



LINKS
HOUSE

AT ROYAL DORNOCH

THE STORY OF LINKS HOUSE AT ROYAL DORNOCH

EARLY YEARS OF LINKS HOUSE: 1843-2005

Links House is a classic Scottish manor home in the great country house tradition. The original building was constructed as the manse to the Dornoch Free Church in 1843 at the direction of The Reverend George Rainy Kennedy. The architectural team of James Raeburn (1787-1851) and his son Robert were selected. Raeburn was born in Boyndie, Banffshire and began his career in the Scottish Office of Works from 1827 to 1839 and retired at the age of 52. In 1841, Raeburn set up practice in Edinburgh. He appears to have been an adherent of the Free Church as he published a lithographed sheet of designs for Free Church buildings. His commissions varied from churches including the Banff Free Church, Banffshire to schools including Davidson's Mains School, Edinburgh. Among Raeburn's final designs was an obelisk to the Reverend Henry Duncan at the Free Church in Ruthwell, Dumfriesshire. Duncan (1774 - 1846), who served over fifty years as the minister in Ruthwell, founded the first ever savings bank to pay investors a rate interest in 1810. James Raeburn is buried in St. Cuthbert's Churchyard, Edinburgh.

The Rev. George Rainy Kennedy was ordained as a Minister in 1837 and was one of the Ministers, along with his father, The Reverend Angus Kennedy, at Dornoch Cathedral. He left the Church of Scotland and joined the Free Church in 1843 during The Great Disruption. The Disruption of 1843 was a schism within the established Church of Scotland, in which 450 ministers broke away to form the Free Church of Scotland, over the right of a wealthy patron to install a minister of his choice into a parish, known as the "right of patronage". Rev G.R. Kennedy was Minister of the Dornoch Free Church until around 1892. Rev. G.R. Kennedy lived at Links House until he died in 1899 when the house was passed to his son, Dr. George Rainy Kennedy Jr. Interestingly, in 1909 the Club purchased land adjacent to Links House for a new clubhouse from Dr. Kennedy but a condition of the land sale was the Club would not have a liquor license. As World War II approached, Dornoch readied for war. In early 1941, Dornoch airstrip was prepared for use by the Royal Air Force and the storage of Spitfires, Havocs, Whitleys and Wellingtons. In 1943, Dr. Kennedy died and it is believed Links House was requisitioned as wartime Officers Quarters. By 1944 Dornoch was mainly use for Beaufighters but wartime service of Dornoch airfield ceased on September 27, 1945 when the last

aircraft took off. In 1943, the estate of Dr. Kennedy sold Links House to Captain Donald Alexander Calder Grant, a decorated member of the Gordon Highlanders, and his wife Jessie Elizabeth. In 1947 the Club entered negotiations with Capt. Grant regarding the purchase of additional land and to rescind the “Feu Charter” against drinking on the premises. Capt. Grant agreed to sell the land occupied today by the Clubhouse in return in part for life membership privileges. However, there was some ambiguity with respect to rescinding Kennedy’s prohibition against drinking and in October 1947 the Duke of Sutherland, President of the Club and more importantly the Superior of the Dornoch Parish and Sutherland, intervened to state he had no objection to the sale of intoxicating liquor at the Club. Alcohol has been proudly served at Royal Dornoch Golf Club ever since. Capt. Grant died in 1975 and his wife sold Links House to Graham and Jill Dobson in 1982.

The property directly across Kennedy Avenue from Links House served as a kitchen garden for Links House from the time of its construction by Rev. G.R. Kennedy in 1843. Early records suggest it was carefully planted with fruit trees, herbs and vegetables surrounded by a matching stonewall to Links House. In 1964, Capt. Grant sold the property to his sister-in-law Sheila Wilson who built the existing structure and affectionately named the property Glensheil as a conjugation of the Scottish / Gaelic term Glen for pure valley or place and her name Sheila. Ms. Wilson passed away in 2012 and her children contacted the Warnocks and suggested they purchase Glensheil with the prospect of reuniting it with Links House.

