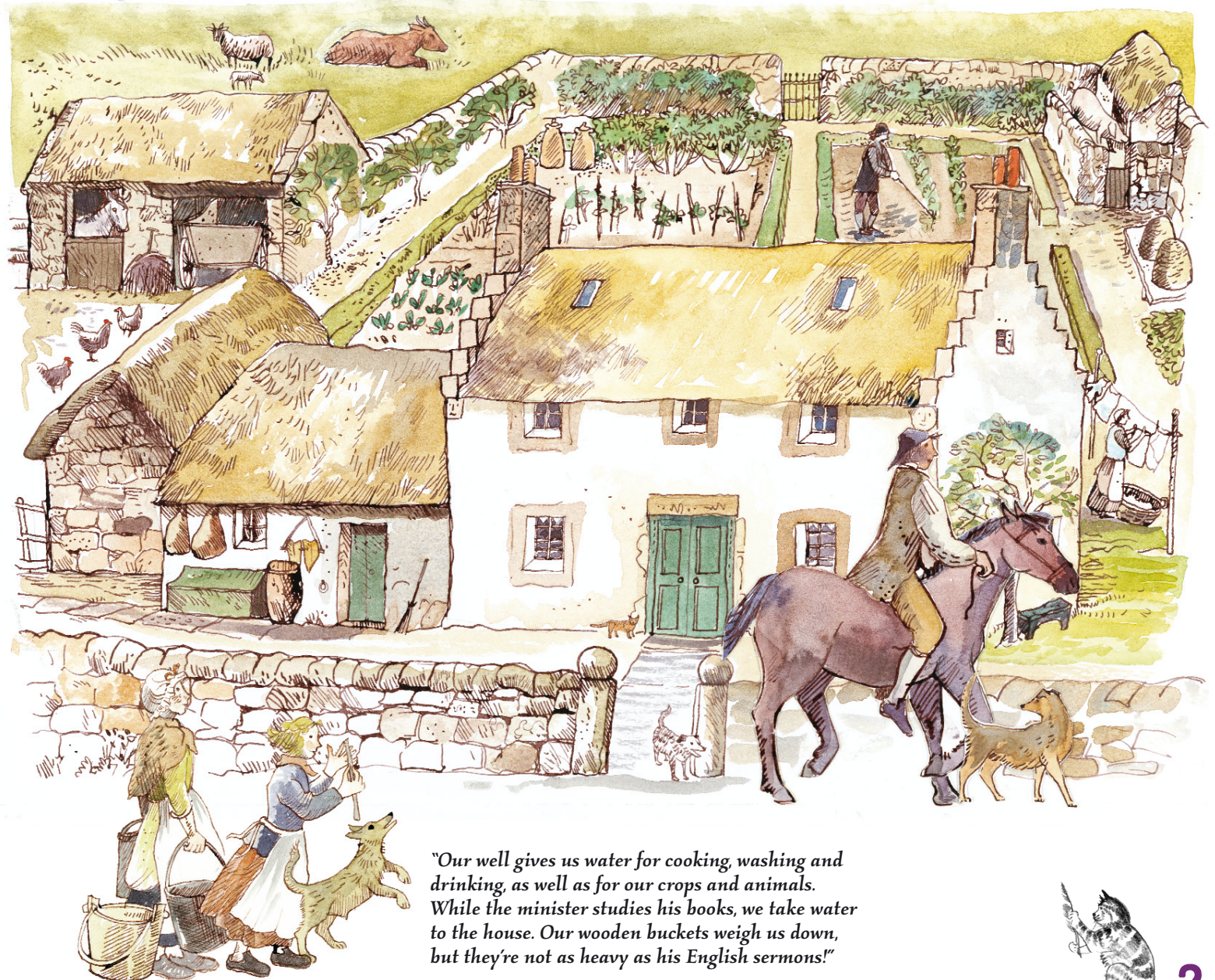


Sermons & sanitation

DORNOCH was an important centre of Church administration and home to many churchmen in the 17th century. They lived in manses or ministers' houses, like the Old Parish Manse pictured here, and preached to their congregations in Gaelic and English.

Sanitation declined as the town expanded in the centuries that followed. 150 years ago the water in the Old Parish Manse well (behind you) was too polluted to drink. Sewage was seeping into our four public wells and rats infested the Dornoch Burn.

In response, a piped water system was installed in 1892. It brought water from hill lochs and, for the first time, flushed sewage away in sealed drains. The fountain by the Cathedral celebrates the day we turned on the new supply. After centuries of use the manse well was no longer needed.



"Our well gives us water for cooking, washing and drinking, as well as for our crops and animals. While the minister studies his books, we take water to the house. Our wooden buckets weigh us down, but they're not as heavy as his English sermons!"



Cathedral & castle

IN 1224 Gilbert de Moravia became Bishop of Caithness and began building the Cathedral on your left. He used local stone and glass, paying for Scotland's smallest Cathedral out of his own pocket.

Bishop Gilbert also built himself a bishop's residence. 200 years later a new Bishop's Palace, or Castle, was built on the site. On your right, you can still see the tower of this 15th-century palace, now the Castle Hotel.



By 1800, clan feuds and lack of money had left parts of the Cathedral and Castle in ruins. Around you, poor families lived in hovels made of turf. Help came from the Duke and Duchess of Sutherland, who had the Castle and Cathedral restored and the turf houses removed.

This peaceful green has been here ever since.



Merchants & money

THE MERCAT or market cross beside you is where Sutherland's wealth was made and spent. Weekly markets were held at the cross from medieval times. By the 18th century, seven county fairs were taking place here every year.

