

Colin Calder's Dingwall Days (1860-1882)

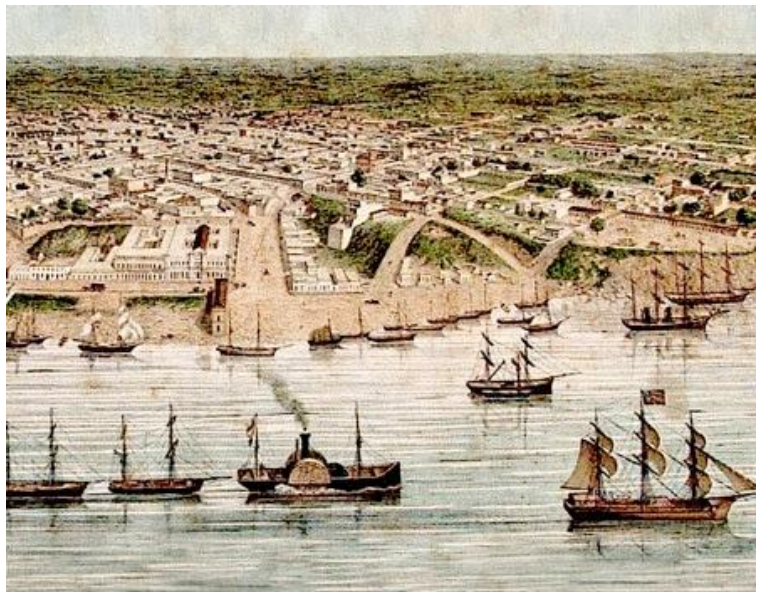
by Forbes Munro of Dingwall Museum



Colin Bain Calder © public domain

From the Peffery to the Parana

Of the men and women who left Dingwall over the years, to seek fresh opportunities and build new lives, perhaps few made more of an impact on their adopted societies than Colin Bain Calder. He left his hometown in 1882, at the age of 21 years, to take up employment with a British-financed railway company in Argentina. He settled in the city of Rosario, on the Parana River, to the northwest of the capital, Buenos Aires. There he rose to become manager of the railway's paint shop, and he and a fellow British worker created a football club that would become *C.A. Rosario Central*, one of the leading lights in Argentinian football.



Rosario, on the Parana River, c. 1870 © public domain

The story of Colin's chairmanship of *Rosario Central* from 1889 to 1900, the development of its fierce intra-city rivalry with *Newell's Old Boys* (a team founded by an English school teacher), and its many successes in the upper levels of the Argentinian league, is well-known in Argentina. But it leaves open the question – what did Colin bring with him from the Highlands of Scotland to the city of Rosario? What do we know about the younger Colin Bain Calder's days in Dingwall?



Rosario Central's Club Logo
© club atletico rosario central escudo/ Fair use

Work and Play in Ross-shire's County Town

Colin was born in Dingwall in 1860, as a member of a relatively poor working-class family. He presumably attended the burgh school before finding his way into adult life through an apprenticeship with a local carriage-making firm, Naughty and Mackimmie. This business, founded by two men from Morayshire, was booming in the aftermath of the arrival of the railways, and a second workshop was opened in Inverness before the owners parted ways in 1880. Alexander Naughty retained the Dingwall workshop, off Tulloch Street.



Dingwall c. 1824, aquatint by John Clarke. © UK Government Art Collection, licensed under the Open Government Licence

There Colin completed his apprenticeship and worked as a journeyman coach painter - while living modestly at 4 MacDonald's Court, off the High Street, with his widowed mother, Charlotte, and a younger brother, Alexander, who was a carpenter to trade.

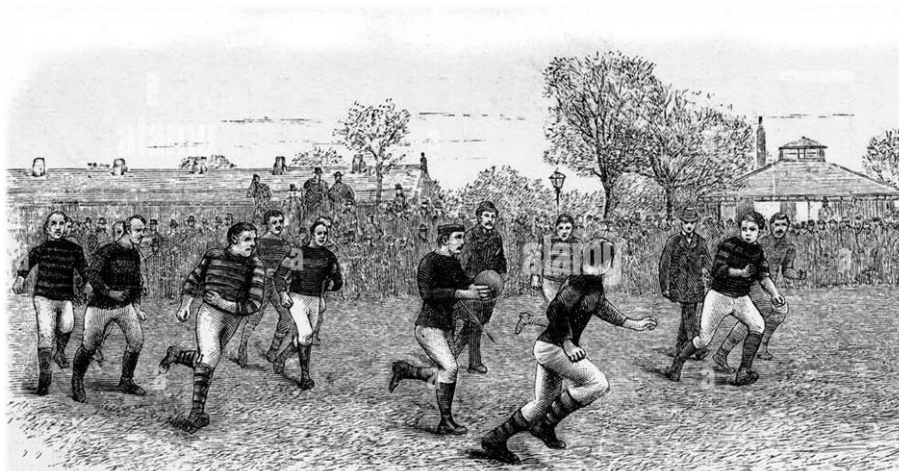
Beyond the workshop Colin was very much a sportsman. He was a founding member of Dingwall's first football club, established by young men of the town in November 1876. *The Ross-shire County Football Club* was set up to challenge the *Inverness Football Club*, some two years its senior, and its earliest matches were played against the team from the larger town. A report in *The Glasgow Herald* of March 1877 noted that:

