

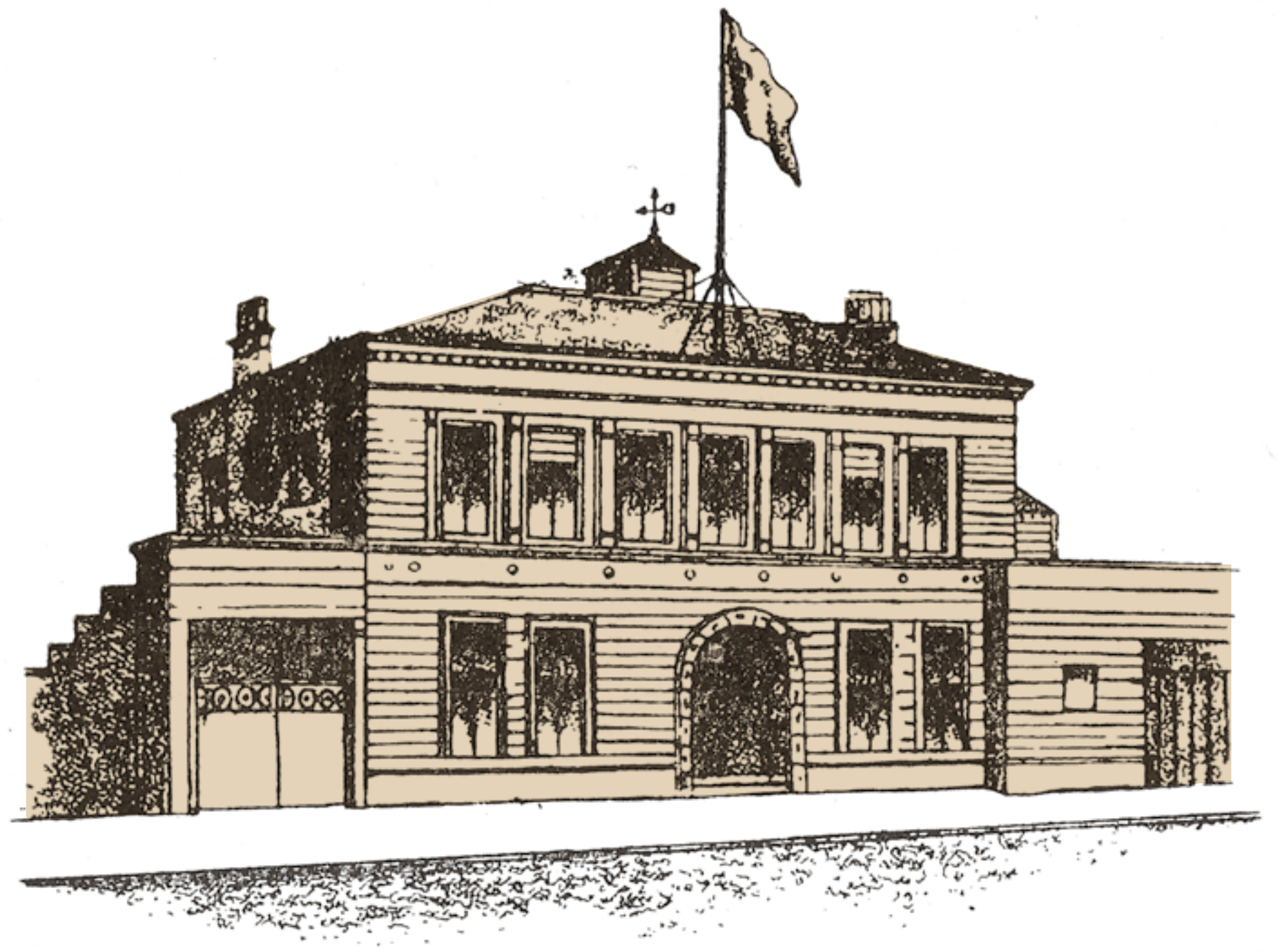
The War Memorial Committee

Wednesday 25th June 1919 is a noteworthy date in Govan's history, though most of us would be forgiven for not knowing why. It was the day on which a group of local councillors called a public meeting to consider establishing a War Memorial for Govan, to commemorate the sacrifice of local citizens in The Great War of 1914-18. As Bailie James Whitehead noted "Govan had taken a very prominent part in the war" and "it would be difficult to find any one place with the same population which had done more in "doing its bit" than the old burgh of Govan in connection with the Great War."

Despite "a disappointing attendance", the idea soon became a plan. Councillor James Somerville moved that the assembled group should "proceed with the erection of a Govan War Memorial and raising of funds therefor." The motion was seconded by ex-Bailie William Munro and carried unanimously. Bailie Whitehead made a point of remarking positively on the number of ladies present, stating that the success of the venture would "depend largely on the ladies."

