

**A Sutherland Man
Fear à Cataibh**



Robert McBeath VC

1897-1922

Nar Cuimhne

Front Cover

This photograph was likely taken in February 1918 either as a wedding portrait or at the time of the Buckingham Palace award ceremonies. (*Original owned by Angus MacKay, Scourie*)

There are two Gaelic phrases on the cover. “Fear à Ca-taibh” means “A Sutherland Man”. “Nar Cuimhne” can be translated as “In Our Memory” or “Always Remembered”.

Acknowledgements

At Kinlochbervie High School, over the last several years, Paula Macleod and I have been researching the life of Robert McBeath. During this time we have amassed many images. My primary objective in putting together this short book was to share these images.

A great many people have helped us in our quest and I would like to thank everyone for their support. I would especially like to acknowledge four people: George Doull (the former Chair of the Kinlochbervie Community Council) who first told me about Robert McBeath, Steve Gibson (retired Vancouver police officer) who shared a great many documents with me and helped establish a continuing link between Kinlochbervie and Vancouver), Kenny White (an Inverness native who told us about the death registration thus solving the final piece of the puzzle about Robert McBeath’s birth) and Paula Macleod (my work colleague at Kinlochbervie High School—we are a team and we wouldn’t be where we are today without her). Finally, I would like to thank Murdo MacPherson who edited this small book.

*Margaret Meek
2nd Printing
September 2017*

Introduction

This is the story of a man who rose from the humblest of circumstances to lead a most extraordinary life. Robert Gordon McBeath was born in 1897 in Fraserburgh, a fishing village in the northeast of Scotland. His birth name was Robert Shepherd. His mother, Williamina Shepherd was a local woman who was separated from her husband. His father is unknown but his last name was likely McBeath,

As a very young boy, Robert was brought to Kinlochbervie by Barbara MacKenzie, an unmarried local woman in her 30s. He grew up speaking Gaelic and considered Kinlochbervie his home.

At the outbreak of World War One, Robert lied about his age and enlisted. He was awarded the Victoria Cross for his courageous actions during the Battle of Cambrai in 1917. He was 19 years old.

After the war, Robert and his new wife Barbara emigrated to Canada. In 1921, he joined the Vancouver Police Department and one year later was fatally shot whilst on duty. His funeral was the largest ever held in Vancouver up to that time. Robert was 24 years old.

Upon being awarded the Victoria Cross, the local newspaper, the Northern Times, reported that "the daring deeds that gained for him the V.C. are just in keeping with the daring

spirit he has shown all through his life". His friends were not surprised and remarked "So like Bob".

When asked in Kinlochbervie about his heroic acts, he is reported to have replied: "It is only a fool like myself that would do what I did".



Fig. 1. Robert McBeath in uniform probably early 1918

(Source: Highlander Museum, Fort George near Inverness)

The Very Early Years

In Kinlochbervie, it is said that Robert McBeath was brought back from the East Coast by Barbara MacKenzie, an unmarried local woman in her 30s. As was common at the time, Barbara worked on the East Coast during the herring season as a gutter and packer “in the fishing”. It was there that she met Robert’s mother—also a herring worker. Unable to care for her young son, Robert’s mother gave him to Barbara in an informal adoption. Robert grew up in Kinlochbervie; he spoke Gaelic and English, attended Inshegra School and enlisted in World War 1 at the earliest opportunity.

Although the details of Robert’s birth eluded researchers for many years, the publication of the 1911 census made it possible to narrow the quest. The puzzle was finally solved when death registrations were published online by the British Columbia Archives.

Robert Gordon McBeath was born in the Scottish fishing village of Fraserburgh on 5 December 1897. His birth name was Robert McBeath Gordon Murison OR Shepherd. His mother was Williamina Shepherd (maiden surname Murison). The name of Robert’s father was not recorded. Williamina declared that her husband Robert George Shepherd, a tin case maker, “is not the father of the child” and “that she has not been living with her husband for several years”.

Using Scottish birth and census records, it is possible to identify eight children that were born to Williamina Shepherd. Robert was the second-youngest.

In the 1891 census, Williamina and her husband were living together in Fraserburgh with their four children. A few years later, the couple separated and her husband moved to Dundee with the children. Williamina stayed in Fraserburgh where she had four more children between 1894 and 1904. There are no fathers recorded on any of the certificates and Williamina declared that her husband was not the father.

In the 1901 census, three-year old Robert Shepherd is listed as a “boarder” in Strichen (8 miles south-west of Fraserburgh) in a household headed by widow Isabella Mutch. His mother Williamina is living alone in Fraserburgh and is employed as a herring and whitefish worker.

Robert came to Kinlochbervie some time between 1901 (when he was in Strichen) and around 1905 (when his mother Williamina moved to Dundee). In the 1911 census, Robert was living in Kinlochbervie as the “adopted son” of Barbara MacKenzie.

Figs 2, 3 and 4 show Robert’s birth certificate and the 1901 census entries for Robert Shepherd and his mother Williamina Shepherd.

More detailed information about Robert’s birth family may be found in the Appendix.

No.	Name of Infant	When and Where Born	Sex	Name, Signature, or Rank or Profession of Father, Name, and Maiden Name of Mother, Date and Place of Marriage	Signature and Qualification of Informant, and Parish or Part of the House in which the Birth occurred
385	Robert M. Beattie Gordon, Marison & Shepherd	1897 December Fifth A.H. 2911 P.M. Rath Street Fraserburgh	M	Williamina Marison, married on 7 th September 1882 to Robert George Shepherd, Saddlemaker, who we declare is not the father of the Child & further that she has not been living with her husband by usual ties	Williamina Marison & Shepherd Mother

Fig. 2. Birth Certificate
Fraserburgh

Name	Relationship	Marital Status	Occupation	Age	Place of Birth
Isabella Mutch	Head	Widow	45 Keeping on own means		D ^o Kinnedburgh
Glennie Mutch	Daughter		17 Scholar		D ^o Murrich
Lizzie B. H. Mutch	Daughter				D ^o D ^o
Alexander Mutch	Son				D ^o D ^o
Robert Shepherd	Boarder				D ^o Kinnedburgh

Fig. 3. 1901 Census—Robert Shepherd
Strichen—8 miles south-west of Fraserburgh

No.	Name	Relationship	Marital Status	Age	Occupation	Place of Birth
41	James	Son		24	out door worker	Workar
42	Williamina Shepherd	Wife	Mar	36	Washing White Hat Maker	do
	James Beale	Head	Mar	37	Baker	do
	Catherine	Wife	Mar	28		do Peterhead

Fig. 4. 1901 Census—Williamina Shepherd
Fraserburgh

Growing Up in Kinlochbervie

Robert McBeath was a very young boy (perhaps only 3 or 4 years old) when he came to live in Kinlochbervie. His adoptive mother, Barbara MacKenzie, had been born into a family of fishermen and crofters. At the time of Robert's adoption, she lived with her widowed mother and her brother Robert—a fisherman.

Robert was known locally as Bobby Dodie and then simply as Bob. He grew up in Dog Street in the centre of the village and later moved to Burnside. In 1912, his adoptive mother married Hugh McIntosh, the local postman.

Many people today can still remember Barbara (Babac Rhuadh), Barbara's brother Robert (Rob Rhuadh) and Barbara's husband Hugh (Hoodle). (Figs. 6–9) The trio lived in two houses in Burnside—Barbara and her brother Robert in one and her husband Hugh in the other. (Figs. 10 and 11) By all accounts, Hoodle took great interest in his postman job and was the news centre of Kinlochbervie. (Fig. 12)

Robert has been described as a fearless daredevil who was always up to tricks. Cathel

Morrison of Kinlochbervie has related a story where Robert put a bucket on the horns of a bull. He and his friends then watched as the bull went mad trying to get the bucket off. When the fun was over, it was Robert who dared go back to the bull and remove the bucket.

At the time of winning the Victoria Cross, the Northern Times reported that Robert had always had a "daring spirit". He was seen as a "quiet and true comrade, until he is roused". As an example of one of his youthful deeds, the newspaper spoke of an incident where Robert and some of his friends intended to blow something up with gunpowder that they had acquired. The scheme literally backfired and they very nearly blew themselves up, sustaining facial injuries.

