

Markets and Trade



| HISTORYLINKS SCHOOLPACKS |

Background information

By the time that Bishop Gilbert died in 1245, a small community had formed around his new Cathedral. This community included the church officials appointed by Gilbert, many of whom lived in substantial stone houses near to the Cathedral itself, and enterprising locals who had taken the opportunity to make some money from the newly-established religious centre at Dornoch.

The beginnings of commerce

Local farmers sold their produce to the churchmen; tradesmen built and repaired houses (as well as looking after the Cathedral); blacksmiths shod horses and sharpened knives and tools; bakers baked; and **pedlars** sold an assortment of goods to anyone and everyone.

While we know very little of life in Dornoch from the time of Gilbert's death until the 16th century, it is reasonable to assume that during this period Dornoch developed into a thriving trading centre that catered for much of south-east Sutherland.

16th century markets and fairs

Certainly by the early 16th century Dornoch had its own mercat cross and held a number of weekly markets and annual fairs. The weekly markets would have been local affairs with farmers from the surrounding areas bringing barley, oats, vegetables and dairy produce into Dornoch to sell to the town's inhabitants.

The fairs were much more impressive events, with farmers and traders from all over Sutherland and Ross-shire bringing their goods to sell in Dornoch. The fairs lasted for three days and were held in the High Street and the nearby churchyard. Booths and stalls were set up in the churchyard (there was no wall round the Cathedral until the early 19th century) and people from all over the north of Scotland descended on Dornoch to buy goods they could not find anywhere else.



*The Plaiden Eil
– merchants used this gravestone to measure cloth.*

The three days turned into a major social event as well as a business occasion. Visitors met up with old friends, bargains were struck, large sums of money changed hands and the local inns did a roaring trade.

The oldest Dornoch fair was Barr's Fair, named after the town's patron saint, Finbarr, who was supposed to have settled in Dornoch during the 6th century and built a church close to the site of Gilbert's Cathedral. Dornoch boasted as many as seven annual fairs at one time or another, spread throughout the year from St Callan's Fair in January to St Andrew's Fair in December.

Dornoch becomes a Royal Burgh

By the 17th century, however, Dornoch's position as the main trading centre in the north-east of Scotland was under threat from other towns in the south. In 1628 Sir Robert Gordon, a powerful relative of the Earl of Sutherland, attempted to restore Dornoch's fortunes by persuading King Charles I to make Dornoch a Royal Burgh.

In the 17th century, only Royal Burghs could trade with foreign countries, leading to increased wealth and prosperity for the town and its inhabitants. Unfortunately for Dornoch, the town did not

possess a natural harbour, and its geographical position meant that it was not well placed to carry out foreign trade - so Sir Robert's hopes for the town came to nothing.

19th century decline

By the start of the 19th century Dornoch had fallen into serious economic decline. Fairs and markets were still held in the town, but they attracted only a fraction of the crowds that had once flocked here. An attempt to boost Dornoch's trade in 1739 by holding yet another annual fair (Wemyss' Fair) in June had clearly not attracted the interest that the town council had hoped for.

Council income falls

The council depended on the fairs and markets to bring in revenue for the town. Every November, the council publicly auctioned (or roused) the burgh customs to the highest bidder. What this meant was that the successful bidder paid the council for the right to collect the custom duties payable on all goods sold at market. Those who bid for the right to collect the customs were gambling that the duties they collected from the merchants and traders throughout the following year would be greater than the sum they had paid to the council in November.

As there was no shortage of bidders every November it would appear that most of those prepared to take the risk made a reasonable profit from their investment. However, an examination of the council records during the 19th century shows that the amount being paid for the right to collect the customs fell sharply over the years:

For example, in 1811 the sum paid to the council was £7, 2 shillings (£7.10) while, in 1852, the successful bidder only had to pay out 5 shillings (25p).

From these figures and the reports of visitors to the town, Dornoch was no longer a major trading centre in the north of Scotland by the middle of the 19th century: the once proud seat of the Diocese of Caithness was on the point of bankruptcy and economic collapse.

