

John O'Groat Journal Christmas Number.

No. 4808.

WICK, DECEMBER 25, 1928.

PRICE ONE SHILLING

Editorial Notes.

THE publication of this ANNUAL is now eagerly anticipated by thousands of people of Caithness and Sutherland connection, and by many other readers. It has therefore been our aim and ambition to produce a NUMBER for 1928 calculated to be acceptable to every one into whose hands it may fall. In its production we have followed the lines previously set, and so widely approved, with a selection of pictorial and literary matter varied in interest and fresh in theme.

It will be for our readers to say whether we have again succeeded to their liking. Under restriction of space for the numerous pictures and articles received, we have striven to give in these pages what would—as we think—best convey the atmosphere of life and scenery in the Far North. In particular we have had exiles from our northern Homeland in mind, for we are well aware of how many copies find their way to Caithness and Sutherland people and their friends overseas. If in turning over these pages they experience any thrill of pleasure, or the awaking of old memories through looking with fond eyes on old familiar scenes and old familiar faces, our main purpose in preparing and printing them will be fully realised. That this NUMBER may bring rays of sunshine into many hearts and homes as it goes forth on its mission of good wishes and good will is our earnest hope and desire.

The year has not been marked in our far northern area with many outstanding events. Yet the social life of our community goes on with a wonderful spirit of hope and cheer. It was a fairly good summer season in point of weather conditions, and the number of tourists and visitors showed a notable increase. There was a good harvest from the land and a moderate return from the sea. But both these—our chief—industries are more or less in decline, particularly that for which the town of Wick was so famous in the past—the herring fishing. Our local fleet is now a small one, but the port still continues to be favoured by many visiting fishing craft in the summer months when the industry on our coast is in full swing. In agriculture we share with other parts of the country in the regrettable decline of arable cultivation; and rural depopulation still goes on. But despite these unfavourable tendencies the standard of living among the people in general moves steadily upward, and the old characteristics of grit, energy, shrewdness, good humour and neighbourly social fellowship remain. If all is not as well as all could wish, there is still much that gives our Northland a peculiar attraction to those who can appreciate the spirit and quality which is all its own.

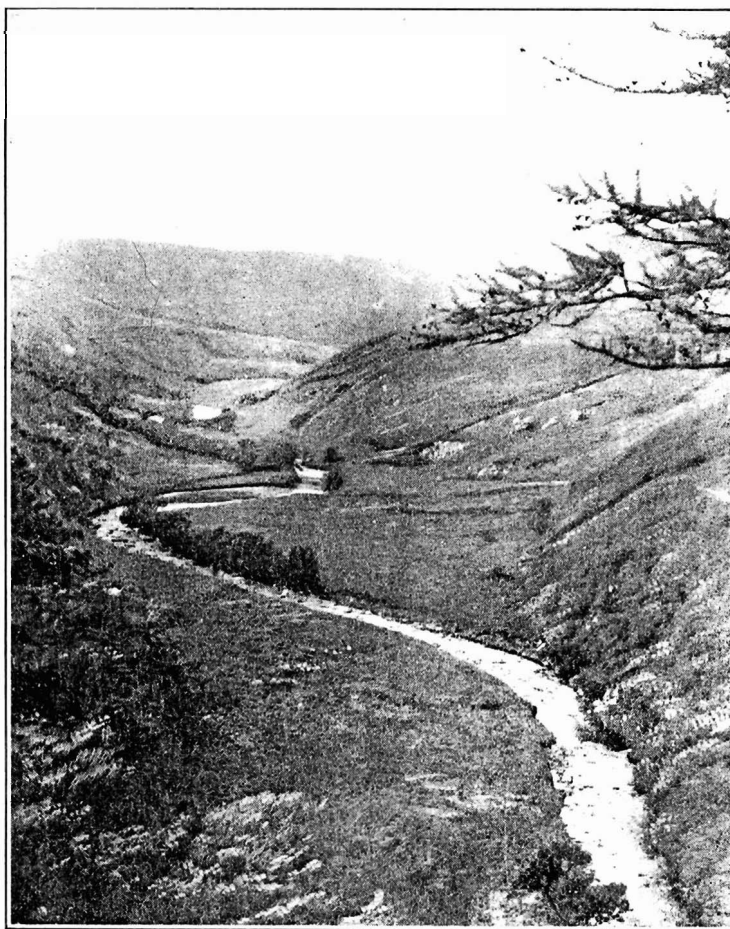
In these introductory notes we can scarcely omit a reference to two local developments. The first is that the year 1928 marks the introduction of electric lighting into the burgh of Wick; and the other is the remarkable increase of motor bus traffic in the county of Caithness. The latter development has, indeed, been quite phenomenal. Since the Pioneer Omnibus Company of Stirling initiated a service between Wick, Thurso and Castletown in the month of May, several local enterprises have got busy and have put similar comfortable conveyances on the county roads. The buses are all largely patronised, the charges for passengers being very moderate; and the result has been not only a great convenience to the public but has appreciably stimulated local trade. There is a feeling that the competition is being rather overdone. In the meantime, however, the county has the advantage of facilities in this respect that are probably not surpassed elsewhere in the country; and the hope may be expressed that profitable traffic will be found in continuance as a reward for all the enterprise shown.