Robert grew up speaking Gaelic and attended Badcall Inchard School (Fig.13). By the time he was 13, his attendance was less regular and he went to work at Duartbeg Farm near Scourie.

Barbara Mackenzie	5	Head	42	5/3	St	Fish Worker 1921	20 Herring Fishing	St	St
Barbara D.		Mother	74	5/2	76 ⁰			St	St
Robert D.		Brother	38	5/3	St			St	St
Robert Mack McBeath		adopt adopt Son	13	5/3	1	Gardener (Casual)	19		
Williamina Munro		Visitor	72	5/3	76 ⁰	School			

Fig. 5. Excerpt from 1911 Census Kinlochbervie
(Source: <http://www.scotlandspople.gov.uk>)

Kinlochbervie in the Early 20th Century



Fig. 6. The Burnside area of Kinlochbervie.
McBeath's house is in the picture.



Fig. 7. Badcall Inchar near Kinlochbervie.
McBeath attended school nearby.

Burnside and Dog Street—where Robert lived



Fig. 8. Kinlochbervie—Burnside
Late 19th Century



Fig. 9. Kinlochbervie—Early 20th Century
Dog Street in foreground, Burnside at rear

Burnside Houses Today



Fig. 10. Robert McBeath lived in this house in Burnside with his adoptive mother Barbara MacKenzie and her brother Robert.



Fig. 11. Hugh McIntosh' house
Barbara McKenzie and Hugh McIntosh were married in 1912 but maintained separate houses next door to each other.

Hugh McIntosh and Inshegra School



HUGH MACINTOSH, POSTMAN FOR ACHRIESGILL.

Fig. 12. Hugh McIntosh (known as Hoodle) delivering the post in the 1940s
(Source: *Achriesgill—A Story of Real People*, date unknown)



Fig. 13. Badcall Incharde School which Robert attended (now Old School House Rooms and Restaurant)

World War One

In 1914, Robert was working on Duartbeg Farm near Scourie. As soon as war broke out, he and his friend Alex MacDonald from Scourie travelled to Golspie to join up and enlisted in the 5th Battalion of the Seaforth Highlanders on 12 August 1914.

McBeath said he was 19 years old instead of his true age of 16. He gave his occupation as shepherd.

The battalion left almost immediately to train in Bedford, England along with a massive contingent of 20,000 Highland men. They were sent to France in May 1915.

McBeath received a gun shot wound in November 1916 at the Battle of Ancre Heights (part of the Battle of the Somme). After four months recovering in England, he returned to the Western Front. He was promoted to Lance Corporal on 24 July 1917.

McBeath earned the Victoria Cross for his actions on 20 November 1917—the first day of the Battle of Cambrai. The battle began at 6.20 a.m. McBeath's battalion (1/5 Seaforth Highlanders) was part of the 51st (Highland) Division. The Seaforths met with early success and were able to penetrate part of the Hindenburg Line. (See Fig. 15 for map of Battle of Cambrai).

When approaching the day's final objective (the capture of the village of Ribecourt), the company encountered a pocket of enemy machine gun fire. Robert answered the call for volunteers and set off alone towards the enemy dugout armed with a Lewis Gun and a revolver and supported by a tank. His actions were pivotal in the capture of Ribecourt.

According to the War Diary entry for that day, "the situation in the village of RIBECOURT was not entirely cleared up and a patrol under L/Cpl. R. MACBEATH which was sent out to reconnoitre captured 5 Machine Guns, killing and capturing 30 of the enemy, including 2 Officers". (Fig. 17)

As a result of his heroic actions, Robert was awarded the Victoria Cross. The official announcement was made in the London Gazette on 11 January 1918. He was the youngest Scottish Victoria Cross recipient during World War 1 and the only one from Sutherland.

The citation (Fig. 16), describing his actions, reads:

"For most conspicuous bravery when with his company in attack and approaching the final objective, a nest of enemy machine-guns in the western outskirts of a village opened fire both on his own unit and on the unit on the right. The advance was checked and heavy casualties resulted.

"When a Lewis gun was called for to deal with these machine-guns, L./Cpl. McBeath volunteered for the duty, and immediately moved off alone with a Lewis gun and his revolver. He located one of the machine-guns in action, and worked his way towards it, shooting the gunner with his revolver.

"Finding several other hostile machine-guns in action, he, with the assistance of a Tank, attacked them and drove the gunners to ground in a deep dug-out. L/Cpl. McBeath, regardless of all danger, rushed in after them, shot an enemy who opposed him on the steps, and drove the remainder of the garrison out of the dug-out, capturing three officers and thirty men.

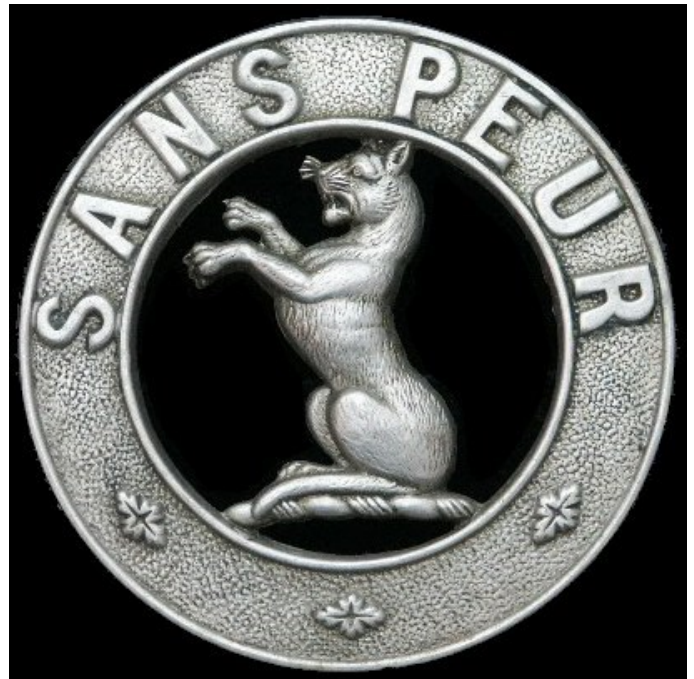
“There were in all five machine-guns mounted round the dug-out and by putting them out of action he cleared the way for the advance of both units.

“The conduct of L./Cpl. McBeath throughout three days of severe fighting was beyond praise”.

Following the announcement, Robert was granted leave and returned to the U.K. The Northern Times gave a glowing account of Robert’s actions at the Battle of Cambrai. Robert told the newspaper when he stopped off in Golspie on his way to Kinlochbervie that he had been armed with a Lewis gun, a revolver and an apron with a “capacious” pouch full of bullets. A tank followed behind.

The newspaper went on to say that he moved “by devious ways – twistings, crawlings and turnings” towards the dugout. He entered an opening, killed a German soldier just inside the opening and caught the other Germans by surprise. They surrendered and left via a second opening in the dugout – where the British tank was waiting. (*Northern Times, 24 January 1918*).

(See Fig. 16 for an extract of the battalion’s War Diary for 20 November 1917 and Fig. 17 for the full citation as announced in the London Gazette)



*Fig. 14. Cap badge of the Seaforth Highlanders.
The motto translates as “Without Fear”.*

