

# Dingwall in 1975: A Pivotal Year

by Forbes Munro of Dingwall Museum, Highland, Scotland

Dingwall Museum was born in 1975, rising from the ashes of local government reform.



Dingwall Museum © Forbes Munro



Dingwall Museum © Forbes Munro

The town council – which was about to be abolished - grew concerned for the future of its small Burgh Museum as well as for items it had collected for a proposed exhibition at the MacDonald Monument.

It therefore set up a Museum Committee to ensure continuity and allocated a small sum from the Common Good Fund. The rest, as they say, is *History* .....

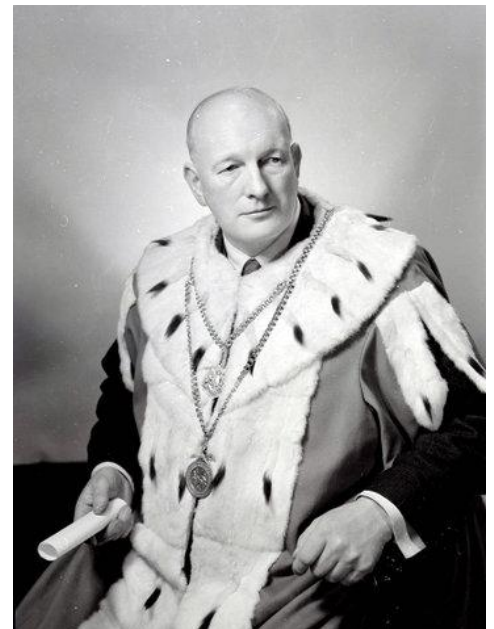
**Local Government Reorganisation** was the big event of 1975.

Dingwall lost its status as a Royal Burgh, held since 1226, while its functions as an administrative centre were greatly reduced by Ross & Cromarty (minus Lewis) becoming a mere district of the new Highland Region.

Sandy Macrae was the last of a long line of Provosts of Dingwall.

His father, Norman Macrae, had told Dingwall's story in *The Romance of a Royal Burgh* – which was reissued in 1975 to mark the impending changes.

In May, Sandy left a farewell message to the people of Dingwall, thanking them for having voted him onto the Council for the past 42 years, and then hosted a Dissolution Dinner at the National Hotel.



Sandy Macrae © Dingwall Museum



County Buildings © Dingwall Museum

The County Council buildings remained in place, but many of the staff began to transfer to an Inverness workplace – arousing concerns about a loss of income in the town.

## North Sea Oil and the Local Economy

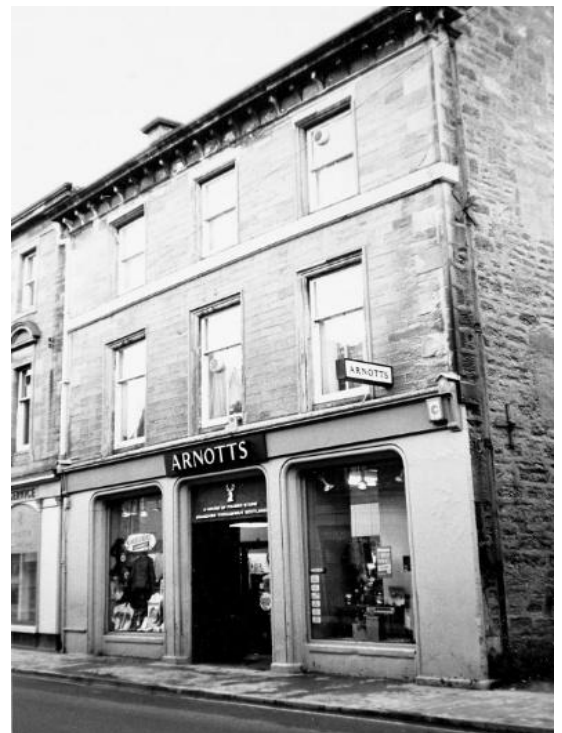
While government was contracting at a local level the economy was expanding – thanks mainly to North Sea Oil. The rig-construction yards at Nigg and Kishorn provided new job opportunities for the people of Dingwall and surrounding areas and brought new families up from the South.