In passing our sixth consecutive CHRISTMAS NUMBER into the hands of our readers, we—editor and staff—unite in offering the Season's Greetings, with the time-honoured wish to one and all—

A Happy Christmas and a Good New Year.

PLEASE NOTE.

It has not been practicable to indicate the source of every photograph used, but acknowledgment is hereby made to all contributors. All unused photographs and literary contributions will be duly returned. Remittances will as usual be made before the end of the year. The NUMBER, like all its predecessors, has been set up and printed in its entirety at the "John O'Groat Journal" Office.



BERRIEDALE'S BEAUTIFUL STRATH. (Scarabens in the background.)
Photo., Johnston, Wick.

CAITHNESS CALLING.

Come and see a Caithness moorland
Nestling in among the hills,
With its homestead and its peat stack
Hiding in its mossy frills.

Come and see a winding roadway
As it dips down to the sea,
Where the groups of happy fishers
Live and end their days so free.

Come and see a wind-swept harbour
When the sea is running high,
And the gulls are shrieking wildly
As they shake their wings and cry.

Come and see a Caithness headland
As it stands out in the sea,
With its cliffs and crags surrounded
With the air that's pure and free.

Come and see a Caithness peat-bank
As it dips into the moss,
Where the cotton flags are waving
Welcome as the bog you cross.

Come where Caithness air is blowing
Fresh from off the land or sea,
Giving life to all who breathe it—
Caithness calling: Come and see!

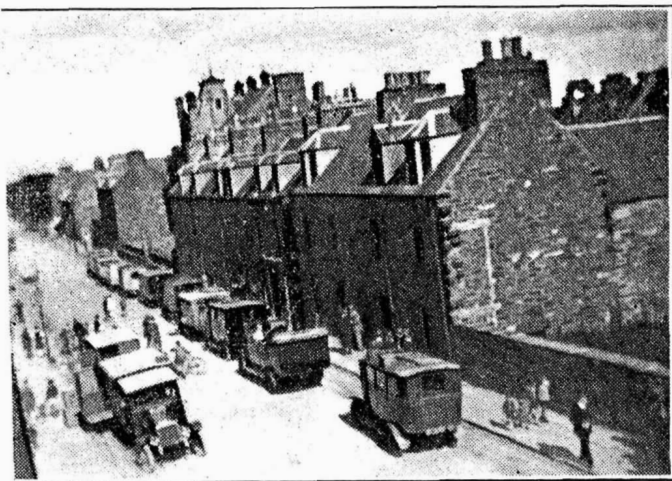
Wick.