LINKS HOUSE REBORN: 2005 - 2014

The idea to transform Links House from a private period manor house to bespoke luxury accommodation first emerged in 2008 when American Todd Warnock was visiting Dornoch on a golf outing. Mr. Warnock had previously visited Dornoch in 2005 staying at Skibo Castle, and he became captivated by the unique history, sunlight, air and ambiance of the surrounding Highlands. Mr. Warnock, who had previously played most of the important links courses of Scotland and Ireland, benefited greatly from insights provided during his first 4-ball match with Dornoch legend Alan Grant and serendipitously his unassuming yet locally famous young caddie, 25-year-old Jimmy Gunn, reigning and four-time Club Champion. It was during this trip Mr. Warnock came to deeply appreciate the essence of Royal Dornoch Golf Club as among the most charming, strategic and thoughtful links golf courses in the world. For several years, Mr. Warnock returned to Dornoch for what he coined his Spring and Fall Residencies to remove himself from the world of commerce and to golf, rest, read and write. On one of these Residencies in 2008, while walking up Golf Road for a 2-ball match, Mr. Warnock noted a small for sale sign on Links House and, looking through a morass of overgrown shrubs, trees and untamed grasses, he saw this beautiful early Victorian Georgian home. The idea of Links House, as a highly bespoke comfortable manor house for the most discerning and contemplative of visitors, was born in that moment. After his match, he inquired

at the door of Links House, first meeting Jill Grant, formerly Dobson, and her second husband Bill, who provided a brief tour of the house and its gardens. As he walked through the house, his interest, enthusiasm and energies went into high gear.



In need of expert advice on both renovation and historic preservation, Mr. Warnock sought the services of James Maxwell, principal architect of the renovations at Skibo Castle and designer of their exceptional and architecturally

appropriate Golf House. Maxwell & Company is known across the Highlands for the bespoke architectural new build and renovation services for castles, shooting lodges, and fine country houses. Mr. Maxwell met Mr. Warnock at Links House on the occasion of his next visit in 2009 to evaluate the potential conversion of Links House into fine country house accommodation. Mr. Warnock was hopeful the classic two-storey late Georgian architectural style of the house and grounds would offer sufficient character and space to fulfill his vision. After careful consideration, analysis and dialogue with Maxwell, Mr. Warnock returned to Chicago convinced Links House could support his vision and to present the project to his wife Liz who had yet to visit the Highlands. Mr. Warnock's presentation stressed the inherent beauty of the building, the need for high end accommodation in Dornoch and, most importantly, his impassioned observation there was "magic in Dornoch, an enchanted feeling one gets when visiting; something about the sunlight on the heathery hillside, the whins, the moor and links land; the air and the sea. Warnock states "it's the only place I have ever been where time seems to slow." Together they agreed Liz, a novice golfer, needed to visit the area and see if she too felt the specialness of Dornoch and then, and only then, they would proceed. During October of 2010, Mr. and Mrs. Warnock returned to Dornoch to test their instincts, see if they together could feel the magic in the air".

Indeed, without ever playing 18 holes at Royal Dornoch, Liz said "I feel it, I see the magic in the color of heathers and whins in sunshine. So let's have some fun with this project!". Links House at Royal Dornoch had begun. Mr. Warnock and his wife Liz have traveled extensively in the United Kingdom and Europe but have no experience as proprietors in the hotel industry. Rather, Links House was born out of their collective love of architecture, antiques, art, country sports, interior design, history particularly of Scotland and it's majestic Highlands.

Over the next several months together, Maxwell with his principal assistant Mr. Gavin Lawrie and the Warnocks excitedly crafted a layout to include 5 spacious bedrooms in the existing main house as well as generous communal space for a library, sitting room and dining room. A second building, The Mews, was designed to expand Links House to 8 bedrooms and provide a manager's quarters. A third small structure, the Sporting Bothy, was designed to house angling rods and tackle, art supplies, bicycles and to dry golf clubs, shoes and outerwear. Finally at this time, the idea of a putting green designed, crafted and maintained by the master green-keepers of Royal Dornoch Golf Club was developed. Mr. Lawrie was responsible for investigating all the construction technicalities required bringing the Warnocks' vision to reality.

Warnock's unwavering commitment to restore Links House in classic Georgian architectural detail including the new built Mews was the subject of great intention yet challenge. Curiously, Historic Scotland, the Scotland's governmental and regulatory agency charged with historic preservation, strongly urged Mr. Warnock to redesign the Links House dining room extension and The Mews in contemporary architectural vernacular so as "to not confuse the eye". Mr. Warnock firmly refused

to consider such an approach and with the help of local Dornoch citizens' appeals including the unwavering support of town councilor, James McGillivray, Warnock stood his ground against poor taste and senseless government intractability. Warnock insisted locally sourced materials be used to ensure new elements would appear as if designed and built along with the original house in 1843. Over the next 2 years, and after numerous appeals and confrontations with Historic Scotland, Mr. Warnock prevailed in advancing a truly historical renovation and expansion of Links House based on early 19th century principals.