The Battle of Cambrai November—December 1917

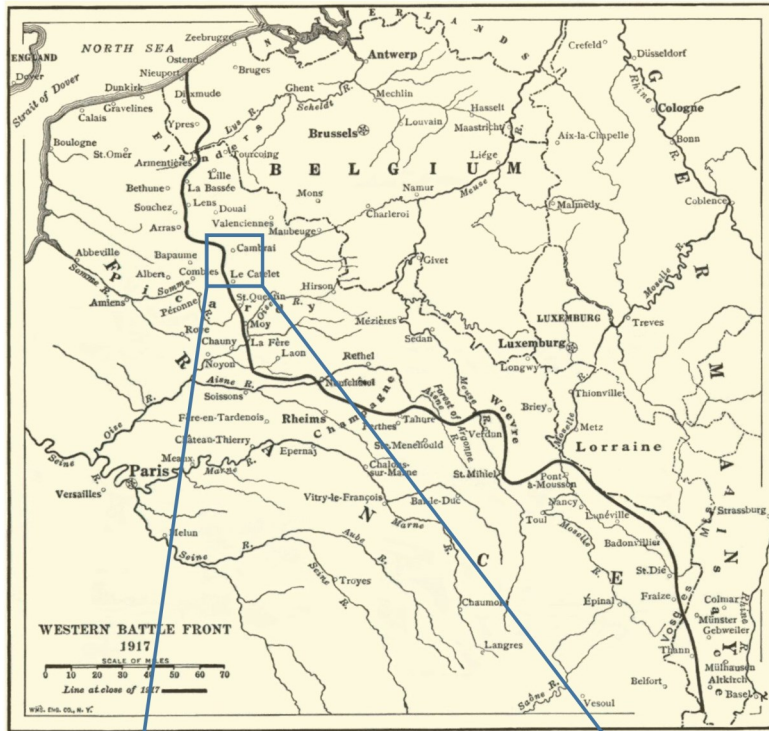
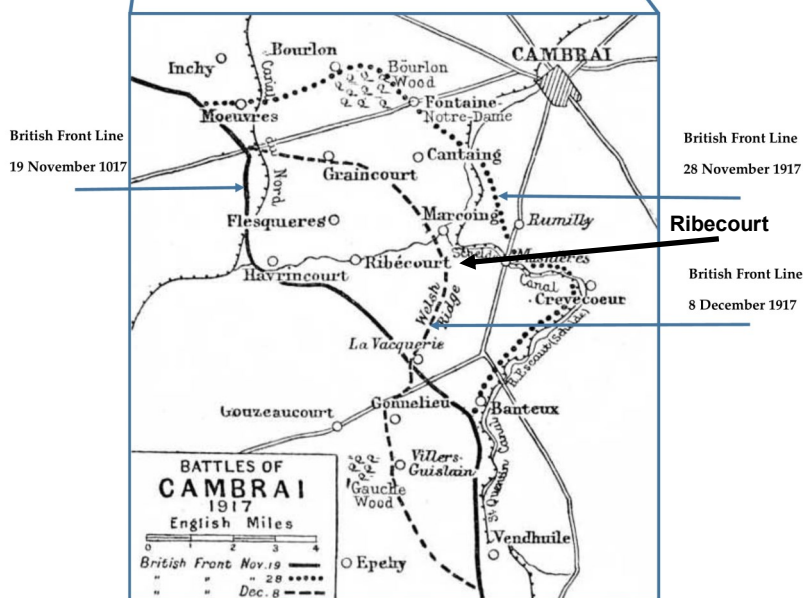


FIG. 17.

Source: <http://alphahistory.com/world-war-1/world-war-i-maps>



Source: <http://www.westernfrontassociation.com>

Fig. 15. Battle of Cambrai showing Ribécourt and surrounding villages as well as the front line on 3 dates.
(Sources indicated on map)

Excerpt from War Diary
1/5 Btn Seaforth Highlanders
20 November 1917

1/5th Bn. SEAFORTH HIGHLANDERS.

ACCOUNT of OPERATIONS

on

20th November, 1917.

ASSEMBLY. At 11 a.m. 19th November, 1917, two Platoons each of "A", "C" and "D" Coys. moved into assembly positions and by 12 midnight had filled in three places in the BRITISH FRONT LINE and three places in STAFFORD SUPPORT to allow a free passage for the TANKS. At the request of the TANK COY. Commander, three passages were made across STAFFORD RESERVE, it being feared that the 6th GORDON HIGHLANDERS would not have time to do the work. All gaps were reported very satisfactory by the Tank Commander. Besides this, six gaps were cut in our own wire to facilitate passage of Infantry.

At 12 midnight, 19th/20th November (Y/Z Night) the Battalion less the above six Platoons, moved into assembly position via WINCHESTER VALLEY and SHAFTESBURY AVENUE.

The Battalion was reported in position by 3.25 a.m. 20th November.

There were no casualties during the Assembly.

ADVANCE. ZERO hour was 6.20 a.m. and our guns opened out promptly at that hour; at the same time the two sections for the GERMAN OUTPOST LINE advanced behind the TANKS which were then about 100 yards in advance of the BRITISH FRONT LINE. The above two Sections captured their objective without resistance.

At ZERO + 15 minutes, "C" and "D" Coys. advanced behind the TANKS which were then about 300 yards ahead and with practically no opposition captured the GERMAN FRONT LINE, TRIANGLE SUPPORT, and MOLE TRENCH by ZERO + 2 hours, 35 mins. Touch was maintained with the 1st LEICESTERSHIRE REGT, on the RIGHT and the 8th ARGYLL & SUTHERLAND HIGHLANDERS on the LEFT in each of the above objectives. "C" and "D" Coys. captured 4 Machine Guns and 220 Prisoners, 12 of whom were Officers.

Places where TANKS had crossed the GERMAN trenches were at once filled in, wire cut, and passages for all arms were made, the men working with extraordinary vigour.

At ZERO + 1 hour, "A" Coy. left STAFFORD SUPPORT in artillery formation. A few light shells were falling in No Man's Land but no casualties were sustained here.

Gaps in the wire were easily found and crossed, and having passed over the GERMAN FRONT LINE, TRIANGLE SUPPORT and MOLE TRENCH, "A" Coy. made a short pause at the GRAND RAVINE to allow the TANKS to get ahead. At this point the above Company was slightly troubled with rifle and Machine Gun fire but the enemy shelling was very light.

The GRAND RAVINE was easily crossed and from this time onwards, "A" Coy. advanced in extended order. A Machine Gun firing from K.30.b.6.3. threatened to be troublesome but it was effectively dealt with by the RIGHT Platoon of "A" Company.

"A" Coy's objective, THE RAILWAY, was reported taken at ZERO + 2 hours, 50 mins.

At this time, the situation in the village of RIBECOURT was not entirely cleared up and a patrol under L/Cpl. R. MACBEATH which was sent out to reconnoitre captured 5 Machine Guns, killing 3 and capturing 30 of the enemy, including 2 Officers. Touch was gained with the 1st Bn. LEICESTERSHIRE REGIMENT on the RIGHT at RIBECOURT STATION and with the 8th ARGYLL & SUTHERLAND HIGHLANDERS on the LEFT. Over 30 TANKS were seen to have crossed the line of the Railway.

Shortly afterwards, an enemy aeroplane flew very low over the RAILWAY EMBANKMENT and "A" Company - who had dug in, in depth - withdrew their front, two platoons from the RAILWAY to a line 200 yards in rear where

they dug in with the other two Platoons. Shortly afterwards, the line of the RAILWAY was shelled.

Battalion Headquarters moved forward to MOLE TRENCH at ZERO + 4 hours, 15 mins, and telephonic communication was established with Brigade Headquarters and Companies.

The line was then reorganised and the dispositions were as follows:- "A" and "B" Companies in depth behind the RAILWAY, "C" Company in MOLE TRENCH, and "D" Company in TRIANGLE SUPPORT.

<u>TOTAL CASUALTIES.</u>	<u>Officers.</u>	Killed.	Nil.
		Wounded.	1.
		Missing.	Nil.
	<u>O.Ranks.</u>	Killed.	4.
		Wounded.	20.
		Missing.	Nil.
<u>TOTAL PRISONERS.</u>	<u>Officers.</u>	14.	
	Other Ranks.	250.	