C. J.

THE ROAD THAT LEADS TO HOME.

EVERY country has its roads; long roads and short, bad roads and good, some that ring with the incessant clatter of traffic, others that stretch across arid tracts on which the occasional veller raises clouds of dust to announce his coming. There is the roaring city streets, the winding roads that lead to lonely, windswept places—but, when all's said and done, it is the road that lies towards home that we remember longest and love the best.

Not that there is any lack of romance elsewhere. The world's roads are wide, and whether we tread them because of the ardour in our hearts or tread them because we must, we soon feel the lure of those far-flung highways—the desire to see what is just round the next bend, and, when we get so far, the insatiable desire to peep over the shoulder of the distant mountain which towers skyward and blocks our view. Our view of it? Ah, that is what we ever thirst to know.



SISTERHOOD, to the number of 217, leaving Dempster Street, for picnic at Castletown Links, July 16, 1928.

But one thing is certain—the further we go, the longer the road that lies behind us, and at this time of year, perhaps more so than at any other, our thoughts retrace the long road even if our feet cannot take us whither our hearts would lead.

Some say the road from Perth to Inverness has been spoiled by the vast alterations which have been made to suit it to the needs of modern traffic. Certain it is that the winding roads by far the greatest charm, and the one leading northward to Inverness has been straightened almost out of recognition. Gone are the elbow bends, and gone the old two-span bridges, built by "Wado's red-coated soldiers" two hundred years ago, also the romance of the olden times with the appearance of concrete bridges under which the mountain torrents flow as if suspicious of their monstrous shadows.

Branching off not far from Grantown-on-Spey there is a road, as so far, been left to dream of other days. It is still obliged to wind round the foothills and through the glens, flanked on her side by a billowing sea of heather until it reaches the rugged shores of Loch-an-Dorb. Here, on an island lying well within the loch, can still be seen the remains of the castle which was the stronghold of the Wolf of Badenoch when that bold son of Robert II, of Scotland struck terror in the hearts of his enemies in the latter part of the fourteenth century. A year or so ago the sole inhabitants of the old castle were a graceful lady and his mate.

As we go a little way into Ross-shire, along the road that leads to those cottage gardens at Garve which in summer fill the

air with sweet scents of honeysuckle and flowers. Then away across the moor, bleak now and drear, to the west coast, where

"The lochs hold shadows in their angry gaze
That give no hint of sunlit yesterdays."

Loch Broom, so smiling when the sun shines, can frown dismally enough in December; yet at all times the majestic mountains cast their spell upon lovers of the west. It was round one of those peaks that last year I saw two golden eagles soaring one evening against the crimson glory of a dying day, when everything on earth seemed hushed to silence by the splendour of the skies.

And if the road that runs up Rhidorroch way is wet now and muddy, and bereft of its sweet briars and dog roses, what matter when the burn rushes headlong to the sea, making music for us as it goes, while from far and near wee beasties watch us, wondering what brings us to invade their sanctuary. Birds, hares, rabbits, "the fairy things that pass in the forests of the grass"—all are here. I have even discovered (with the aid of binoculars) that I have been watched by a wild cat far up on the hill. Wherever we go there are little eyes to watch our passing, and it is on what we call the loneliest roads that we are most hemmed in by anxious watchers.

Now let us wander north from Brora and strike the road that leaves Creag a'Chrionaich on our left and leads on through Glen Loth. Here is a broad scene set amidst wild splendour, and, as we pass this way, the wee watchers of the lonely places abound. Here I have heard the cry of the grouse "Go back! Go back!" so startlingly clear that I have felt indeed I had no right to go forward. But the song of the burn lures one on—bracken pressing close against the road, heather sweeping to the hilltops. One can see peak after peak, purple against the blue; and at last there is a bird's eye view of the Helmsdale lying far below. Very lovely is the river, a vivid streak of blue against the soft green of the strath. Loth is indeed a byway to be treasured in remembrance long after we have left it behind.