In 2011, Warnock and Maxwell conducted an extensive selection process for a general contractor with sufficient skill and attention for detail to implement the renovation and expansion of Links House. The firm of O'Brien Properties was selected based on their understanding of historical renovations and quality craftsmanship. Led by Davy Coburn on site, O'Briens began the extensive process of returning Links House to it's original structural elements in preparation for renovation and expansion. Several interesting discoveries were made during that time including the determination that Links House had likely had four major alterations since 1843. The original structure was symmetrical with a two-storey, three-bay front constructed in a formal manner with central door and tall ground floor windows. This construction is now masked by the addition, in the late 19th century, of the entryway at the front door. This principal elevation has classical detailing using Ashlaw sandstone dressings to create corner pilasters, moulded stone architraves to the center second floor windows above the entryway and a sill band running horizontally at first floor level. The composition is finished at the roofline with a moulded eaves cornice, a blocking course to form a slightly pitched parapet terminating at each end, and rounded dies above the pilasters. The side and rear elevations are typically less imposing hosting random rubble stone masonry and dressed stonework around the window and door openings. At the rear, the original house had a centrally placed outshot, a projecting two-storey element, which may have enclosed a staircase. Finally, late in the 19th century, a formal two-storey extension was added which now consists of the Brora bedroom and the kitchen. Lastly, in the early 20th century, a one-storey extension, now the Helmsdale bedroom, was added to this previous extension.

Several critical decisions were made to ensure Links House would achieve the grandeur and authenticity of its origins. For example, the entire exterior masonry was painstakingly repointed in lime mortar, as would have been the case originally, in order to preserve and enhance the stonework, and reinvigorate Raeburn's original design. All slate-work and lead-work on the roofs were renewed and rainwater goods in structural cast-iron were reinstated. Importantly, the front facade of Links House is quite formal in design, again layered in symmetrically cut Highland sandstone with a subtle column feature on either topped with a clever arched cap at the roof. An important sandstone acitrave stretches across the midpoint of the front façade serving as window bases. Upon close inspection, one notes the Mews'

exterior details carefully mirror these subtle but classic architectural features on Links House, including the rubble stone masonry side elevations. Peat burning fireplaces were located and rebuilt in both the library and sitting room. The kitchen was completely relocated to create needed space. And most profoundly, perhaps Maxwell's greatest inspiration, the ceiling above the main stair second floor landing was removed to afford a large two storey cupola to provide light through the core of the house. Materials were selected in context with the 19th century vernacular such as Douglas fir pine paneling in the library, full-length shutters along each of the windows and wide plank oak flooring throughout. The new dining room was designed with great sympathy toward the original Raeburn design featuring a coffered ceiling above a spacious gabled cupola punctuated by a large chandelier made of Highland red deer antlers, an imposing stand stone, wood burning fireplace and large Firth facing windows.





Bespoke Highland-inspired interior designs were also sought to complete the entire ambiance of Links House and the Warnocks sought the advice of local-based Helen Lyon Interiors of Little Ferry, Loch Fleet. Helen, and her friendly, Scottish cheese-monger husband Scott, immediately grasped the essence and vision the Warnocks were seeking. Helen's love of the tweeds, color palate and country life of the Highlands can be felt throughout the house. Scott can be thanked for the clever antique fly rod and reel installations in the main house stairwell and dining room. Stuart Clifford, a genius at furniture repair, restoration, rebuilding and essential miscellany, aided him wonderfully. Clifford also built all our headboards. Lyon Interiors launched several important initiatives to ensure the most beautiful and authentic interior design and execution. Local businesses and suppliers were used wherever possible. Early on, the idea to name the eight bedrooms after the eight principal salmon rivers of the Highlands was suggested by the late Alistair Ross of The Sutherland Sporting Tweed Company from Lairg. His tweeds have long been a favorite of the Warnocks. Helen developed storyboards of color, fabric and furniture for each room based on these rivers. Together, the Warnocks and the Lyons searched bookshops, antique stores and auctions across Scotland and the Highlands for historical prints, paintings, maps and general information on each of these watersheds and these works are displayed proudly in each bedroom. The Warnocks, in close consultation with Lyon Interiors, carefully designed a proprietary Links House Tweed via Hunters of Brora having it manufactured by Johnson's of Elgin, considered the finest tweed and cashmere manufacturer in the world. This tweed is found selectively through the house as well as in specialty hats, ties and handbags available for sale in the gift shop. Betty Murray of Just Sew in Dornoch, ably assisted by Bryony, handmade all the window treatments and bed skirts in country fabrics sources by Lyon Interiors. Many antiques were sourced