Fig. 16. Account of Operations 20 November 1917

(Source: Highlander Museum,
Fort George near Inverness)

Award of Victoria Cross
London Gazette 11 January 1918

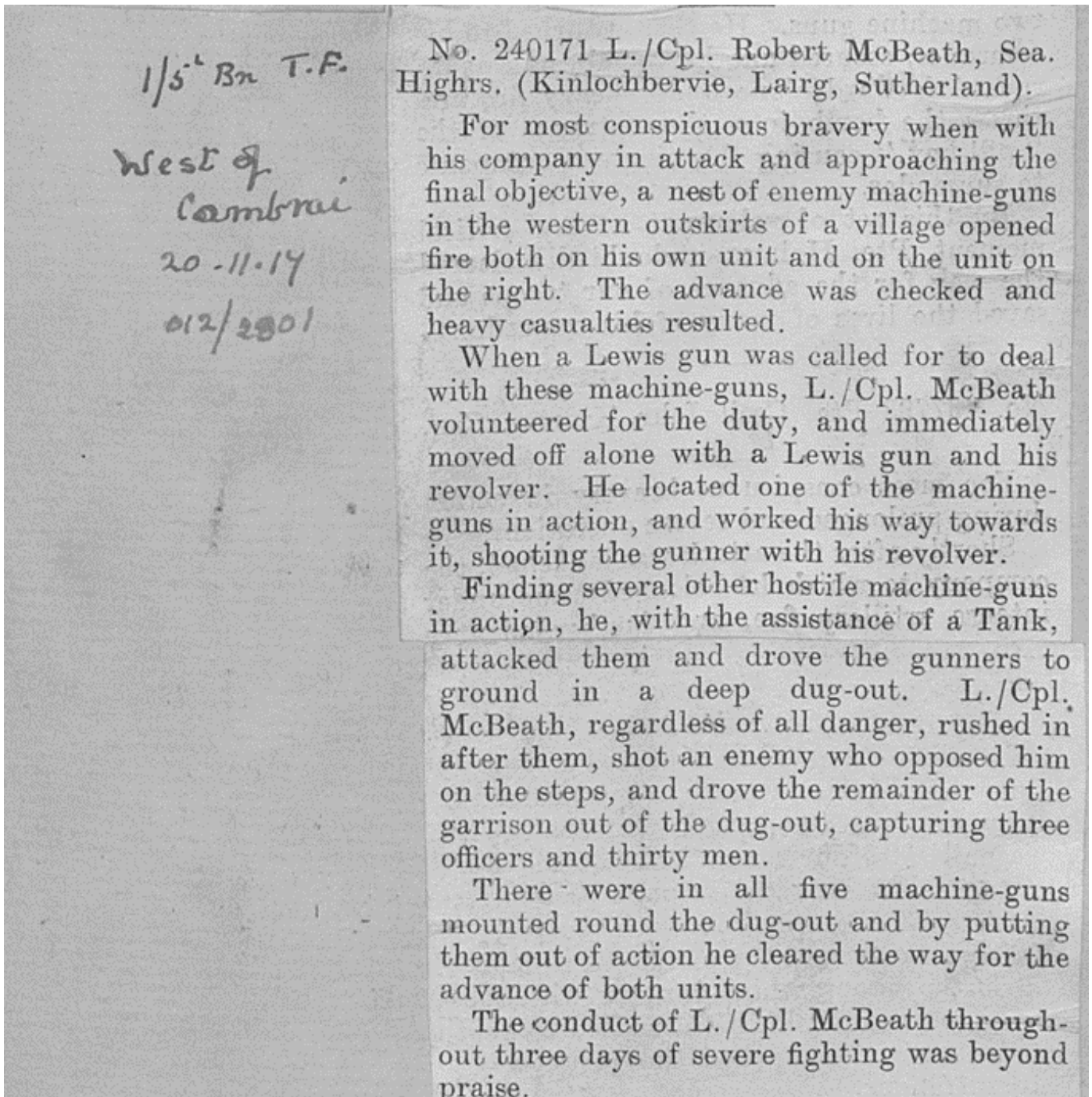


Fig. 17. Award of the Victoria Cross to Robert McBeath
London Gazette 11 January 1918
(Source: Online records at <http://www.ancestry.co.uk>)

Photographs from 20 November 1917

The photographs in the next several pages are part of the collection held by the Imperial War Museum (IWM) in London. Figs. 18 to 24 were taken on 20 November 1917 in the vicinity of Ribecourt and show the 51st (Highland) Division. Fig. 25 was taken three days later in the village of Flesquières which is about one mile from Ribecourt; it is a posed photograph of men shaving but displays a calm that is in contrast to the earlier photographs. Finally, Fig. 26 was actually taken during the Battle of the Somme but was chosen for inclusion here because it depicts a Lewis gun in use.



Fig. 18. Troops of the 4th Battalion, Gordon Highlanders (51st Division) crossing a trench. Ribecourt, 20 November 1917. (Source: IWM, Q6278)

20 November 1917—On Way to Front Line



Fig. 19. Men of the 51st (Highland) Division crossing a captured German communication trench near Ribecourt on their way to the front line, 20 November 1917. (Source: IWM, Q6287)



Fig. 20. A British tank of the type which supported McBeath crossing a trench on its way to take part in the Battle of Cambrai, November 1917. (Source: IWM, Q6285)

20 November 1917– Ribecourt and Prisoners



*Fig. 21. Ribecourt immediately after capture.
20 November 1917. (Source: IWM, Q6272)*



*Fig. 22. German prisoners captured by the 51st (Highland) Division.
Near Ribecourt. 20 November 1917. (Source: IWM, Q6289)*

20 November 1917– German Prisoners



Fig. 23. Wounded German prisoners, captured by the 51st Division, as well as British wounded. Near Trescault—just over 2 miles from Ribecourt. 20 November 1917. (Source: IWM, Q6281)



Fig. 24. Troops of the 51st (Highland) Division with German prisoners close to the former German front line in the Cantaing-Flesquières area. 20 November 1917. (Source: IWM, Q6276)

Men Shaving Three Days Later and Lewis Gun In Action



Fig. 25. Three Days Later: Men of the 51st (Highland) Division in Flesquières . 23 November 1917. (Source: IWM, Q6324)



Fig. 26. A Lewis machine gun in action. This photo was taken during the Battle of the Somme but is the type of gun carried by McBeath during his action at the Battle of Cambrai. (Source: IWM Q3987)

Return and Celebration

Following the announcement in the London Gazette, Robert was immediately given a month's leave. This was extended several times and eventually he was released from active service on 26 February 1918. Although Robert remained in the military until 1919, he never returned to the Front. His life, however, changed dramatically.

The Northern Times (17 January 1918) printed the citation from the London Gazette in full (Fig. 16) under the headline:

*Victoria Cross for Sutherland Man
Conspicuous Bravery Recognised*

At the same time, two Golspie women, Jean MacDonald of the Sutherland Arms Hotel and Helen Macaulay of Bank House, started a campaign to raise funds to honour McBeath. They argued that "such bravery should not be allowed to pass into the region of memory only, without suitable recognition of his indomitable pluck and disregard of personal danger, which resulted single-handed in the breaking up of a particularly strong and dangerous enemy post, and the capture of 3 enemy officers and 30 men besides numerous guns". (*Northern Times*, 17 January 1918)

Heading home from France in January 1918, Robert made short stops in London (where he had been invited to the house of the Duke and Duchess of Sutherland) and also in Edinburgh (where he met members of the Highland Societies of Edinburgh). But heavy snows throughout the north meant that he had to abandon the last leg of his journey—the part between Lairg and Kinlochbervie. Instead, he chose to continue on the train to Golspie where the headquar-

ters of his battalion was located.

The headline in the Northern Times (24 January 1918) read:

*Sutherland V.C. in Golspie
His Hopes of Reaching Home Not Realised
Roads All Snowblocked*

Jean MacDonald and Helen Macaulay made sure he had a hero's welcome. He was met by a piper from the Seaforth Highlanders and a car to take him to the Sutherland Arms Hotel. He spent a few days visiting various dignitaries and being shown around the area including a visit to Golspie High School and the offices of the Northern Times.

Under the sub-heading "*Always a Daring Spirit*", much of the article was devoted to a description of McBeath's character and personality. The newspaper reported that "those who knew the V.C. intimately say that the daring deeds that gained for him the V.C. are just in keeping with the daring spirit he has shown all through his life. 'Bob', as he is familiarly called by his intimates, was up to all sorts of pranks in his young days. He was the leader in every ploy".

The newspaper concluded that "the daring temperament that the V.C. has shown all through his military career is but a development of his youthful exhibited daring.

'So like Bob', his friends remarked, when they read the official account of his daring". (*Northern Times*, 24 January 1918)

On Saturday 12 February 1918, there was a celebration for Robert McBeath in Golspie. The evening began with speeches and telegrams and then moved on to a musical programme and dance. (*Northern Times, 14 February 1918*)

One of the evening's speakers called Robert a "Gaelic speaking man and a genuine Highlander". Another said that "he is a young man, a quiet and true comrade, until he is roused, when he seems fit to carry out any deed of derring do".

Jean MacDonald and Helen MacAulay of Golspie had worked hard in the preceding weeks to raise funds to honour Robert McBeath. On this evening, he was presented with a gold watch and chain as well as war bonds totalling a value of £367.

