before the service commenced. One day the last boy out released the lock and closed the door, thus locking his father in. 11 am came and passed, but no minister appeared. Ten minutes passed. No minister. Finally, the boy confessed, a key was produced, and the service started much later than expected.

Dr Bentinck was a gentle, kind man who is remembered with respect and affection as a minister who would walk all the way to Birichen to bring comfort and consolation to a grieving family, who were not even members of his church, but whom he felt needed comforting.

THE VERY REVEREND DOCTOR  
**JAMES A. SIMPSON**  
MINISTER OF DORNOCH CATHEDRAL  
1976 TO 1997  
MODERATOR OF THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY 1994

The Very Rev Dr James A. Simpson was born in Glasgow in 1934. He was educated at Giffnock Primary School and Eastwood Secondary School. On leaving school he attended Glasgow University where, in 1955, he graduated with a B.Sc. (Hons) in Maths and Physics. He remained at the university, in order to study for entry into the Church, and graduated as B.D. in 1958. The following year he travelled to the U.S.A. where, having studied at Union Seminary, New York, he graduated as S.T.M. (Master of Sacred Theology). Finally, he was awarded an honorary doctorate by Aberdeen University in 1995.

In 1960 he married Helen McCorquodale and their marriage has been blessed with five children, two girls, Morag and Elaine, and three boys, Neil, Graeme and Alistair.

In 1960, Dr Simpson commenced his work in the Church at Grahamston Parish Church, Falkirk, moving to St John's Renfield Church, Glasgow, in 1966. He was called to Dornoch Cathedral in 1976 and remained there until 1997. On leaving Dornoch he undertook Interim Ministries for the Church in Almondbank, Perthshire, and in Brechin Cathedral. The Very Rev Dr Simpson retired to Bankfoot in 1999.

In 1992, Dr Simpson was appointed Chaplain to the Queen and, in 1994, he was elected Moderator of the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland, the first Dornoch minister in the long history of the Church to receive this honour. Apart from representing the Church of Scotland during the Assembly week, being Moderator entails speaking and acting on behalf of the Church of Scotland, here and all over the world, for the following year until the next General Assembly. It demands a year of unremitting hard work, but the experience is very rewarding.

He is the author of several books; six on the subject of humour, five on religious or moral themes, and Pictorial Histories of Dornoch Cathedral and Royal Dornoch Golf Club. He is a regular contributor to Life and Work, the organ of the Church of Scotland, and other magazines.

When time permitted he relaxed by playing golf, which he played to a high standard off a single figure handicap. Besides giving him a chance to relax, this non-church activity enabled him to meet and interact with a whole new section of the community, the members of which, in turn, were exposed to the full force of his powerful christian intellect. He was elected Captain of Royal Dornoch Golf Club in 1993.



Dr Simpson's achievements at Dornoch were considerable and his enthusiasm energised those around him. He possessed the happy knack of being able to involve people where he saw a need, and he had so much energy and drive that they found it impossible to refuse him. His parishioners saw him as a sincere family man who was able to reach out and touch people from the highest to the lowest in a meaningful manner. He found time for everybody. He started the Breakfast Club for the youth of the area and it still continues as our Sunday Youth Group.

During his ministry the statue of the 1st Duke of Sutherland was removed from the cathedral and returned to Dunrobin Castle, the elegant internal porch in the nave and the small ante-room in the north transept were built, the organ was rebuilt and the beautiful Gilbert window was installed in 1989, at a service attended by the Prince of Wales to mark the 750th Anniversary of the first service held in the cathedral in 1239.

Dr Simpson was fortunate in being able to rely upon the full and constant support of his wife, Helen, in all his work for the Church.

His parishioners remember the Very Rev. Dr. Simpson with affection for the gentle and ever-present sense of humour which irradiated and enlightened all that he did in church and in his everyday life. Above all he is remembered for his superb sermons. They displayed a pleasing literary depth and they possessed a marked literary content. He had the ability to persuade the members of the congregation that he was talking directly to each one of them, individually, and that they were each receiving the full personal benefit of his christian teaching.

It is not surprising that the active, worshipping congregation tripled in size during his stay in Dornoch. No minister could leave behind a better testimony to his ministry.

The congregation, in a moment of inspiration, chose the Rev. Susan Brown as his successor.

THE REVEREND

# SUSAN M. BROWN

MINISTER OF DORNOCH CATHEDRAL

1998 AND STILL SERVING

The Reverend Susan Brown (nee Attwell) was born in Penicuik, Midlothian, in 1958. She was educated at Eastfield and Cuiken Primary Schools before attending Penicuik High School. She left school in 1977 and commenced studying for a B.D. degree at Edinburgh University. She graduated in 1981 and moved on to a postgraduate Diploma in Ministry course which she completed in 1983. That same year she was appointed as an Assistant Minister in St Giles' Cathedral, Edinburgh. She stayed there for some two years before being ordained and installed as Minister of Killearnan on the Black Isle in 1985. She moved to Dornoch Cathedral in 1998, becoming the first woman in the country to take charge of a cathedral and, as such, she became an important landmark in the long history of the cathedral.

She is married to the Rev Dr Derek Brown, who is Chaplain at the Highland Hospice and at Raigmore Hospital, Inverness. They have two children, Simon and Hannah.

She was a member of the Special Commission anent Review and Reform which was asked to address the problems that occur when we have declining congregations together with a chronic lack of suitable candidates who are prepared to enter the Ministry. The resultant book, known as "Church Without Walls", is a most imaginative and challenging document which is likely to affect Church thinking for many years and it may well begin a whole new chapter in the life of the Church. The Rev Brown wrote the invaluable practical Guide which accompanies the book.

She and her husband are members of the local inshore rescue lifeboat crew which is based in Dornoch. This non-church activity presents her with the opportunity of meeting new people who will experience the power of her ever-present christian beliefs, while she will be taking part in something which is refreshingly different from her church activities, yet clearly demonstrates practical christianity at work.

The congregation is delighted to find that it has appointed a worthy successor to Dr Simpson. Her sermons are pleasingly clear and direct. She is brave enough to face the issues of the day and give the christian response to them in a thought-provoking manner. The Rev Brown, too, has a well-developed and much-used sense of humour. She is lively, active and quite uninhibited in church, especially with the children. She displays a great sense of drama in the way she presents her services and they catch the immediate attention of all present. Although there is often a humorous side to her preaching her sermons are most moving and effective as they confront the congregation with the powerful message of Christ's teaching.

The Rev Brown is doing her best to ensure that Dornoch Cathedral will be able to meet the needs and face the challenges of the 21st century. Under her guidance the congregation faces the future with confidence and anticipation.