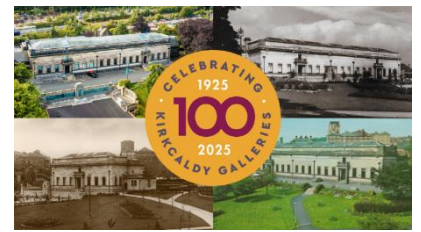


Kirkcaldy's Memorial Complex The Museum and Art Gallery



Welcome to the third offering following on from the completion of the original 50 Objects project in October 2024. This is an unusual narrative as, for the first time, it takes the form of a 'commission'! Although the team have previously written on the above subjects, it seemed only right and proper that a contribution should be made to the centenary celebrations of the museum and art gallery. By coincidence, we were approached by Jane Freel, Curator(Engagement) of On Fife, who asked if we could pen a piece to commemorate the centenary. When approached, we were delighted to accept.

Jane was instrumental in putting together the current superb exhibition celebrating 'Galleries 100'. It is an outstanding local exhibition for an outstanding local institution and is well worthy of a visit. The library has not been included by virtue of the fact that it was a later addition, not opening until 1928.

The team's idea behind this Object is to examine what led to the provision of this outstanding complex, followed by a focus on the opening itself and finally a re-run of some of the activities which took place during the remainder of 1925. The buildings, the memorial and the gardens, are one of Kirkcaldy's cultural hubs but it should never be forgotten why they were established – as a poignant reminder of the loss of 985 of Kirkcaldy's youth in what was believed and hoped to be – The War to end Wars.

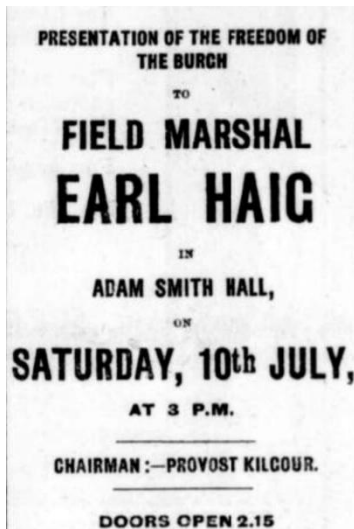
This narrative is also designed as an appreciation of the staff of Kirkcaldy Galleries, especially the Local Studies team, who have provided invaluable and willing assistance to the team as they worked their way through the original 50 Objects. Many a time have they come to our rescue and such an incident is related in this story. It was a pleasure to watch the preparations the staff were undertaking for the centenary celebrations – hearts and souls were flung into it. It was very fitting that King Charles III took time to visit the Galleries on the day the War Memorial was rededicated and was introduced to some members of staff which included Jane Freel. Helen Stevenson, the Venue Manager can be very proud of her staff.



* * * *

The starting point for any discussion on this complex has to be the public clamour for the provision of a tangible memorial to record the names of the 985 local men who made the supreme sacrifice in World War I. The simple fact is that the war memorial, along with the museum and art gallery, are inextricably linked, although the original project was intended to be restricted to a memorial only. It was within the pages of the

Fife Free Press of the 28th February 1920 that mention was made of a War Memorial Committee being formed and the appeal for funds launched – more on this will feature later.



The Fife Free Press of the 10th July 1920 carries an excellent leader which we suspect was penned by the paper's editor Lachlan McBean. The style of writing carries all the hallmarks of his work. The headline was *The War Memorial Scheme*. By coincidence, the 10th of July was the self-same day on which Field Marshall, the Earl Haig, was to receive the Freedom of Kirkcaldy. That ceremony was to take place in the Adam Smith Halls at 3.00pm. (Object 12 – The Freedom of the Burgh). An advertisement from the front page of the edition is reproduced here. Provost Alexander Kilgour was in the chair for the function and he plays a significant part in this Object. The previous evening, Earl Haig, who collected honours like confetti, had received the Freedom of Dunfermline.

Alexander Kilgour was an outstanding Provost for Kirkcaldy. He served on the Council for a total of 36 years, spending 19 of these as the Treasurer and a further 15 as Provost. During his tenure he oversaw, amongst other projects, the construction of the Promenade and several local authority housing schemes – including the first of the so called 'homes fit for heroes'. He also carried through the extension of the town's water supply with the construction of the Arnot Reservoir. He was Provost when Ravenscraig Park was gifted to Kirkcaldy and when the provision of a park for Gallatown was fulfilled. He was also the civic head when Dysart amalgamated with Kirkcaldy. When he retired he was presented with his portrait in oils which was funded by public subscription. The portrait was the work of the outstanding Scottish artist, Stanley Cursiter. Cursiter's body of work is impressive with one of his best known works being his 1953 - *Her Majesty the Queen receiving the Honours of Scotland in the High Kirk of St Giles*. The painting hangs on the Great Stair in the palace of Holyroodhouse.



Alexander Kilgour was associated with the firm of *Ireland and Wishart*, linen manufacturers for 67 years. His co-directors were George Reekie, another former Treasurer of Kirkcaldy Town Council, along with Charles Reekie who held the position of Chairman. Remarkably, as well as being business colleagues, it was George Reekie who succeeded Alexander Kilgour as the town's Treasurer in 1919, when Alexander was elected Provost. It is a fact that the two men, between them, for 33 consecutive years held the position of Treasurer of Kirkcaldy Town Council. Alexander Kilgour died in 1942 and George Reekie in 1944. Both had retired from the Council in 1934.

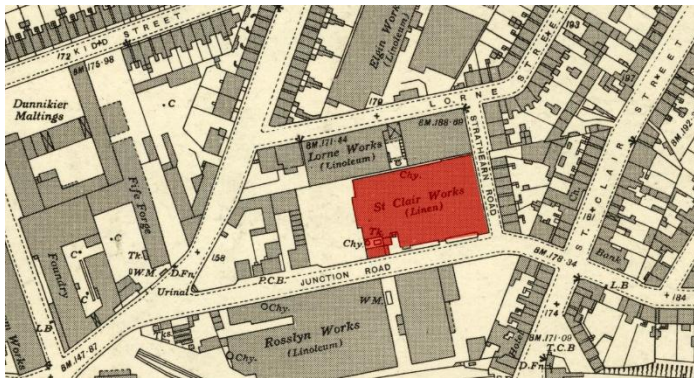
What is hugely impressive is that Provost Kilgour rose from poverty, attending Pathhead Philp School, after his father's early death and worked his way from being an office boy to Managing Director of the firm. The team are convinced that, as his father had been a sailor, the family may well have been

supported by Kirkcaldy's Prime Gilt Box but the records remain elusive.

If that is not sufficient achievement, we can reveal that Charles Reekie also attended the same Philp School as Alexander Kilgour. As with Kilgour, Charles, also started working life as an office boy, becoming a director in 1884 before reaching the pinnacle of being elected Chairman following the death of James Wishart in 1917.

Even more of a coincidence is that George Reekie had also joined Ireland & Wishart as an office boy! Therefore, the three men running the company had all commenced work as office boys – with two being attendees at a Philp School – and yet all climbed to the top.

The firm of Ireland and Wishart continued to thrive with the sons and grandsons of the three above mentioned gentlemen predominantly at the helm. However, in May 1957, the firm amalgamated with G. & J. Johnston of East Wemyss and the business was then transferred to the East Wemyss factory, where its then state of the art machinery being supplemented by the working of a double day shift system.



Strangely, despite Ireland & Wishart being on the site for over 100 years, when the main factory building was demolished to make way for housing – the name Rutherford Court was chosen – that despite the fact that *Rutherford's Cash and Carry* used the site for a fraction of the time Ireland & Wishart did – 20 years only – before moving to new premises in Randolph Industrial Estate.

The years between 1957 and 1959 were difficult ones for the linen trade in Kirkcaldy. As well as Ireland & Wishart being lost to the town, the firm of Robert Wemyss & Co. Ltd., closed their Caledonian Linen Factory and finally T. McLaren & Son., closed their Parkhead Works in Rosslyn Street. At its peak McLaren's had 160 looms in operation.

The reason for this seemingly unnecessary information is twofold, firstly, the team have spent countless hours trying to trace the descendants of Alexander Kilgour, in order that they may be invited to the 2025 re-dedication of the war memorial. Sadly, despite unearthing a catalogue of names – the hunt has been unsuccessful. The second reason is that at the opening of the war memorial complex, on the platform were Alexander Kilgour in his position as Provost and George Reekie, in his position as the Treasurer - colleagues in business and civic affairs. So unusual as to merit a mention.

We can now return to the main story:-

The article revealed that the Town Council, the public and the Public War Memorial Committee now had four choices before them as the site of the proposed war memorial. In truth they were all contained in a very small area. They were:-

- In front of the Adam Smith Hall.
- On the lower corner of Balsusney Park.
- In the centre of a wide space to be created at the junction of Wemyssfield,

Bennoch Road, Abbotshall Road and St. Brycedale Avenue.

- In the centre of what was then Balsusney Park. (The grounds were for sale at that stage.)

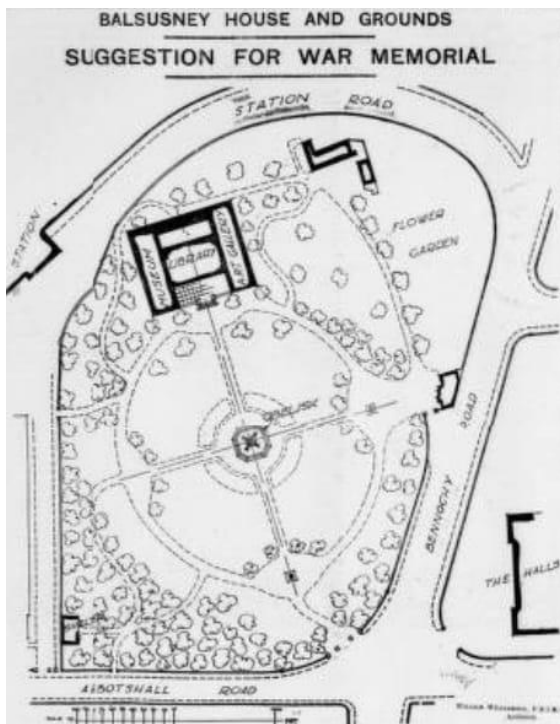
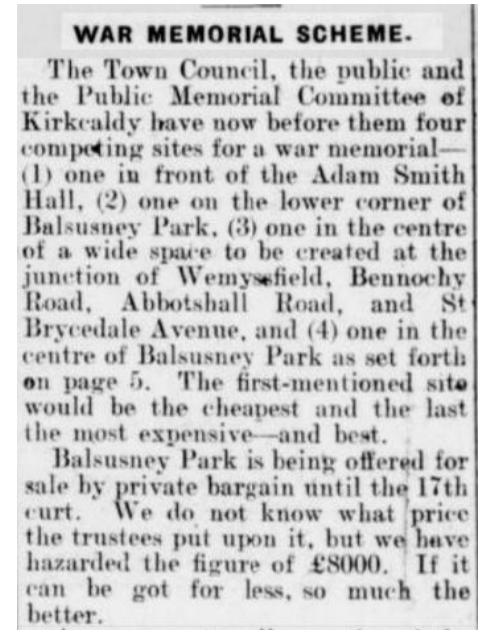
Balsusney Park stood close to where the museum and art gallery stand today and its grounds encompassed what is now the War Memorial Gardens. The property had been the home of the recently deceased linen manufacturer, Charles Maxton, and was currently exposed for sale by private bargain.

The article expressed the opinion that the first mentioned was the cheapest option with the last mentioned the most expensive – but the best! It was quite obvious that the *Advertiser* saw this as the best option and started to do calculations. They considered the property and grounds might be secured for £8,000. To lay out the grounds could well cost £4,000 to £5,000 more. They also wished to have two wings added to the existing building to accommodate a museum and an art gallery while the existing house would be the home of a new library. The figure of £5,000 was the estimated cost for the alterations to the house. The newspaper suggested that it could well cost between

£17,000 and £20,000 to provide this 'truly outstanding memorial'. The final paragraph read – 'The sum needed may seem large, though it is not really large for a town of the size, the importance and the wealth of Kirkcaldy. But towns, like people know their value best'.

It was on the following page that the writer went into full flow. The centrepiece of the article was a design drawn up by the eminent local architect, William Williamson. His outstanding body of work, much of which still enhances the town, was covered in a blog written by our late contributor, Tom Reid. The item is well worth a read which takes approximately 20 minutes to cover the architect Tom described as 'one of the most accomplished of his generation'.

The item struck the right note for a town still numb over the loss of so many of its sons. "The people of Kirkcaldy are in earnest in their desire to prepare a memorial worthy of the men whose immortal heroism has saved us from worse than death – not a bare obelisk, but a thing of beauty that can be held dear and sacred to their memory. Any proposal adequate for such an ideal must be bold to the point of audacity, original in conception and gracious in breadth and charm.



“Such a proposal we suggest to our townspeople today. We suggest that the town ought to buy Balsusney Park, now for sale, and erect in the centre a beautiful monument to our dead. The ground would no doubt be laid out with walks and shrubberies and made beautiful with trees and gardens but ever the centre of interest would be the graceful statuary at their heart. If such a scheme could be realised, we venture to say that no town in our land would have a more worthy memorial of the great war!

“We invite our townsmen to consider the suggestion from every point of view, for the more it is considered, the more plainly do its merits stand out – a mark of greatness in any conception.