Having established the all male office bearers for the War Memorial Committee, a fund-raising target of £30,000 was quickly agreed. This sum may reflect an initial interest in funding something rather different from the finished War Memorial and indeed earlier in the meeting, Councillor Somerville expressed the hope that the memorial would not be "something in the way of a statue or some useless piece of architecture" but rather "something of real public utility, something to alleviate suffering."

Among the fund-raising ideas immediately expressed, Bailie Whitehead confidently asserted "Rangers FC would give them a match or matches." Other suggestions included flag days and public subscription, while Bailie Whitehead also felt able to propose that "the ladies could raise money by means of sales of work, cake and candy and other methods" and further asserted that "from what he knew of the workers, they would be quite prepared to give a certain amount off their wage over, say, a stated period for this object."



The first meeting of the War Memorial Committee was held in Court Hall, Police Chambers, Albert Street (now Orkney Street).

"Something of real public utility, something to alleviate suffering."



William Munro

The initial meeting to consider creating a War Memorial for Govan was not entirely without contention. Ex-Bailie Munro is reported to have stated at the meeting that he was "amazed to find the lack of interest in the remembrance of those men" who had fought in the war, both living and dead. Munro had himself lost a son, Alexander, at The Battle of the Somme in 1916. William Munro was the original owner of the rediscovered Roll of Honour.



Above: James Whitehead

Left: William Munro with his wife Mary Ann Syme, son Alexander and daughters; Margaret and Williamina.

