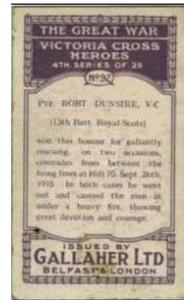




18274 Robert A. Dunsire VC.



For King and Country he Fought This Day.

On the 16th November 1918, the first Saturday after the Armistice was signed, The Fifehire Advertiser contained a major leader.

Our Fallen Heroes.

Kirkcaldy's Sacrifice In The War.

"They died as brave men die,

"They sleep where heroes sleep."

"During the next few weeks we will publish the names, addresses, and regiments or ships of our gallant Kirkcaldy soldiers and sailors, who have given their lives for their country and for the freedom of the world in the great war. By-and-bye they will be inscribed on a more permanent memorial and we desire that no native or adopted citizen of Kirkcaldy should be overlooked. In order that the Roll of Honour may be as complete as possible, we invite the relatives or friends of any dead hero, whose name may be omitted from our list, to send the name, home address, regiment etc., to the "Fifehire Advertiser" Office as early as possible. Relatives are also invited to notify us of any correction of the names which appear on our

list. The following is the first instalment of Kirkcaldy's Roll of Honour and contains 172 names. A second list will be published next week."

It was in June 1926 that the "more permanent memorial" was unveiled by Admiral of the Fleet, Lord Wester Wemyss GCB; CMG; MVO. The memorial was designed by J.S.McKay of Heiton McKay, Perth with the art deco panels containing the 985 names, designed by George Henry Paulin."

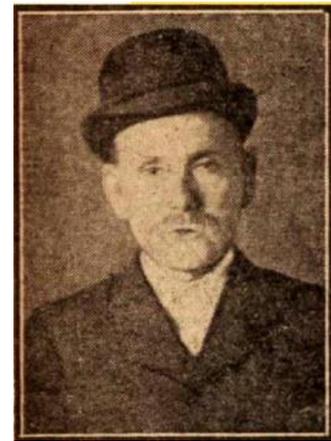
"Rosslyn Erskine Wemyss had been born in the ancestral home at Wemyss Castle in 1877 and enjoyed a long and successful naval career. He was the senior British Representative at the signing of the Armistice in 1918 and it was his decision to bring hostilities to an end at 11.00am, on the 11th day of the 11th month. This caused annoyance to the Prime Minister - Lloyd George - as he had wanted it signed at 2.30pm, in order that he could make the announcement in the House of Commons. Wemyss had two reasons - firstly that the triple 11s had a strong poetic ring but more importantly, it was possible more troops could die unnecessarily in the intervening three and a half hours.

The "Fifeshire Advertiser's" list contained the name of L.-Corporal Robert Dunsire, V.C., Commercial Street, 13th Royal Scots. The following is an outline of the man and his gallantry.

Robert Anderson Dunsire was born on the 26th November 1891 at 5.30am, the



9th child in a family of 13. His parents were Thomas Dunsire a miner and Elizabeth Dunsire (nee Warrender). Robert had 6 brothers



and 6 sisters. He was born in the Parish of Buckhaven.

1891 DUNSIRE, ROBERT ANDERSON (Statutory registers Births 459/2 319)
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Page 107.

1891. BIRTHS in the District of Buckhaven in the County of Fife

No.	Sex	Given Name	When and Where Born	No.	Rank, Regiment, & Trade or Profession of Father	Rank, Regiment, & Trade or Profession of Mother	Where and When Registered, and Name of Registrar
310	M	Robert Anderson Dunsire	26th Nov 1891 5.30 am A.M. Buckhaven	1174	Thomas Dunsire Coalminer	Elizabeth Dunsire Wid. Warrender	310. December 1st at Buckhaven D.M. Pye
300	F	Mary Elizabeth Adair	20th Nov 1891 10.30 am P.M. Buckhaven	1175	James Adair Coalminer	Elizabeth Adair Wid. Warrender	300. December 11th at Buckhaven D.M. Pye
321	M	Andrew Dunsire Stanhouse	20th Nov 1891 11.30 am A.M. Buckhaven	1176	Thomas Dunsire Coalminer	Elizabeth Dunsire Wid. Warrender	321. December 11th at Buckhaven D.M. Pye

David M. Pye Registrar

In the 1891 census taken just a few months before Robert was born, the family were living in Station Road Buckhaven.



By 1901 the family had moved to Kirkcaldy where Thomas had secured employment at the Dunnikier Colliery. They were living at 19 Overton Road. Although some of the older children have left home, there are a considerable number still living with the parents. We see; Catherine 18, Lizzie 15, Bella 12, Grace 11, Robert 9, Maggie 7, John 4 and William 8 months. There is also the 85 year old Mother of Elizabeth, plus a boarder making 12 in

all. As four year old John was born in Buckhaven, it is safe to assume the family were not in Kirkcaldy before 1897, which fits in with Robert being around the age of five when the family moved. At the time they moved to Kirkcaldy, the family were living in Methil Brae. Robert is listed as a scholar in this census. Catherine and Lizzie are both linen workers and Bella has the occupation of “household helper.”

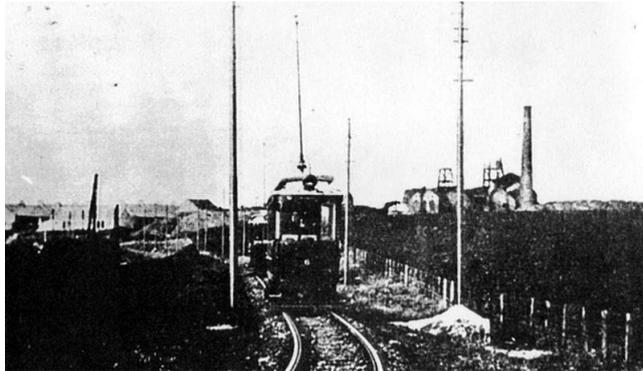
The 1911 census shows another move – this time to 20 Nether Street. Robert has now left school and his occupation is given as a coal miner. The numbers living in the family home are much reduced, although another child Marshall has been born and a 5 month old Grand – daughter, Jane makes up the family.