“The grounds enclose the fine old house which could be utilised as an adjunct to the memorial park. For one thing, it might well accommodate a museum, in which certain relics of the great war would no doubt find an appropriate home. It might ultimately house a public library worthy of the town and most essential to the true welfare of its inhabitants and not entirely devoid of books relating to the war commemorated in the great central monument. Room might also be found for the addition of a fine picture gallery, and here, also, as one may well imagine, pictures and sculptures relating to the great European conflict would find a real though subordinate place”.

There was no certainty as to the identity of the individual or group who instructed Mr Williamson to produce the sketch. Reading on, the words do suggest that perhaps the vision came from the newspaper itself. What the article does do however is clearly show that there were plans for a museum, art gallery and library, prior to John Nairn becoming involved – or involved publicly at least. The one certainty is that the *Fifeshire Advertiser* had nailed its colours to that particular mast. The second half of the article moved from explanation and suggestion towards almost a plea for support as can be seen by the following:-

“But we leave it to the townspeople themselves and the Public Committee entrusted with the duty of finding an adequate monument to consider the scheme in detail”. The article then went on to indicate Mr Williamson had as well as drawing the sketch had provided the costings. The writer then mused on the potential improvement to the area if the plan came to fruition including the much needed improvement to the junction of the four roads and with the high wall of Balsusney Park being lowered with an iron railing being added in its place. “In this way the amenity of this important centre would be greatly improved and strangers arriving in Kirkcaldy by train, and by the tramway, which passes and overlooks the ground, would obtain a favourable first impression of the town”.

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The question is will the people of Kirkcaldy rise to so great an occasion and provide the funds? Of course there is plenty of money in the town; but is there sufficient imagination to picture a project so appropriate and so magnificent? That is just what now remains to be seen.

Certainly a really big proposal like this would elicit support that would be withheld from a poorer scheme. We should not be surprised if many persons should intimate donations on the express condition that the Balsusney scheme is adopted.

The suggestion comes before the public with neither patron nor patronage, with no aid but its own merits, and we are frankly curious to see how the intelligence and enterprise of the town will stand the test.

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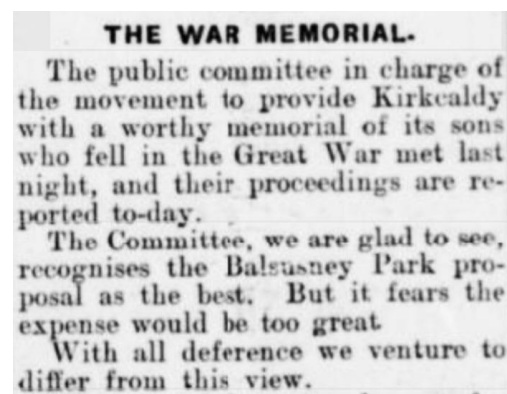


Moving on to the 18th September, the *Fifeshire Advertiser* carried two items in relation to the war memorial site on the same page. One was a report of the War Memorial Committee which had been held the previous night. In the two months since the July article, two further potential sites had been identified. One was at the very top on Nicol Street although, at the meeting, it was suggested that the vacant ground opposite Falladon Crescent would provide a better location. The final site was to be within the grounds of the Beveridge Park with no particular position mentioned.

The sites were discussed, with the committee looking at the difficulties and costs associated with each. Without question the preferred site was the purchase of Balsusney Park but the issue was the projected costs. Both Provost Kilgour and Treasurer Reekie believed that the cost would not be much less than £20,000 if at all. Finally, it was determined that two of the proposals would be put to a public vote and in the meantime every avenue to raise further funds would be explored. It did seem that the reality of the financial side was going to eliminate the whole of Balsusney House and park.

The two sites finally elected to be voted on were:- the corner of Balsusney Park with the other, surprisingly, being the new suggestion covering the top of Nicol Street. This, today, would put it somewhere in the area opposite Falladon Crescent. To give some context to the scale, the area being spoken about in Balsusney Park was around one eighth of an acre. The article was factual and gave no comment or preference.

However, in the second article there was not a mention of any other sites nor did it mention that two had been selected to take part in a public vote. It was almost as if the other possible locations simply did not exist:- “The public committee in charge of the movement to provide Kirkcaldy with a worthy memorial of its sons who fell in the Great War met last night and their proceedings are reported today. The committee, we are glad to see, recognises the Balsusney Park as the best. But it fears that the expense would be too great. With all deference we wish to differ from this view”. A range of suggestions and figures followed which possibly do not stand up to scrutiny:-



- The article claimed that the ground might now be bought for £7,000.
- The monument and the laying out of the park might extend to £4,000/£5,000.
- This meant that circa £12,000 would be required and for the first time we learn that £6,000 was the sum subscribed to date - meaning a further £6,000 was still required.
- “But a really worthy memorial that will appeal to everyone might easily bring in more than the £5,000/£6,000 still required”. This suggests the belief that the more grandiose the memorial, the more likely great donations.
- “At any rate, it would be well worth our while as a town to give possible donors an opportunity”.

“Just think of the position. Numbers of the Kirkcaldy men who fought and fell in the war were trained in Balsusney Park. By a coincidence that Park has come into the market at the very time when Kirkcaldy is looking for a site for its war memorial. What could be more fitting than the monument to our heroes should be raised on the very spot where they were fitted for their great adventure? All this apart from the Park being so laid out as to be a very fine entrance to the town, we earnestly trust that the Balsusney Park will get a chance”.

Nothing can be more certain than the *Fifeshire Advertiser* had only one scheme in mind – however it seems to have ignored the house itself and the cost of the proposed alteration/addition. It would seem that even the newspaper could see the effect the suggested cost of £20,000 was having on the minds of the Committee.

By moving on to the *Fifeshire Advertiser* of the 10th September 1921 – it is possible to look both backwards and forwards. There is of course no doubt that the gap between September 1920 and September 1921 does seem inordinately long. However, the headline that day was produced in large and bold type:-

**Balsusney Park for War Memorial
House and Grounds Secured at Cost of £4,500**

“Kirkcaldy War Memorial Committee, after long and anxious consideration and much criticism of their apparent tardiness, have at last brought off a magnificent coup. Provost Kilgour has solved, most satisfactorily, the problem of a site for the memorial to our dead heroes by securing an option over Balsusney Mansion House and Park for the remarkably moderate sum of £4,500”.



The article referred to and probably, quite justifiably, the paper's Leader from July 1920, which championed the proposal to purchase Balsusney Park as the site. On reading further it was not only their championing the proposal which was now seemingly being celebrated but also their being the actual proposer of the

suggestion. It is now made quite clear that it was the *Advertiser* who had commissioned the sketch and it was once again reproduced as the focus for the article with a strap line of:-

“Fifeshire Advertiser” Proposal For Balsusney Park

The newspaper was convinced that the grounds could be laid out with a magnificent memorial and the mansion house as an excellent adjunct which could be converted into a museum, library and picture gallery. One of the main considerations was that the corner of the Park facing Wemyssfield was to be rounded rather than the existing right angle. It was suggested that this was one of the most dangerous crossings in the town. The same was to be carried out to the corner of the Adam Smith Hall opposite. The article suggested that the townspeople were strongly and favourably impressed with the attractive and bold proposal put forward by the *Fifeshire Advertiser* and during the many months which have passed since it appeared the idea has steadily grown in favour, with not only the War Memorial Committee, but with the townspeople in general. The only criticism had been that the cost of carrying out such a magnificent memorial to our townspeople was prohibitive and we are glad at last that it has been made possible to accomplish a memorial such as no other town in the country can excel.

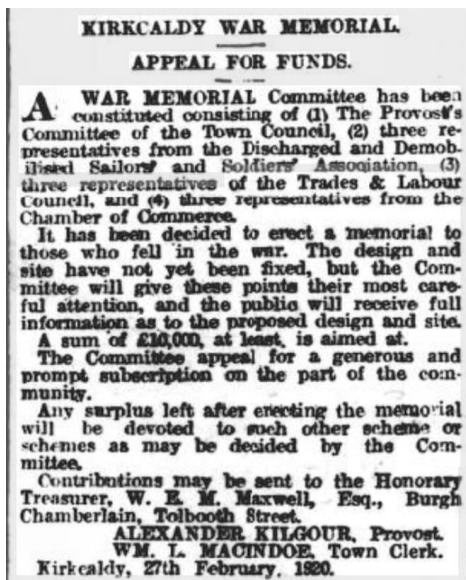
The original asking price for the house and grounds set by the trustees of John Jeffrey & Co., had been £7,500 which was subsequently reduced to £6,000. The Committee had considered this price prohibitive and for many months the idea lay in abeyance. While the other schemes had been discussed it seems that no matter which one was considered – it would be at best – second choice. The wish to purchase Balsusney was gaining traction with the War Memorial Committee as well as the public. We are informed that at the previous meeting of the Committee it gave the power to negotiate with the Trustees to Provost Kilgour. It was at the subsequent meeting on Monday the 5th September that the Provost was able to announce the successful conclusion to his negotiations. The members present “expressed the greatest satisfaction and having unanimously adopted the proposal to purchase Balsusney, proceeded to discuss the

manner in which the house could best be utilised”.

As the Provost carefully pointed out, the War Memorial Committee's decision has to be endorsed by the Town Council, which meets on Monday evening first. It is not anticipated that the Town Council will do anything but heartily endorse the action of the Provost and the decision of the War Memorial Committee.

Side by side with the above was a report on the meeting of the War Memorial Committee which was factual rather than offering any opinion. However once again the newspaper made full use of bold headlines – almost as if it was celebrating its own victory.

Committee Adopt the Proposal Unanimous for Balsusney Scheme Members Congratulate Provost



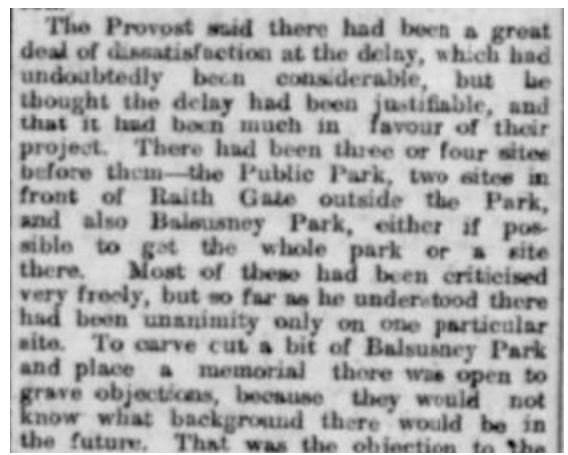
The members of the Committee present were, in the Chair, Provost Alexander Kilgour, with Bailie Gourlay, Judge Peebles, Treasurer Reekie and Councillors Ferguson, Miller, Laing, Scott and Percival representing the Town Council. Others in attendance were Messrs. D Pearson, W. Grieve, J. Lawson, W.K. Latimer and J. Robertson.

Travelling back for a moment to the *Fife Free Press* of the 28th February 1920 we find the first public mention of The War Memorial Committee which had only recently been constituted. The advertisement which was seeking to raise the sum of £10,000 towards the venture is reproduced here. It also makes mention of the make-up of the Committee and it must be assumed that the 5 individuals mentioned above

were drawn from the associations mentioned below.

- The Provost's Committee of Kirkcaldy Town Council.
- 3 Representatives from the *Discharged and Demobilised Sailors and Soldier's Association*.
- 3 Representatives from *The Trades & Labour Council*.
- 3 Representatives of the *Chamber of Commerce*.

Returning to the meeting of the 5th September 1921 the Provost was quite honest when he said that - “there had been a great deal of dissatisfaction over the delay which was understandable, but he thought the delay had been justifiable, and that it had been much in favour of our project”. He made mention of some of the other potential sites and the reason why they were dismissed. The Beveridge Park was considered too far away and was away from what was termed “not in a good public position”. The corner site, which meant cutting into part of Balsusney Park, was at the mercy



The Provost said there had been a great deal of dissatisfaction at the delay, which had undoubtedly been considerable, but he thought the delay had been justifiable, and that it had been much in favour of their project. There had been three or four sites before them—the Public Park, two sites in front of Raith Gate outside the Park, and also Balsusney Park, either if possible to get the whole park or a site there. Most of these had been criticised very freely, but so far as he understood there had been unanimity only on one particular site. To carve out a bit of Balsusney Park and place a memorial there was open to grave objections, because they would not know what background there would be in the future. That was the objection to the

of any fresh backdrop being developed in the Park. From the very first, the purchase of the mansion house and grounds was his preference but the financial question always loomed big against that proposition. As they were aware they now had fully £7,000 from subscriptions. There was another £400 from the Kirkcaldy Cafe Company which was being withheld until they knew the Council's intentions. He also held an offer of £1,000 not for the war memorial but for the purpose, if possible, of buying Balsusney Park for the town, which would bring the total fund, if they entered into a purchase, to about £8,500. (No prizes for guessing who offered the £1,000)

The Provost went over the movements in the sale price which was already mentioned had started at £7,500 but had gradually reduced via steps of £6,500 - £6,000 - £5,500 which was the lowest figure the site was offered at. It seems that from the outset businessmen in the town believed that the sale price was excessive with some believing £4,000 was more realistic – hence the Provost refusing to seal a bargain at what he considered an exaggerated price. He had mentioned that time alone might show the Trustees that the price being asked was not right. The fact that there were continual reductions would suggest that this was the case.