from George and Joyce Maclean, proprietors of Castle Street Antiques in Dornoch. Black Isle Bronze foundry was procured to cast specialty bronze fly rod and golf putter-themed Links House door handles, designed by the Warnocks. Period paintings, related Highland artwork and antique books were purchased at auction in Edinburgh and London. Numerous fulfilled hours were spent at Leakey's Second-hand Books, Greyfriars Hall, Inverness searching for Highland titles. Ken Hardiman and his friendly, able son Drew at Alder Art Gallery in Beaulieu oversaw painting selection, restoration, research and framing efforts. Ken and Drew are also avid anglers providing Mr. Warnock with his first successful pike-angling outing near Loch Mullardoch in May, 2013. A number of silver and related antiques were sourced via Iain Marr at Iain Marr Antiques also of Beaulieu. The vast majority of the furniture was sourced with great assistance from John Dixon at Georgian Antiques of Edinburgh, an antique buyer's paradise with six floors of seemingly endless aisles of finds.

In recognition Links House is a celebration of the Highlands including but beyond links golf, the decision was made to minimize golf as a design theme for interiors particularly paintings and artwork. However it did seem appropriate to have a select number of paintings in the Links House Collection of the sacred links at Royal Dornoch Golf Club. Few such paintings particularly of size and in oil exist. Mr. Warnock was familiar with the work of Donald Shearer, perhaps the most accomplished contemporary landscape painter who specializes in golf courses in the Highlands and learned Mr. Shearer lived in nearby Invergordon. Mr. Shearer executed the wonderful large landscape over the hearth in the dining room during 2012 and 2013. Despite being in his 88th year, he made several plein-air visits to Royal Dornoch's Championship 7th tee and, as a result, captured its enchanting southern view perfectly. Mr. Warnock also sought two commissions from Frank Mcluskie of Edinburgh after purchasing his reproduction of the iconic portrait of Old Tom Morris (1903) by Sir George Reid (1841-1913) which is held in the collection of Royal and Ancient Golf Club of St. Andrew's, Scotland. Mcluskie executed two large paintings of Royal Dornoch: The Majestic View at Royal Dornoch's 3rd Tee and 4-Ball Match: The 10th Green at Royal Dornoch as well as four wonderful studies displayed in the dining room. The keen observer will note 4-Ball Match: The 10th Green at Royal Dornoch depicts a match between Dornoch personalities Alan Grant (Skibo) and Chris Surmonte (Luigi's) against Mr. Warnock and his son Motts. Links House is deeply indebted to both of these talented artists.

The Warnocks are also deeply appreciative of the insights and advice of Yvonne Crook and Angharad Gronbach of View Marketing, Moy, Inverness-shire. In addition to our initial marketing strategy, View Marketing working closely with the Warnocks, developed the Links House brand, thistle imagery website design, photography, video work and marketing collateral. Yvonne's tourism relationships

throughout the Highlands have provided meaningful assistance to the launch of Links House. More recently Claire Bath of CLB Media has provided exceptional branding, internet analysis and marketing advice to Links House. Good friends Fraser Cromarty, his famous outdoorsman father Hamish Cromarty and Castle Stuart Golf Links co-founder, Grant Sword all provided support and encouragement. Alan Grant, Peter Crome, Claire Bruce, and Diane Munro of Skibo Castle have given friendly advice and counsel on the science of high-end hospitality.

Robert Ratcliffe, Cameron Ferguson and all the staff at The Royal Golf Hotel, our home in Dornoch for all the years, have become good friends and have been so helpful at every turn.