On the 22nd July 1914, Robert married “Catherine” Pitt. Although known as Catherine, both her birth and marriage certificates show her as Kate. Kate was born in George Street, Cellardyke on the 1st May, 1895. Her parents were John Pitt and Isabella Pitt (nee Easson) Her Father is listed as a publican but by the time of her marriage, his occupation is given as general dealer.

Kate Pitt is listed in the 1911 census at 210 Denbeath, living with her parents and two older brothers. Kate at this time is 15 years old and her occupation is given as a "Pithead worker."

The wedding took place at West High Street, Methil, the service being conducted by the Rev. Alexander



Robertson. The witnesses were John Anderson Dunsire and Georgina Sutherland. Kate's address remained as 210 Denbeath but Robert's

usual address is given as Hazel Terrace, Braehead, Methil. As Robert was working at the Fife Coal

Company's Rosie Pit when he was married, the assumption has to be, that he was living with a relative, or as a boarder, at that address. What is certain, is that after his marriage, the couple moved in with Mr and Mrs Pitt at 210 Denbeath. The property address in time



was altered to 210 Dee Street, Denbeath and was demolished around 1988. The Rossie Pit was close to Buckhaven and was originally sunk by Bowman and

Company but was taken over in 1905 by the Wemyss Coal Company. It was nationalised in 1947 but closed shortly thereafter in 1953.

The Fife Free Press of the 27th November 1915, in a lengthy series of articles covering the previous week, goes into some detail of Robert's life and gives in-depth coverage of the gallant deed, which saw him win the highest award which the country offers to members of its armed forces.

“ Great satisfaction was felt throughout the district, when it was learned at the end of the week, that the highest honour for bravery had been awarded to a young soldier, who, although not presently residing in Kirkcaldy, has spent most of his wife in the town, The fortunate soldier is 18274 Private Robert Dunsire, 13th Royal Scots (Lothian Regiment), a son of Thomas Dunsire, mining contractor, 84 Commercial Street, Pathhead, Kirkcaldy.

Robert came to Kirkcaldy when he was five years of age and was educated at Pathhead Public School, after which,



he started work with his father at the Pannie Pit. He is an accomplished musician, and in addition to being a cornet player in Dunnikier Colliery Band, he was a clever violinist and frequently performed at concerts

and dance parties. He was also a member of the orchestra in connection with Dysart Temperance Gospel Union. Robert was also a member of the YMCA in Kirkcaldy. He was married in July last year, and went to reside in Denbeath, where he was employed at the Rosie Pit, prior to enlisting in January of this year.

ORIGINAL
SHORT SERVICE.
 (For the Duration of the War.)
ATTESTATION OF
ROYAL SCOTS

No. 1994 Name *Robert Dunmore* Corp *Royal Scots*

Questions to be put to the recruit before enlisting:
 1. What is your name? *Robert Dunmore*
 2. What is your full Address? *1211 Broughton, Perth*
 3. Are you a British Subject? *Yes*
 4. What is your Age? *23*
 5. What is your Trade or Calling? *Bookbinder*
 6. Are you married? *No*
 7. Have you ever served in any branch of His Majesty's Army, Navy or Air Force, if so? *No*
 8. Are you willing to be recruited as an untrained recruit? *Yes*
 9. Are you willing to be recruited for General Service? *Yes*
 10. Did you receive a Gratuity, and do you understand the meaning and value given to you? *Yes*
 11. Are you willing to serve upon the following conditions provided His Majesty should so long require your services?
 For the duration of the War, at the end of which you will be discharged with all necessary pay, and subject to the provisions of the Army Act, 1905, and the Army Act, 1914, and any other Act in that behalf made, and your service in the Army, till you have been called up to the second line.

Robert Dunmore I do hereby declare that the above answers are true to the above questions set out, and that I am willing to fulfil the engagements made.
 Signature of Recruit: *Robert Dunmore*
 Signature of Officer: *Robert Dunmore*
 Signature of Sergeant: *Robert Dunmore*

After enlisting, he had 6 months training in England, and while there, his proficiency in trench digging and dug-out making was greatly praised by the officers, the battalion on one occasion being paraded to see his work.

In July 1915 he went to France with his regiment, and although he was quickly into the thick of the fighting, he has so far escaped without a scratch. Robert had only been there for two months when he performed the deed which brought him such honour. Private Dunsire, like all true heroes, is very modest, and he has barely referred to his brave action. In a letter to his Mother some time ago, he simply wrote: "You know Mother a miner never thinks of danger."

The incident for which he obtained the distinguished honour is described in the official report as follows:-



For most conspicuous bravery on Hill 70 on the 26th September 1915. Private Dunsire went out under very heavy fire and rescued a wounded man from between the firing lines. Later, when another man considerably nearer the German lines was heard shouting for help, he crawled out again with utter disregard for the enemy's fire, and carried him in also. Shortly afterwards the Germans attacked over this ground.

It should not be forgotten how great an honour the Victoria Cross is. In the First World War 627 in total were awarded. Of this number 74 were won by Scots. Only the bravest of the brave won this medal.

How He Won the Victoria Cross

**The article went on to quote from a letter he had written to his wife shortly after the battle. He said :-
"We were in reserve. After lying in a wet trench all night, we received orders to proceed to the firing line. The regiment was very glad to see us, as there did not seem to be a machine gun near. It is those little guns which are doing a lot of damage in this war. I was still in the firing line, when a Colonel of an East Yorkshire regiment shook hands with me and told me I was a brave lad. I was sitting on the parapet of the trench looking over the battlefield, when I noticed a man**

crawling over the ridge which separated our parapet from theirs. With the glasses, I made out he was one of our lads, so I made a dive out of the trench, got him on my back and brought him in. I had not been back a quarter of an hour when I noticed another lad. This time it was worse than the first, as shells were bursting all around, and when the snipers saw me, they kept up a continuous fire. I simply can't tell how I escaped being shot, as I was a good target, running about 100 hundred yards with a man on my back. I was glad I got a chance to be of service somehow, as we had to retire when our gun went out of action."