When Provost Kilgour resumed negotiations the Trustees sought £5,000 with the Provost making a counter-offer of £4,000. As always seems to happen, the final price was settled in the middle of the two figures. Provost Kilgour now argued that from the £8,500 fund, once the purchase had been settled, £4,000 remained for the memorial and the laying out of the grounds. He believed that the town would have a memorial worthy of their heroes but with the grounds laid out “for all time they would have a splendid asset for the town”. (looking at the whole site in 2025, Provost Kilgour was absolutely correct in his statement).

The question then arose as to what could be done with the mansion. At one time it had been thought it would make an excellent centre for ex-servicemen who had anticipated that they would receive £2,000 from a *Canteen Fund*. This sum did not materialise with only £1,300 forthcoming, which allowed a more suitable property to be purchased. The Provost spoke of his vision for a museum on the ground floor with the provision of an art gallery on the top level. Of course, what could be achieved was dependent on the level of funding received. The Provost moved that the committee recommend to the

full council that Balsusney House and Park were purchased for the sum of £4,500 – to which he instantly found a seconder in Mr W. Grieve. The decision was unanimous and Treasurer Reekie congratulated the Provost on bringing matters to a conclusion as these negotiations had been ongoing for almost a year.

As an aside, the Will of Charles Maxton was in itself very interesting. The testamentary trustees, after dealing with the annuities in favour of relatives, were to accumulate the remaining income for a period of 21 years. At that point the funds were to be transferred into a Trust, controlled by the Provost, Senior Magistrates and Town Clerk of Kirkcaldy together with the sheriffs of Fife and Perth, to be named *The Maxton Trust*. In essence it was to be available to assist young men, born in the parishes of Kirkcaldy and Crieff, in further education, apprenticeships or attending university “who were in circumstances deserving of assistance”.

THE MAXTON BEQUEST.

BOYS and Young Men born in the area of the Municipal Burgh of Kirkcaldy or in the Parish of Crieff who, having completed the period of compulsory attendance at School required by law, are (a) engaged in study at any Continuation Class, Secondary School, Technical School, College, or University, and (b) engaged in serving an Apprenticeship to any Trade or Profession or who having completed their study for a Profession or their Apprenticeship as aforesaid, are not yet in a position to maintain themselves, may receive Financial Assistance from the Fund known as “The Maxton Bequest” if, in the opinion of the Fund Trustees, they are in circumstances requiring and deserving of assistance.

In the case of Boys and Young Men born in the area of the Municipal Burgh of Kirkcaldy application should be made to Dow & Son, Solicitors, Kirkcaldy, from whom forms of application may be received.

In the case of Boys and Young Men born in the Parish of Crieff application should be made to the Town Clerk of Crieff, from whom forms of application may be received.

DOW & SON,
Solicitors, Kirkcaldy.
Agents for the Trustees of
The Maxton Bequest.

It was a well-used Trust and reproduced here is the very first advertisement carried by the *Fife Free Press* of the 8th November 1941 seeking applicants – after the 21 years of accumulation had ended. It seems appropriate to make mention of the bequest given, that the sale of the house and grounds led to the honouring of the fallen, while the sale price achieved assisted the living, by rendering financial assistance, where appropriate.

The Fife Advertiser of the 8th October 1921, once again returned to its theme, originally carried in the edition of the 20th July 1920, by making direct reference to its quotation - “we are frankly curious to see how the intelligence and enterprise of the town will stand the test”.

Before moving on it is worthwhile pausing to look at what Kirkcaldy had on offer in the way of museum and facilities to display artworks prior to 1925. Looking firstly at the museum, it is perhaps little known that Kirkcaldy did indeed have a modest museum which had opened its doors on the 20th September 1913. Fittingly it was housed at 132 High Street – the former home of the town's famous child poet – Pet Marjorie.

The idea of a museum was the brainchild of the *Kirkcaldy Naturalists Society* which had been founded at a public meeting, held on the 28th March 1882, through a proposal from Colonel Storrar which was then seconded by Mr W.D. Sang. One of the objectives of the embryonic society was to “encourage and promote the formation of a public museum in Kirkcaldy”. It obviously took time but they got there in the end and their efforts should be recognised – especially as their collections came to play a major part in the displays which were ultimately housed in the town's new museum. The museum's opening day offerings would have been the poorer without the Naturalists providing the core.

Turning to art – the *Kirkcaldy Art Union*, which research reveals as having been in existence from at least 1872, was seemingly the custodian of the town's enthusiasm, support and passion for the arts.. At one stage there were 600 members which suggests there was an inherent interest in fine art. The *Fifeshire Advertiser* of the 6th October 1877 reports on an exhibition which had been held in the “Gallery”. Sadly, the exact address of this High Street venue is not known but the best guess is that it was in, or close to, what is now the Trustee Savings Bank. Number 114 or 116 High Street are the most likely venues; however another alternative exists in the shape of premises close to the Port Brae probably/possibly number 325. The only certainty which has been unearthed, so far, is that in 1906 its registered address was 154 High Street – now *Eloise* or *Costa*. It would appear that the prime purpose of the *Union* was the promotion of contemporary artists via an annual exhibition where many of their works were offered for sale. There also appears to be, at each exhibition, a sprinkling of high quality works probably on loan and used to enhance the exhibition – but not for sale.

In the meticulously detailed article it was disclosed that the costs were met by a raffle where 1,255 tickets were sold at 25p each bringing in £313. The committee managed to cover their expenses using only 10% of that sum leaving the other 90% as the prize pot. The major prizes were £25, £20, £15 and £10 with numerous prizes of smaller denominations. The names of all the winners were published and we note that R.C.M. Ferguson of Raith, Daniel Hendry of Forth Park and George Whyte of Marchmont were amongst the winners.

It took further study encompassing the *Fifeshire Advertiser* of the 29th May 1880 before realising that the winners did not receive actual cash as a prize. Instead, they could select an item included in the exhibition up to the value of their prize. As mentioned previously, some paintings in the exhibition were for sale and the proceeds rose from a modest £280 in 1872 to £1,463 by 1879.

The Fife Free Press of the 2nd June 1923 provides the opportunity to reproduce in full the report of that year's exhibition. A point to note are the names of the Committee of Management as many will feature strongly as this narrative unfolds. The names of the winners, the titles of the paintings and the artists' names, are all shown. This particular report is included as it is the fullest and closest uncovered prior to the 1925 opening of the new Art Gallery. It is this article which lists the Secretary's Office as 116 High Street. James Wilson is mentioned as the Secretary. James Wilson came to Kirkcaldy as a solicitor to work with Thomas Dow & Son. These are the father and brother of Kirkcaldy's eminent artist – Thomas Millie Dow. In time after the death of the Dow's – James

PUBLIC NOTICES.

KIRKCALDY ART UNION.

SECRETARY'S OFFICE,

116 HIGH STREET, KIRKCALDY.

COMMITTEE OF MANAGEMENT—

James Hepburn, Ravenshaugh, Chairman; Sir Robert Hutchison, M.P., Braemar St.
Robert C. Lockhart, Allanbank; Henry W. Hutchison of Kinloch; R. Wemyss
Hewitman, Westdean; J. W. Ryley, Wilby House; Andrew Harley, Binkton
James Wilson, Solicitor, Hon. Secretary; C. C. Patterson, Bank Agent, Hon.
Treasurer.

AUDITOR—J. R. Anderson, C.A., KIRKCALDY.

DRAWING FOR PRIZES

HELD ON 10th MAY, '83.

Subscription, 10s.

£175 2 3

Total amount of subscriptions received,

Expenses, including Printing, Advertising, Postage, &c.,

£12 12 3

Sum allotted and paid for Prizes,

157 10 0

Sum placed on Deposit Receipts,

3 0 0

£175 8 3

LIST OF PRIZES.

No.	Prize	Name and Address of Winner.	Title of Picture.	Name of Artist.
10081	£30	Miss M. G. Reid, 8 Hyndland Ave., Glasgow.	"The Red Scarf."	Mrs A. E. Laing.
10100	£20	William Allison, The Croft, Dysart.	"Poppies in Sunlight."	Patrick W. Adams.
9933	£10	R. Abbie, Greenhous, Lussie Links.	"Old Life."	James B. Anderson.
7081	£10	Miss Ella Pirie, Townsend Villas, Townsend Place, Kirkcaldy.	"A Study."	H. V. Alison.
10106	£10	George Leall, 23 Southshore Road, Edinburgh.	"The Woodcutter's Yard."	T. Bonar Lyon.
7880	£7 10	A. Ryley, Rytheswood, Kirkcaldy.	"Evening on the Carmel," Ayrshire.	John McNeill.
9978	£7 10	Robert Griev, 47 Lady Helen Street, Kirkcaldy.	"Bait Gashers."	Robert Thomas.
9181	£5	David Allison, 7 Bedford Park, Edinburgh.	"The Fox Rabbit."	Mary Duncan.
9991	£5	T. Smea, Ainsford, Kirkcaldy.	"Shirley Lines."	Chris. McVicar.
9129	£5 10	Mrs Hearn, Forth Park, Kirkcaldy.	"The Hiding."	
1794	£5 10	C. A. Mathers, 30 Springhill, Dundee.	"Sunshine and Shadow."	Wilfred C. Appley.
9406	£3 10	Sydney Logan, David St., Kirkcaldy.	"Anchor and Harbour."	James McLaren.
9880	£3 10	Miss Wood, Union Bank, Coastbridge.	"The Yard."	William Croxall.
9897	£3 10	Miss L. A. Cook, Carsock, Dunfermline.	"Rothsay Harbour."	Alex. Gilman.
			"Pamie Den."	M. Anderson.
			"Sunshine and Shadow."	Wilfred C. Appley.
			"Sunshine and Shadow."	Wilfred C. Appley.
			"Dysart Foreshore."	Wm. C. Appley.
				R. Aytoun Henderson.

Wilson became the proprietor of the firm without changing the name. In time the firm merged with and became Gibson, Spears & Dow and Son. James Wilson became Provost of Kirkcaldy between 1934 and 1946. It would seem therefore that it was the offices not the 'gallery' which were housed at 114 or 116 – more research required!

Scanning through these reports on the annual exhibitions we are struck by an item contained in the *Fife Free Press* of the 4th December 1926. It revealed that the first prize has been won by *Aitken Dott & Son of Edinburgh*. They were art dealers and a firm widely used by John Blyth to source his paintings. The prize was a painting by no less an artist than S.J. Peploe and named *Still Life - Roses*. The obvious question is, who would donate such an important artist's work as a raffle prize and secondly – we are certain that the painting is part of the museum's impressive Peploe collection!

In fact very little was needed as the next stop was the *Fife Free Press* of the 18th December. There we learn that the prize had been donated to the Kirkcaldy Art Gallery. Moreover, “the donor desired that his name should not appear and it was accordingly registered as *presented by the winner of the first prize in the Kirkcaldy Art Union, 1926*”. Mystifying - as a glance at the edition of the 4th tells the world who won the first prize and Aitken Dott & Son are certainly not a “his” - so who donated it and again who would donate a Peploe? Maybe investigation required with this too?

To complete this tangent and based on pure speculation – we suspect that it was painted by Peploe for - John Blyth/The Kirkcaldy Art Union or Aitken Dott & Son. John Blyth had bought his first Peploe in 1915 with a second in 1925 and in 1928 he curated a Fine Art Exhibition in Kirkcaldy featuring 25 Peploe's.

Research indicates that it was in the 1920s when the artist started producing still life paintings of roses. Over and above it was Aitken Dott & Son who curated Peploe's first two major exhibitions in 1903 and 1909 respectively. Peploe died in 1935 and it was John Blyth who put together a retrospective exhibition of his work in 1938. Very possibly/probably there existed a significant enough relationship to ask the artist if he would provide a painting?

We suspect that the intention all along was to donate the painting to the gallery. How else can winning it on the 4th and donating it 14 days later on the 18th be explained? That is our theory and we stand to be corrected and when time permits more research will be carried out on the story of the *Kirkcaldy Art Union* whose memberships included the very cream of Kirkcaldy and Fife's society.

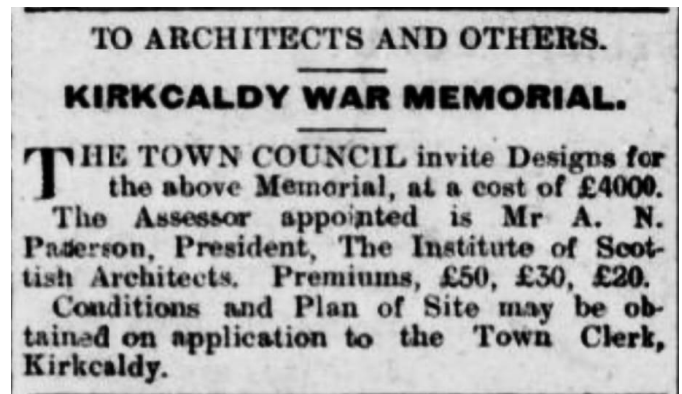
However, this digression has hopefully shown that there was a gallery which housed exhibitions but probably only transient ones – a permanent home seemingly only became available after the opening of the new Art Gallery.