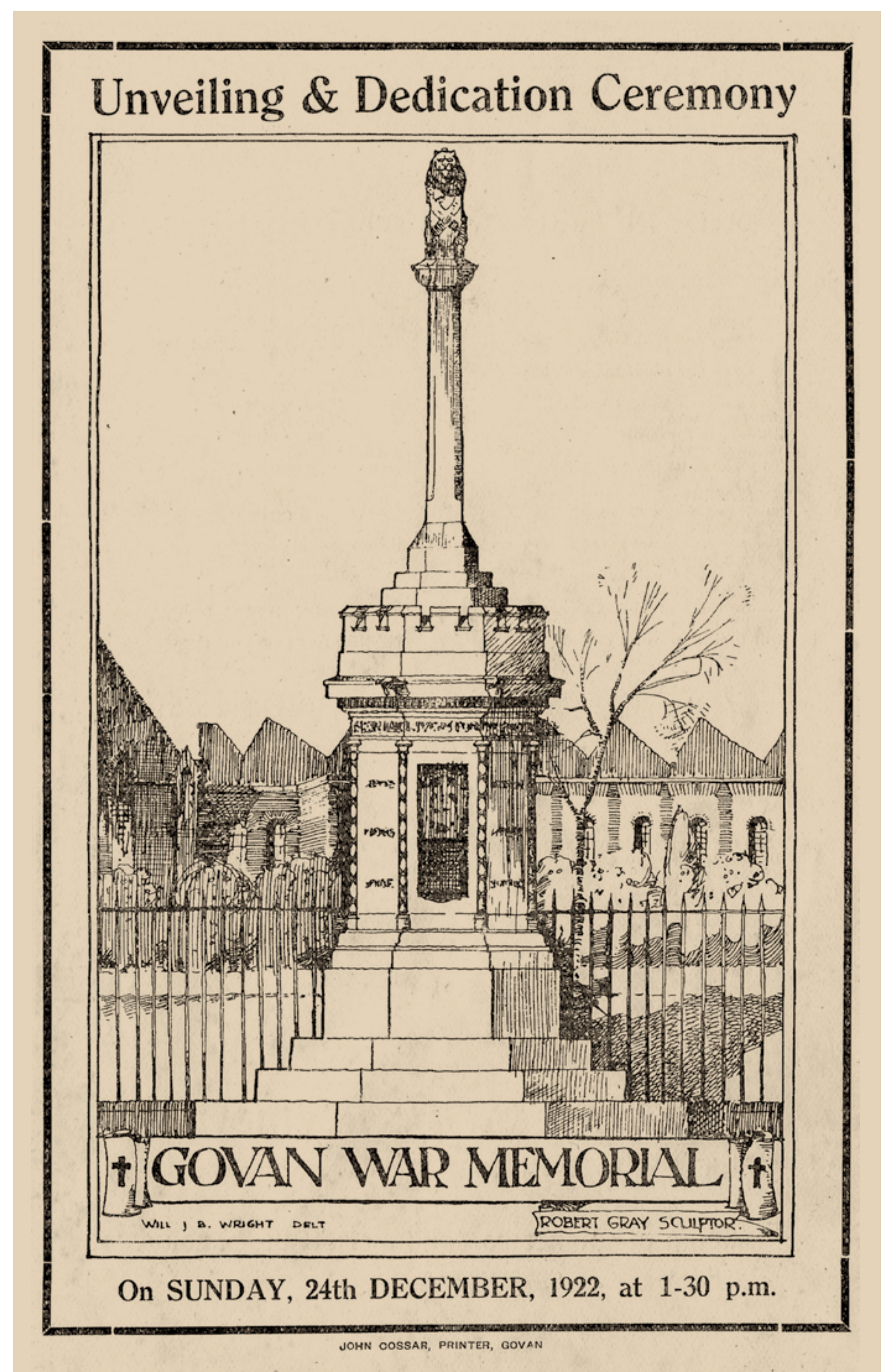
The Unveiling

The Govan War Memorial was unveiled on Christmas Eve 1922, a little over three years after the end of the War. On December 22nd, the Govan Press, looking ahead to the unveiling, regarded the site of the War Memorial as "surely the most appropriate that could have been found", noting that it had been "holy ground for thirteen centuries."

The war memorial itself – 22 feet high and of Creetown granite in Scots Baronial style – was described as, "peculiarly appropriate and essentially Scottish [taking] the form of a Mercat Cross." Created by Glasgow-based sculptor Robert Gray – also responsible for the K13 Memorial Drinking Fountain in Elder Park – the monument is octagonal in shape with the names of the major military engagements of the war inscribed on four of the eight sides: Falkland Islands, Jutland and Zeebrugge; Ypres, Somme, Mons, Loos, Palestine, Mesopotamia, Gallipoli, Salonika and Paschandael (sic).

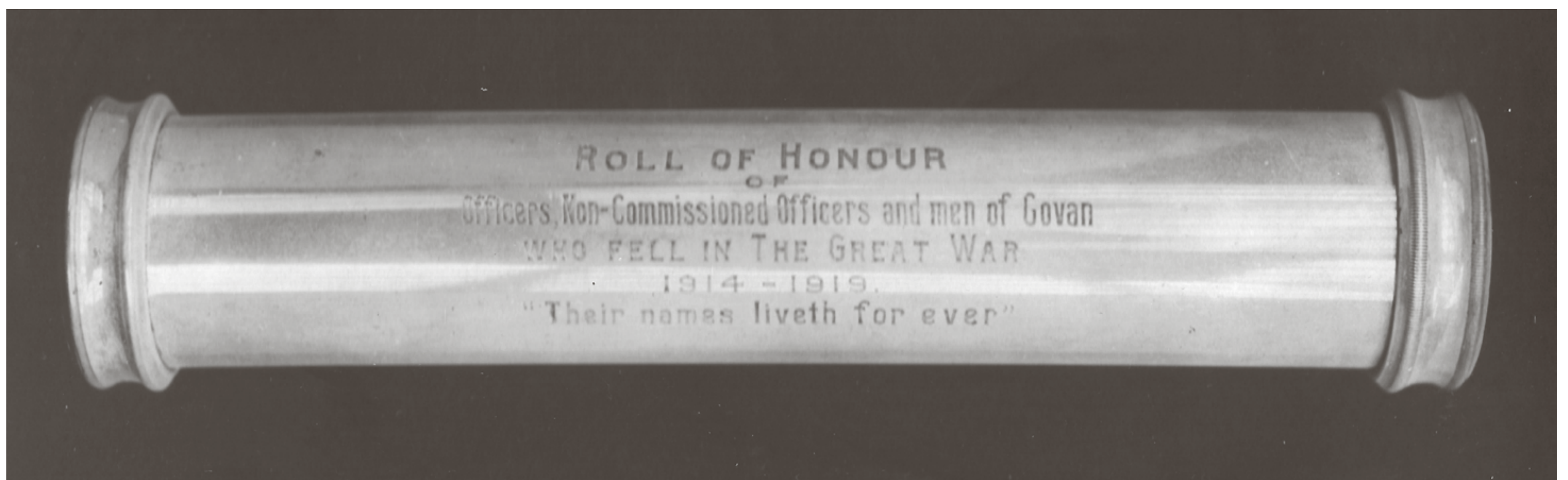
The unveiling by Major the Right Honourable the Lord Blythwood took place "in presence of a huge concourse, numbering several thousands of the general public." The Govan Press noted the crowd was so large that "Govan Road was entirely blocked" and that people found vantage points where they could, including atop a tramcar "which was held up by the crowd." Even the elements appear to have accommodated the unveiling ceremony. Described as "lowering skies and a hail-laden west wind" in the run up to the scheduled start time, "just before the ceremony commenced the sky cleared somewhat and... a rainbow appeared arched over the Parish Churchyard and the rain kept off until the ceremony was over."