" In a later letter Private Dunsire mentioned that the Yorkshire Colonel had since been killed. The Denbeath soldier was attached to a machine gun section. The gun was put out of action and the men were ordered to retire. Knowing this would mean idly hanging about in the rear trenches, and seeing the urgent need for men in the face of the massing Germans, he picked up a rifle and cartridges and joined the thin line manning the trench."

Arrival At Kirkcaldy

In the same edition the Press told of the enthusiastic reception Robert had received on arriving at Kirkcaldy Station on Monday the 22nd November by the 7.30 London express. "When Private Dunsire V.C., alighted with the other passengers, his appearance would not have attracted more attention than of other

soldiers home on furlough, had not a relative of his own not happened to be on the platform and recognised him. He was immediately surrounded and to his great embarrassment was warmly congratulated. It was apparent that this reception was proving too much for him, and with the remark "I'll have to hurry home," he made his way down Station Road and boarded a cab for Denbeath, where his wife resides. Mrs Dunsire had received a wire during the day stating that her husband was on the way home and would arrive on Monday night.

Private Dunsire arrived home earlier than expected, so there was no opportunity of giving him a reception when he arrived home in the tramway car.

In an interview he stated that he was in the trenches on Friday morning when the news of the award was received, to the great rejoicing in the regiment. Colonel McLear wasted no time in hastening to him and after hearty congratulations, asked if he wished to leave for home. Naturally Private Dunsire jumped at the opportunity, and, making his way to Headquarters, received his pass."

"Referring to the Sunday when he won his great distinction, he said, the machine gun was put out of action. The Regiment holding the trenches was a Yorkshire battalion, and, seeing the lines threatened by the Germans, Private Dunsire delayed obeying the order to retire to the rear trenches. The first time he

went over the parapet to the rescue of a Yorkshire man, he had a comparatively easy time in bringing in the man, till just before he reached shelter, when very heavy fire was turned on the two. The second time he went out, machine guns blazed at him. Shells were bursting all around, and how he escaped was a marvel to himself, as he had to struggle around 100 yards with the helpless man clinging to him.

Buckhaven Town Council at a special meeting on Monday night, instructed a committee to arrange to give Private Dunsire a fitting reception and testimonial. At the same time, Provost Rose made feeling reference to the bereavement of Bailie Simpson, whose son, had been reported killed by shell fire.”

Buckhaven Entertains the Hero

“The municipality of Buckhaven are undoubtedly proud of the honour and distinction that has been bestowed upon it through Private Dunsire having gained the soldier’s greatest honour – the Victoria Cross. The citizens are naturally carried away by the occasion, but the hero

General Notices.

Burgh of Buckhaven, Methil, and Innerleven.

PRESENTATION and TESTIMONIAL TO Private R. DUNSIRE, V.C.

THE PUBLIC PRESENTATION of the TESTIMONIAL which has been subscribed for by the Inhabitants of the Burgh of Buckhaven and Parish of Wemyss to Private **ROBERT DUNSIRE, V.C.**, will take place in the **GAIETY THEATRE, DUNDEE**, on **SATURDAY, 4th December**, at **3.45 o'clock**.

Orchestra Stalls and Dress Circle will be Reserved to Ticket-Holders at 2s each.

Rest of Theatre is open, but a Silver Collection will be taken, proceeds of which will be given to Randolph Wemyss Memorial Hospital.

Provost Rose, J.P., will preside, and make the Presentation.

himself is modest in the midst of his greatness. This was in evidence last night (Wednesday) when he was entertained in the White Swan Hotel, by the Provost, Magistrates and Town Council of Buckhaven, where a splendid dinner was served. Among those present were the relatives of Private Dunsire.

Later in the evening, the party adjourned to the Gaiety Theatre, Methil, where a large crowd was waiting. As the hero of the trenches, proceeded from the hotel to the theatre, the crowds – several hundred in numbers – raised cheer after cheer, which he acknowledged with pleasant smiles, whilst in the theatre scenes of great enthusiasm prevailed.”

The new V.C. on rising to say a few words, was greeted with loud and prolonged cheers, and the audience sang “For he’s a jolly good fellow.” Private Dunsire thanked the audience, and said he was better at fighting the Germans than making speeches, never the less, he told them sincerely that they required more men out in France, and that it was up to every man to do their duty. Mr Lindsay, of the “Lindsay and Hearte Review Company”, who were performing that night, on behalf of the Company, presented Private Dunsire with a set of pipes and a tobacco pouch, also a gold chain and locket for Mrs Dunsire. In doing so, he wished the V.C. and his wife every happiness and good luck.”

The two major Kirkcaldy newspapers, the Fife Free Press and the Fifeshire Advertiser were both published weekly and so carried all Roberts exploits of the previous week on the 27th November. There was very little variation in the content of the reports. However, the Fifeshire Advertiser had a snippet or two of their own, with:-

Firstly, we learn a little more about the deed which won Private Dunsire his high honour. He had been describing the incident but in the final paragraph read, "I got to within 25 yards of our own trenches, when I had to let him drop, as it was impossible for me to carry him further. I asked one of my pals, a north country chap, called Dewar, and a really good fellow, to help me bring him in the remaining distance, and this we safely accomplished. Both the men I brought in belonged to the East Yorkshire Regiment, so I did not know them, neither have I heard anything further about them." (Fifeshire Advertiser, 27th November).

And:-

"Although Private Dunsire has lived most of his life in Kirkcaldy, where he was reared and educated, he was born in Buckhaven and married a Denbeath wife, having worked in that District for some six months. Consequently there has been great rivalry between the different places as to the ownership of the Victoria Cross hero, and when a newspaper placard appeared on the hoardings of Denbeath, proclaiming that a

“Methil Hero Gains the V.C.” the bills were promptly torn down by the jealous Denbeath residents.” (Fifeshire Advertiser, 27th November).