While not in itself being critical the article, again well written, pointed out that, as matters stood – the fund of £8,500 would cover the purchase and the cost of the memorial with every farthing being required. The cost of the laying out of the grounds

and the alterations to the mansion house, necessary to convert it into a museum and art gallery were put at £5,000 – the article argued that the test would not be completed until this funding was in place. Yes, they accepted it was a large sum but not when spread over 40,000 people or 8,000 families. The money had to be found and only by public subscription and it was therefore up to those with the means to back up the aspirations.

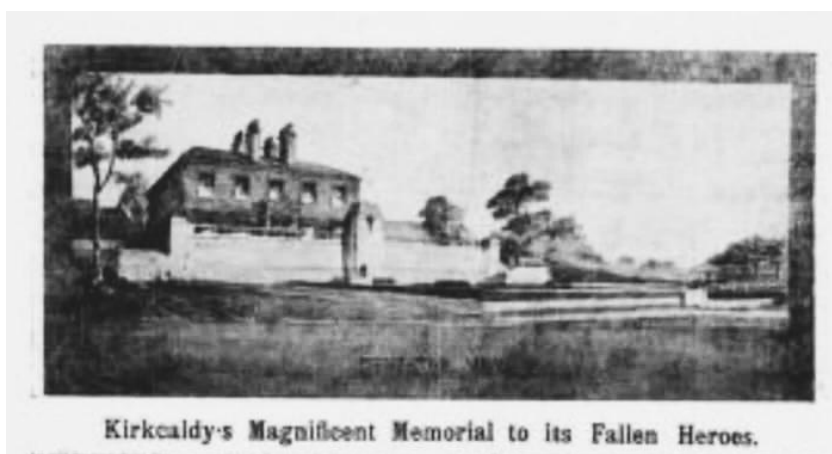
The next paragraphs seem harsh and even falling just short of a form of blackmail when the article continued with – “we have been carefully examining the list of donors up to this date. They number only 300! Surely there are many more that ought to be included. There must be many more on the list who desire to increase their subscription now that a great public improvement is being offered. We propose, at an early date, to publish a complete list of the public-spirited donors who have taken this burden upon themselves for their town. But, first of all, we should like to see added many new names and many second subscriptions from persons whose names are already on the list. Who are going to help!”

However, matters could not just sit still and, in December 1921, newspapers and architectural journals carried an advertisement outlining a competition to design Kirkcaldy's war memorial. The cost was to be no more than £4,000 with the assessor being named as Mr A.N. Paterson, the President of the *Institute of Scottish Architects*. There were prizes of £50, £30 and £20 on offer for those taking the first three places. Given its importance the advertisement carried by the *Fifeshire Advertiser* on the 21st December is reproduced here.



It was in the *Fifeshire Advertiser* of the 18th February 1922 that the winning entries were disclosed. The winning entry was that of Mr John S. McKay of Glasgow and it was to him that the £50 was awarded. James W. Honeyman of Glasgow filled the

second spot and secured £30. The third place went to William Williamson, the local man. who had produced the earliest ideas and sketches. The article gave a little background on the winner who in 1932 left architecture behind to train for the ministry. What was exciting about this article was, as well as giving details of the memorial – a photograph/drawing was included of Balsusney House



but superimposed onto it was a drawing of the memorial – the first clear impression of

how the finished article might look. The article described the memorial as “stately and impressive”. The memorial was to run along the length of the front of Balsusney House – a distance of 107 feet. The ground in front of the house was to be excavated to create both a plaza and formal gardens. It was estimated that the wall, to which the names of the fallen would be affixed, would be around 9/10 feet high, with the central pillar, which was to include a Celtic cross, reaching a height of 15 feet. At either end of the wall were to be stairways from the house level to the memorial level, which were said, “to give a pleasing completeness to the design”. From any point in the still to be laid out gardens it was believed that the “monument will give a fine imposing appearance”. The grounds would contain a drinking fountain and two shelters. The cost was set at £3,835.

A little more research unveiled an item in the *Fifeshire Advertiser* of the 11th February. There we learned that 107 entries had been received and all were on display in the Burgh Court which was then based within the Police Buildings in St. Brycedale Road. They would continue to be displayed that week while the Assessor cut the entries down to a more manageable 15. He had met with the Committee, answering their questions and pointing out what he saw as the advantages and disadvantages of each entry. By the Thursday, he had reduced the number to 7 and from the 7 he made his final selection. He was at pains to point out that he was not just seeking a memorial for today but for generations to come. He also stressed that the winning entry had to do justice to Kirkcaldy, to himself and the other 106 entrants. He selected numbers 81, 102 and 83 as 1st, 2nd and 3rd, therefore the winning entries were known, but not the name of the architects and this included Mr Paterson! The winning entry was described as outlined above, with the runner up being described as similar but without the stairways. A statue of a soldier was to be placed at each end of the wall, instead of stairways. No 83 was described as being similar to London's Cenotaph but “not as lofty” and the article suggested it was the work of a Kirkcaldy architect and, in that guess, they were correct.

Saturday the 25th March 1922 brought a welcome article published by the *Fifeshire Advertiser* with victory seemingly being snatched from the jaws of defeat. Only a fortnight previously it had looked as if the full plan for the memorial might have to be postponed for a period of some 6/7 years – not the memorial itself but the plan to create a museum and art gallery in Balsusney House. The paper's edition of the 11th March had reported that the Council believed that there was no immediate prospect of raising the £2,000 still required. They had been approached by the Ministry of Pensions, asking if Balsusney House was available for lease over a 5 year period at £100 per annum. Treasurer Reekie stressed that they were not departing from the Balsusney House plan but, at that stage, it seemed appropriate to take the offer. Provost Kilgour saw no point in leaving the property unlet when this income was available and it was agreed to accept the offer.

This was the cause of the doom laden article in the *Advertiser* but which was certainly lifted on the 25th, when the paper reported that an unknown individual had offered, from his own pocket, the sum of £500 which was the total income the lease would have generated over the five year term, as long as the lease did not proceed. It seems that the gentleman who had offered the £500 had also asked that the house, in its present condition or after renovation, be made available to the Kirkcaldy Naturalists Society to house their collections which were then in Pet Marjorie's former home on the High Street – to all intents and purposes the town's first museum. The Provost's plan was unanimously adopted – but, never forget, without that £500 it would have been a far different scenario. It would have been let as quasi office space and who knows what would have happened in the long run. The assumption has always been that it was John Nairn who produced the game changing £500 but we shall see how valid that belief is later in the narrative.

BALSUSNEY THE BEAUTIFUL.

Not just yet, but by the good-will of influential citizens, whose actions speak although their names are hidden, Balsusney Park promises to become in time a thing of beauty and a joy for ever. A fortnight ago things looked black for our ideals, and we had to draw public attention to the arrangement then adopted to postpone for six or seven years the completion of our war memorial, and at same time to lose for the town the excellent nucleus of a local museum which has been carefully collected these many years. Happily two things happened immediately. By the prompt intervention of a friend who offered from his own purse to make up the £500 which the Memorial Committee could get by leasing Balsusney House for five years, that proposal was withdrawn and the House can now be opened at an early date for the Kirkcaldy Museum.

However, the cat was soon out of the bag being reported on in the *Fife Free Press* of the 13th May 1922. At the full council meeting the previous Monday, Provost Kilgour

A MUNIFICENT DONOR

THE NEW ART GALLERY AND MUSEUM.

A statement was made by Provost Kilgour at the monthly meeting of Kirkcaldy Town Council on Monday night regarding the present position of the war memorial scheme, which revealed the fact that a citizen of the town has come forward and guaranteed the cost of the reconstruction of Balsusney House suitable for an art gallery and museum, or the erection of a new building.

The matter arose through a question by Councillor M'Cormack under the heading of competent general business. He asked that the Provost make a statement with regard to the position of the war memorial, as a great majority of the public were pretty much in the dark. He thought it would be advisable to make a full statement in the Council which would receive proper publicity.

The Provost remarked that it was rather a large question, and he did not know if he could make a statement profitably under competent general business, but if the Town Council would permit him the indulgence of listening to what he could say he was prepared to make a statement that night.

The Council afforded their approval by

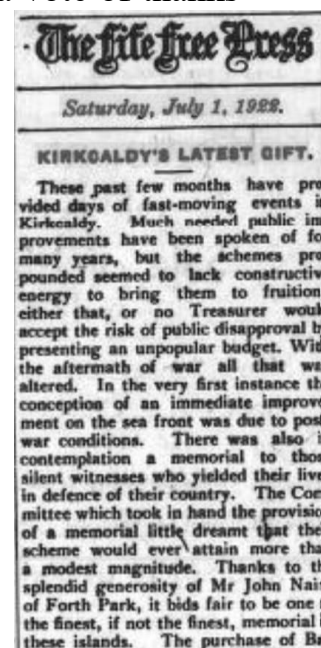
made a statement in response to a question from Councillor McCormack. The councillor, very reasonably asked if the Provost could give an update on the war memorial as many in the town were in the dark? Kilgour accepted the question fully understanding why it was being asked, "given there was a general desire in the community to know what was being done".

He was able to say that a gentleman had come forward to guarantee the reconstruction costs of Balsusney House or the erection of a new building. Reconstruction and adding wings had always seemed to be the plan but there was now every possibility that the mansion would be demolished and replaced with a new build. The total cost was now going to be close to £40,000 and all guaranteed by the one man.

The Provost foresaw three contracts – the memorial itself, the museum, art gallery and attendant's house, followed by the laying out of the grounds. It was seen that demolition would lead to further delays as the new building would have to be well underway before the excavations for, and the building of the memorial itself, could commence.

“His only regret was that he was prohibited from saying anything about the donor. His instructions were to say nothing at all – not even the name or move a vote of thanks and in the meantime he much regretted he could take no action to recognise this munificent liberality of the gentleman in question”. (loud applause) So it now looked as if the vision could well become a reality.

The next step is a leader in the *Fife Free Press* which was published on the 1st July 1922. It is a pivotal piece and no apologies are made for quoting much of the article verbatim:- “These past few months have provided days of fast moving events in Kirkcaldy. Much needed public improvements have been spoken of for many years, but the schemes propounded seemed to lack constructive energy to bring them to fruition; either that; or no Treasurer would accept the risk of public disapproval by presenting an unpopular budget.



“With the aftermath of war all that has been altered. In the very first instance the conception of an immediate improvement on the seafront was due to postwar conditions. There was also in contemplation a memorial to those silent witnesses who yielded their lives in defence of their country. The Committee which took in hand the provision of a memorial little dreamt that their scheme would ever attain more than a modest magnitude. Thanks to the splendid generosity of Mr John Nairn of Forth Park, it bids fair to be one of the finest, if not the finest, memorial in these islands.

“The purchase of Balsusney House and Grounds, in which negotiations Provost Kilgour took an honourable share, was a wise step. From that point the Committee proceeded to consider a suitable type of memorial. As in other schemes, its materialisation was a matter of finance, so that while the house was regarded as an ideal building for a picture gallery and museum, the prospect of its becoming so remained in the distant perspective.

“And then the matter suddenly assumed a new complexion. There were hints of an unknown benefactor who was willing to furnish the means to materialise the dreams of the Committee and community alike. A scrupulous secrecy was maintained for a much longer period than secrets usually keep, until last Monday evening when it transpired that the gentleman who had so munificently acted the part of the fairy-godmother – if there is such a being – was none other than Mr John Nairn of Forth Park.

“It is not the first time that the Nairn family have been associated with benefactions to their native town. The late Sir Michael Nairn, Bart., gifted the hospital and rebuilt the High School. Now we have Mr John Nairn's intentions made public. Mr Nairn, we believe, is not one of those who cares for the fierce light of public approval. He has rendered valuable aid to many causes in a quiet and obscure way; but it would scarce be seeming were we to allow this latest benefaction to pass without at least, in a very inadequate way, conveying to the generous donor the thanks of the entire community

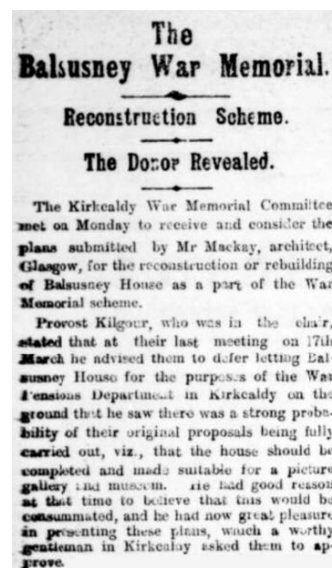
for a gift in such complete accord with the town's necessities as well as the occasion which calls it forth.

As a piece of architecture alone the building will confer distinction on the Burgh, but its purpose will be more far-reaching. It will provide an educative institution of great value to the youth of the town whose acquaintance with the refining influence of art has hitherto been but slight. The museum and lecture-rooms will be utilised to the full by those whose outlook is educative and progressive; and fresh interests of an enduring kind will spring up around the building. In this way Mr Nairn has gifted what will remain a fadeless memory, not alone to the men who have fallen, but to the donor, whose name will be more deeply graven in the hearts of the people than upon an stone.