Lord Blythwood's speech focused on the importance of remembrance, including a reference to "the men and women at home who supplied ships and material to carry on the great struggle." Other speakers included the Reverend Peter Smith and ex-Bailie James Whitehead, who described the process of establishing the War Memorial as having been achieved "despite adverse criticism." Once the War Memorial had been unveiled, a Mrs Ryan was asked to deposit the casket – Mrs Ryan's family having lost four members to the War – and a Mrs Whittaker added a number of coins. There then followed a prayer of dedication, two minutes silence, the sounding of the Last Post and the laying of wreathes.



The Roll of Honour

A silver-plated copper cylinder or "casket", provided by Mr James Somerville J. P., was placed in a cavity of the War Memorial on the day of its unveiling. The casket bore the inscription "Roll of Honour of officers, non-commissioned officers and men of Govan who fell in the Great War, 1914-1919. Their names liveth forever." Inside it held a red-leather bound Roll of Honour, bearing the names of 1122 Govan men who died during the conflict, together with a copy of the Govan Press containing a report of the public meeting (see *The War Memorial Committee*) held in the Police Chambers, Albert Street (now Orkney Street). Each member of the Committee was given a duplicate of the Roll of Honour.



Refurbishing the Memorial

On the 27th February 2017, Central Govan Action Plan and Govan Cross Townscape Heritage Initiative announced a public consultation for the next phase of Public Space Improvements, including proposals to refurbish the Govan War Memorial. By this time approaching 95 years old, various signs of wear and tear were apparent, including some undermining of the monument by the roots of a nearby tree. A programme of repointing and cleaning would therefore be appropriate.

This gave the Govan Reminiscence Group an idea – with the refurbishment works likely to require the disassembly of the monument, an opportunity would exist to retrieve the Roll of Honour, take a note of the names recorded on it (for future research purposes), then replace it in the refurbished structure. The funding and permission to do this took some two years but was eventually agreed in February 2019.



Work on the War Memorial refurbishment began on 3rd June 2019, conducted by Graciela Ainsworth Conservation – this following an assessment by Fiona Sinclair Architect. During the refurbishment the bronze plaque was (eventually) removed and the casket retrieved, along with a small tin containing coins, presumably those reported as having been deposited by Mrs Whittaker at the unveiling ceremony.

AOC Archaeology undertook the conservation work on the retrieved items but sadly found water had penetrated the casket. As a consequence, the paper roll of honour, together with the associated copy of the Govan Press, had been reduced to illegible mush. The little tin transpired to be a white metal shaving soap tin which contained coins including a farthing (dated 1921), a halfpenny (date illegible), a penny (1921) and a shilling (1922).