Enthusiastic Scenes at Kirkcaldy

“On Wednesday forenoon (24th November) Private Dunsire visited his parents at 84 Commercial Street, Kirkcaldy. The residents had learned of his intention, and from many of the dwelling houses flags were displayed, while his appearance in the street was a signal for a loud burst of cheering for the Pathhead hero. After receiving the congratulations of his mother and sisters, he proceeded to Pathhead Public School, where he received his early education. Here, he was met by his old headmaster, Mr John Christie, and on entering the class-rooms the V.C. was cheered by the happy children, who were granted a half holiday in honour of the occasion. Private Dunsire then hurried to Dunnikier Colliery, where he was for some time employed and he was heartily cheered by his former workmates. By this time, the word had spread still further, that the V.C. was in Pathhead district and mothers and children flocked to Commercial Street to catch a glimpse of the hero of the hour. Private Dunsire felt the honour being paid to him very keenly, and as he wended his way to his mother’s home, he acknowledged the cheers of his old time neighbours with a happy smile. Almost everyone was anxious to

shake the hand of one who had risked his life to save others, in fact one who had walked into the very jaws of death, but whose gallantry and self sacrifice triumphed.

To the credit of Private Dunsire, it must be noted that he is taking his honour with becoming modesty, and is not given to boasting of his brave deed.” (Fife Free Press, 27th November 1915).

Great Enthusiasm Last Night

On Friday the 26th November, Market Street hosted a formal welcome to Robert. The Fife Free Press of the following day covered the event.

“No better reception could have been given to any man than that accorded Private Dunsire last night, when he appeared in the Pavilion, which was packed to its utmost capacity. The Provost, Sir Robert C. Lockhart presided and was accompanied on the platform by Bailies Duncan and Wright, Mr John Christie and Mr P Dunsire. As Dunnikier Colliery Prize Band played a selection, the V.C. was carried shoulder high onto the platform. His appearance being the signal for a loud burst of applause.

Provost Lockhart, in introducing the hero said he was going to say Kirkcaldy’s V.C. but, they must remember that the neighbouring friendly burgh of Buckhaven claimed Dunsire as a native. Private Dunsire however,

was educated in Kirkcaldy, he was reared in Kirkcaldy, he learnt his work in Kirkcaldy, and spent the best part of his life in Kirkcaldy, and he thought the people of Kirkcaldy were entitled to say that what the V.C. knew, he learned in the “Lang Toon”

The Provost went on to remark that “he thought it was one of the greatest attributes of the army at the present day, that they found men of all ranks and social standing equally honoured – the Colonel – the Captain – the Lieutenant and the Private – suffering together, bleeding together, dying together and honoured together.”

The Provost hoped that “Mr Dunsire would remind the young men of Kirkcaldy, who were perhaps hesitating about their duty at the present moment, of what they could do and what they could win, when one of themselves could return to their native town and be honoured by a vast audience such as this, and be recognised as he would be on Monday night by the Corporation of Kirkcaldy. On Monday night, he would have the honour of presenting him with the burgess ticket conferring upon him the freedom of the Burgh of Kirkcaldy.”

When Private Dunsire rose to reply, he thanked everyone for the wonderful reception he had received. He apologised for going home on the Monday night of his return, which was due to his wife’s illness. He claimed to be a citizen of Kirkcaldy – having spent

most of his life amongst them. He then spoke again about young men enlisting, if they wished the war brought to a speedy end. "He thanked them from the bottom of his heart for the great and unexpected reception they had honoured him with that night, and their expressions of admiration for a poor private soldier, who only did his duty as any soldier ought to do. "That was all – I only did my duty."

The Provost then called for three hearty cheers to which the audience rose to their feet and responded enthusiastically. Private Dunsire with his father and mother, sisters and brothers, and other relatives present, to the number of twenty, were then grouped on the stage and photographed.

"Mr Pearson, lessee of the Pavilion presented Private Dunsire with a purse of gold amid a fresh outburst of cheering. As the hero left he had to run the gauntlet of many enthusiasts eager to shake his hand."

Again the Fifeshire Advertiser had a little extra in their report, in that a possible reason for his wife's ill health, could have been:-

We also learn in the issue that Mrs Dunsire's brother, "Ralph, Scots Guards, must now be mourned as dead. The last tidings that comrades could give, was the powerful Guardsman, in a fury of despair, plying his bayonet, surrounded by Germans."

"Private Dunsire was as busy on Thursday (25th) as any public man, taking part in two causes promoted

for patriotic schemes. He joined Provost Rose and Major Cameron on the platform at the opening of a flower show and cake sale in Buckhaven, later giving several violin selections.

Later in the evening he again gave several selections at a song-lecture by Mr A. Allan Beveridge, Edinburgh, in Methil, on behalf of the parish work parties engaged on soldier's comforts. His simple and frank words, and ready obliging manner have everywhere charmed the thousands of new friends met in these, for him, busy days." (Fife Free Press, 27th November)

On Saturday the 27th November, Robert attended a football match – Denbeath Star v Glencraig Celtic. The report tells us that, “the game was a Fife Cup tie played on a home-and-home principle. Denbeath followed up their recent draw at Glencraig by winning 3-0 at Denbeath, Cunningham scoring all three goals. Private R. Dunsire, V.C. kicked off, and at the interval, Bailie Farmer, president of the Club, presented him with a wristlet watch from the club as an appreciation of his gallant action. Private Dunsire, in a speech, thanked the club, and hoped they would finish victorious.” (Fife Free Press 4th December 1915.