In giving thanks for the presentation, Robert said that "whatever I have done to have the V.C. given to me, thousands of men in the British Army have done, and are doing every day". He thanked the people of Golspie for the kindness they had shown not just to him but "to all soldiers who have the luck to come north again".

An interesting footnote is that £18 was collected on the night to help meet the costs of soldiers travelling from Lairg to the north and west coasts.

Andrew Lindsay, the Convenor of Sutherland, called it a "disgrace" that "men had to tramp away for distances of 50 or 60 miles after travelling night and day from the fighting lines".

The gold watch (*Fig. 32*) was engraved as follows:

PRESENTED
WITH WAR STOCK CERTIFICATE
BY
THE PEOPLE OF SUTHERLAND
TO
LANCE CORPORAL R. MCBEATH
5TH SEAFORTH HIGHLANDERS
IN RECOGNITION OF
THE GALLANTRY AND HEROISM
WHICH WON HIM
THE COVETED V.C.
JANUARY 1918

Ceremony at Buckingham Palace

After the event in Golspie, Robert returned to London where four days later, on 16 February 1918, he received his Victoria Cross at Buckingham Palace from King George V. The award was widely reported in various national papers. The Scotsman newspaper gave a particularly succinct account of McBeath's actions.

"The Victoria Cross was conferred upon Robert McBeath, Seaforth Highlanders. McBeath located a nest of enemy machine guns and

attacked them, single-handed at first, and then with the assistance of a Tank crew, and was instrumental in the capture of some 33 German officers and men". (*The Scotsman, 18 February 1918*)

The Victoria Cross was ultimately bequeathed to a family member and donated to the Highlander Museum at Fort George near Inverness. (*Fig. 28*)



Fig. 28. Victoria Cross awarded to Robert McBeath
(Source: Highlander Museum, Fort George near Inverness)

Marriage to Barbara MacKay

On 19 February 1918, only three days after the investiture at Buckingham Palace, Robert married Barbara MacKay of Drumnaguie at the Palace Hotel on Princes Street in Edinburgh.

(See Figs. 29 and 30)

On their marriage certificate (*Fig. 31*), Robert gave his age as 20 and his usual residence as Burnside, Kinlochbervie. He was on active service as a Lance Corporal of the 1/5 Seaforth Highlanders. The space for his parents was blank.

Barbara MacKay gave her age as 18 and her usual residence as Drumnaguie, Kinlochbervie. Her parents were listed as John MacKay (deceased) and Williamina Morrison.

Barbara's father John was a fisherman who had drowned off Sheigra in 1900 leaving a very young family. Barbara's mother Williamina remarried and had several more children with her second husband, Hugh MacLeod. The family eventually settled in Badcall near Scourie.



Fig. 29. Robert McBeath's wife, Barbara MacKay, was born in this house in Drumnaguie near Kinlochbervie. (Source: Kinlochbervie High School)



Fig. 30. Barbara MacKay at the time of her marriage to Robert McBeath. (Source: Photograph loaned by Angus MacKay, Scourie)



1861-1921
 Extract of an entry in a REGISTER of MARRIAGES
 Registration of Births, Deaths and Marriages (Scotland) Act 1965

53551

No.	1 When, where and how married	2 Signature of parties, rank or profession, whether single or widowed and relationship (if any)	3 Age	4 Usual residence	5 Name, surname and rank or profession of father Name and maiden surname of mother	6 If a regular marriage, signatures of officiating minister and witnesses If irregular, date of conviction, Decree of Declarator or Sheriff's warrant	7 When and where registered and signature of registrar
68	1918 on the nineteenth day of February at Palace Hotel Castle Street Edinburgh After solemn according to the Form of the Service Book of the Church of Scotland	Signs Robert McBeath Shepherd Lance Corporal 1/5th Seaforth Highlanders Bachelor Signs Barbara MacKay Spinster	20	Kirkcaldy - Berris on active service	— — — Mungie John MacKay Kirkcaldy - Berris (deceased) Williamina MacKay Mrs. Morrison	Signs Patrick R. MacKay D. S. — — Signs John MacKay Fisher John McKay Witness P. Macfarlane Registrar Witness Witness	1918 February 20 Edinburgh

The above particulars are extracted from a Register of Marriages for the District of Saint Andrew in the Burgh of Edinburgh of 2 July February 2001
 Given under the Seal of the General Register Office, New Register House, Edinburgh on



The above particulars incorporate any subsequent corrections or amendments to the original entry made with the authority of the Registrar General.
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 This extract is evidence of an event recorded in a register of marriages. It is NOT evidence of the identity of the person presenting it.

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Fig. 31. Entry in Register of Marriages for Robert McBeath and Barbara MacKay

Did Robert know his birth name?
 The column for parents' names on the marriage certificate is blank. But there is a hint that he may have known his original name. The first line for the groom's name says "Robert McBeath" and the second line says "Shepherd". Does this mean that his name was "Robert McBeath Shepherd" or that his occupation was a shepherd? Both statements are accurate but it is impossible to determine the truth as there is no consistency in the way the Registrar recorded information on the marriage certificates.

Robert's death registration certificate in 1922, however, shows that he knew his birth name and his mother's name. Did he always know? Or did he find out at some point in his life?

Robert was the second-youngest of Williamina's eight children. It is likely that the older ones knew about Robert while he may have known nothing of them. When he received the Victoria Cross, it may be that one or more of his siblings contacted him. This seems the likely answer but we will probably never know.

Return to Kinlochbervie

It had been a busy few days for Robert McBeath. He was celebrated at a ceremony in Golspie on 12th February, awarded the Victoria Cross in London on 16th February and got married in Edinburgh on 19th February. Immediately after the wedding, Robert and Barbara McBeath returned home to Kinlochbervie where a celebration was held on 23 February — only four days after the pair had married.

On 7 March 1918, the Northern Times reported the evening's event in full under the headline:

*The Kinlochbervie Hero:
Presentation by Parish of Eddrachilles*

Over £60 had been raised in Eddrachilles — the largest sum ever for a single cause. On the night, the McBeaths were presented with £50 and a promise that the balance would be used to purchase a silver tea set that would be inscribed to commemorate their marriage. (Fig. 33)

The presentation was made by Robert's old schoolmaster Alexander Macrae who joked about his lively ways. "He is still in appearance what he was — a quiet and unassuming young man, but beneath his calm exterior when once aggravated there is a veritable Volcanic 'Stroke'.

"Little did I think when Bobbie McBeath was sitting in the lower benches of my school making Scotch love to my assistant teacher in my absence that I would have to look up to him this evening and salute him. We are proud of him as a man. We are proud of him as a soldier. We are proud of him as a Highlander and we are proud of him as our own Kinlo-

chbervie hero — Our Own V.C. who has brought renown not only to himself, his regiment, to the county of Sutherland, to the Highlands in general but to far away and unknown Kinlochbervie".

Back in Golspie, the Sutherland V.C. Fund continued to collect donations during February and March. Eventually the fund set up by the two women from Golspie (Jean MacDonald and Helen MacAulay) raised over £600 with more than 1,200 individual contributions — mainly from communities throughout the whole of Sutherland. The vast support given to the Fund demonstrates how proud the people of Sutherland were of their "own V.C."

Watch and Silver Tea Set



Fig. 32. Gold watch presented to Robert McBeath in Golspie in February 1918 using money contributed to the Sutherland V.C. Hero Fund. (Source: Vancouver Police Department)



Fig. 33. Silver Tea Set presented by the people of Eddrachilles Parish to Robert and Barbara McBeath to commemorate their marriage. (Source: Bequeathed to family member and loaned by Angus McIntosh of Portskerra to Kinlochbervie High School for exhibition in 2009.)

Demobilisation 1919

After winning the Victoria Cross, Robert remained in the Seaforth Highlanders but never returned to France. He was promoted to Lance/Sergeant in November 1918 and demobilised in March 1919. His service records show a Vancouver home address at the time of demobilisation—a clear indication that he already intended to move to Canada.