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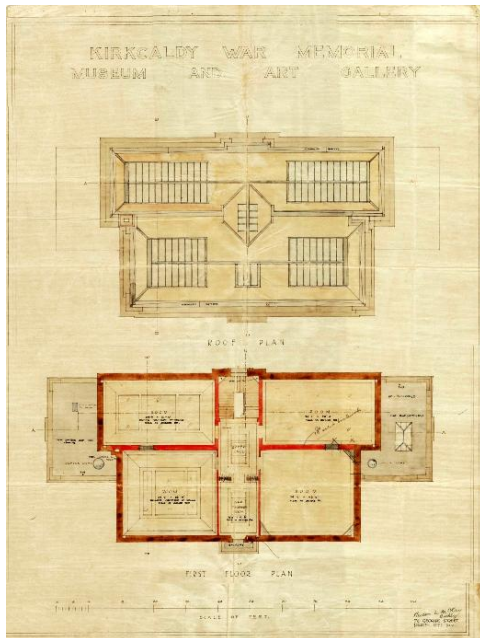
“Happy he, who, possessing the talents proves so faithful a steward. From the brow of Mars he snatches no wreath of laurel, but amid more domestic scenes and in homely surroundings, Mr Nairn will have earned the enduring gratitude of thousands by whom the name of Nairn will ever be held in honour and respect”.

The *Fifeshire Advertiser* published the same day – the 1st July 1922 - carried a report on the Town Council meeting which had been held the previous Monday when the identity of the donor had been revealed. The meeting had been called to consider the plans for the reconstruction or rebuilding of Balsusney House as part of the war memorial scheme. Provost Kilgour, who was in the chair, had previously asked on the 17th March that a decision to rent out Balsusney House to the War Pensions Office be deferred. With raising sufficient capital to carry out the full scheme being in doubt – this was a possible/probable use for the mansion. He had suggested at the time (17th March) there was a strong possibility that the whole original scheme might still be carried through and that night (26th June) he was able to confirm that plans were being put before them - “which a worthy gentleman would ask them to approve”. He pointed out that they had been keeping the architect busy with three sets of plans having been drawn up. The first had shown the reconstruction of the house, with the second showing a further reconstruction. The third, which was now before them showed the demolition of the house and a new structure being erected on the site. He then submitted a description of the building which had been prepared by Mr McKay.

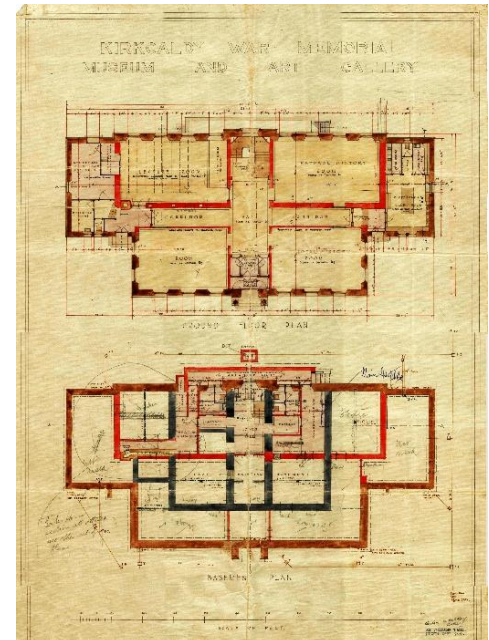


Balsusney House was to be demolished to ground level with the basement being utilised for heating purposes etc. The building is to be designed as a background to the war memorial and would sit the same distance from the memorial as Balsusney House would have been. At this stage the Provost intimated he and the donor were in

agreement that the house was not to be separate from the memorial – in fact “ the whole conception of the war memorial, the ground, the erection in front of the house and the house itself formed the war memorial of Kirkcaldy. They were not to have any distinctive building called the war memorial, but rather the whole scheme as presented was the war memorial. The original layout had been adapted to conform to the new conditions”.



The nature of the building is that it will be fire resisting with walls of white freestone, the floors and staircase of reinforced concrete with wood finishing and the roof reinforced concrete with asphalt. Lighting for the upper floor would be from a glass roof and for the lower floor from side windows. On the ground floor there would be a vestibule, entrance hall and staircase, three museum rooms, a lecture room and a cinematograph operating room attached. The low wing to the northeast would contain



a photographic club room with annexes, whilst in the corresponding southwest wing there would be a reception room and a retiring room in connection with the lecture room. Both the lecture room and the photographic club room, while part of the main building, would have separate entrances, so that when the art gallery and museum were closed, these might be used. On the first floor were shown four galleries, two for oil paintings, with another two for water colours and photographic work. Placed centrally and overlooking the war memorial was a room for war trophies, thereby associating with the object they had in view. The plans which were submitted to the committee are reproduced here. There must have been a huge sense of relief that their vision would in all probability now come to pass and that even 100 years later – that plan and that vision remain one of Kirkcaldy's outstanding spots. It is quite possible to argue that today the vista has been improved by the demolition of the factories which once surrounded much of the area – but temper that though with the fact that industry and jobs have gone.

He then read the following letter which had been received from the donor.

Forth Park, Kirkcaldy, the 21st June 1922

To the Provost, Magistrates and Councillors of the Burgh of Kirkcaldy

Gentlemen, - I beg to submit the plans of the museum and picture gallery, together with attendant's house, to be built in the grounds of the war memorial, and if these plans are

approved by you, I undertake at my own expense to build, complete and equip the building as shown on the plans, subject to minor alterations which may be subsequently made and approved by me.

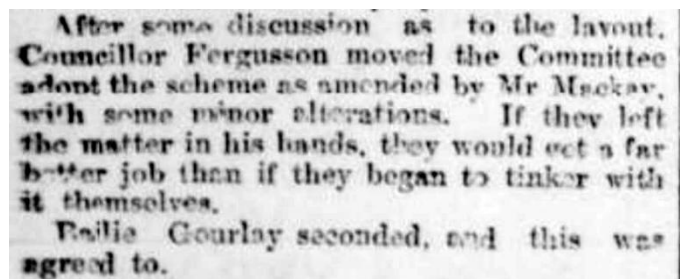
Your obedient servant

John Nairn.

Continuing, the Provost said he had no hesitation in moving the Committee recommend the Town Council to approve and accept this magnificent gift to the town by Mr John Nairn. There had been a great deal of care exercised in getting forward this scheme. Mr Mckay had been extremely busy since March, and now it seemed to him they had reached the culminating point so far as this site and the wants of Kirkcaldy were concerned. He had not the slightest doubt that, when erected, it would prove a magnificent memorial for our fallen soldiers and well worthy of them. He did not intend that night to move a vote of thanks or recognise the very great generosity of the gentleman who had been good enough to subscribe and was prepared to erect this building. In many other ways previously they had been indebted to him, and he would take the earliest opportunity at the Town Council to effect the object he had in view.

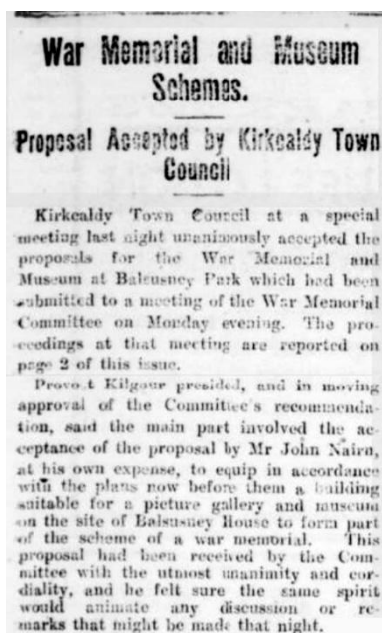
Mr William Grieve, in seconding the Provost, said after all the delay, the anxiety and worry had been lifted through the great generosity of Mr Nairn. He also was sure that, when erected, this memorial would compare with any other in Scotland.

The motion was unanimously adopted and the Provost indicated that he would be calling a special meeting of the Council for later that week. After some discussion as to the layout, Councillor Ferguson moved that the Committee adopt the scheme as produced by Mr Mckay with some minor alterations. If they left the matter in his hands, they would get a far better job than if they began to tinker with it themselves. Bailie Gourlay seconded and this was agreed. Next step is to seek approval from the full Town Council.



After some discussion as to the layout, Councillor Fergusson moved the Committee adopt the scheme as amended by Mr Mckay, with some minor alterations. If they left the matter in his hands, they would get a far better job than if they began to tinker with it themselves. Bailie Gourlay seconded, and this was agreed to.

The special meeting was indeed called and took place on the Friday which meant that the *Fifeshire Advertiser* was able to carry reports on both meetings in its 1st July issue.



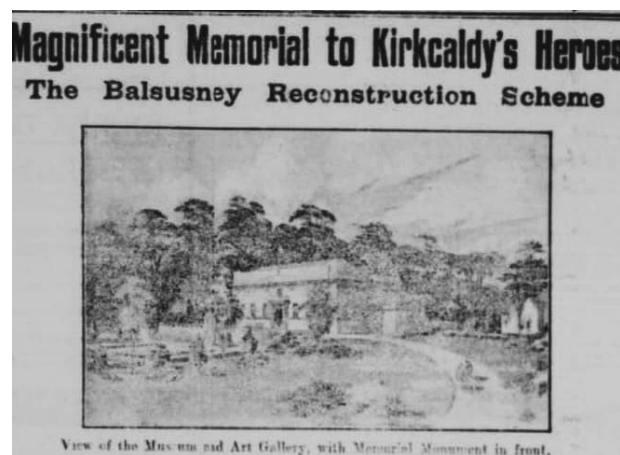
The earlier meeting had been that of the War Memorial Committee while the latter was the full Town Council. It follows that much of the Friday meeting was similar in content to that of Monday but to a different audience. The only business was to approve the War Memorial Committee's decision to approve accepting Mr Nairn's offer. This was done and the Provost took a little time to reflect. "They had now reached the goal of their ambitions in connection with the war memorial. When the complete scheme had been spoken of, it seemed almost impossible of realisation, but as they had gone along one difficulty after another, which at first seemed insuperable, had been bridged and they were now in the position of having reached a memorial that would be worthy of its object, second to none, superior to many and at the same time add enormously to the amenity and attractiveness of the town".

The Provost went on to speak about John Nairn but he certainly did not miss out others who had made a contribution:- "They were deeply indebted to many generous friends who had subscribed. Mr Nairn's generosity had helped them over the stile once or twice and now he had consented to throw aside his anonymity and make this magnificent offer. Mr Nairn, as they knew, was a gentleman who had no desire to appear in the limelight and he knew that if his purpose could have been achieved without the knowledge of anyone, undoubtedly that is what he would have preferred. That was impossible and he thought it equally impossible that they could accept this magnificent offer without tendering their most cordial appreciation of his great generosity. He had pleasure in moving accordingly. (applause)"

They were deeply indebted to many generous friends who had subscribed. Mr Nairn's generosity had helped them over the stile more than once or twice, and now he had consented to throw aside his anonymity and make this magnificent offer. Mr Nairn, as they knew, was a gentleman who had no desire to appear in the lime'light, and he knew that if his purpose could have been achieved without the knowledge of any one, undoubtedly that was what he would have preferred.

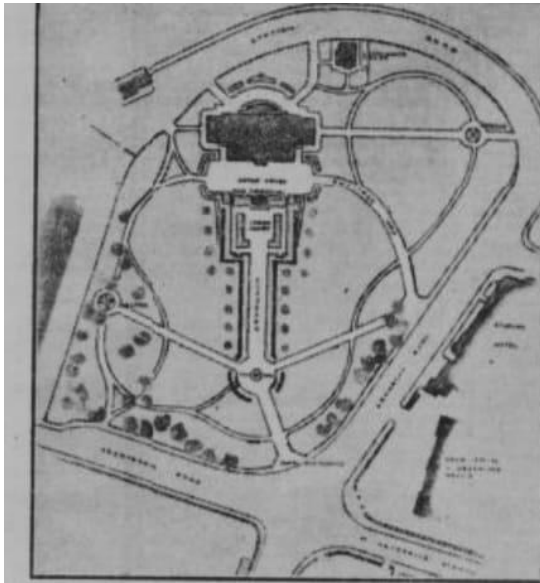
With the following wording the article drew attention to:- we have pleasure in submitting to our readers very interesting photographs of the Balcusney War Memorial Scheme, including views of the proposed Museum, Art Gallery and Memorial Wall, the front view of the reconstructed building, plan of the layout of Balcusney Park and view of the memorial monument.

The drawing of the planned Museum and Art Gallery with the memorial in situ. The Custodian's house is also seen, although that would change in 1928 when the Library was added. The addition of the Library must have plunged the house from

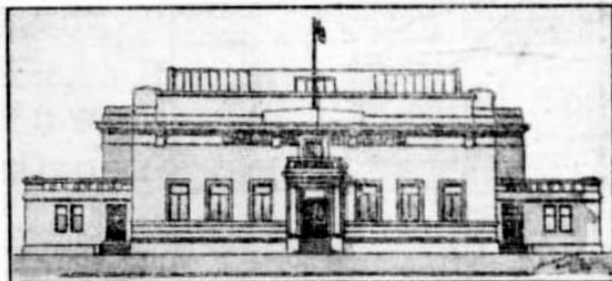
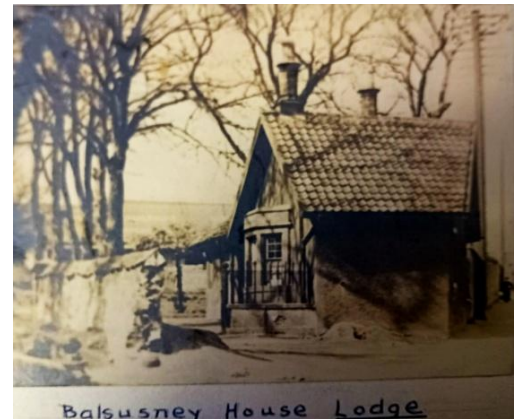


sunlight into shade. The drawing is certainly an excellent and accurate representation of how the project turned out.