The Fife Free Press on Saturday the 4th December gave full rein to Robert's investiture as a Freeman of the Burgh:-

“The burgh of Kirkcaldy on Monday evening conferred on Private Robert Dunsire, V.C., their highest honour

by making him an honorary Burgess of the Royal Burgh of Kirkcaldy. Private Dunsire intended leaving for the front on Monday night, and had arranged to proceed from the Town Hall, where the ceremony took place, direct to the station. He accordingly left home with his full equipment, and was accompanied by his wife, who had been indisposed during the period of her husband's brief holiday. While on the way to the hall, however, the gallant soldier received a communication intimating that his leave of absence had been extended for another week. On arriving with the car at Gallatown a wagonette was waiting for him, in which were his father, mother and sister, while Dunnikier Colliery Band (of which he had formerly been a member) was also in attendance. The gallant soldier and his wife having taken their seats in the carriage, were preceded by the band playing patriotic airs and conveyed in triumph to the Town House, where a large crowd which had assembled gave him a hearty cheer as he entered the building.

Provost Sir Robert Lockhart, wearing his chain of office, presided, and was supported on the right by Private Dunsire, Bailies Wright and Blyth, and on the left by Bailie Duncan and Treasurer Kilgour. The proceedings opened with the signing of the National anthem."

Treasurer Kilgour proposed the toast of the "Navy, Army and Reserve Forces," which was replied to by Major Ferguson."

The Provost in proposing the toast of the evening – “Private Robert Dunsire. V.C.” gave a lengthy oration covering many aspects of the wider struggle before moving onto Kirkcaldy in particular with:-

“They in Kirkcaldy, living in a prohibited area, within the danger zone, and subject to attacks at any time by sea or by air, had all along been keenly alive to the call of the Empire. With pride they had sent their sons by the thousand to take their place in the fighting line, and with sorrow month by month, they had mourned the death of the gallant and beloved, in the very flower of their youth. That night however, they were met in a different capacity. They were met to rejoice in the glorious return of one of their young citizens, who for conspicuous bravery in the field, had been accounted worthy to receive the highest and most coveted of all military decorations – the Victoria Cross for valour. He could have wished on such an occasion that they might have arranged for a great public welcome, but time was so short that the utmost they could do was to meet in that semi-public capacity to honour their young townsman, in order to bestow on him, the highest honour at their disposal and place his name on the roll of the distinguished and illustrious townsmen who from time to time had been made honorary burgesses of the Royal and Ancient Burgh.” He went on to name those on the roll and mentioned that “following the name of the Right Hon.H.H.Asquith,M.P. Prime Minister of Great Britain, would be placed the name of

Private Robert Dunsire. V.C. He thought this was a typical outstanding feature of this war, that rich and poor, high and low, had given themselves at the Empire's call. Peers of the realm, Members of Parliament, professional and merchant classes, as well as peasants, miners and artisans, all suffered, bled, and died together, breaking the old prejudices of race, class, colour and creed. Men of the Southern Cross were fighting side by side with the Canadian farmer and the dusky sons of India, Dutchmen from the Cape and sturdy highlanders from the North of Scotland. The castle and the cottage together anxiously scanned the casualty lists, and mourned alike dear ones who would return never more. He could assure their young friend that that ceremony was no mere empty honour. His name would go down to posterity as one who had been deemed worthy by his fellow citizens to have his name inscribed on this coveted roll of honour. After reading the official account of the brave deed which had secured the Victoria Cross to Private Dunsire, the Provost said they all admired and venerated many glorious episodes in the annals of the British Army - the charge of the Light Brigade, the stern resistance of the thin red line, while recent chapters of history manifested no decline in British courage and



resolution. The retreat from Mons, the recovery and victory of the Marne and the wild, glorious attack at Loos were all worthy of our highest traditions, but there were deeds which required a sterner sense

of duty, a more resolute courage. Calmly and deliberately to leave the safety of the trenches, mount the parapet, expose oneself in full view of the enemy, to almost certain death, in order to save not a dearly loved comrade, but a stranger in Khaki, to have the incredible good luck to return in safety carrying a wounded man, and to venture for a second time into the valley of death to save another, covering a distance of about a hundred yards – more than halfway to the enemy's trenches, to crawl back amidst a hail of bullets and bursting shells, with the heavy burden of a helpless British soldier; deeds like these rise to the highest ideals of chivalry, and touched the noblest aspirations of the human race – absolute and fearless self-sacrifice. Such deeds had won Private Dunsire the V.C. and fully justified their action in enrolling his name amongst those of our noblest citizens, in fullest assurance that he was worthy of the highest honour they could confer.

Mr Macindoe, Town Clerk, then read the burgess ticket, which was in the following terms:-

At Kirkcaldy the twenty-ninth day of November nineteen hundred and fifteen. In presence of Sir Robert Cook Lockhart, Provost, and James Wright, James Wotherspoon Duncan, Andrew Blyth and John Leslie, Esquires, Bailies of the Royal Burgh of Kirkcaldy, appeared

Private Robert Anderson Dunsire. 18274.

13th Battalion Royal Scots, Lothian Regiment, and in recognition of the bravery and heroism displayed by him in Flanders in the great European War, and especially of his going out from the trenches and rescuing two soldiers who were wounded, and carrying them in for a distance of 75 yards under



heavy rifle fire at Hill 70, for which bravery he has already been awarded by his Majesty the King the decoration of the Victoria Cross, was admitted and received a Guild Brother Burgess and Freeman of said Burgh, and to all the liberties and privileges thereto belonging, and by accepting hereof the said Robert

Anderson Dunsire becomes bound to perform all the civil duties of a Burgess incumbent on law.

Extracted by William L. Macindoe.

29th November 1915. “

The Provost then handed Private Dunsire the extract and in conclusion, he proposed the health of “Private Dunsire. V.C.” and the company toasted the hero with enthusiasm and sang “He’s a jolly good fellow.”

“Private Dunsire, who was heartily applauded on rising to reply, said words failed him to express the deep feelings of his heart when he thought of the great honour they had conferred upon him, one of the humblest of their townsmen. He asked them to accept his sincere and grateful thanks for making him a burgess of the Royal Burgh of Kirkcaldy with men of culture, science and knowledge, which made him wonder if he would be able to keep up the high standard set by his distinguished fellow-burgesses. By God’s help he would do all in his power to uphold the honour and dignity conferred upon him. Before he went back to the trenches he would like to see every young man in Scotland enlisted, so that he could go back to the trenches and tell the boys there that every young man in Scotland had enlisted. It would cheer them up to know they were going to get help soon, and he was sure the war would then be finished sooner than they anticipated.