Then there is the winding way to Braemore, and the track that goes over to Glut and Dalnawillan. Wide, open spaces, heather-scented breeze, white clouds sailing across an azure sky, fleeting shadows moving across the solitudes of the moor, and, last time I passed that way, a red deer calf lying within a stone's throw of the marshy track—two soft ears and a pair of bright eyes, all that could be seen above the heather. It is strange how the little wild things live in memory and come creeping into most of the pictures we have stored there.

Let us dream our way on along the byways that lead through Westerdale and Mybster, to Loch Watten where the deep blue shadows dwell, and up between the fields to Brabsterdoran where in a few months more the creamy white clover will once again have its fragrance wafted from the pastures by a fitful breeze.

You who live in the far north may sometimes envy us exiles our sunnier climate, but I would fain wander now up past Barroek and Slickly, and pause on the high ground to look back across Caithness—back across the kindly, undulating countryside

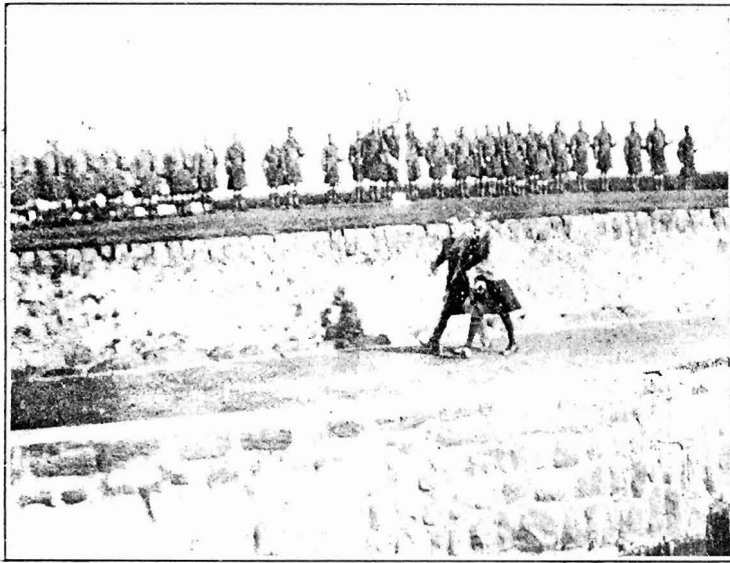


SUISGILL LODGE, KILDONAN STRATH.

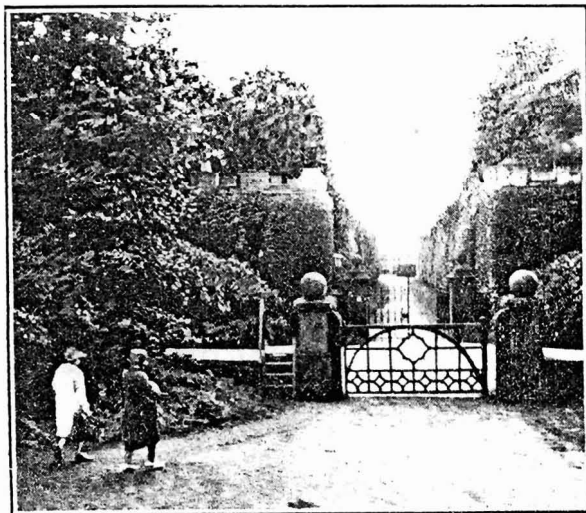
KING OF SPAIN AT DUNROBIN.

SINCE he has succeeded to the dukedom, the present Duke of Sutherland has on many occasions entertained Royalty at Dunrobin Castle, his beautiful ancestral home in Sutherland. In September this year His Majesty King Alfonso of Spain paid a private visit to the Duke and Duchess. His Majesty journeyed to Golspie Bay in his battle cruiser, Principe Alfonso, and landed from a launch at the private pier near Dunrobin Castle, where he was received by the Duke and Duchess of Sutherland. A spirited Highland welcome was played by the pipers of the 4/5th Seaforth Highlanders, which regiment also provided a Guard of Honour. For several days His Majesty had good sport in the Dunrobin and Ben Armine deer forests, his "bag" consisting of five stags.