The plan of the park is also reproduced and it shows a broad walk from the main entrance opposite the Adam Smith Halls. The ornamental fountain can be seen just where the walk broadens out in its approach to the garden enclosure in front of the Monument with the Museum and Art Gallery behind. The Custodian's house can be seen at the rear. A carriageway runs from where the lodge was once situated to the Museum entrance. The lodge was a victim of the plans. A huge thank you is due to a member of staff of the Local Studies team in the museum who unearthed this photograph of the



Balsusney Park lodge. Our thanks are due to Fife Cultural Trust for permission to use this image. Two shelters can also be seen – one close to Station Road with the other on the western side of the park closer to Abbotshall Road.



Front View of the Memorial Museum and Art Gallery after reconstruction.

A front view of the building was also included and is again reproduced here. The building looks very symmetrical and, despite the subsequent addition of the Library its, symmetry has been retained. If you are not aware of the addition of the Library it is almost impossible to tell that the whole complex was not built at the one time. It is easier seen from the rear that there is a 1928 extension to the original.

The *Fifeshire Advertiser* of the 23rd September is the next milestone. The article discloses that plans had been approved by the Council the previous Tuesday evening and that work will commence immediately. The contractors for the undertaking are disclosed and they are as follows:-

- | | |
|-----------------|-------------------------------|
| • Mason work | George Smith & Son, Kirkcaldy |
| • Joinery work | Cumming & McDonald, Glasgow |
| • Plumbing work | Henry Hutchison, Kirkcaldy |
| • Slater Work | J. Lawson & Son, Kirkcaldy |
| • Plaster work | A. Hutchison & Son, Kirkcaldy |
| • Glazier work | J. Haxton & Co., Kirkcaldy |
| • Asphalt work | W. Briggs Ltd, Dundee |

Mr W. Syme, a Kirkcaldy architect, had been appointed to supervise the work which was to the design of John S. McKay of Heiton & McKay of George Street in Perth. A local man, James Gentles, was appointed as the surveyor and through time his offices were situated in Osborne House – just over the road from Balsusney Park. John S. McKay had at this time been taken into partnership by Alexander G. Heiton of Perth, when Heiton's ill health all but prevented him producing architectural drawings.

The same issue carried an article on the death of Mr William Black, of Chapel, a very well-known and industrious figure in the town. Mr Black had passed away at his home the previous day from a heart condition which he had suffered from for a number of years. The connection here is that it was William Black who provided the £500 which prevented the leasing of Balsusney House. William Black was the son-in-law of the late Sir Michael B. Nairn and, in all probability, acted at the request of John Nairn – but the fact is, the lease was prevented from coming into existence by the intervention of William Black. It was also William Black who asked that the building be made available to house the museum collection of the Kirkcaldy Naturalist Society. The first plaque, provided in 1919,

DEATH OF MR WILLIAM BLACK OF CHAPEL



OPENING OF ART LOAN COLLECTION

THURSDAY'S CEREMONY.

In view of the important public event which is to take place to-day, when Lord Wester Wemyss will officially unveil the Kirkcaldy War Memorial and open the new Museum and Art Gallery, a semi-private ceremony of considerable importance took place on Thursday afternoon in the magnificent building. Those present were the Provost, Magistrates, and Town Councillors of Kirkcaldy, the responsible Committees of the Museum and Art Gallery, the War Memorial Committee, and their lady friends.

indicating the birthplace of Adam Smith, on the High

Street, was attributed to the Naturalist Society as being the donors but, in fact, it was paid for by William Black. The plaque was found, some years later, to contain an error and was replaced by that which is still affixed to the same spot today. Interestingly, one of the first duties undertaken by Provost Kilgour was the unveiling of that 1919 plaque.

The *Fifeshire Advertiser* of the 27th of June 1925 carried a report on a semi-official ceremony held on the previous

Thursday. The ceremony was attended by the Provost, Magistrates and Town Councillors of Kirkcaldy, the Committees of the Art Gallery and the Museum, the War Memorial Committee and their lady friends. (strange choice of words!) Provost Kilgour presided over the gathering and he was accompanied on the platform by;-Mr & Mrs R. Wemyss Honeyman (John Nairn's daughter and son-in-law), The Rev. A.T. Richardson (convenor of the Museum Committee), Treasurer Reekie, Bailie Gourlay, John Blyth (convenor of the Art Gallery Committee), Mr W. L Macindoe (Town Clerk), Mr J. L. Caw (the National Art Galleries), Mr Paterson (Royal Scottish Academy) and Mr Mackay (the architect).

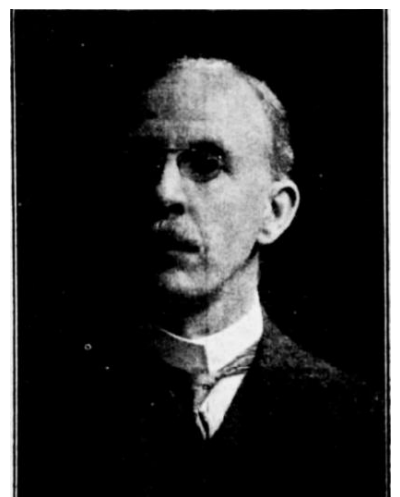
This was not a ceremony to formally open the premises but was aimed at throwing the building open to allow the public to view the exhibits in their new museum and art

gallery. It was thought that, with the huge crowds anticipated on the Saturday, to view the unveiling of the war memorial, it would be logistically impossible to have such numbers attempting to visit the Galleries at the same time. The sensible decision was taken to formally open the museum and art gallery at 6.00pm on the Saturday, when the majority of those attending the war memorial function would have dissipated. This informal function was to give an early opportunity to view the exhibits and the various committees to come together to view the outcome of their hard work.

The Provost opened the proceedings by saying how pleased he was to be present and spoke about one of his first duties, as Provost, being the setting up the War Memorial Committee. Although it had taken five years to complete the project, they were now in the last stage bar one, and he felt that it was almost universally accepted they had succeeded in no small measure. On these occasions it is almost inevitable that the road to fulfilment features long and loud with this function being no exception as the Provost's words unfolded.

When the idea of the memorial was first instigated the first person he had approached was John Nairn who gave him a cordial welcome and to his surprise handed over a personal cheque for £1,000 to get the ball rolling. His firm did likewise so fortifying and encouraging the Provost going forward. "They had experienced a lot of difficulties on the way, financial and otherwise, and when they were afraid to move for lack of funds, it was Mr Nairn, without being approached, who made another £1,000 available". While they were able to proceed with the Dedication Wall and the grounds there was always the question as to what to do with Balsusney House. He "confirmed that they were about to give it on lease to a government department when Mr Black stepped in with the offer of the £500, which would have been the income from the lease, as long as the Museum and Art Gallery were built".

It had been agreed that the only satisfactory way to deal with Balsusney House was to demolish it and built a new Art Gallery and Museum in its place. Provost Kilgour believed that everyone going through the buildings would recognise they were first class premises for the purpose. In terms of the upstairs art gallery "he had heard it stated by experts, who had visited them, that the galleries were the finest in existence. Some were larger but none were finer than what they had upstairs and they were certainly the finest in any provincial town. He could not express his depth of appreciation for Mr John Nairn's generosity. It had been great, but he appreciated it all the more by the simple and unostentatious way in which the whole thing had been done". He had, when calling on him in connection with the scheme, tried to thank him for all he had done, and he said "I want no thanks; don't thank me". (successive Councils, who have had the responsibility for the Art Gallery and Museum, have certainly maintained his wish – even 100 years after its opening, they have steadfastly refused to allow his name to be associated with the Galleries – in the opinion of this writer and not necessarily the



view of Kirkcaldy Civic Society – that is an absolute disgrace).

The Provost then mentioned that they were vastly indebted to the members of the two committees who had worked so industriously to have the exhibits ready for public viewing. Thanks to their energy and enthusiasm, along with the efforts of Mr Caw, they had gathered together a collection of pictures rarely, if ever, seen in a provincial town. Moving on, he indicated that “he had hoped that the donor of this magnificent building could have attended to declare it open and that he was sorry that Mr Nairn could not attend. However, he was delighted that Mrs Honeyman was here and prepared to carry out that necessary duty. He did not require to introduce her to the audience as she was well known in Kirkcaldy and he had great pleasure in calling upon her to declare the Galleries open”.

Mrs Honeyman said “she had to express the regret of her father who found it impossible to be present. On his behalf she would hand over these buildings to the town and in doing so she would like to express the hope that they would help to promote art in all its branches amongst their fellow citizens. She had great pleasure in declaring the building and the loan exhibition of pictures open”. It has to be said, that throughout the occasion, the words were punctuated by applause – never more so than when the building and exhibition were declared open.

At that stage, Miss Cora Blyth, the daughter of Mr John W. Blyth, presented Mrs Honeyman with a bouquet of roses. Miss Blyth in time went on to become Mrs Portillo and the mother of former politician Michael Portillo.



The architect, Mr McKay, on behalf of this firm, Mr Gentles, the quantity surveyor, and the contractors, presented Mrs Honeyman with an engraved silver salver as a memento of the occasion. It is very fitting that it is on display in the Galleries as part of their centenary celebrations. The engraving reads:- *Presented to Mrs R. W. Honeyman on the occasion of the opening of Kirkcaldy War Memorial Museum and Art Gallery, 25th June, 1925.*

Mr R. Wemyss Honeyman thanked the Provost for the kind manner in which his wife had been received and also Mr McKay and the others for the gift given to Mrs Honeyman. He also confessed that as a member of the Art Gallery Committee – there had been moments of concern and despair but these were now in the past. The Provost then “accepted the custody of the building, assuring Mrs Honeyman that they would prize their duty most highly, and hoped it would be the centre and inspiration for higher things amongst the industrial population of Kirkcaldy and help them to carry out the high ideals that he knew Mr Nairn had in presenting the building” (more applause).

John Blyth then proposed a vote of thanks to those who had lent pictures for the

exhibition. He remarked that the best way of showing their appreciation was by visiting many times and not only viewing but studying the various paintings and exhibits.

The Provost thanked Mr Caw for the invaluable guidance and help that he had given. Mr Caw replied by suggesting that “the collection was practically unique for a provincial town like Kirkcaldy”. Mr Paterson, R.S.A. indicated that the loan collection was one of the most remarkable exhibitions of art that had ever been held in Scotland!”

The company were then entertained to tea, followed by many taking the opportunity to view the exhibits. In terms of the Art Gallery – what was there to see? At this time Kirkcaldy had no collection of paintings, so what could be displayed? The answer was *The Inaugural Fine Art Loan Exhibition*. Believe it or not, there were 176 paintings exhibited including works by Degas, Monet, Van Gogh as well as many Scottish artists. Credit has to be given to two individuals in particular, with both being members of the National Galleries of Scotland – The first was the aforementioned James Caw, the Director, and T Corson Morton who, in time, became the first Curator of Kirkcaldy's Galleries.

Works came from far and wide both from institutions and individuals which included:

- The National Gallery of Scotland
- The Royal Scottish Academy
- Glasgow Art Gallery
- Dundee Art Gallery
- Aberdeen Art Gallery
- William Burrell (art collector and shipping magnate)
- John W. Blyth (Kirkcaldy linen manufacturer)
- Andrew Harley (Fife Forge)
- John Nairn (Kirkcaldy linoleum manufacturer)
- Robert W. Honeyman (Kirkcaldy linen manufacturer)

Burrell hailed from the west of Scotland but the other four were successful local businessmen who were extremely generous in loaning items from their own collections. Our Object number 5 *Away to the West** tells the story of John Blyth's outstanding contribution to Kirkcaldy's Art Gallery over the years.

*It was John Blyth's first McTaggart, for which he had to sell his car to afford the purchase.

The exhibition ended in September 1925 with all the paintings being returned to their owners although, in time, a total of 12 of these paintings were donated to Kirkcaldy Art Gallery with some purchased.

The exhibition was hardly over when, in the October, John Nairn donated two of his exhibition paintings to the Gallery. They were both by Arthur Melville who had died

in 1901. His first donation was the *Bullring Crowd*, closely followed by *The Boatyard*. In the same year he made the third donation to the collection which was *Gathering*

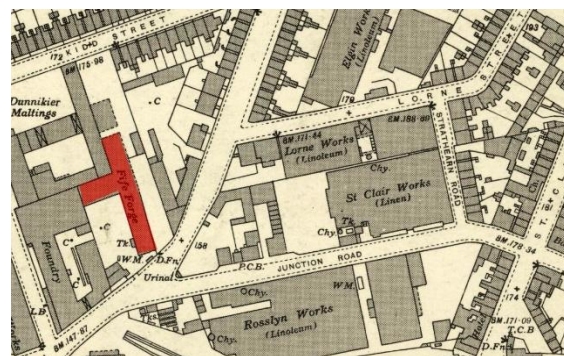
Seaweed which was the work of Jean-Charles Cazin. It is very fitting that one of the highlights of the Galleries centenary exhibition is the display of the first two paintings in a beautiful setting showing them at their best. Very appropriately on entering the exhibition room the first painting viewed is a full length portrait of John Nairn, on his yacht, painted by local solicitor and acclaimed artist, Thomas Millie Dow. The painting was donated to the gallery in 1928 by the Nairn Family.