The Retrieved Casket



The Roll Rediscovered

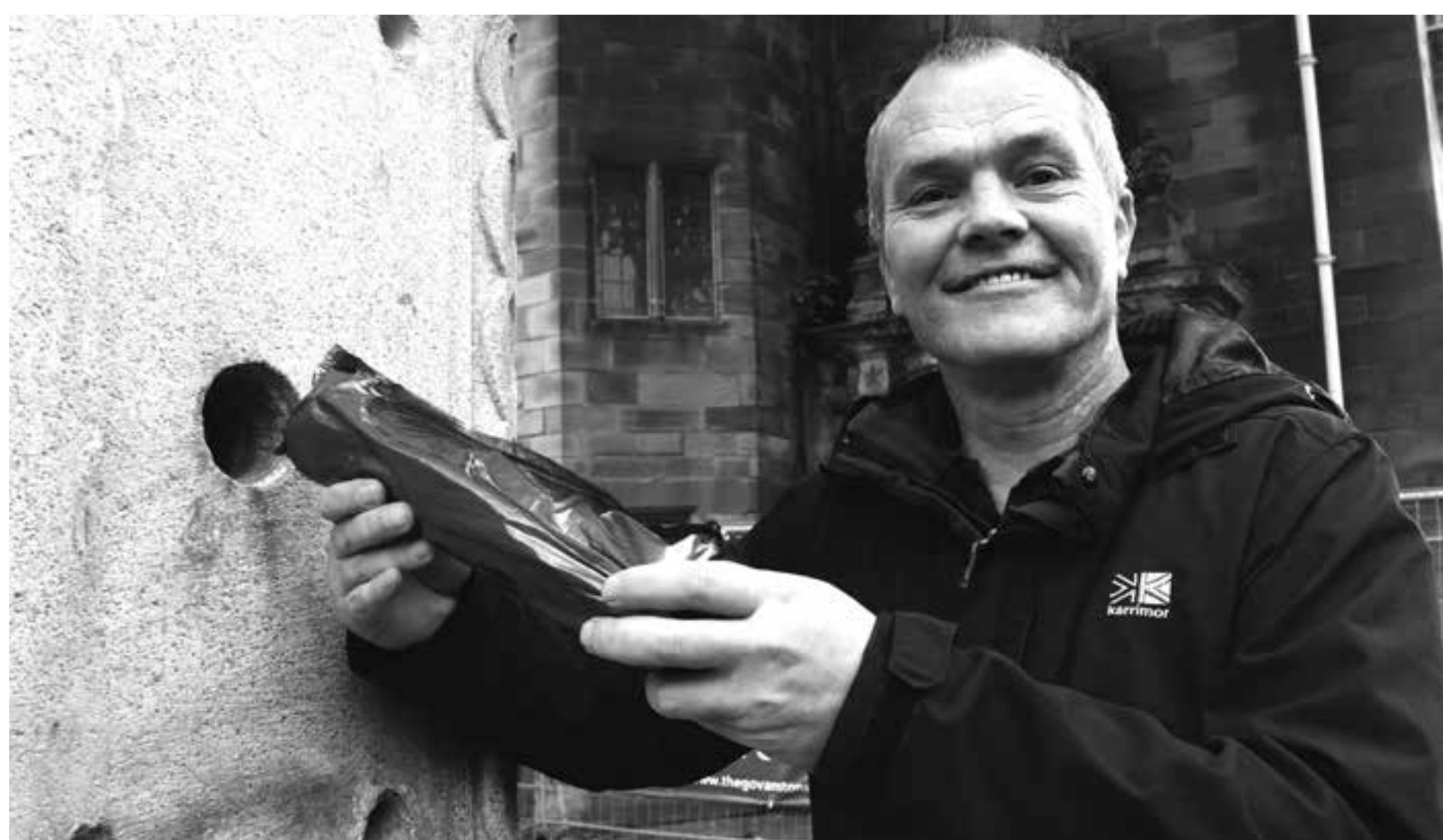


The disappointment engendered by the discovery of the ruined Roll of Honour within the War Memorial in June 2019 did not deter the Govan Reminiscence Group. The Govan Press account of the unveiling of the War Memorial explicitly stated that "Each member of the War Memorial Committee... has received a duplicate copy of the roll, bound in blue cloth boards, the gift of ex-Bailie James Whitehead J.P." This being so, the potential existed for examples of these duplicates to have survived, though tracking them down seemed unlikely to be straightforward.



The approach adopted was to try to locate living descendants of the War Memorial Committee, working systematically through the list of committee members' names. An early target was William Munro, Vice Chair of the Committee and a distinguished former elected representative for Govan. Using the website *Ancestry.co.uk* as a means to reach anyone with a relative called William Munro, contact was made with Sheila Lawson.

The question was asked: "Do you know anything about the Roll of Honour?" The answer, received on 12th July 2019, was: "Is this what you are looking for?", complete with two images: one showing the blue cover of the duplicate Roll of Honour, the other the first page of the names of the fallen servicemen of Govan. The Roll of Honour transpired to have been found along with an order of service, newspaper clippings about the unveiling, a photo of the casket and some Munro family photographs.



This remarkable discovery was rendered even more remarkable by the fact that Sheila Lawson was not related to William Munro and had in fact discovered the roll of honour on top of a crumbling barn wall on a croft named Tokavaig on the Isle of Skye, to which Sheila had moved in 2016. Deeming the discovery too important to throw out, Sheila did her own research into the origins of this cache of documents and discovered that William Munro's daughter Williamina had married a crofter from Skye named Malcolm Morrison in Govan in 1933. Malcolm Morrison had been the owner of Tokavaig since 1932.

