

A PRIVATE MATTER *DUNROBIN*



Notes by Our Wullie

The Duke of Sutherland's second *Dunrobin* – the one built by Sharp Stewart in 1895 – poses for the camera. Unfortunately, we do not have a date or location for this picture. The livery is dark green; given the lack of any lining we are left wondering whether this picture was taken immediately after a repaint – i.e. before lining had been applied. The apparent spaciousness of the cab is not deceptive. When only one or two passengers had to be conveyed the engine was usually sent out on its own; the passengers therefore had to travel in the cab, so two seats – complete with arrests and backrests – were provided at the rear of the cab. If said passengers were peckish after a long journey, two 'lunch baskets' were carried under the seats. *Photograph: Rail Archive Stephenson*

Even before the privatisation of Britain's railways in the 1990s, there were numerous instances of privately-owned locomotives – usually suitably-registered industrial locos – handling goods trains on specific sections of 'main line' track, but instances of privately-owned *passenger* trains running on 'main line' metals were very rare indeed. Perhaps the best-known of the very few was that of the Duke of Sutherland.

The Inverness & Ross-shire Railway completed its line from Inverness to Bonar Bridge in 1864, and the following year the Sutherland Railway obtained authorisation to extend the line from Bonar Bridge to Brora. However, in 1868 the Sutherland company ran out of money – and it had reached only as far as Golspie. Given that the countryside through which the proposed railway was to pass was very sparsely inhabited, financiers were not exactly queuing up to pour money into the scheme; for a while it looked as if the project would never be completed, but a saviour was waiting in the proverbial wings. This saviour was the Duke of Sutherland.

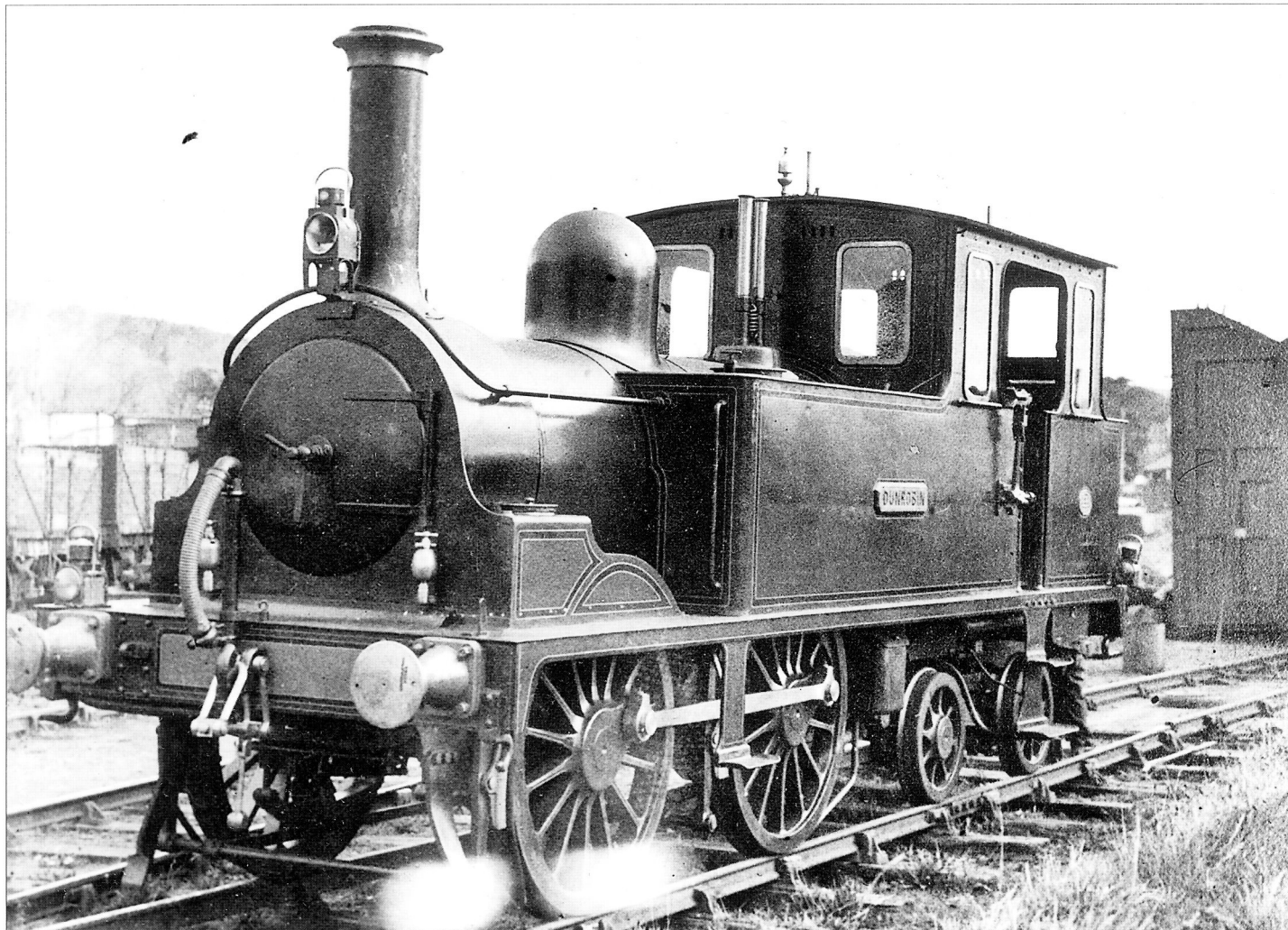
The Duke, the principal landowner in the county of Sutherland and whose seat was at Dunrobin Castle, two miles north of