On fair days merchants and farmers poured into town, pitching their sales booths across the graveyard in front of you. They traded, danced and drank for three days, to the delight and profit of Dornoch's nine alehouses!

Over the wall on a flat gravestone you can see our Plaiden Ell, one of three surviving in Scotland. The ell was a fixed measure for plaid, or tartan cloth, and there was a nasty punishment for anyone who sold their customers short...



...dishonest merchants were put in the burgh stocks and pelted with rubbish! Try this for yourself in our town stocks at Historylinks Museum.



In the early 19th century Dornoch's famous mercats went into decline. Roaming pigs were digging up the graves in the churchyard and, to keep them out, the town council built the wall you see here. Unfortunately, the new wall cut the marketplace in half and the fairs never recovered.



Saints & cells

YOU COULD be standing near one of Scotland's earliest Christian sites.

Saint Finbarr (or Saint Barr) sailed from Ireland in the 6th century and, so the story goes, founded a small Christian settlement here around 540 AD. Evidence was apparently discovered by workmen early last century; on School Hill to your left, they found what they described as "monks' cells", or living quarters.

Did Finbarr ever settle here? His influence was certainly strong in Dornoch. Place names associated with him still exist and the parish church, which stood in the graveyard on your right until the 13th century, was dedicated to the saint.

Bishop Gilbert clearly thought highly of him – in 1224 he moved the seat of the diocese to Dornoch and dedicated his new Cathedral to Saint Barr.



Trains & tourists

IN 1902, our first train service steamed into this station. A large crowd welcomed the little engine, for it was a vital connection to the rest of Britain.

For the first time local people could travel easily. Embo fishworkers bought return tickets to England's great herring ports and earned money to send home. Local producers sent fresh fish and livestock to market by rail.

For 58 years the Dornoch Light Railway also brought thousands of visitors to the town. Some played golf, others fished nearby or bathed in the sea. While a few wealthier tourists built second homes here, most people stayed in the town's smart new hotels.



"A handsome carriage met our train and carried us to the Railway Hotel. Our room overlooks the sea and the golf course, and is most luxurious. They say this hotel has over 60 bedrooms – no wonder it cost more to build than the railway!"



Fear & fire

JANET HORNE had been a lady's maid before she married, but by 1727 she was old and confused. Early that year her neighbours reported that she was using witchcraft to turn her daughter into 'the devil's pony'.

Janet and her daughter (whose hand was deformed) were imprisoned in Dornoch, where they were tried and found guilty of witchcraft. The daughter escaped before she could be punished, but her mother was sentenced to death.

The next day, Janet Horne was stripped, rolled in tar and placed in a barrel. A grim procession carried her to this place, where she was burned alive. She was the last recorded person in Scotland to die in this terrible way.

Janet Horne's execution place was marked by a stone, now part of the garden in front of you. The date on the stone should be 1727.



"I've tried to lead a good life, but my people are strangers to me now. My girl has a twisted hand and they whisper terrible things about us. Why do they hate us so?"



Rents & refugees

CAN YOU believe this attractive hamlet used to be a refugee camp?

During the Clearances, evicted families arrived here and built temporary turf huts for shelter. In time, they were able to replace these dwellings with stone-built walls and thatched roofs. Their refugee settlement soon became known as Littletown.

Ironically, the refugees did not escape their former landlord. In 1820 the town council came looking for rents. Leases were signed and payments made, but not to the council. The councillor who had negotiated the new leases was the Duke of Sutherland's factor, and the new Littletown rents went direct to the Duke himself!

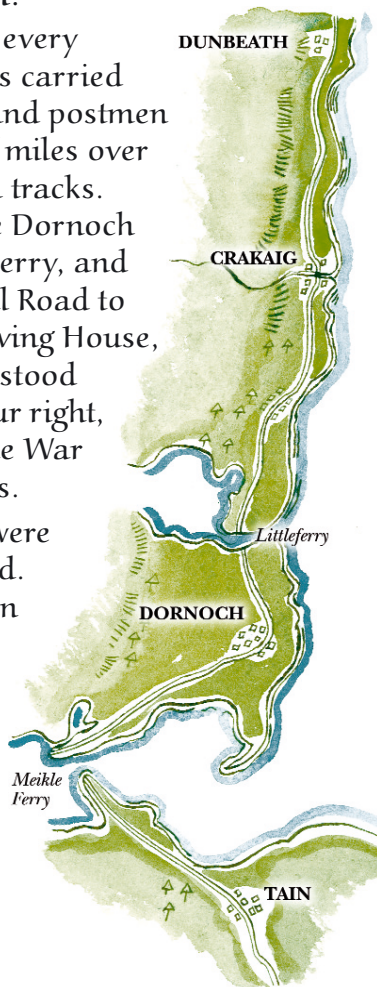


Running for the post

CAN YOU imagine a world without email, phones or roads? A world where athletes deliver your post?

200 years ago every piece of mail was carried by foot. Sutherland postmen ran hundreds of miles over rough paths and tracks. They crossed the Dornoch Firth at Meikle Ferry, and ran along Cuthill Road to Dornoch's Receiving House, pictured here. It stood on the hill to your right, near to where the War Memorial now is.

Foot runners were always welcomed. Families relied on them for news – of soldier sons fighting abroad or of relatives in Canada, Australia or America.



From Dornoch, the foot runners headed north to the Littleferry crossing at Loch Fleet. They ran 18 miles to Craikaig, slept briefly and then ran another 21 miles to Dunbeath the following day.