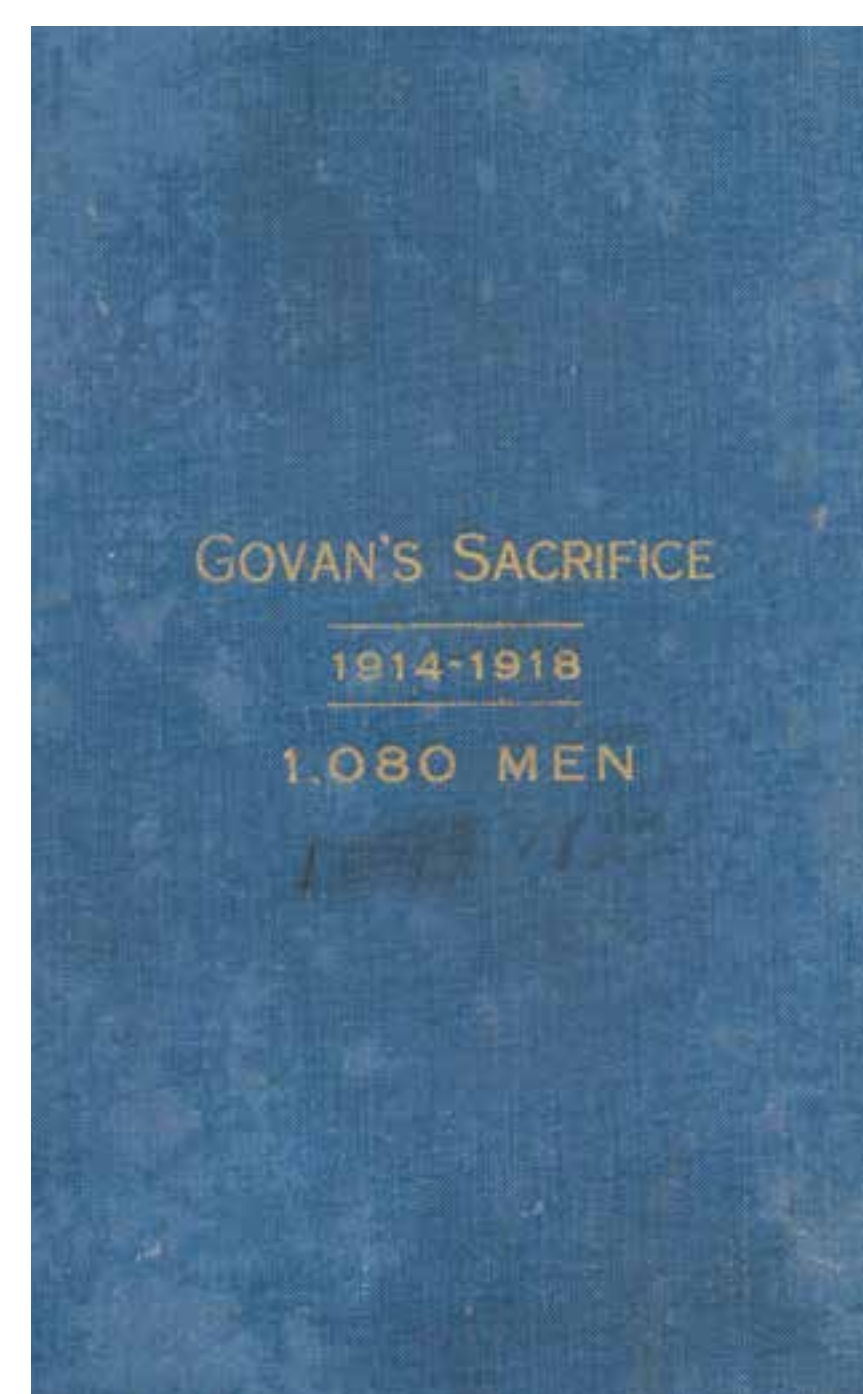
The casket containing a new Roll of Honour was re-inserted in the War Memorial on 15th October 2019 following completion of the restoration work.

The Names on the Roll of Honour

The Roll of Honour runs to 18 foolscap pages and contains 1122 names, though it is clear that the identification of Govan service personnel eligible for inclusion was an ongoing process, right up to the publication of the list. The last two pages are supplements, containing 43 names, added to the 1079 names on the original sixteen-page document.

The Govan Reminiscence Group has now established not only that a number of the names on the roll are duplicated but also that the names of a great many more men (and women) of Govan who died in the Great War are omitted from the Roll of Honour, so that the real total should be over 2000 names.

Just a few of those people omitted from the Roll of Honour are commemorated in *Their Stories III & IV*.



The cover and first page of the rediscovered Roll of Honour.

Their Stories

Some notable Govanites on the Roll of Honour



Staff-Surgeon William George Barras

A medical doctor, born 30th March 1868 in Govan. Son of Govan doctor James Barras, William was also to become Deputy Medical Officer, Police Casualty Surgeon & Bacteriologist to Govan as well as a physician at Elder Hospital. A member of the Royal Navy Volunteer reserve, he became staff surgeon when hostilities broke out and served in the Dardanelles campaign and in The Battle of Jutland. William was killed on 9th July 1917 onboard the HMS Vanguard when it blew up in Scapa Flow with the loss of all but two of its crew. Only 22 bodies out of the 843 killed were recovered and the wreck was eventually given legal protection as an official war grave in 1984. Today William Barras is perhaps best remembered for his map depicting The Village of Govan in 1837, which he drew up in 1906.



Private James Chaplin

A medical student at Glasgow University, born in 1899 in Govan, James was the son of a Provision Merchant and attended Govan High School. In 1916 he took the first of his courses at GU but, despite having the ability to apply for study exemption, he enlisted as a private in the 14th Battalion of the Highland Light Infantry. He died at Arras on 27th March 1918. He was 19 years old.