For interest and information this link will take the reader to many of the paintings contained in that inaugural exhibition –

<https://artuk.org/discover/curations/1925-inaugural-loan-art-exhibition-at-kirkcaldy-galleries>

Coming away from 1925 for a moment we can pause to look at Andrew Harley and R. Wemyss Honeyman. Harley was born into the family who owned the Fife Forge, which was one of Kirkcaldy's most successful and best known industrial firms. It had been founded by a Mr Laverick in the 1870s but had been purchased by John Harley in the mid-1880s. Interestingly, John Harley had started his working career with John Key of Whitebank Engineering – a figure who often crops up in our Objects. From there, he struck out on his own opening an iron merchant's business in Mitchell Street. For a spell he operated both businesses in tandem before closing down the Mitchell Street enterprise. John Harley lived at Blinkbonny in East Albert Road in Kirkcaldy but, in 1903, had a country house, which he named Devon Hall, built in the Yetts of Muckhart. The Fife Forge was run by John before taking on his son Andrew, his son-in-law James Hepburn and Frank Harley as directors. John died in 1924 and it was Andrew who took over the mantle from his father and was so generous to the Art Gallery on his own death in 1950. In 1921, Andrew had extended the grounds of Devon Hall to provide a garden measuring slightly over 10 acres, of which, 4 took the form of an arboretum. He was acknowledged as one of the country's outstanding amateur botanists. In his Will he left 12 paintings to Kirkcaldy Art Gallery



and 7 of these had featured in that Inaugural Loan Exhibition. The 12 paintings were:-

- | | |
|-------------------------|------------------------|
| • Mother and Children - | Bernardos J. Blommers |
| • French Port - | Eugene I. Boudin |
| • Loch Ness - | Sir D.Y. Cameron |
| • Still Life - | I.H.J.T. Fontin-Latour |
| • The Gleaners - | Leon L' Hermitte |
| • Kinloch Rannoch - | William McTaggart |
| • Auchmithie - | William McTaggart |
| • Helping Granny - | William McTaggart |
| • Washing Day - | Anton Mauve |
| • Iona Landscape - | S.J.Peploe |
| • Still Life - | S.J.Peploe |
| • Harvesting - | Sir J. Lawton Wingate |

This magnificent gift is well worth including here, as 7 of the 12 paintings which appeared in the Loan Exhibition and are now in the possession of the Art Gallery came from Andrew Harley. This particular detour and tangent are certainly justified.



Robert Wemyss Honeyman was born in Kirkcaldy in 1885 into the family of *D. S. Honeyman & Son*, bleachers at Denburn in Kirkcaldy. His introduction to the linen business was via Robert Wemyss & Co before joining the family firm prior to the First World War. In 1915, he married Gertrude Couper Nairn, the elder daughter of John Nairn. The following year, he claimed that such was his father's health that he sought exemption from active service in the conflict. This was to ensure that he could keep the family business, employing 40 hands, operational. He failed



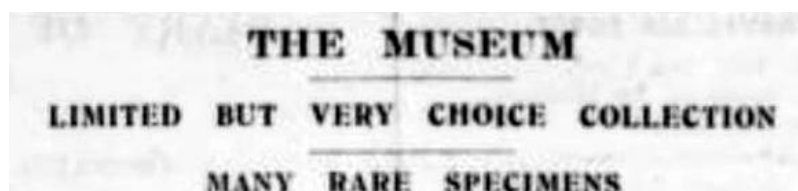
in that request and served with the R.A.M.C. during the conflict. Somehow, his health stricken father survived until 1926 when Robert became the sole owner. Wemyss Honeyman then embarked on the veracious purchase of various local firms, including Robert Stocks & Co in 1930, then taking an interest in the Dunfermline firm of Erskine Beveridge & Co. Ltd, again in the 1930s he secured N.& N. Lockhart with John Honeyman & Co., from Cupar, also being secured. This firm had been founded by his grandfather in the 1860s.

He also had interests in several linen and bleaching firms in Dundee and Angus. He was an avid art collector and, along with John Blyth, was one of the instrumental figures in ensuring Kirkcaldy boasted a superb collection of paintings. The couple lived at Westdene, in Bennoch Road, but also had an estate at Derculich in Strathhtay where

Aberdeen Angus cattle were bred. This was carried on, after his death, by his only daughter Elizabeth. He was for many years the Convenor of Kirkcaldy Art Gallery Sub-Committee. Gertrude Couper Nairn died in 1963 aged 73 – leaving an estate close to one million pounds in value.

Mr Wemyss Honeyman was not finished yet and in 1965, at the age of 79, he married Margaret Christine Rodgers, an HR assistant with Erskine Beveridge & Co who was aged 43 at the time. It is reported that following his death in January 1969 – his whole estate, of £780,000, went to his grieving widow. There can be no question that as well as being on the original Art Gallery Committee he played a major part in raising the general standards of the local gallery.

It is fair to say that the contents of page four of the *Fifeshire Advertiser* was a superb backdrop for this Object. Within the page was the section on the Art Gallery covered above, plus a separate article on the museum layout. For well over 40 years there had



been a slow but consistent appetite for such a building and now, as the museum prepared to open its doors, the *Advertiser* could publish a remarkably full and detailed preview

of the intended exhibits. These range from civic treasures and literary memorabilia to curious objects from far-flung corners of the world. The article offered a tantalising and forensic glimpse of what visitors could expect to encounter.

Although contained in the same building, the Museum and Art Gallery had different sub-committees. The chair of the Museum committee was the Rev. A.T. Richardson – the then minister of Whytescauseway Baptist Church. The word then is used as in 1930 he retired from the ministry to take over the *Fifeshire Advertiser*. He had ministered in Kirkcaldy from 1914 and was a well-known and well respected figure in the town – having served as President of three important local organisations – the Rotary Club, the Chamber of Commerce and the Kirkcaldy Naturalist Society. Although he died in Kilmacolm in 1956, he is buried in Bennochly Cemetery.

The credit for much of the museum's contents has to go to the Naturalist Society as it was they who had founded the town's first short-lived small museum in Pet Marjorie's house on the High Street. To a great extent it was the contents of this small museum which gave a core to the collection in the new building. Without question the move of relics of Kirkcaldy's history to John Nairn's wonderful new building brought a boost to civic pride and cultural



memory. When dealing with the Art Gallery it was commenting on 176 paintings which could not be compared with the absolute mass of exhibits housed in the Museum.

To reproduce the full extent of the *Advertiser's* itemised list would be impractical here – in fact impossible. Instead, what follows is a sampling, chosen not for volume but to attempt to reflect the diversity that characterised the early museum. By definition it has to be one person's view – it can be nothing else. The article on the museum had its headline plus two strap-lines – however one of the strap-lines will be saved until the end of the section as, to the team's eyes, it produces an excellent summing up.

The Museum

Many Rare Specimens

The introductory paragraph, after paying tribute to John Nairn, went on to say that “The Committee very wisely arranged to begin on a modest scale, seeing that the time at their disposal was small, but a glance at the contents will show that we have here the foundations of an excellent museum”.

The paragraph concluded with “as is not unusual geology is the dominant department and is housed in the large hall occupying the rear section of the ground floor”. *Please keep in mind that at that time there was no library and the main door was the one on the west side of the building and is now normally no longer in use.*

In essence what was at the heart of this new building was recounting the story of Kirkcaldy's past through documents, objects and maps, which can be summarised as:-

- **Charters and manuscripts** tracing the development of the town and its civic institution.
- **Yeomanry records, medals, and wartime memorabilia** showcased local military service especially from the recent conflict
- **Maps, prints, and early photographs** painted a picture of Kirkcaldy over time.
- **Archaeological artefacts**, including prehistoric tools and Roman fragments, connected the town to broader histories.

It is probably fair to say, without being critical, that the displays encouraged reflection and interest rather than spectacle, awe and amazement. This writer can now understand how during visits with his grandparents they found echoes of lives which had been lived, while he gained a sense of the town's heritage which has never left him.

Starting from the entrance door we will now attempt to conjure up a -

A Guided Walk through – room by room.

1. Archaeology and Local History Room (Straight Ahead)

The largest room on the ground floor was located at the rear of the building and offered both a visual and tactile observation of the natural sciences. The hall's generous layout featured both wall cases and free standing display cases allowing the presentation of items relating to:-

Geology

Diagrams and cross-sections traced Scotland's and Fife's geological past:

- Fault lines and sediment layers

- Rock formations from the Highlands to coastal cliffs
- Educational panels linking landforms to local geography

Local Rocks

Collected from quarries, beaches, and buildings, these specimens included:-

- Sandstone, shale, and basalt
- Quarrymen's initials carved into working stones
- Industrial links through materials once mined or used locally

Local Fossils

These artefacts included:-

- Devonian fish from Dura Den*
- Plant impressions from coal seams
- Marine fossils found along the Fife coast

Precious Ores

This section explored the extraction of:

- Haematite, galena, and coal
- Historical mining tools and methods
- Display panels examining environmental change

In terms of the rocks and fossils exhibited, credit was given to a local geologist, James Wright, who had a large collection contained in a wall mounted glass display case which was said to be the finest collection of Fife's rocks and fossils to be found anywhere in Scotland. Some of the more highly prized exhibits included limestone slabs from Dura Den and minerals, such as quartz and amethystine varieties, from Pettycur which were described as being of "brilliant and beautiful mauve colours".

It was said that James Wright's favourite objects were a class of fossil Lili-form animals known as Crinoids of which many were on display and primarily collected at Seafeld and Inverteil.

*Dura Den features large in the exhibits and it appears that as long ago as 1859, the minister of Newburgh and a keen geologist, John Anderson, had unearthed fossilised fish.

Shells

With specimens from both Fife's own shores and further abroad, this section displayed:-

- Native Scottish shells arranged by type and colour
- Exotic shells from merchant sailors
- Magnified displays revealing intricate structures

Other Sections (Also within Natural History Hall)

Within the same hall, additional collections added richness and depth to the above displays.

Flowers

- Pressed wildflowers with full herbarium documentation
- Panels on pollination and seasonal cycles
- Displays linking botany with domestic gardens

Ornithology

- Mounted birds: from puffins and curlews to exotic gifts
- Nesting habits shown with varied materials
- Diagrams of wings and eggs supported lessons in biology

Other Animals

- Hedgehogs, squirrels and stoats - common Scottish mammals
- Visiting specimens from travelling exhibits
- Conservation-focused notes on habitat and biodiversity

Insects

- Butterflies and moths making a vivid display
- Life cycle charts of many of the exhibits.
- Beetles, bees, and ants and their link to agriculture and soil health

The Natural History Room became a favourite amongst schoolchildren and adults alike and despite the fact that many of the displays would no longer be considered appropriate, (e.g. Stuffed birds and animals.) there is an underlying feeling that Kirkcaldy Naturalists already had a mind on conservation and, dare we say it - biodiversity - and that was 100 years ago.

2. War Memorial Room (To the Left)

This space could be nothing other than one of solemn remembrance given it, as did the external Memorial, commemorated the lives shaped and lost in wartime. As the First World War was still vivid in the public's memory, the exhibits had to and did strike a respectful tone. The items on display included:-

- **Medals, letters, and sketches** telling individual stories
- **Rolls of honour and regiment records** offering a view of heroism and tragedy.
- **Personal effects** such as uniform pieces and personal belongings must have invited quiet contemplation at the time.

It was said that the display offered dignity without glorification, allowing grief, pride, and reflection to co-exist. There were plenty visitors and relatives to do that – there are 985 names on that memorial!

3. Adam Smith Room (to the Right)

Dedicated to Kirkcaldy's most famous son, the moral philosopher and founder of modern economics, spent much of his formative years in the town. The room celebrated his legacy and roots and to a degree gave a personal insight into his life. In wider terms this was done by the display containing:-

- **Books, watch, and manuscript letters**, some donated by descendants
- **Portraits and commemorative items**, reflecting Smith's local and global importance
- **Interpretive texts** explored his influence on economics and enlightened thinking.

Featured Relics included:-

- **Volumes from Smith's personal library**, including a copy of the first edition of the *Wealth of Nations*, published in London in 1776.
- His **silver pocket watch** and a **bookplate** engraved "Adam Smith his book". This came from a book, *Entropious*, which Smith had used while at school in Kirkcaldy.
- **A book from his library** entitled a *Short Introduction to English Grammar* – 1763.
- **A book titled** *Two Treaties of Government* by John Locke – 1728.
- **A Book from his library** entitled *De L' Importance Des Opinions Religionises* – Necker 1788
- **A Japanese edition of the Wealth of Nations** which was presented to Kirkcaldy by Lieutenant Daisuke Taku, of the Imperial Japanese Navy. Taku was a member of the Adam Smith Society in Tokyo and had made a pilgrimage to Kirkcaldy in 1911.

Interestingly, visitors entered this room by passing a harpoon, a symbol from the 19th-century serving as a reminder of Kirkcaldy's former whaling industry and is an artefact which remains on display today. The harpoon had been presented to the original High Street museum in 1914 by the then Provost – Sir Robert Lockhart.

