

# Legacies of War - Dingwall in the 1920s

*by Forbes Munro of Dingwall Museum*

The shadow of the Great War hung over Dingwall as it entered the 1920s. This was to be expected in a small community which had sent almost five hundred young men into active service - 20 per cent of whom 'paid the supreme sacrifice'.

The work of the Town Council to provide a fitting War Memorial came to fruition in June 1922, when Sir Hector Munro unveiled a striking memorial near the National Hotel. This became the focal point for annual Remembrance Day ceremonies over the next 100 years.

In 1920 a 4<sup>th</sup> Seaforth's 1914-18 Reunion Club came into being, reflecting the fact that so many local men had served in that 'volunteer' unit. The club organised a Highland Gathering in the Jubilee Park in the summer of 1920, the first in a long line of such annual events.

In 1925 the Cambrai Cross, a memorial dedicated to the 4<sup>th</sup> Seaforth's, was unveiled at the station square, pictured below right.

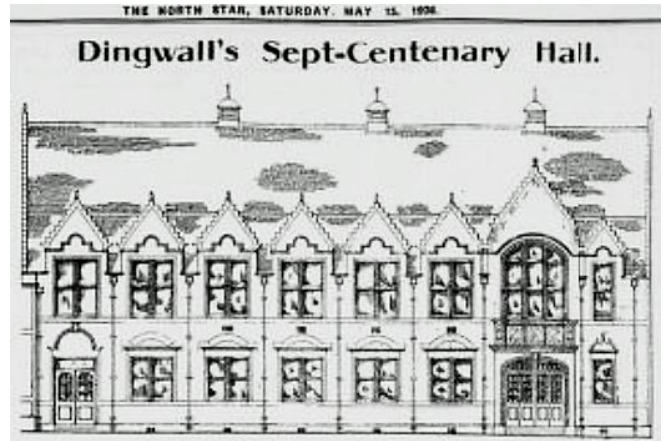
In 1920 the Town Council initiated a scheme for publicly-owned housing in which priority would be given to ex-servicemen. A partnership between local and national government, it envisaged up to 100 new homes being built. The first were allocated to married ex-servicemen in 1921. By 1928, the project was in its third phase of construction, with new roads having been laid through the old 'Meiklefield'. The rationale had now become one of overcoming shortages in the housing stock and providing for families coming into the town for employment.

In 1920, Dingwall's six licenced premises remained in the ownership of a State Control Board. The local Temperance Movement campaigned twice – in 1920 and 1923 – for a 'no-licence' vote in local polls. By 1923 concern arose that people who simply disliked 'the Control', and wanted rid of it, might cast a 'dry' vote. In the event, Dingwall remained 'wet' and 'the Control' continued its operations for another fifty years. The success of the Temperance Movement in the USA brought about the end of the 'Ferintosh Distillery' – which closed in 1926.



The Masonic Hall on the High Street was sold in 1920 – to become a Weaving Institute for disabled ex-servicemen. It was formerly the largest hall in the town, hosting large public events, and its absence put pressure on the smaller Carnegie Hall, beside the townhouse. The Council began to consider the construction of a new Town Hall, as a centre-piece for celebration of the 700<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the royal charter in 1926.

However, the new hall did not open until 1928 – the General Strike of 1926 muted the Sept Centenary celebrations and public subscriptions came in only slowly. When completed, as part of a re-configuration on Church Street, it offered a large upper hall that quickly became the venue for much of the communal life of the people - hosting dances, theatrical performances, political meetings, fund-raising activities and even, for a few years, cinema showings. It ranked alongside the housing programme as the largest civic project of the decade. A new Fingal Lodge also opened in 1928 to replace what had been sold in 1920.



Not all the developments of the 1920s stemmed directly from the war as there were other sources of innovation. In particular, the greater availability and reduced costs of motor vehicles improved local travel, transport, trade, and agriculture. Electricity-supply and wireless broadcasting were also among the major technological changes of the decade.

A 'new beginning' appeared in sport. In 1926 the Dingwall Victoria United football team entered the semi-professional Highland League, and became Ross County F.C. The club built a new 'enclosure and pavilion' alongside the county buildings, which attracted a crowd of over 1,000 at its opening in August 1929. 'From little acorns.....'

**Sources:** *The Ross-shire Journal, 1919-1929; The North Star and Farmer's Chronicle, 1919-29.*