Mr P. Herd proposed “The Parents and Wife of our Hero” passing a eulogium on Mr and Mrs Dunsire, sen.

Mr Thomas Dunsire, the hero’s father, thanked Mr Herd for his kind reference to his wife, daughter-in-law and son. His son was of quiet disposition, but he knew perfectly well that if he saw one of his fellow men in difficulties, his feeling heart would compel him to go and bring him in.

Mrs Dunsire, sen., also replied, claiming her son to be a citizen of Kirkcaldy. He got all his education in Kirkcaldy, both elementary and musical, and had a right to be claimed as a son of Kirkcaldy. She was proud of her son for what he had done – and hoped he would go back to the war and do his bit again, and come back to them more victorious than ever.

Councillor Whitelaw having given a song, and Mr Lumsden, Burgh Surveyor, a humorous recitation, Councillor Gourlay proposed the toast of “Pathhead School and its Headmaster.” Mr Christie replied and following some more toasts and songs, proceedings closed with hearty cheers and handshakes between Private Dunsire and the company.”

The Edinburgh Evening News of the 26th November 1915 reports that Private Robert Dunsire, V.C. whose parents live in Commercial Street, Kirkcaldy today was presented with a silver-mounted walking stick by the staff of Sinclairtown Public School.

“On the 30th November, on the invitation of Provost Rose, Robert visited Methil Brick Works, receiving an enthusiastic welcome. The female members of staff presented Robert with a pocket-book and the male workers a supply of cigarettes, in cases specially designed for the front. In a complimentary speech the Provost stated that through the intervention of the Town Council of Buckhaven, Private Dunsire had been granted extended leave, and he would be with them in the district for another week. Private Dunsire expressed his appreciation of the kindness shown.” (The Courier, 1st December 1915).

Robert was also kept busy on the morning of the 2nd December 1915. “A very interesting, although quiet presentation took place on Thursday forenoon in Mr Mason’s Hairdressing Salon, Commercial Street, where Private R. Dunsire, V.C. was presented by Mr R. Mason with a violin and lock-up case, the V.C., being a pupil of Mr Mason’s when a boy. The violin was a gift of Mr. Peter Berry, a local maker of violins, whose instruments are highly prized by experts. The violin with which Private Dunsire was presented was highly praised by Mr Honeyman, Newport, who is considered an expert. Private Dunsire warmly thanked Mr Berry for his handsome gift. (Fife Free Press 4th December)

Several newspapers carried reports of Private Dunsire being honoured by the town of his birth and where he had lived for the first five years of his life. He had of course



returned to the burgh following his marriage the previous year. The Daily Record of the 6th December outlined the event :-

“Private Robert Dunsire, V.C. was honoured by his native burgh, Buckhaven, on Saturday afternoon when Provost Rose presented him with a handsome gold watch and albert, and War Loan stock to the amount of about £55; also a gold brooch for Mrs Dunsire.

The presentation took place in the Gaiety Theatre, Methil, and was also made the occasion of a collection for the Wemyss Memorial Hospital, for which a gratifying sum was obtained.

Provost Rose was accompanied by Private Dunsire, V.C., Mrs Dunsire, wife of the hero; Mr Peter Dunsire (Uncle), Bailies Taylor, Galloway and Town Councillors of the Burghs of Buckhaven, Methil and Innerleven.

The Buckhaven Town Band was in attendance, and rendered spirited music at the theatre entrance prior

to the meeting. The Buckhaven Orchestra, under Mr Terris, also rendered a becoming programme during the afternoon.

“In handing over the gifts Provost Rose said that to have won the Victoria Cross in a war such as the present was surely proof of courage which could not be excelled. He had heard with pride and delight of the heroic act of their townsman. Private Dunsire had observed two of his comrades lying wounded in the fighting line. What did he do? Wait and count the cost of risking the venture? No, he leapt over the parapet and into the firing line and saved the men. No doubt Private Dunsire said he only did his duty. What would they have said if the hero had been unsuccessful? They would probably have remarked, “poor fellow, he tried to do the impossible.” But the nerve of the man had made the seemingly impossible possible. It was his supreme control over his actions which made the deed possible.

Provost Rose wished Private and Mrs Dunsire long life and good health to wear the articles of jewellery and to enjoy the interest from the war stock.

Private Dunsire on rising to reply was accorded a great ovation. He returned warm thanks for the gifts. They would be cherished he said as long as he lived as a token of their kindness to a humble citizen and soldier of the King. He felt his position very trying.

Everyone had been so kind and words failed to express his emotions.”

The watch was thus inscribed:- “Presented to Pte. R. Dunsire, 13th Royal Scots, by the inhabitants of the burgh of Buckhaven, Methil and Innerleven and the parish of Wemyss in recognition of his having been awarded the Victoria Cross, 4th December, 1915.”

“The brooch given to Mrs Dunsire is of handsome design, and set with pearls and amethyst.”

The Fife Free Press of the 11th December 1915 carried an important item :- At Buckingham Palace on Tuesday, (7th) His Majesty the King decorated the Denbeath V.C. hero, Private Robert Dunsire, 13th Royal Scots, Lothian Regiment. The



investiture took place during the changing of the Guard. Private Dunsire possesses all those qualities which seems to belong to heroes. “The King stood at a little table when I entered the reception-room. He shook hands with me heartily, and the account of what I did on Hill 70 was read aloud to him. Then he pinned the cross on my left breast. I felt very proud of being British. “What were you before you joined the army?” asked His Majesty. I replied “ I was a miner.”