In commemoration of his demobilisation, popular Canadian poet Robert Service presented him with a signed copy of his book *Rhymes of a Red Cross Man*. (See Fig. 34) Robert Service had grown up in Scotland and emigrated to Canada around the turn of the century. While he is

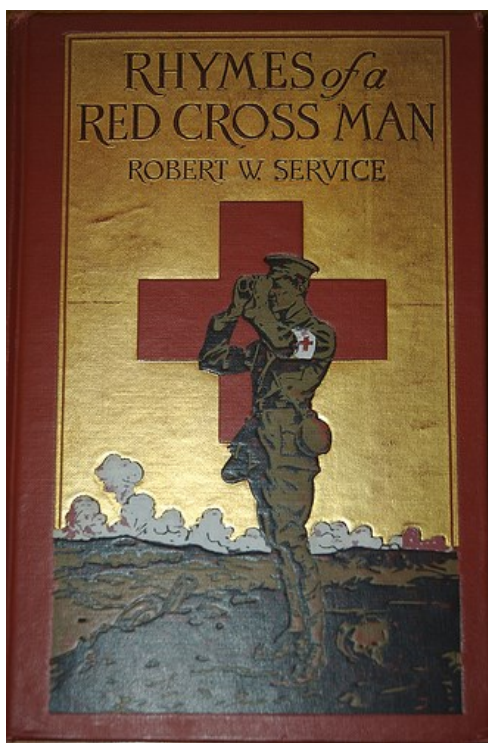


Fig. 34. Cover of *Rhymes of a Red Cross Man*
(Source: widely available on the internet)

best known today for his poems about the Yukon Gold Rush in Canada, he also wrote about his experiences as an ambulance driver in World War 1 where he would have faced the same sort of conditions as McBeath.

In a signed copy of *Rhymes of a Red Cross Man* that he presented to McBeath, Robert Service wrote:

*“This book *The Soldier’s Immortality* I present to you Robert McBeath V.C. as a memento of this day on your demobilisation with every good luck. R. W. Service March 3rd 1919”.*

There is a further inscription after the poem entitled “Carry On”:

“To Robert McBeath may these words be your watchword through life...”

The final stanza of the poem reads:

Carry on! Carry on!

Fight the good fight and true;

**Believe in your mission, greet life with a
cheer;**

**There’s big work to do, and that’s why you
are here.**

Carry on! Carry on!

Let the world be better for you;

And at last when you die, let this be your cry

Carry on, my soul! Carry on!

Emigration to Canada

At the time of winning the Victoria Cross, Robert stated that he intended to take up the Duke of Sutherland's offer of a holding in Sutherland. (*Northern Times*, 31 January 1918). His desire to emigrate, however, was confirmed when four months after demobilisation in March 1919, the *Northern Times* reported that he hoped instead to apply for a holding on the Duke of Sutherland's lands in Alberta. (Source: *Northern Times*, 17 July 1919).

On 8 August 1919, Robert and Barbara sailed from Liverpool on the SS Corinthian. They gave their ages as 21 and 19. Robert stated that he had been a farmer in Scotland and intended to be a farmer in Canada. The couple arrived in Montreal 11 days later where a special CPR train met the boat to transport immigrants westward. Their intended destination was Vancouver.

Upon arrival in Vancouver (Fig. 35), Robert worked at the Coughlan Shipyards (Fig. 36) and at various odd jobs. He also joined the 72nd Battalion of the Seaforth Highlanders in Vancouver. (Fig. 37) There are also unconfirmed reports that the couple invested in a sheep farm in Canada and lost all their money.

Although Robert and Barbara were already married, Robert purchased an engagement ring in Vancouver from Birks Jewellers. Barbara eventually bequeathed it to a family member still in its original box. (See Fig. 38)

(Sources for this section: *Northern Times*, *Ship's Manifest* available on findmypast.co.uk, *Vancouver City Archives*, *Vancouver City Directories*, *Census of Canada 1921*)



Fig. 35. Looking north towards downtown and the mountains 1921

Photo taken from the World Building at Pender and Beatty. (Source: *City of Vancouver Archives*)



Fig. 36. Coughlan Shipyards 1918

Robert worked here when he first arrived in Vancouver. (Source: *City of Vancouver Archives*)



Fig. 37. Upon his arrival in Vancouver, Robert joined the 72nd Battalion of the Seaforth Highlanders of Canada. The photo to the left is part of a group photo taken in September 1919 of the Guard of Honour to the Prince of Wales. Robert is standing in the centre of the front row. (Source: *City of Vancouver Archives*)



Fig. 38. Engagement Ring. Although already married, Robert purchased an engagement ring from Birks Jewellers in Vancouver. (Source: *Bequeathed to family member and loaned by Angus McIntosh of Portskerra to Kinlochbervie High School for exhibition in 2009.*)

Vancouver Police Department

In August 1921, two years after arrival in Canada, Robert joined the Vancouver Police Department. The group photo (Fig. 41 at bottom of page) was taken two months later. Fig. 40 (to the right) is a close-up from the group photo. In Fig. 39, Robert is possibly standing in front of his house. Figs. 42 and 43 on the next page depict Vancouver policemen of the period.



Fig. 39. Robert McBeath in uniform and wearing his war medals. (Source: Internet, undated)



Fig. 40. Robert McBeath in the front row of the 1921 Vancouver Police Department group photo. He is wearing all his medals. (Source: Vancouver Police Department)

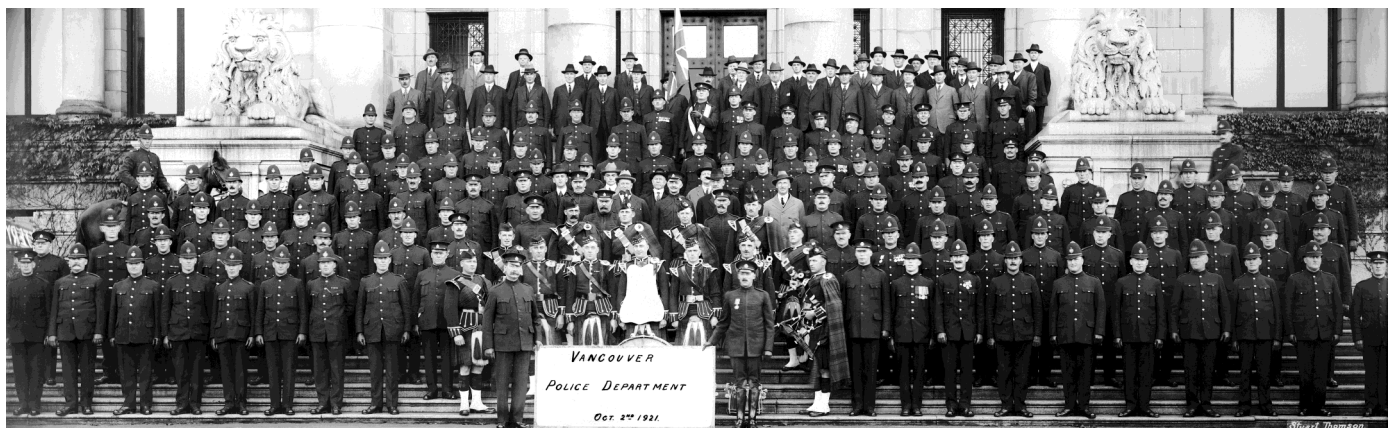


Fig. 41. City of Vancouver Police Department. October 1921. (Source: Vancouver Police Department)

Vancouver Police Constables



Fig. 42. Directing traffic on Granville Street. 1917.
(Source: City of Vancouver Archives)



Fig. 43. Vancouver Police Constables. About 1924.
(Source: City of Vancouver Archives)

Death on Granville Street

In the early hours of 9 October 1922, Robert's life came to a tragic end in a manner usually associated with crime thrillers.

Constable McBeath and Detective Richard Quirk were at the corner of Granville and Davie Streets (*Figs 44a & 44b*) at 2.00 am when they noticed a car being driven erratically. Quirk stated at the inquest (held the next day) that "it was driven in a very erratic manner, zigzagging from one side of the street to the other and the horn was getting sounded as if someone was leaning over it".

Thinking the occupants were drunk, McBeath ordered the driver to stop; instead, the car turned around and started to speed away. McBeath and Quirk jumped on the running boards and the driver stopped a short distance down the block.

The driver was Fred Deal—a 30-year-old black American (*Fig. 45*) and his passenger was Marjorie Earle—a local prostitute who was very well known to police. (*Fig. 46*) Quirk reported at the inquest that both occupants were drunk. This was disputed, however, by some witnesses who said that while Earle was definitely drunk, Deal could walk a straight line.