Second Lieutenant Andrew Russell Jeff

A civil servant with the Board of Agriculture in Edinburgh, Andrew was born in Coatbridge in 1898 to celebrated Govanites Mary Russell Watson and Andrew Jeff of 59 Greenhead Drive and later 17 George Drive, Govan. Both parents played key roles in the Govan Rent Strikes, Andrew as Chair of the South Govan Tenants Committee and Mary as one of a group of women who campaigned against evictions and orchestrated defence against the bailiffs. Mary was also the chair of the Ladies Section of the Govan War Memorial Committee. Commissioned in January 1916 with the 12th Highland Light Infantry, Andrew was killed in action on 13th August 1916 and is buried at Villers-Brettonneux Cemetery on the Somme.



Warrant Engineer Peter Fiskin

Born in Liverpool in 1867, Peter's parents returned to Glasgow and settled in Govan when he was a young child. A Warrant Engineer with the Royal Naval Reserves since 1905, Peter took part in the quelling of the Singapore Mutiny at the start of the war. In 1916 Peter was aboard HMS Hampshire on its voyage to Russia with Minister of War Lord Kitchener when it struck a German mine and sank. 643 of the 655 crew, including Peter, were lost, drowned or died of exposure. He is buried at Lyness Royal Naval Cemetery on Mainland Orkney.

HMS Hampshire.
Credit: Orkney Library and Archive.



Their Stories II

Further notable Govanites on the Roll of Honour



Private Lawrence Nealis

A shipyard labourer, born 20th June 1898 at 113 Brighton Street, Govan. Prefiguring Frederick Forsyth and a key plotting device from *The Day Of The Jackal* by nearly 60 years, Lawrence was 15 when he enlisted with the 3rd Royal Scots Fusiliers (Special Reserves) in 1913, but claimed to be 18, using as "proof" the birth certificate of an elder brother, also called Lawrence, who had died in infancy. He later became a regular soldier, still aged 15, with the 2nd Battalion of The Argyll & Sutherland Highlanders. Having already been wounded in the hand at 16, Lawrence was filling water bottles when he was shot and killed by a German sniper, five days after his 17th birthday. The Evening Times reporting on his death in July 1915 maintained that he "was only 20 years of age." Lawrence is buried at Ration Farm Military Cemetery, La Chapelle-D'Armentieres in northern France close to the Belgian border.



Second Lieutenant John Kennedy

A teacher at Govan High School, John was born on 1st July 1887, the son of a cabinet maker and grew up at 14 George Drive, Govan. After attending Glasgow University and the Glasgow Provincial Training College (an early version of Teacher Training College), John became a staff member at Govan High School. He was commissioned as a 2nd Lieutenant in The Cameronians (Scottish Rifles) in early 1917 but was listed as missing at Monchy le Preux on the Western Front, while attached to the 7th Battalion of the Border Regiment after only three months of service. He was 29 years old.



Private Bernard Connolly

Born in Govan in 1894, Bernard was a well-known and well-liked figure associated with St Anthony's Church and School and an employee of the Glasgow & South Western Railway. He joined up with the 10th Cameronians (Scottish Rifles) but was wounded and subsequently died of his wounds aged 21 on 29th September 1915.



Lieutenant James McGregor Hill

The Govan-born son of a ship-plater, James' early years were spent at the family home at 252 Langlands Road. He attended Fairfield Public School, later serving there as a Pupil Teacher, then attended Glasgow University and the Glasgow Provincial Training College, becoming a teacher at East Walker School in Newcastle in 1913. He gained his commission in the 2nd Northumberland Fusiliers shortly after the outbreak of war and fought on the Macedonian/Salonika Front (in the Struma Offensive). He died of his wounds on 10th November 1916 aged 27 and is buried in a single grave in the Mikra British Cemetery at Kalamaria, near Thessaloniki, in Greece.

No photo of James could be found.



Lawrence's Nephew Andrew Nealis & Niece Irene McMichael with his medals.

Their Stories III

Some Decorated Men of Govan



**Captain John
Alexander Harper**

A medical doctor in private practice in Govan, John was born on 14th April 1888 and spent his childhood at 8 Brighton Terrace, Ibrox. A gifted athlete as well as a prize winning academic, he went to France as a Medical Officer in the RAMC and was attached to the 7th Battalion of the Yorkshire Regiment in December 1915, then holding part of the Ypres salient. Here he gained the Military Cross for "conspicuous gallantry when leading stretcher bearers during operations. On one occasion when three of his bearers were wounded, he went alone under heavy fire to the aid post." He died aged 27 on 14th February 1917 and is buried at The Guards Cemetery, Combles in France, where his tombstone bears the simple inscription "He was loved."