The situation improves

Fortunately for Dornoch, the second half of the 19th century brought a change in fortune. Through the efforts of a number of prominent local men, Dornoch embraced golf and tourism which gradually brought prosperity to the town.

The fairs today

Although markets and fairs continued to be held in Dornoch until the 1920s, their importance to the town's economy was insignificant. However, very recently, two of the town's original seven fairs have been reinstated: St Andrew's Fair in November and Wemyss' Fair in June now attract tourists and locals alike to the town centre where they can buy and consume locally-produced food and refreshments, purchase local crafts and enjoy a wide range of street entertainment.

The stalls still stand on the High Street, but not in the churchyard. The poles from the traders' booths no longer disturb the graves, nor do merchants measure their cloth on the plaiden ells that still stand next to the entrance to the Cathedral near the mercat cross. Indeed, the mercat cross and the stone ells are the only reminder of Dornoch's mercantile past, when the markets and fairs were not simply popular social events, but a vital part of the town's economy and way of life.

MARKETS & TRADE SOURCE SHEET

Source A:

From: *Parish Life in the North of Scotland* by Donald Sage, published in 1840 (adapted):

*The public fairs of Dornoch made a considerable stir. From the Ord-head to the Meikle Ferry, almost every man, woman and child attended the Dornoch market. The market was held in the churchyard. Dornoch was an **Episcopalian** town, and the **consecrated** grounds of the Cathedral was just the place where the men of those days would choose, either for burying their dead, or holding their markets. The evening before the market was a busy one. A long train of heavily loaded carts might be seen making their weary way into town, mostly from Tain, by the Meikle Ferry. The merchants' booths, or tents, were then set up, made of canvas stretched upon poles inserted several feet into the ground, even into graves and deep enough to reach the coffins.*

Source B:

From: *Parish Life in the North of Scotland* by Donald Sage, published in 1840 (adapted):

*The fairs started about 12 o'clock noon and lasted for two days and a half. During this time, every sort of saleable article was bought and sold, whether of home or foreign manufacture. The bustle and variety of the scene very much impressed me. The schoolmaster gave us a holiday; and as my brother and I wandered about the market place, pence in hand to make our purchases, all sorts of persons, articles, amusements, employments, sights and sounds grabbed our attention. We noticed a group of young lasses, in their best clothes, accompanied by their boyfriends, who treated them with gingerbread, ribbons and whisky. Next we saw a **recruiting party**, marching through the crowd, headed by a sergeant, sword in hand. From one part of the crowd might have been heard a loud laugh as friends met and joked together, from another would come the shrill piping of little toy trumpets which mothers had purchased for their children.*

Source C:

From: *Old Dornoch: Its Traditions and Legends* by H. Mackay, published in 1920 (adapted):

On 26 October 1737 Hugh Calder, a Merchant from Elgin, was charged with violent behaviour in that he, along with others, did 'in an outrageous manner, assault, beat and bruise each other, to the great effusion of their blood and, upon their being carried to the prison by the guard, did beat and abuse the guard'. Calder was found guilty of the charges and imprisoned in Dornoch Jail. However, as this offence had taken place during St Barr's Fair, the prison doors were kept open and Calder was allowed to sell his goods to passers by. As the old prison stood next to the mercat cross right in the centre of the market place, Calder probably did a roaring trade.

Source D:

From: *A list of dues, extracted from a meeting of the Burgh Baillies held at Dornoch on 18 October 1822 for the fixing of new rates for levying and collecting the Customs of the stated Fairs of the Burgh.*

Every time something was sold at a market or fair, the seller had to pay an agreed sum of money to the Burgh's allotted customs collector. Every item had a clearly specified duty and all monies collected were kept by the customs collector, who paid the Council an annual sum for the right to collect dues.