The Duke presented a number of his guests to His Majesty when he arrived, and thereafter presented Col. A. N. Macaulay, Vice-Convener of Sutherland; Mr Andrew Lindsay, Convener of Sutherland (since retired); and Col. Campbell Cawdor, of the 4.5th Seaforth Highlanders.



KING ALFONSO AND THE DUKE OF SUTHERLAND.

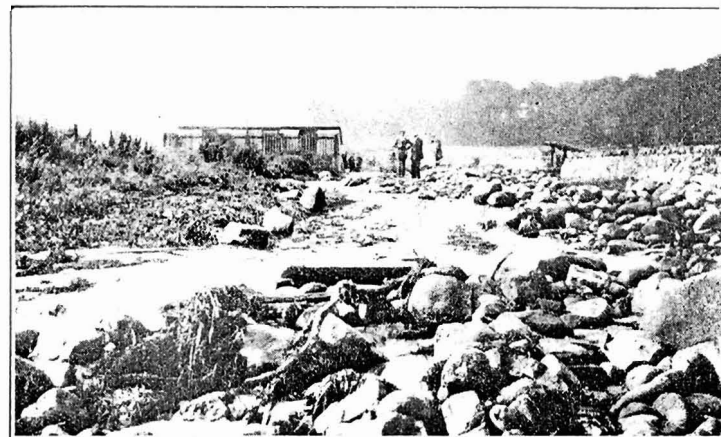
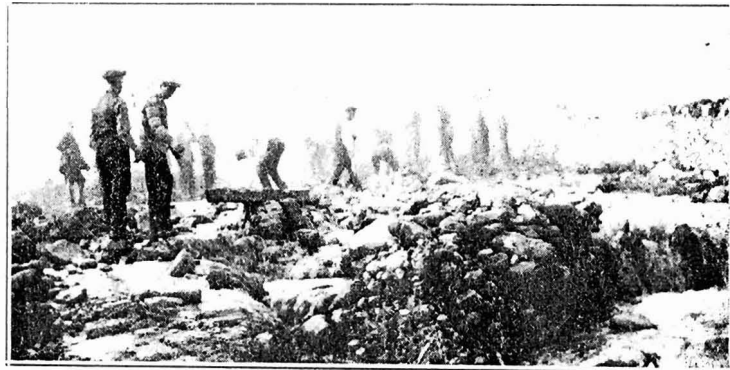


ENTRANCE TO DUNROBIN CASTLE APPROACH.

CLOUDBURST IN SUTHERLAND.

AT noon on Sunday, August 12, 1928, a terrifying cloudburst devastated the districts of Clynemilton, Kintradwell, Lothbeg, Crakaig and Kildonan, to the north of Brora. The railway bridge at Lothbeg was partly washed away, many houses were damaged and there was a great loss of stock, mainly sheep. A house at Kintradwell occupied by Mrs Polson was severely damaged, and the occupants had a narrow escape from being trapped by the water.

The pictures underneath give an idea of the havoc wrought by the cloudburst. The first shows how the roadway at the rear of Mrs Polson's house was torn up, and the second shows the road to Kintradwell Kennels after the flood had subsided. The third photo. is a picture of the rear of Mrs Polson's house, where the water, carrying with it huge boulders and tons of silt, broke through the wall.



THE DORNOCH TERCENTENARY CELEBRATIONS.

On August 29, 1928, Dornoch was the scene of what possibly was the most elaborate function ever organised in the North. The event was held to celebrate the tercentenary of the granting of a Royal Charter to the burgh. Thousands of visitors were attracted by the proceedings, and the day proved an outstanding success.