A significant beneficiary of these developments was **Newton's Coaches**, which had been reconstituted by Morris Newton in 1968. By 1975 the business had a fleet of 60 vehicles, many of them engaged in transporting workers to and from the construction yards.



*Newton's Coaches © Commercial Motor*

The effects of improving incomes also showed up on Dingwall High Street where the House of Fraser opened its most northerly store - a branch of **Arnotts**. A journalist noted the ensuing excitement: 'Local housewives crowded around the entrance as Sir Hugh arrived and cut the tartan tape.'



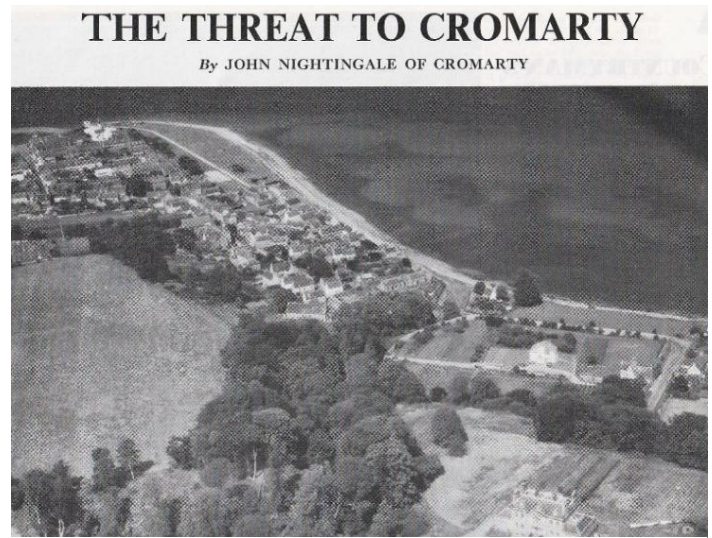
*Arnotts on the High Street © Dingwall Museum*



*Nigg Yard © public domain*

## The Oil-Refinery Inquiry

For ten weeks early in 1975 a public inquiry met in the County Council buildings to consider a proposal to build an oil refinery at Nigg. A stream of interested parties and special witnesses came and went through the town. The project, which originated from a reclusive American multi-millionaire, met with strong local objections – especially from the people of Cromarty. To the great relief of the objectors, the Public Inquiry Reporter recommended against the project in December 1975 – mainly on environmental grounds.



*Threat to Cromarty © Country Life*



*Local Hero @Goldcrest Films*

These events provided the inspiration for Bill Gregory's film 'Local Hero', released in 1983.

Sadly, Dingwall did not feature in this much-loved movie.

## New Beginnings

Dingwall's inner relief road opened in 1975, together with a one-way system at the eastern end of the High Street. Construction of the road resulted in several residential properties being demolished, and the relocation or disappearance of some long-established businesses. These changes, however, paved the way for the 'semi-pedestrianisation' of the modern High Street.



*The 'New' High Street © Dingwall Museum*



*St Clements School © The Ross-shire Journal*

## Hamish Gray and the St Clements School

St Clements School opened in 1975, in what were the Old Academy Buildings. This was one of the last initiatives of the Ross & Cromarty Education Committee.

It was also a tribute to Hamish Gray, the local MP, who had successfully steered through the House of Commons a private members bill to oblige local authorities in Scotland to take responsibility for the education of children with mental difficulties.



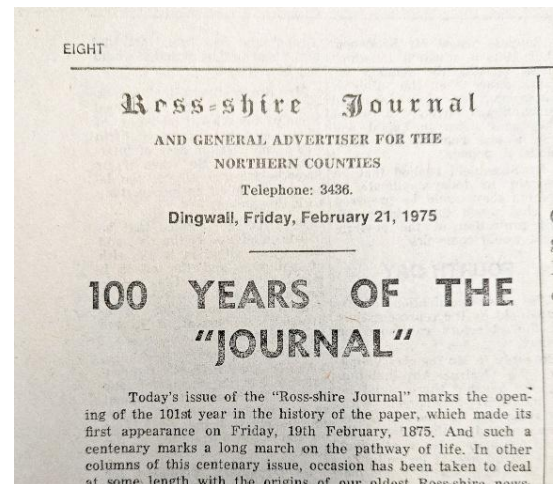
*Hamish Gray, M.P. © public domain*

## Events

In February *The Ross-shire Journal* celebrated its 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary. The joint-editors in 1975 were local Dingwall men – David Watt and Alistair MacBeth.