Golspie, obtained powers, not only to complete the Sutherland Railway through to Brora, but also to extend the railway to Helmsdale. Importantly, he financed the construction work himself. Engineering difficulties at either end of the line delayed the completion of the works but the section between Dunrobin (two miles north of Golspie) and 'West Helmsdale', a temporary terminus $\frac{3}{4}$ -mile short of Helmsdale itself, was ready for opening in the autumn of 1870.

The obligatory 'pre-opening' Board of Trade inspection was conducted by Captain Tyler. His report, which is dated 31 October, was written in Dunrobin Castle and there is a suggestion that he was enjoying the Duke's hospitality or, at least, engaging in a bit of forelock-tugging. The report *did* include the requisite description of the works in the customary 'hard facts only' manner but, most irregularly for a BoT inspection report, parts of it seemed like a personal testimony to the Duke himself, as evidenced by this particular extract: *'This is a railway of a most interesting character, inasmuch as it has been constructed not only with funds by, but also under the personal supervision of, the Duke, with the assistance of Mr Murray of Geanies and Mr Baxter as engineer, for the purpose of opening out*

the resources and of improving the communications through His Grace's property. It is also interesting as having been made at the small cost of £3,700 per mile and at the same time in an efficient and substantial manner as regards both the permanent way and the works. (* Presumably, the fact that the land did not have to be paid for did much to keep down the cost.) In all these respects it is an important example to all who are interested in property not yet supplied with railway communications. Although it may be in the power of very few to construct long portions of railway out of their own means, yet much more may be done than has hitherto been done by combination amongst proprietors by their affording support and assistance in place of throwing obstructions and difficulties in the way and by judicious management keeping down the cost under a system of cash payments in place of the system of financing which has inflicted so severe a blow upon the healthy progress of railway construction in this country...'* Such tub-thumping was definitely not the norm for a BoT inspection report!