**Sergeant George
Battison Smith**

Born in Govan in 1894, George lived at 3 Drumoyne Terrace and attended Govan High School, after which he became Assistant Librarian at Glasgow University. He joined the 9th Battalion of the Cameronians (Scottish Rifles), who fought at Loos in 1915, then through the Somme and Ypres. During this time George was awarded the Military Medal for exceptional bravery, the equivalent of the Military Cross for non-commissioned officers and men. On 19th October 1918, less than a month before the armistice, George died during the Allied advance through Belgium. He is buried in the Harlebeke New British Cemetery in West Flanders.



**Lieutenant-Colonel
Gavin Laurie
Wilson**

Born in the school house at Tillicoultry, Clackmannanshire on 13th October 1894, Gavin was a mining engineer before joining the Argyll & Sutherland Highlanders on 10th July 1915 and was a Battalion Machine Gun Officer at the Battle of Loos. By 1916 he had become a captain and was also married with a child, living at 78 Copland Road, Govan. Gavin was also wounded in action at the Somme in 1916, the same action gaining him a Military Cross. He went on to be awarded the Companion of the Distinguished Service Order, the Croix de Chevalier de la Legion D'Honneur and the Croix de Guerre, and he was twice mentioned in dispatches. During this time he also rose to the rank of Lieutenant Colonel. Gavin survived the War, but tragically died shortly afterwards of bronchitis at Etaples on 11th February 1919. He was still only 24 years old. Gavin's name does not appear on the War Memorial Roll of Honour.



**Sergeant Malcolm
McIver**

Malcom, who lived at 5 Shandon Street Govan, served with the 3rd Battalion of the Cameronians. He was awarded the Distinguished Conduct Medal in 1916 for conspicuous gallantry while operating as a stretcher bearer. Over the course of several days he carried wounded men back to Allied lines while under intense shellfire until he himself was wounded. He was later awarded a bar to the DCM, in 1917, again for conspicuous gallantry, again as a stretcher bearer, this time for taking out stretcher parties to No Man's Land to bring in wounded men. This required making several journeys during the night through heavily shelled areas. Malcolm survived the end of the War but died of his wounds on 11th January 1920. His name does not appear on the War Memorial Roll of Honour.

Their Stories IV

Govanites not on the Roll of Honour



Private Donald McNeill

Donald & Neil McNeill were two of four brothers (along with Archibald and Alex), and a brother-in-law, Hamilton McDiarmid, who served in the First World War. The McNeill family home was at 200 Brighton Street. Archibald, Alex and Hamilton all came home at the end of the War but Donald & Neil sadly did not. Donald was with the 2nd Battalion of the Cameronians when he died on 15 March 1916, and Neil was with the 16th Battalion of the Highland Light Infantry and died on the very first day of the Battle of the Somme. Neither Donald nor Neil appear on the War Memorial Roll of Honour.



Private Neil McNeill



Private John McDonald

A dock labourer at Glasgow Harbour, John enlisted with the 5th Battalion of the Cameronians in 1914. On 25th September 1915 he took part in the first day of the Battle of Loos when the British soldiers were mown down in waves by German machine guns, losing 90% of their complement in this single action. John, at 25 years of age, was one of the 800 men killed that day. John is not recorded on the Govan War Memorial Roll of Honour.



Sergeant Adam James Kennedy

Born at 57 Windsor Street (now Vicarfield Street) Govan on 24th April 1888, Adam enlisted with the 1st Battalion Gordon Highlanders and served on the Western Front at The Battles of Mons, Le Cateau, the Marne, the Aisne La Basse and Messines – all in 1914. He died on 17th November 1914 of wounds received at the First Battle of Ypres and he is buried at Poperinghe Old Military Cemetery in Belgium. Adam is not recorded on the Govan War Memorial Roll of Honour.

The Munitions Women

The majority of workers employed at the National Projectile Factories and National Filling Factories were women. Working in these munitions factories with high explosives could be very dangerous; it is recorded that 77 women were killed by explosions at National Filling Factories and two of these women, Agnes Heffernan and Marion Russell, were from Govan.

Neither Agnes nor Minnie have been found commemorated on any WW1 roll or memorial.

Agnes Heffernan

Agnes was born in Bolton, England in 1899, daughter of Michael Heffernan and Mary Keenan. Agnes was only 17 years old when she was fatally injured due to a shell explosion at Georgetown National Filling Factory in Renfrewshire. Agnes sadly died as a result of her injuries at the Victoria Infirmary in Glasgow on 26th April 1917. Agnes' usual residence was 116 Mclean Street, Plantation where she lived with her parents.

Marion (Minnie) Russell

Born on 5th April 1888 in Kilmarnock to Walter Russell and Agnes Weir. Minnie aged 28 was living with her mother at 3 Aboukir Street, Linthouse when she was fatally injured after an explosion of a detonator at the Cardonald National Filling Factory on Meiklewood Road in Drumoyne. Minnie sadly died as a result of her injuries at Glasgow's Western Infirmary on 29th May 1917.