Additionally, the Warnocks benefited from the friendship, cooperation and support of Neil Hampton, General Manager, Hamish Macrae and George Gunn, past and current Captains, Dennis Bethune President, as well as Michael Carr head chef of Royal Dornoch Golf Club. Additionally, head green keeper Eoin Riddell and his able staff took great pride in the development, construction and maintenance of their 19th championship green. Claire, Audrey and Shona in the Club's office ably assisted with introductions, tee times, site meetings and numerous other causes. Kerensa Carr, wife of chef Michael Carr, provided tireless framing work on the collection of paintings and prints.

Finally, a word about the management team at Links House bears mention. After working with James Maxwell to develop the plan of Links House, Mr. Warnock had a frightened epiphany: who would run Links House? After deciding to halt the project without a solution, faithful serendipity played its hand again when Beverley Navarro returned to Dornoch for a golfing vacation. Beverley had previously lived in Dornoch while attending the golf management program at University of the Highlands & Islands, affiliated with St Andrews University and risen to employment with British Airways, leading VIP customer service programs at their flagship Heathrow Terminal 5. Introduced by Dornoch friends, Beverley expressed strong interest in moving back to Dornoch and managing Links House. Cautiously, Mr. Warnock sought the help of dear friends David and Ginny Kidd of Godalming, Surrey to conduct the first interview. David is a very senior executive search executive at Egon Zander & Associates and Ginny has a practice in executive coaching. With the Kidd's confident blessing, Mr. Warnock flew to London to interview Beverley and share his vision. Beverley was eventually offered general manager of Links House and moved back to Dornoch in 2011 to oversee business planning.

The subject of hiring a chef was debated extensively with the conclusion that only a full time chef could provide the quality and specialty dining experience dictated by the spacious dining room and inspiration of Links House. Our first chef Darren Miranda previously served at Michelin Stared Boath House, among the finest restaurants in the Scotland.

After our first full season, the decision was made to expand the menu and seating options for our guests and to open the restaurant to the public. After a serendipitous discussion with Graham Watson, Executive Chef of The Belfry, an introduction was made to hire Jon-Paul Saint as new Head Chef. Jon-Paul, who grew up in The Highlands, is among the most exciting new culinary talents in Scotland having trained under three of the most influential chefs in the United Kingdom: the renowned Albert Roux, Masterchef winner Derek Johnstone and The Belfry's Glen Watson. Previously Jon-Paul served as head chef at Inver Lodge Hotel in Lochinver, as well as at Greywalls Hotel in Gullane and The Chateau Montreuil a Relais & Chateau hotel in Montreuil-sur-Mer, France. Jon-Paul is also a certified personal trainer.

LINKS HOUSE EXPANDED: 2015-2017

The final chapter in the Links House development was the purchase and rejoining of Links House with Glensheil, the property directly across Kennedy Avenue. Glensheil was originally the kitchen gardens for Links House and was sold to Sheila Wilson in 1964. Sadly, Sheila passed away in 2012 and her son Alistair Wilson and daughter Hazel Cameron called inquiring whether the Warnocks wished to bring Links House completely back to its previous grandeur. The Wilson descendants had decided they would give the Warnocks a first opportunity to recombine the properties as they had such fond family memories at Links House and Glensheil. In keeping with the small town nature of Dornoch, Sheila Wilson was the grandmother of Eion Riddell course manager and master green keeper who oversaw the construction of the putting green at Links House.

During 2014, the Warnocks began conversations with Highlands & Islands Enterprise regarding a grant to fund a new building on the Glenshiel site. In 2015, after extensive due diligence, HIE agreed to provide a grant and the new building project was launched. Set to open Spring 2017, the 6-bedroom addition of exquisite Victorian architecture will perfectly complement the Georgian Links House. Again, designed by renowned Highland architects James Maxwell & Company, the new building will resemble a stately manor home built circa 1860. Glenshiel will include 5 expansive suites all en-suite, a luxury one bedroom master suite, and a large bespoke pine-paneled library all with expansive views of the Dornoch Firth. Glenshiel's interiors will be developed in conjunction with Helen Lyon Interiors in keeping with the bespoke approach so well received at Links House. The grounds of Glenshiel will consist of bespoke traditional stonewalls, beautiful gardens, a Sporting Bothy (golf/angling drystore), outside fire pit, and a fun boules court in the front yard. Finally, expanding the Highland theme of Links House, the 6 new suites will be named after six Highland sea lochs historically known for exceptional angling and walking.

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EXPANSION OPENING
SPRING 2017