Pet Marjorie

Known locally and nationally as “Pet Marjorie” Marjorie Fleming was Kirkcaldy’s precocious child poet, whose literary promise was cut short by her death at age eight in 1811. The museum, quiet rightly, honoured her not as a curiosity, but as a genuine cultural figure whose name still resonates today two hundred years after her death. Since 1930, her writings are held by the National Library of Scotland and can be accessed online.

The Team's Object Number 18 tells the full story of Marjorie Fleming - her life, her writings, and her enduring influence. As mentioned previously Kirkcaldy's first museum was based in her former High Street home where she was both lived and died.

The featured Relics included:-

- **Two original letters** written by Marjorie to her cousin Isa Keith (who was very instrumental in Marjorie's life)
- A collection of **books and toys** once associated with her childhood
- A **framed portrait and biographical sketches** contributed by her extended family

The collection and display illustrated that in life, as well as in a museum, even short lives can leave cultural footprints.

Thomas Carlyle.

The museum’s literary material included memorabilia associated with the Victorian sage, Thomas Carlyle, who had a strong connection with Kirkcaldy, having spent time in the town as a teacher between 1816 and 1818. A plaque still records that fact on the remaining wall of the old Burgh School in Hill Street. The school closed in 1843. He was extremely friendly with Kirkcaldy's long serving Provost – Patrick Don Swan, having taught him as a pupil. Carlyle was considered one of the Victorian era's great thinkers.

Featured Relics included:

- A **signed letter from Carlyle**, dated 2 June 1868 addressed to Provost Swan. The letter had come into the possession of Lachlan Macbean (Editor of the *Fifeshire Advertiser*) who had donated it to the Town Council – who, in turn, lent it for the exhibition.
- A Second **letter**, dated 22nd November 1877, this time from Provost Patrick D. Swan introducing Sandford Fleming to Thomas Carlyle. This letter had been presented to the Council by an Alex Carlyle in August 1914. Fleming gained the Freedom of the Burgh in 1882 and was knighted by Queen Victoria in 1897. In the *Fife Free Press Centenary Supplement* published in January 1971 – the paper declared Sandford Fleming as Kirkcaldy's greatest son.

Loan Collection: Items Lent by R. Milliken

Amongst the museum’s earliest treasures were items from local collector R. Milliken. Robert Milliken had come to Kirkcaldy in 1880, taking over Thomson's photographic business at 82 High Street from where he operated for close to 50 years. He was a keen antiquarian and was known to have significant and outstanding collections. The Sub-Committee wrote to him, as late as the 13th May 1925, indicating that a standing display case would be entirely at his disposal if he took up their offer to display parts of his collection. Not only were these made available for the opening - they remained on display right up to his death in March 1930.

Selected Items from his extensive collection:-

- **The Poors' money box** which hung from the Parish Church door in the 18th century
- A **salad knife, fork and spoon**, made from whalebone.
- **The Alarm Bugle** used by Kirkcaldy Fire Brigade around 1870.
- **Beggar's badges** issued by Dysart and Kirkcaldy Town Council in the 18th century.
- **Spurs** used in cockfighting

- **An original letter** signed by Sir Walter Scott and dated 1827.
- It would seem that the **Japanese edition of the Wealth of Nations**, which was mentioned earlier, had also been loaned by Mr Milliken – strange given it was presented to Kirkcaldy. Little more research here?

These objects, without question, enriched the museum's opening display highlighting not only what was made, found or related to Kirkcaldy and the local area — but also items which came to it, through trade, diplomacy or means which are now frowned upon.

As mentioned earlier, one element of the *Advertiser's* headline for the museum article had been kept back until now. The team felt that the six words **“*Limited but a Very Choice Collection*”** neatly seems to sum up the sub-committee's quiet confidence that they had achieved a very strong collection in the short time available to them.

The newspaper's attention having looked at both the Museum and Art Gallery now focused on the external surroundings. This article was under the headline:-

The Memorial Gardens How They are Laid Out

The article went on to give a description of the Memorial Gardens themselves. It is only right and proper that some space is given to the work of George Sinclair – the Corporation Gardener and Superintendent of Parks:- “Mr Sinclair is an expert in landscape gardening and floral decoration and this is strikingly exemplified by the manner in which Balsusney Park has been treated. Throwing his whole heart into the congenial task, he has achieved a result that arouses the admiration of all who see it and to a large number of the public the beautiful grounds form a very important part of the Memorial to Kirkcaldy's valiant and patriotic sons”.



Without question George Sinclair was every inch the expert suggested above. Look at an article from the Fife Advertiser of the 15th September 1934 we discover that 400 members of the *Association of Superintendents of Parks and Botanic Gardens* had descended on Kirkcaldy at the end of their Annual conference in Edinburgh. The headline reproduced here are a glowing tribute to the man who for 36 years was the town's Park's Superintendent.

One of the major differences to the grounds had been the reduction to three of the four high walls which enclosed Balsusney Park. Only the west wall, which separates the grounds from the former Maxton linen mill, remains at its original height. All the other walls were dramatically reduced to the size seen today. Those high walls and the lodge, which was shown earlier, made for a far different vista than the one seen today.



We now return to the Advertiser's article:- The area within the walls had been laid out with turf while some areas had seen the sowing of grass seed. In terms of the floral arrangements it is revealed that:-

- At either side of the main entrance were flower beds of serpentine design – one filled with 500 *Coltness Gem dahlias* while the other contained 500 *East Lothian white stock*.
- Further to the right is a large oval bed of *White Rhododendrons* in full bloom and to the right and left are beds of *Pink Pearl rhododendrons*, one of the finest kind in cultivation.
- A fine bed of geraniums, including *Colvalisca* and a bed of 500 *White Stock* were tastefully laid out on the Bennoch Road side. The bed on the right was filled with *Oriental Poppies*, relieved by *Blue Delphiniums*.
- Nearing the steps in front of the Wall of Remembrance are two large beds of *Prunis Prarsardia*, bordered with *Golden Sambucas*, *Aurea* and *Lavender Nepetia* (or catmint)
- Ascending the short stairway to the lower court in front of the Wall, it is seen that the asphalted space, flanked on either side by steps leading to the upper terrace is relieved by two plots of flowers each 50 feet long by 8 feet wide. In these are planted five *Drosina Australias* which are each 8 feet high and intermixed with *Prunis Prarsardia* which are about 3 feet tall, while the body of the plot is laid out with *Veronica Swansonia* (white) and a groundworks of *Blue Violas*, with a line of *Arisine*, *Blue Lobelia* and *Golden Feather* – the whole making a beautiful combination of design and colour
- The approach to the Memorial is lined with *yew hedges* about two feet high. On the broad walk is an avenue of *copper beech* and on the approach a line of *deodar cedars*. Behind the building the ground is tastefully laid out with coniferous ornamental trees. Here beds are planted out with *antirrhinums* and *pentstemons* to fill vacant places and many thousands have been planted.
- Proceeding towards the shelter, two fine scroll beds of *Coltness Gem dahlias* are noticed, a round bed of *standard fuchsias* with a gradient of *Veronica Swansonia*

and two crescents of the handsome *John Waterer rhododendrons*.

- In the scheme are also three beds containing over 200 roses, including such splendid varieties as *Caroline Testout*, *Ophelia* and *Mrs Henry Morse*.
- The whole scheme is tastefully finished off with double flowering cherry, laburnum and scarlet thorns about thirty feet apart completing a magnificent lay-out which adds another triumph to those already achieved by Mr Sinclair in the Beveridge Park.

George Sinclair retired in 1935 and no less a figure than former Provost Alexander Kilgour launched an appeal for public donations to recognise Sinclair's work. This resulted on his retiral his being presented with a wallet containing notes and an engraved silver salver. The *Fifeshire Advertiser* of the 12th October 1935 records that the salver read: –



“Presented to Mr George Sinclair, Superintendent of Public Parks in the Burgh of Kirkcaldy, on the occasion of his retiral, by citizens of the Burgh, in recognition of his outstanding skill in floral culture and his enthusiasm and absorption in his work during the 36 years (1899-1935) he has been an official of the Corporation”.



Sadly ill-health and, in his final months, blindness, saw Mr Sinclair move to Cornwall to live with his daughter and on the 22nd May 1937 the *Fifeshire Advertiser* recorded that he had passed away aged 72 and that his coffin had arrived by rail from Redruth. It had rested overnight in Abbotshall Church before being buried in the graveyard on the Thursday. The pallbearers included two Markinch men – ex-

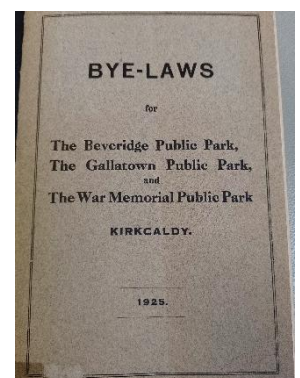
Bailie Walker and a James Ewing. Prior to coming to Kirkcaldy George had worked in the gardens of Balbirnie House in Markinch – it raises the question was he a Markinch man or did he have a Markinch wife – another one to check?

Given that in 1929 he also took on responsibility for the Ravenscraig Park – he certainly deserved all the accolades he received but none more than the fact that – his work lives on.

It is difficult to imagine how the area now covered by the Library may have looked at the time of the above description. Certainly the Copper beeches still make an outstanding spectacle.

Miscellaneous Items.

- *The Fifehire Advertiser* of the 21st March 1925 announced that Mr T. Corson Morton, who was shortly to retire from his post as Keeper of the Scottish National and Portrait Galleries, would become the first Curator of the Kirkcaldy Art Gallery.
- The *Fifehire Advertiser* of the 18th April 1925 reveals that, in March, Councillor Lockhart had been requested to write to Dr Archibald Fleming, in whose possession were many of Pet Marjorie's relics, asking if they could be released into the possession of Kirkcaldy Town Council. As they were included in the display the good Doctor appears to have agreed.
- In the same edition we learn that David Pryde, of 154 Links Street, had secured the position of Caretaker. His wage was £2.50 per week but he also had the benefits of the tied house, light, coal and a uniform. Only those who had been in the forces could apply for the post.
- Saturday the 12th September 1925 saw the publication of statistics by the *Fifehire Advertiser*. The article revealed that the Art Gallery was being visited by around 300 people per day or 1,500 per week which the paper viewed as excellent for a new gallery. The article claimed that not only were these figures being maintained but were increasing. "It is a beautiful place and the present collection is worthy of lengthy study during the week while we still have it". The article concluded with "We believe that it will shortly be succeeded by a collection formed by the *Scottish Modern Arts Association* of which the Earl of Crawford is President, while Mr Arthur Kay is Chairman of their Executive. The new collection will probably be opened in November". An advertisement from the *Fifehire Advertiser* of the 7th November which relates to the exhibition is reproduced here.
- On the 14th September 1925 Kirkcaldy Town Council passed Bye-laws to cover – the Beveridge Park, the Gallatown Public Park and the War Memorial Public Park. The same Bye-laws covered all three public spaces. The document was signed for the Town Council by the Town Clerk - Mr W. L. Macindoe and as required by law - P. R. Laird on behalf of the Secretary of State for Scotland. For interest the first page of the document is reproduced here.
- The Fifehire Advertiser of the 14th November 1925 reported on the inaugural meeting of the Kirkcaldy Naturalist Society for season 1925/26 in their new surroundings. It was the Rev. A.T. Richardson who was in the chair. The room was packed to capacity and, prior to introducing the speaker, Richardson made mention of John Nairn's generosity in providing this "handsome edifice". He also paid tribute to James Wright who was mentioned earlier - and he was delighted to say that John had been honoured by being elected as a Fellow of The Geological Society. A little more research disclosed that Mr Wright had been awarded the Neill Prize by the Royal Society of Edinburgh for 1937/38. The



article which was unearthed in the *Fifeshire Advertiser* and revealed that James had been a son of the late Bailie White and had followed his father in running *James Wright & Son*, a house furnisher at 64 High Street.

- In the *Fifeshire Advertiser* of the 5th December 1925 it is disclosed that John Blyth had donated two paintings to the collection. They are *Cloud, Wrack and Sea* by Sir J. Lawton Wingate and an unusual *still life*, which was also the title, by Alex Fraser. It was termed unusual as the subject was described as a “heap of unshelled green bean pods with lemons hovering in the background”.

This brings the 3rd or 53rd object, depending on how the reader views it, to a conclusion and we hope and trust that it has, partly at least, added a little more information and colour to the seemingly timeless and ageless aura that the whole garden and buildings engenders. We also hope that we have shone a spotlight on the part played by Provost Alexander Kilgour in securing Balsusney Park as the site for the memorial. Without question his tenacity and determination won the day and without that it would/could have been a far different outcome.

* * * *

Acknowledgements

The core of this Object has been produced almost exclusively through researching newspapers. Most of the individual newspapers used for articles, sketches, advertisements and photographs are credited in the text. This newspaper information was obtained from the *Find My Past Newspaper Archive* in partnership with the *British Library*.

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The photograph of the cover of the Bye-laws booklet is reproduced thanks to *On-Fife – Kirkcaldy Local Studies Section*.

The photographs of Alexander Kilgour on page 2, William Black on page 23 and John Nairn on page 24 are all taken from their respective obituaries which appeared in the *Fife Free Press*.

As with every object, valuable assistance and support was provided by the staff of the Local Studies Department within Kirkcaldy Central Library. We have to also thank Jane Freel for approaching us in relation to the Object and her continual and unfailing assistance.