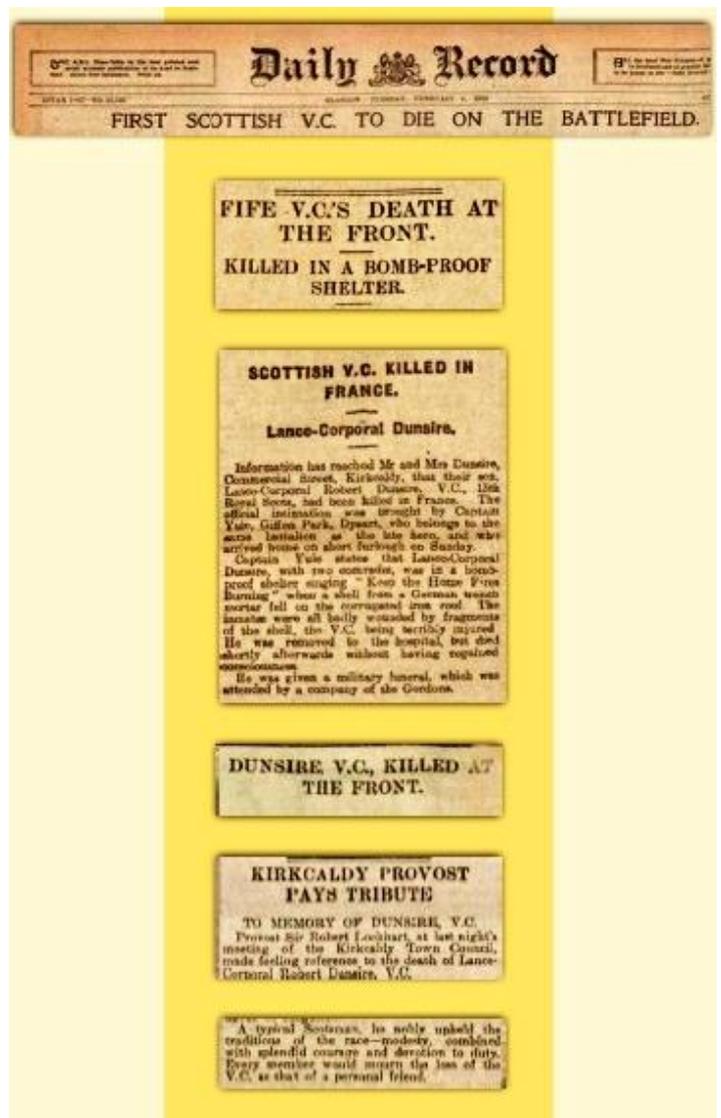
“I congratulate you upon your brave action” said the King, “and I trust that you will live long to wear your decoration.”

The article ended with the poignant paragraph referring to Robert leaving for his investiture and then the front earlier in the week.

“Almost as quietly and unobtrusively as he had arrived home Private Dunsire left again for the front on Monday night (6th December) after fourteen days furlough. He joined the mail train at Kirkcaldy and was seen off by his wife and relatives. A few townspeople also bade him God-speed and good luck. As he boarded the train, he was met by several comrades, who were also returning from furlough. “Good old Bob was the cheery greeting.”

Death of a V.C.

The Courier of Monday the 7th February 1916 brings sad tidings, not just in the content but the manner the news reached Mr and Mrs Dunsire. The facts were that Lance-Corporal



Robert Dunsire, V.C. had been killed at the front.

“Official notification had been given to a “Courier” representative last night by Captain Yule, Giffen Park House, Dysart who has just returned from the trenches. Rumours were prevalent in Kirkcaldy yesterday that the gallant soldier had been killed, the fact having been mentioned in a letter sent home by a member of Dunsire’s Company.”

Sensitively and thoughtfully the representative then headed for the home of Mr & Mrs Dunsire:-

“On visiting the parents of the hero at Commercial Street, Kirkcaldy, last night, our representative was informed that they had no word of any mishap, and, in fact, had just received a field postcard from their son, stating that he was well, and expected to be “facing the music almost immediately again.”

It would of course be inevitable that the parents would learn of their son’s death fairly soon but the Courier certainly made their Sunday night.

The Evening Telegraph and Post from Monday the 7th February 1916, was one of the newspapers which carried an article on the death of Robert. The article followed an interview with the officer in charge of the company of Royal Scots in which Robert served and Robert’s eldest brother Tom. The officer was Captain Yule, returning on leave to Giffan Park House, Dysart.

Both were interviewed by a journalist with Captain Yule saying that “the whole battalion was deeply pained at the occurrence, as Dunsire had become one of the most popular members. The V.C. had been, along with two companions, in a dug-out bomb proof shelter when a German trench mortar shell had burst through the iron corrugated roof, and fatally wounding Dunsire and another, and seriously wounding the third occupant. With all haste the men were hurried to the hospital, but Dunsire and his comrade died almost immediately after admission. “it was a fitting and a soldier’s end to a hero’s life” added the Captain, “and we gave them a military funeral, attended by the company of Gordons at the rear.”

“Captain Yule stated that had Dunsire been spared, he was almost immediately to have been promoted sergeant in the machine gun section. The V.C. gained his lance- corporal stripe on going back to the front after his furlough, during which he he was presented with the Victoria Cross, and was feted in Denbeath and Kirkcaldy, being made a burgess of the latter place.”

The article went on to recount a story which the same journalist had been told when he interviewed Robert’s mother after the announcement that he had won the Victoria Cross. It appears that “an itinerant spey-wife called at her door in Commercial Street, Kirkcaldy, and “read” Mrs Dunsire’s palm. “Your son is in France,” said the fortune teller, “has brought or will bring, great honour to the family. He will do it a second time,

too. He will go back to the front and gain further honour.”

“These fateful words have proved only too true. Lance-corporal Dunsire has found a hero’s grave, and his death evokes the sympathy not only of his native county and burgh, but of the whole country. His deed will live as one of the brightest incidents of heroism of the war.”

Other newspapers gave some further details suggesting the group were singing “Keep the Home Fires burning,” when the shell burst through the roof. One report suggested Robert’s leg had been blown off.