The main feature of the celebrations was a Pageant in which various exciting episodes in Dornoch's history were re-enacted. In seven episodes—staged in the afternoon in the open space between the Cathedral and Castle—old-time battles were re-fought, and other important events in Dornoch's "life-story" were depicted. The scenes included an ancient ceremony in which Fynbar (a sixth century divine) blessed the nets and boats; the battle of Embo, the burning of the Castle and Cathedral by the Sinclairs and Mackays; a visit to Dornoch of Bishop Gilbert; a Court Levee in 1628; the burning of the witch (the last tragic event of the kind in Scotland); and visits of Countess Elizabeth of Sutherland in 1772 and the Duchess Countess of Sutherland in 1800.

On the forenoon of the same day the freedom of the burgh was presented to His Grace the Duke of Sutherland and to Viscount Rothermere. A tablet was unveiled in the Cathedral to the memory of Sir Robert Gordon, the Sutherland historian, through whose efforts Dornoch was created a Royal Burgh.



Photo., C. M. Gillespie, Dornoch.
A scene from the Burning of the Witch, showing the witch and a number of fishwives.



Photo., "The Bulletin," Glasgow.
A Group of Principals in the Pageant photographed at the sundial at the Castle.

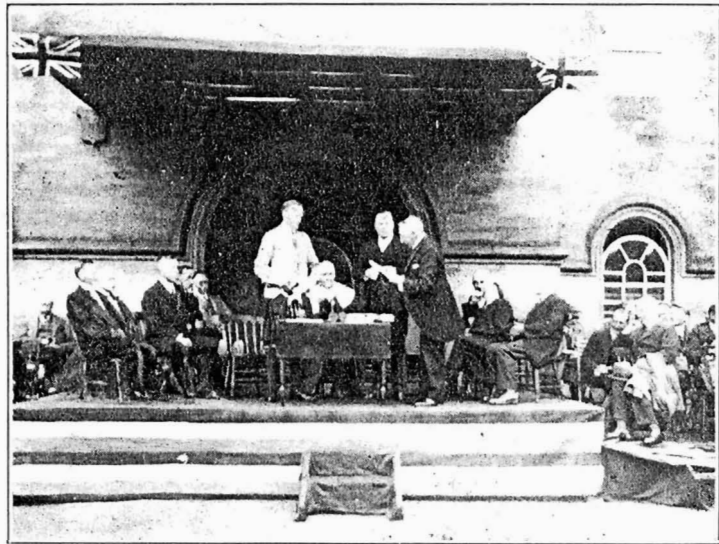
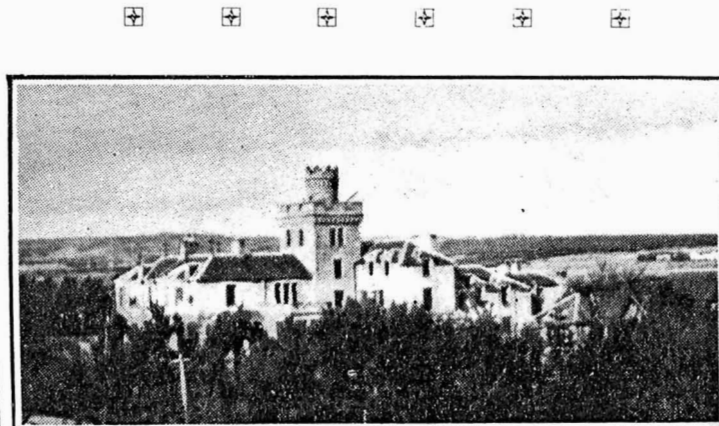


Photo., Wm. Bremner.
PRESENTATION CEREMONY.
At table (left to right)—His Grace the Duke of Sutherland, Provost Murray (seated), Viscount Rothermere, and Mr John Sutherland, Town Clerk.



Photo., C. M. Gillespie, Dornoch.
Fynbar and a Group of his Monks of the early Celtic Church.



"BURGHFIELD,"
Lord Rothermere's residence at Dornoch.