"The return match between these two teams came off at Dingwall, on Saturday. The game, being a novelty in this part of the country, drew a large number of spectators, the number being reckoned at close on four hundred. The game resulted in favour of the Ross-shire team by one goal and two touches."

Fairly soon, however, clubs also appeared in Alness and Invergordon in Easter Ross, providing the Dingwall club with a wider range of opponents and more frequent matches. Most of the home games were played in Bridaig Park.

At this time emerging football teams in the Highland communities played by 'rugby union' rules rather than the 'association' rules which were becoming more prevalent in the Central Belt. Contemporary descriptions of the matches, however, suggest that there was still a large degree of overlap between the two 'codes' – what went on at Bridaig seemed to involve a lot of dribbling of the ball by feet.

It wasn't until 1888, after Colin's departure, that *The Ross-shire County* club first sent out a team to play by 'association' rules (once more against Inverness rivals) – and set the first footsteps on the pathway to the modern Ross County F.C.



A Victorian Rugby Match - public domain

Colin played as a 'half-back', or sometimes 'quarter-back', for the Dingwall team. He was a regular try-scorer and, despite his relative youth, was also elected as the club's treasurer.

During the summer months, he turned out for the Dingwall Cricket Club – which played its matches in the grounds of either Tulloch Castle or Castle Leod. At Tulloch in June 1880, in a friendly match against visiting officers of the Highland Light Infantry, he was reported as 'batting with his usual coolness' and becoming the top scorer with 18 runs.



Tulloch Castle © Peter Moore

Other Interests

At the New Year holiday in 1882 an 'Athletics Games' was held in Dingwall for the first time in many years. Colin participated in the pole-vault competition, tying for third place, but his principal contribution to the event came in performances by the Boys' Flute Band which he had created and trained over the preceding months.

The flute band initiative linked Colin's other two youthful interests. One was music - in pursuit of which he joined the Musical Association which was established in Dingwall in 1880 'for the cultivation of high-class music'. The Association offered tuition on various instruments and held concerts in the town from time to time. The other was the attraction of military service and discipline. Like almost all the other young men of the town, Colin was a member of the Dingwall company of the Ross-shire Volunteer Rifles (a militia unit with origins dating back to the Napoleonic Wars). Weekends or holidays in which sport did not take first place would find him on the parade ground or the rifle range.

Departure and Tribute

On a Saturday evening in January 1882, following Colin's last game for the football team, townsfolk gathered in the Caledonian Hotel on the High Street to pay tribute and say farewell. His presentation – attended by workmates, team-mates, and representatives of the Town Council, the Musical Association and the Volunteers – made it clear that he was held in high esteem. He was indeed one of the burgh's 'favourite sons'. Generous gifts – a gold chain and a purse of sovereigns – were presented, while warm speeches attested to his character and talents, and wished him well in his new country.



The Caledonian Hotel © Forbes Munro

We do not know what – other than an adventurous spirit - induced Colin's decision to leave his family and community, in order to move to a new country half-way around the world. Dingwall was thriving at the time, and Colin had made good use of the opportunities it offered him. But the attributes he carried with him to Argentina are readily seen – craft skills, a love of sports and music, experience in managing voluntary organisations, and a knowledge of military discipline.



MacDonald's Court has disappeared from Dingwall – swept away in the early 1970s to build the new road that cuts across the western end of the High Street. But perhaps offsetting that loss is the Colin Calder Street which now exists in Rosario.

Plaque at the beginning of Colin Calder Street, Rosario, Argentina © Juanmariokd

Sources:

- ['Colin Calder', Wikipedia;](#)
- [Scotland's People, census of 1881 for Dingwall](#)
- [various newspapers, 1876-88 - including *The Glasgow Herald*, *The Ross-shire Journal*, *The Inverness Courier*, *The Inverness Advertiser and Ross-shire Chronicle*, and *The Invergordon Times and General Advertiser*.](#)