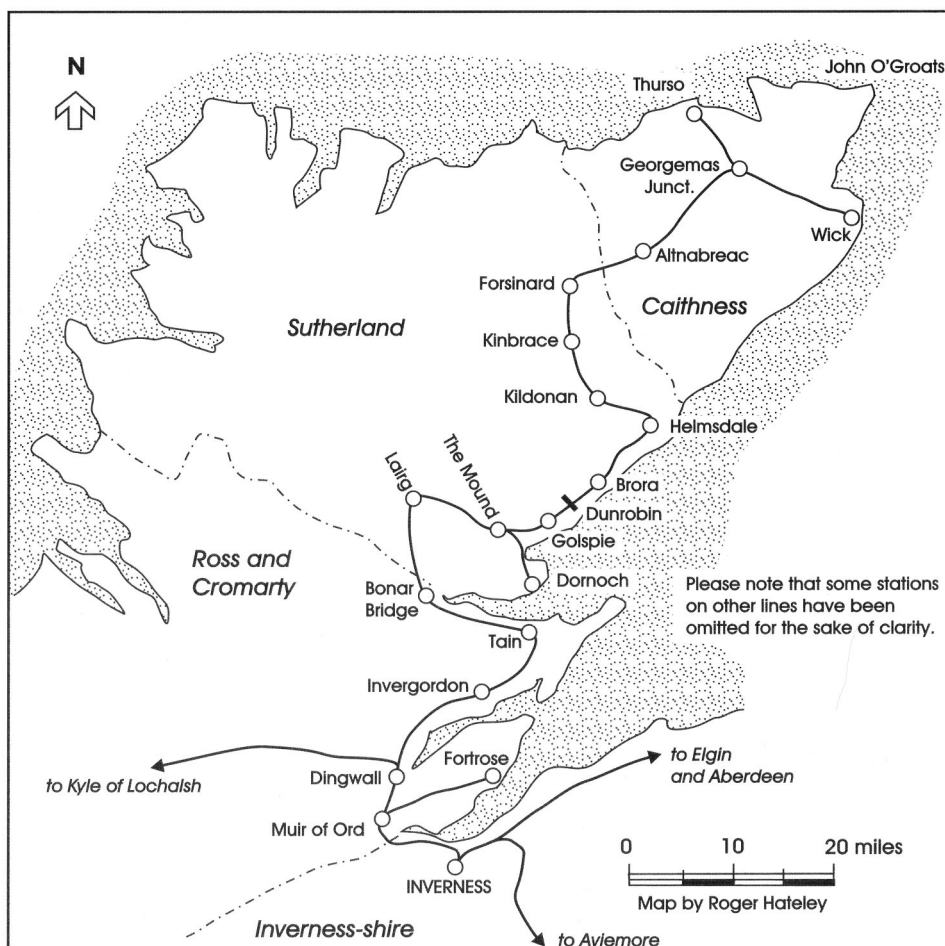
Although the Dunrobin-'West Helmsdale' section of line was completely isolated (until the Golspie-Dunrobin link was finished), the Duke wanted it to be used straight away. He had already taken delivery of a locomotive; named *Dunrobin*, it was a