*D.M. Watt © The Ross-shire Journal*



## The Corries in Dingwall

Dingwall in 1975 did not lack for entertainment. The Town Hall offered a venue to local performers like the Dingwall Players or the Dingwall Gaelic Choir as well as visiting entertainers of wider fame. The most enthusiastic welcome probably went to The Corries, the Scottish folk-song duet then at height of their popularity. They performed two concerts over consecutive nights in April.



*The Corries © www.corries.co.uk*

## To Leave the EEC or Not?



*EEC Flag © public domain*

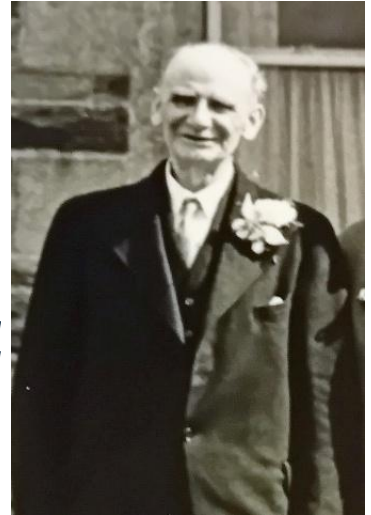
The most important national event of the year was arguably the Referendum over continuing membership of the European Common Market. This led to debate within and between the town and county branches of the political parties, with the strongest opinion apparently being to 'stay in' – which matched the eventual outcome.

## People

### A Funeral at Fodderty

Many inhabitants of Dingwall passed away in 1975. The first funeral of the year took place at Fodderty Cemetery on New Year's Day. **John Ronald MacLeod**, popularly known as 'Jorah', was the last surviving member of the 4<sup>th</sup> Bn. Seaforth Highlanders to have fought in the First World War. He was also the head of a family which was very active in community affairs.

*John Ronald MacLeod  
© P MacLeod*



*Mr & Mrs Logan © Dingwall Museum*

### Willie Logan

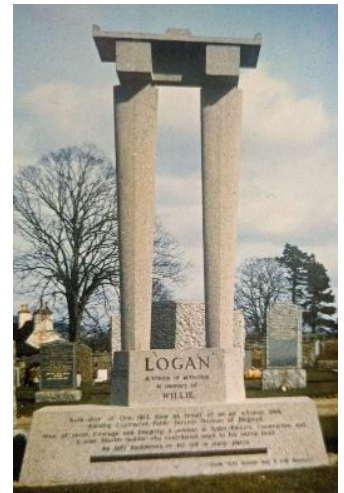
In April, what was described as 'a striking and symbolic memorial' was erected over the grave, at Fodderty, of one of Dingwall's favourite sons. His widow, Mrs Helen Logan, commemorated his life and their marriage with a 10-foot-high replica of two of the Tay Bridge's pillars.

*Gail McGrane © BBC*



### Gail McGrane

Among those born in Dingwall in 1975 was Gail Pirie who, under her married name of Gail McGrane, would achieve national recognition as a weather presenter for BBC Scotland.



*The Logan Memorial  
© Dingwall Museum*

### And Finally . . . .



*© The Ross-shire Journal, 1975*

**Back Row (L/R)** Robert Mackay, Alan Edwards, Gordon Seaton, D. Cumming, W. Sutherland, Donnie Bain, Stan Sokolowski, Jack Lornie, Colin Brett.

**Front Row (L/ R)** Tommy Tulloch, George Urquhart, W. Skinner, Ian Hunter, John Wilkie, Jim Mackechnie, James Mutch.

If 1975 was a year of new beginnings in so many aspects of Dingwall life, sadly this was not true of one of its most important institutions.

Ross County F.C. had an indifferent Season 1974-75, losing to Falkirk in the Scottish Cup and to Inverness Caley in the League Cup, while finishing mid-table in the Highland League.

Late summer defeats in home friendlies seemed to hold out little prospect that Season 1975-76 would be any better.