<i>1. For every Cow, Ox, Heifer or other Low beast</i>	<i>3d</i>
<i>2. For every Horse, Gelding or Garron, Mule, Ass</i>	<i>3d</i>
<i>3. For every Sow or Boar ringed in the nose</i>	<i>2d</i>
<i>4. For every Sow or Boar unringed</i>	<i>6d</i>
<i>5. For every sheep</i>	<i>1d</i>
<i>6. For every Stone of Butter of 24lb English</i>	<i>3d</i>
<i>7. For every Stone of Cheese</i>	<i>2d</i>
<i>8. For every Stone of Tallow</i>	<i>3d</i>
<i>9. For every Stone of Wool</i>	<i>3d</i>
<i>10. Yarn or Flax, every 6 Hands</i>	<i>1d</i>
<i>11. Stockings per dozen</i>	<i>3d</i>
<i>12. Shoes per dozen</i>	<i>3d</i>
<i>13. For every cartload of Bark and Timber for carts & other farming use</i>	<i>6d</i>
<i>14. For every Anker of Oil</i>	<i>6d</i>
<i>15. Ale and Porter, for every Hogshead</i>	<i>1s</i>
<i>16. For every Anker of Whisky</i>	<i>9d</i>
<i>17. Apples, Pears, Onions, for each Peck</i>	<i>1d</i>
<i>18. Potatoes per Boll</i>	<i>2d</i>
<i>19. Vegetables, per cartload</i>	<i>6d</i>
<i>20. Gooseberries and Currants, per cartload</i>	<i>6d</i>
<i>21. Beef per leg</i>	<i>6d</i>
<i>22. Mutton, Pork etc., per leg</i>	<i>1d</i>
<i>23. Merchant stands or booths covered per foot</i>	<i>1d</i>
<i>24. Merchant stands uncovered or tables per foot</i>	<i>1/2d</i>

Glossary

consecrated: *to make sacred for religious use – usually referring to a cemetery*

episcopalian: *a church run by bishops*

pedlar: *someone who sells goods from place to place*

recruiting party: *a group of soldiers/sailors who try to persuade young men to join the armed forces*

MARKETS & TRADE QUIZ

From the Sources, answer the following questions:

Look at Source A

1. What evidence is there from the source that Dornoch's markets were very busy? Give two reasons.

2. Where in Dornoch were the markets held?

3. What problems were caused by the merchants setting up their stalls?

4. Is **Source A** a primary or a secondary source? Explain your answer.

Look at Source B

5. How long did the fairs last?

6. What phrase tells us that it was not only British goods that were sold at the fairs?

7. How did the young men try to impress their girlfriends?

8. Why would a recruiting party come to a country fair?

Look at Source C

9. What crime was Hugh Calder charged with?

10. Using your own words, describe what Calder and his companions did?

11. Why do you think that Calder was allowed to keep trading despite being found guilty?

Look at Source D

12. Match the correct meaning of the following words from the choices given:

Word	Meaning	Options
Heifer		animal fat
Garron		young cow
Sow		plant fibre
Tallow		female pig
Flax		small horse

13. Including 'cartload', what different types of measurement can you identify from the list of goods? (There should be 11 in total). List them below:

14. Go to the Cathedral churchyard. On the north side of the churchyard, close to the entrance near the mercat cross, you will see a stone slab with the sign 'plaiden ell' next to it. An 'ell' was an old unit of measurement equivalent to 1m and 14cm. Measure the ell and see if it is accurate. (NB: the long edge of this piece of paper is 30cm).

Dornoch's plaiden ell measures: _____

15. Using all the sources and your imagination, describe what it would have been like to visit one of Dornoch's fairs in the early 19th century. Your answer should be several paragraphs long.

MARKETS & TRADE WORD PUZZLE

Try to rearrange the letters into words. All the answers are in your worksheet – somewhere!

DARPEL	_____
FRUINANALA	_____ / _____
HOSTOB	_____
SRABARFRI	_____ / _____
GLOYBARRUH	_____ / _____
PROU	_____
STUDIMOUSSECT	_____ / _____
LALILPNEED	_____ / _____