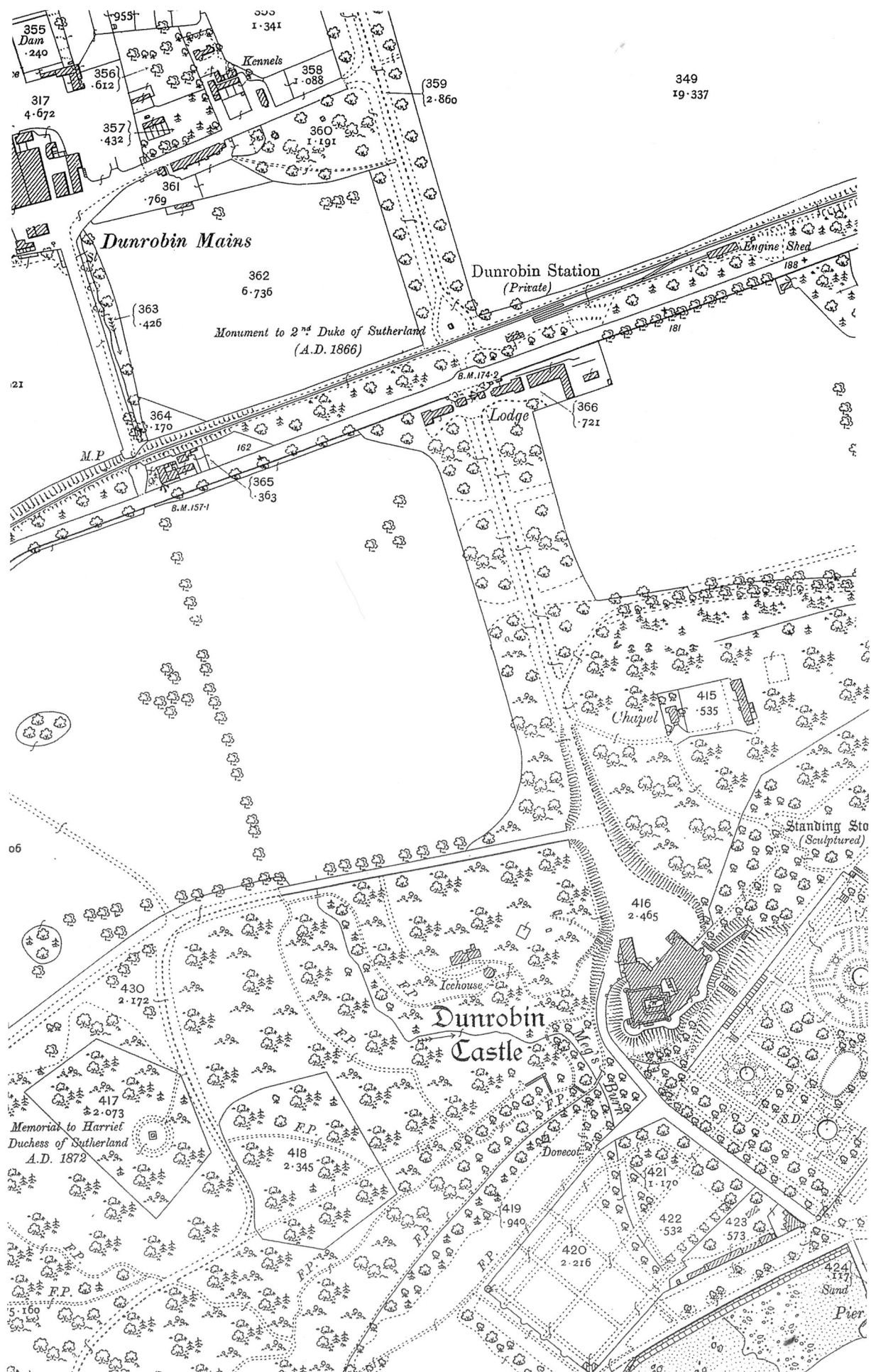


The second *Dunrobin* shows off the lined green livery which had been applied in 1946. This picture was taken at Golspie in 1949; the shed where the loco was kept is on the right. Photograph: Rail Archive Stephenson

2-4-0 well tank which had been built by Kitson & Co of Leeds. With 4ft coupled wheels and 10in x 18in cylinders, it weighed a modest 21 tons and was afforded a tractive effort of 4,463lbs. It was brought by sea to Helmsdale. The Duke hired a coach, a brake van and four wagons from the Highland Railway, these being brought by road from Golspie to Brora and hauled from there to Dunrobin by traction engines. Public passenger services on what was invariably referred to as 'The Duke of Sutherland's Railway' commenced on 1 November 1870.

The 'missing link' between Golspie and Dunrobin was completed in June 1871, and the Highland Railway took over the working of the public passenger services and goods trains through to Helmsdale. The 'main line' railway map of the Far North was completed in July 1874 when the extension northwards from Helmsdale to Wick and Thurso was opened. Although this was also worked by the Highland Railway simply as a continuation of the line from Inverness, it had been built by an independent concern, the Sutherland & Caithness Railway. In its formative years the S&C had found difficulties in raising the necessary capital – given that the area through which the line was to pass was very sparsely inhabited, it had not been viewed as a potentially profitable project – but, once again, the Duke





25-inch Ordnance Survey map of 1906 reduced to approx 17½ in to the mile. Crown Copyright

DUNROBIN CASTLE (PRIVATE) STATION

When the station is not open for traffic, goods and parcels for Dunrobin Castle must be put out at Dunrobin (Private) station by guards, and placed under cover of the verandah, where the traffic will be taken delivery of by Castle attendants. Invoices must be handed to Station Master at Golspie, with the remark "taken on to Dunrobin" entered on same.