McBeath arrested Deal and started walking him to a nearby police call box. A struggle ensued and Deal opened fire, shooting McBeath in the chest and through his heart. McBeath loosened his grip immediately and Deal ran off with Quirk in pursuit.

During the chase, Deal managed to shoot Quirk through his hand and shoulder of his coat, causing him to fall down. McBeath staggered over but collapsed without speaking.

Quirk resumed his pursuit of Deal and fired four shots. Deal eventually escaped down a lane and Quirk returned to McBeath. A passing taxi driver drove him to a nearby hospital where he died 10 minutes later.

Other police constables were soon at the scene. They chased Fred Deal up and down a series of streets and lanes and arrested him about 30 minutes later. Deal had thrown his gun away but it was found the next day.

Marjorie Earle was not charged but was held as a witness. At the inquest, she said that she had been very drunk and didn't remember anything. She did admit to ownership of both the car and the gun.

She told the inquest that she kept the fully-loaded gun under her mattress and didn't know that Deal had taken it. She refused to say where she got the gun. At Deal's trial the following month, she testified that it was a police revolver that had been given to her by a high-ranking officer.

Four shots were fired from Marjorie Earle's gun and four from Detective Quirk's gun. Robert McBeath's gun had not been fired.

The post-mortem examination showed that the bullet had passed through his heart, liver and right kidney. Death was from haemorrhage and shock.

(Sources: *Coroner's Report 1922; The Murder of Constable Robert McBeath V.C. in Blue and Gold Magazine, date unknown; and Black and Blue, Life and Death from <http://pattensvancouver.com>*)

Granville Street 1920s



Fig. 44a. Granville Street 1920.
(Source: City of Vancouver Archives)



Fig. 44b. Granville Street at Davie 1928
(Source: City of Vancouver Archives)

Fred Deal and Marjorie Earle

Fred Deal (*Fig. 45*) was a 30-year old black American from Florida. Employed by Earle, he was often seen in her company. Marjorie Earle (*Fig. 46*) operated a brothel on Granville Street and was well known to police. On the night of McBeath's murder, she had been drinking heavily and claimed she remembered nothing. She was not charged but was a witness at the inquest and at Fred Deal's trial. The Vancouver Province referred to her as a "notorious character of the underworld". (*Sources: Coroner's Inquest; Vancouver Province*)



Fig. 45. Fred Deal. Photo from booking sheet.

(Source: Vancouver Police Department)



Fig. 46. Marjorie Earle. Photo from booking sheet.

Source: Vancouver Police Department)

Coroner's Inquest Into the Death of Robert Gordon McBeath

The inquest into Robert McBeath's death was held the following day (10 October 1922). Testimony was heard from a variety of witnesses, including Detective Richard Quirk who had been with McBeath, Marjorie Earle, the doctor who had attended to him at the hospital, the doctor who performed the post-mortem and the police officers who had been involved in the eventual arrest of Fred Deal and the discovery of the gun that he had thrown away. The verdict of the inquest was that Robert McBeath "came to his death between 2:20 and 3:00 o'clock on October 9th, 1922, in St. Paul's Hospital, Vancouver, B.C., as the result of a bullet wound".

Below is part of Detective Quirk's testimony:

"I threw my left hand out and caught the gun, the muzzle of the gun in my hand and we struggled for control of the gun. At the end, of course, I received a shot and one or two more after. In the struggle I fell on the ground; I was stung by the bullet and on recovering I saw Constable McBeath coming towards me and he fell right across my body. I lifted him off me and I said, "Are you hurt, Mac?" And his lips just moved, then he coughed".

"I believe the first shot got Constable McBeath for he released his grip, but he sure done his very best. I have got to admire him for that; he kept on his feet and I believe that he was just conscious enough coming towards me to know that I was put out, to come and help me, when he gave in. He was shot right through the chest, around the heart, I believe".



Fig. 47. Detective Richard Quirk
(Source: Vancouver Police Department)

Newspaper Report

On the day that Robert died, the Vancouver Province published an extensive story. The headlines were:

BRAVE SCOT IS MURDERED ON STREET

**Constable Robert McBeath
Shot Down on Davie Street
Early This Morning**

**Fred Deal, Negro, Identified
And Charged with Crime—
Remand Ordered**

**Detective Quirk—Wounded
Twice in Struggle With
Crazed Chauffeur**

**Slain Constable Won Victoria
Cross in France by Deed
of Great Heroism**

The story included this poignant description about Robert's personal life:

"The neat home of the McBeaths contains many trophies of the military and athletic history of the constable. His war medals consist of the Victoria Cross, Mons Medal and two service medals. On the mantelpiece stands a handsome silver cup won by McBeath at the Seattle police sports for the half-mile race. One of the most treasured things in the home is a silver tea service presented to Mr. and Mrs. McBeath on the occasion of their marriage in

Scotland by their friends. The officer carried a gold watch and chain which, with £367, was given him by the citizens of Golspie, Sutherlandshire".

An old friend, Mr. C. Skinner, said of Robert McBeath:

"He was one of the bravest, best-natured chaps I ever knew. He would share his last dollar with a friend. He knew no fear, and I readily understand how he would be a mark for the gun of a criminal. As his friends knew him, he was just a big, good-hearted boy, full of high spirits, generous, and one who always looked on the bright side of life".




Fig. 48. Robert McBeath's War Medals photographed shortly after his death (Source: Vancouver Police Department)

Death Registration

Fig. 49 is the death registration for Robert McBeath. His father is "McBeath" and his mother is "Mina Shepherd". His date of birth is 5 December 1897. These facts confirm that Robert McBeath was born as Robert McBeath Gordon Shepherd and that he knew his birth name.

N.B.—WRITE PLAINLY WITH UNFADING INK—THIS IS A PERMANENT RECORD. Every item of information should be carefully supplied. AGE should be stated EXACTLY. PHYSICIANS should STATE CAUSE OF DEATH in plain terms, so that it may be properly classified. Exact statement of OCCUPATION is very important. RACIAL ORIGIN will be described by stating to what race or people the deceased person belonged whether English, Irish, Scotch, French, German, etc. The terms "American" or "Canadian" must not be used as they express citizenship but not a Racial origin. See instructions on back of Certificate.



FORM 6. PROVINCE OF BRITISH COLUMBIA 88020
CERTIFICATE OF REGISTRATION OF DEATH

If in Municipality _____ Name _____ Registered No. 99-91-22
(For use of Registrar of Vital Statistics only)

If in City or Town Vancouver Street _____ House No. _____
Name

If in hospital or institution, give name St. Pauls Hospital

2 NAME OF DECEASED Robert Gordon MacBeath

Residence 1308 Howe St.
(Usual place of abode)

PERSONAL AND STATISTICAL INFORMATION				MEDICAL CERTIFICATE OF DEATH	
3 SEX <u>M. Scotch</u>	4 RACIAL ORIGIN <u>Scotch</u>	5 Single, Married, Widowed or Divorced (Write the word) <u>Married</u>		20 Date of death <u>October 9th</u> 19 <u>22</u> <small>(Month, day and year)</small>	
6 BIRTHPLACE (Province or Country) <u>Scotland</u>				21 I HEREBY CERTIFY, that I attended deceased from <u>inquest</u> 19 <u>22</u> to <u>Oct 10th</u> 19 <u>22</u> that I last saw h. <u>alive</u> on _____ 19 <u>22</u> and that death occurred on the date stated above, at <u>3 A.</u> m.	
7 DATE OF BIRTH (month, day and year) <u>Dec 5-1897</u>				The CAUSE OF DEATH was as follows: <u>Homicide by a 173</u> <u>revolver shot wound</u>	
8 AGE Years <u>24</u> Months <u>10</u> Days <u>4</u> <small>If less than one day, hrs. or min.</small>	9 LAST OCCUPATION OF DECEASED (a) <u>Police Constable</u> <small>(Trade or occupation or kind of work) (Kind of industry)</small>			(duration) _____ yrs. _____ mos. _____ dys	
10 FORMER OCCUPATION OF DECEASED (a) _____ (b) _____ <small>(Trade or occupation or kind of work) (Kind of industry)</small>				CONTRIBUTORY <u>Hammacher & Stock</u> <small>(Secondary) (duration) _____ yrs. _____ mos. _____ dys.</small>	
11 LENGTH OF RESIDENCE (In years and months) (a) At place of death _____ (b) In province <u>3 years</u> (c) In Canada (if as immigrant) <u>3 years</u>				22 Where was disease contracted if not at place of death? <u>See David's residence 110 St.</u>	
12 Name of father <u>MacBeath</u>				Did an operation precede death? <u>No</u> Date of _____	
13 Birthplace of father <u>Scotland</u> <small>(Province or country)</small>				Was there an autopsy? <u>Yes</u>	
14 Maiden name of mother <u>Mina Shepherd</u>				(Signed) <u>Thomas J. Gormley</u> M.D.	
15 Birthplace of mother <u>Scotland</u> <small>(Province or country)</small>				Address <u>1200 1/2th Avenue</u>	
16 Informant's name <u>Barbara MacBeath</u>				Date <u>October 11th 1922</u>	
Address <u>1308 Howe St.</u>				State the Disease causing Death, or in death from Violent Causes, state (1) Means and Nature of Injury, (2) whether Accidental, Suicidal or Homicidal.	
17 Relationship to deceased <u>Wife</u>				23 District Registrar's Record Number <u>265</u>	
18 Place of burial, cremation or removal <u>Mountain View Cemetery</u> Date of burial <u>Oct. 12th 1922</u>				24 Filed <u>12th</u> Oct. 19 <u>22</u> <u>J. Mahony</u> <small>District Registrar</small>	
19 Undertaker <u>Death of Hanna P. H.</u>					