The Fife Free Press published a letter from a former employee on the 16th September 1916. Lance-Corporal James Smith, from Kirkcaldy, had been an apprentice compositor with the paper and had written to his former employers. “James had joined Kitchener’s Army in late 1914 as a member of the H.C.B. and had quite recently been transferred from Home Service to France. His letter included the following:-

“I have now got my first spell in the trenches over, and am in fact, just going up for my second spell. We came up from the base, and joined H.L.I. and not the Black Watch as we were led to expect. However, I think we are in as fine a battalion as we could have wished for, and are getting on famously. We did 11 days together, and had a good baptism of fire. We are, just now,

billeted opposite a graveyard, and whilst strolling through it this afternoon I came across the last resting place of Robert Dunsire, V.C. Quite a crowd of the Fife chaps gathered round, and one of the chaps put a photo of the hero on the little wooden cross at the head of the grave. He lies among some hundred or so of other men from different regiments, of whom a great many are Scotch. Of all the graves, I believe his is the most inconspicuous, and his name is on a strip of aluminium, evidently from an automatic machine, like those at railway stations. Knowing you would be interested in the incident, I thought I would write, and thus keep in touch with the establishment where I spent such a pleasant and profitable part of my life.”

Aftermath

The Dundee Courier of the 19th October 1916 contained an unexpected article. On the previous day, at Kirkcaldy, Sheriff Armour Hannay had described a case as “unfortunate and rather sordid. Before him appeared Thomas Dunsire, father of the late Robert as the pursuer, who was suing his daughter in law. The dispute was around the return of some items of furniture, which Thomas maintained had only been given to his son for the use of, whilst “Catherine” argued that they were wedding gifts. The items in question were; a dressing table, marble clock, washstand, silver watch, gold chain, clothes chest and a violin. Mr Dunsire argued that it had been agreed

with his son, that the value was to be repaid and until such time, they would remain his property.

“Before proceeding with the proof, his Lordship asked the parties if they would not come to an amicable arrangement, but to this the defender declined. After a lengthy proof the Sheriff gave his decision in favour of Mr Dunsire.

His Lordship said it would have been better had the memory of a brave and gallant man like Robert Dunsire. V.C. not been tarnished by such proceedings. Apparently there had been a family dispute and he gathered Mrs Dunsire would not consent to any arrangement, so he had to make a decision.

Mr Dunsire, the pursuer, then said he would only ask for the return of the watch, chain and violin. He would not ask for expenses.”

On the 24th September 1921 Kate remarried in Edinburgh. Her spouse was a joiner, Robert James Stewart who lived in Carberry Road Leven and was aged 27. Kate is referred to on this certificate as Catherine and is registered as still living at 210 Denbeath. This seems to be a name of choice rather than using deed poll to formalise the alteration. Catherine died on the 17th January 1959. She died in the Victoria Hospital, Kirkcaldy. Her usual address was given as 36 Herd Crescent Methilhill.

In 1962, her husband married for a second time. When he died in 1970, his first wife was shown as Kathleen Stewart, so yet another variation on the name.



On the 26th September 2015 a commemoration of the life and deeds of Robert Dunsire was held in Buckhaven and Wemyss Parish

Church. The service was followed by the unveiling of a memorial stone at Toll Park, Muiredge, Buckhaven. The stone was unveiled by Johnny Miller, the great, great nephew of Robert. An exhibition was on display in Methil Heritage Centre until December 2015.

Kirkcaldy has of course named Dunsire Street after Robert but there does not appear to have been any commemoration of the centenary of Robert's heroic deed.

The Royal Scots Club in Edinburgh has a memorial to Robert in the shape of a commemorative paving stone adjacent to its main entrance.

There is a pleasant ending to part of the story, which is related by "Fife Today" on the 21st May 2018 and concerns the violin which was gifted to Robert in 1915. It was made by Peter Berry, a joiner and violin

maker, whose business was in Park Road. Peter had died in 1939. The violin was found in a Dundee antique shop, where it was purchased by a noted violinist, Tony Moffat. Seeing it was manufactured in Kirkcaldy Tony contacted David Rattray of Balwearie Gardens (Kirkcaldy's only professional violin maker) and the instrument came into his hands. On researching the violin, David learned its history and plans to restore it before presenting the violin to Fife Museums.

A Recital from the Robert Dunsire violin
Sunday 3rd March at 2pm
In Kirkcaldy Galleries



For this special event, Vince Gray (leader of the Kirkcaldy Orchestral Society) will play songs from World War One and some Scottish tunes on a violin that belonged to Robert Dunsire VC

Fifer Robert Dunsire was a World War One hero, receiving a Victoria Cross for his bravery during the Battle of Loos.

Private Dunsire's violin was lost in the trenches of WWI, and a replacement was made for him by local joiner and violin maker Peter Berry.



David Rattray (Violin restorer & excavator at the Royal Academy of Music, London) will discuss the violin's discovery, his research into its origins and its restoration.

After the restoration, Kirkcaldy Galleries, hosted Vince Gray of Kirkcaldy Orchestral Society, playing a selection of World War 1 songs and a selection of Scottish tunes. David Rattray, the restorer gave an outline of the history and restoration of the instrument.

So ends the story of a Fife lad, probably unknown outside his local area, who rose like a comet and flashed over the skyline to become known and famous far beyond the boundaries of his native County.

It was all packed into a short space of time, from his heroic action on the 26th September 1915, through to his homecoming on the 22nd November, with all the attendant celebrations, commemorations, fame and honouring. Sadly it was an all too short journey from leaving Kirkcaldy on the 6th December until his tragic death on the 30th January 1915.

It is a cause of great regret that his family could not be with him, when the King presented Robert with his Victoria Cross. Circumstances dictated that he had to return to the trenches and that his loved ones never had the opportunity of seeing Robert and the cross together.

There is little question that Robert Dunsire was a modest man and not given to swaggering, conceited or overbearing attitudes. Instead we have a picture of a hero who was humble, unassuming and unassuming, is all to his immense credit.



The medal is now housed in the Royal Scots Museum in Edinburgh Castle. It is in its rightful place, where a wonderful job is done of evoking memories in describing the

absolutely heartbreaking stories of the lives of its heroic soldiers.

Robert Dunsire was one such figure.