LMS working timetable appendix, March 1937.

of Sutherland had come to the rescue. Of the company's authorised capital of £120,000, the Duke had subscribed no less than £60,000.

A further tweak to the local railway map came in 1884 when the four different independently-built sections of railway north of Inverness were formally amalgamated with the Highland Railway.

As we have seen, the Highland Railway had taken over the actual working of the public trains on the Duke of Sutherland's Railway in 1871, but that had not brought an end to the Duke's railway activities. He kept his locomotive and a coach and, with the permission of the Highland Railway who, clearly, recognised the Duke's considerable contribution to the railway development of the Far North, he ran his private train when required, southwards from Dunrobin to Inverness (usually for the benefit of distinguished guests visiting the castle) and northwards to Wick and Thurso. Officially, the engine was driven by Alex Rhind, a member of the Duke's staff at Dunrobin Castle, with the Duke occasionally acting as fireman, but it was a very poorly-kept secret that the Duke often took the controls himself.

The Duke's coach was kept in a carriage shed at Dunrobin but the engine was kept in a shed at Brora station. When the loco required repairs which could not be undertaken by the Duke's staff it was dispatched to Helmsdale shed for the work to be done there.

The 3rd Duke of Sutherland passed away in 1892 and the privilege of running a private train on Highland metals was handed down to his heir, the 4th Duke. In 1894 the new Duke decided that a more modern locomotive was required so he approached the Highland Railway's Locomotive Superintendent, David Jones (for whom the Duke apparently had a high regard), and asked him to design a new loco and arrange for its construction. The construction was contracted out to Sharp Stewart of Glasgow and the loco was delivered in July 1895. Costing £1,364, it took the name *Dunrobin* from its predecessor. That predecessor was sold to the Highland Railway for £300 and, as HR No.118, it was named *Gordon Castle*. It was used on various branch lines, at Invergordon Harbour and also had a period on loan to the Great North of Scotland Railway, but it seems that it was not well regarded. It was withdrawn in 1923.

The new *Dunrobin* had 4ft 6in coupled wheels, 13in x 18in cylinders, a boiler pressure of 150lbs and weighed 25tons 5½cwt in working order. It had a tractive effort of 7,183lbs. Shortly after its introduction the stabling point for the locomotive was moved from Brora to Golspie; the latter was not only closer to Dunrobin Castle but also had a turntable.

It the latter part of the 1890s and the very early 1900s the loco made anything between ten and twenty trips on the main line each year, and on at one occasion it hauled the Duke's coach to the Kyle of Lochalsh to collect guests for Dunrobin Castle. In June 1902 the locomotive worked a special 'VIP' train from The Mound to Dornoch for the opening of the Dornoch Light Railway, and on 6 September of that same year the train made another special trip to Dornoch, this time with King Edward VII on the footplate.

The 3rd Duke had used what has been described by Cormack and Stevenson as 'a nondescript coach with light upper panels' but in 1899 the 4th Duke ordered a new bogie coach to be built at the LNWR's carriage works at Wolverton. The idea behind having a 'main line' style of coach was that it could, if required, be attached to ordinary trains south of Inverness. In 1909 another coach – a smaller, four-wheeled version of the LNWR-built clerestory – was built for the Duke at the Highland Railway's Lochgorm Works. This vehicle was used for most of the 'local' work.



As noted in the text, following BR's edict that the Duke of Sutherland could no longer run his own train on BR metals, *Dunrobin* and the Lochgorm-built four-wheel coach of 1909 were acquired for display at New Romney. The ensemble left Golspie in March 1950, the engine running under its own steam as far as Carlisle, from where it was taken on as part of a goods train. Although this picture came without any details, we are fairly sure that it shows the train somewhere *en route* between Golspie and Carlisle. Any comments, anyone? Photograph: M.Robertson; www.transporttreasury.co.uk