SEC. 46—Vital Statistics Act makes it the duty of the Undertaker or person acting as Undertaker to obtain all the particulars required in the "Certificate of Registration of Death" and to file the same with the District Registrar who shall issue the burial permit. (OVER)

Fig. 49. Death Registration for Robert McBeath. (Source: British Columbia Archives)

Funeral

On 12 October 1922, in the largest funeral held up to that date in Vancouver, Robert McBeath was buried with full civic and military honours. Many stores and offices closed and thousands lined the route of the procession. As he was buried, the Police Pipe Band played the lament *Lochaber No More*.

Robert belonged to the Freemasons, having joined in Inverness on 12 July 1919, a month before emigrating to Canada. His funeral was held in the Masonic Temple.

Fig. 50 below is the death notice and *Fig. 51* in the right column is an obituary which has been published on the website of the Grand Lodge of British Columbia and Yukon. It contains a detailed description of the very large funeral procession. *Figs. 52-54* are from a Vancouver Police Department film.

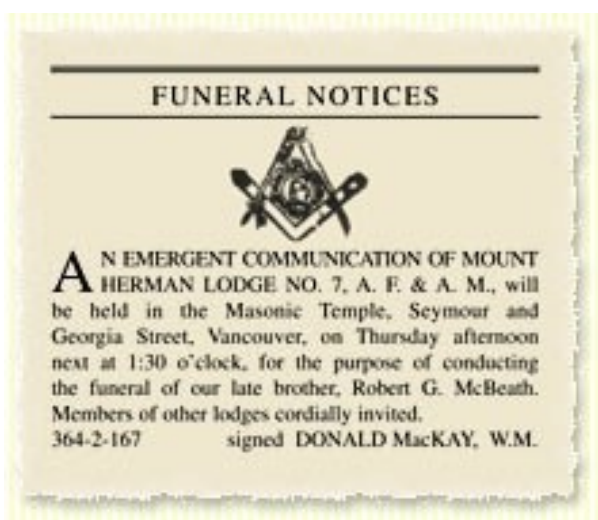


Fig. 50. Death Notice
(Source: Vancouver Province)

Robert Gordon McBeath **Died October 9th, 1922, aged 23**

Robert Gordon McBeath was awarded the Victoria Cross for single handedly capturing an emplacement of five machine guns during the battle of the Somme, in Cambrai France, on November 20, 1917.

He joined the Vancouver Police Force on August 12, 1921, and little more than a year later, at 2:30 in the morning of October 9th, 1922, he was shot at close range while apprehending one Fred Deal of Florida at the corner of Davie and Granville Streets, dying shortly after being admitted to Saint Paul's Hospital.

Constable McBeath's funeral procession, attended by thousands, was one of the largest ever held in Vancouver. Led by Vancouver Police Inspector George Hood on horse back and two other mounted policemen, the procession included the Vancouver Police Pipe Band, his widow Barbara in a hearse, the mayor and council members, 377 freemasons, eighty members of the Vancouver Police led by Chief Constable James Anderson, one hundred members of the Vancouver Fire Department, twelve members of the Royal Canadian Mounted Police in scarlet uniform, fifty members of the Seaforth Highlanders Regiment Vancouver, a contingent from the Irish Fusiliers of Canada, several hundred World War One veterans, forty members of the BC Electric Railway, twelve members of the Canadian Pacific Police, several hundred members of the Foresters, St. Andrews, and Caledonia Societies and also several hundred members of the public.

Fig. 51. Obituary as published on website: http://freemasonry.bcy.ca/biography/mcbeath_r/mcbeath.html



Fig. 52. Funeral Procession. Screenshot from film. (Source: Vancouver Police Department)



Fig. 53. Funeral Procession. Screenshot from film. (Source: Vancouver Police Department)



Fig. 54. Crowds at funeral procession. Screenshot from film. (Source: Vancouver Police Department)

Grave

Robert McBeath was buried in Mountain View Cemetery in Vancouver (Fig. 55).



Fig. 55. Grave of Robert McBeath, Vancouver. (Source: Kinlochberrie High School)

Fred Deal Sentenced to Death

Fred Deal was tried in November less than a month after McBeath's murder. He claimed that both McBeath and Quirk had beaten him while police witnesses claimed that he had been beaten whilst in custody.

Deal was sentenced to be hanged but was granted a new trial the following January in light of his claims of brutality and racism. At the second trial, he was convicted of manslaughter and sentenced to life imprisonment. He is said to have been a model prisoner and was deported to his native Florida in 1938. (Fig. 56)

VANCOUVER B. C. POLICE DEPARTMENT

No. 8899 F. I. U 00 10

CRIMINAL RECORD 1 U 00

NAME Fred Deal *B26 Pen 2778*

ARRESTS AND CONVICTIONS

Arr. Oct. 9/22 (Sgt. Tuning & P.C. 91) Murder. C. J. J. 12th

Charged with the murder of P.C. 98 Robt. McBeath, V.C. whilst being placed under arrest.

Also charged with attempted murder of Det. R.S. Quirk.

Evidence taken as applicable to both charges.

To Hang - Jan. 26/23 - (Nov. 9/22) To have new trial =

Mar 15/23 - Found guilty of manslaughter - (B.P. 2778)

Jury out for more than 10 hours -

(Judge McDonald) sentenced to Life Imprisonment = APR 6 1923

Released for deportation May. 30/38. —

Fig. 56. Criminal Record for Fred Deal (Source: Vancouver Police Department)

Barbara Returns to Scotland

In December 1922, only two months after Robert's death, a homesick Barbara returned to Scotland on the SS Metagama. She gave her intended address as Badcall, Scourie. This is where her mother lived. (Fig. 58)

Barbara and Alec lived at "Cnochbehalich" in Scouriemore. While he and Barbara had no children, they both had brothers and sisters in Scourie and Kinlochbervie as well as many nieces and nephews.

Barbara remarried in 1924. Her second husband, Alexander MacDonald from Scourie, was the same Alex MacDonald who had worked with Robert McBeath at Duartbeg Farm when they were teenagers and the same Alex MacDonald who joined up with Robert in August 1914.

Barbara died in 1946 at the age of 47.

Name of Ship "METAGAMA" Steamship Line, CANADIAN PACIFIC.		Port of Arrival GLASGOW		Date of Arrival DECEMBER 23rd 1922		P.M. 23.		Whence Arrived ST JOHN, N. B.												
NAMES AND DESCRIPTIONS OF BRITISH PASSENGERS																				
(1) Port of Embarkation	(2) Port at which Passengers have been landed	(3) NAMES OF PASSENGERS (SURNAME FIRST)	(4) PROPOSED ADDRESS IN THE UNITED KINGDOM	(5) CLASS (Whether 1st, 2nd, or 3rd)	(6) Profession, Occupation, or Calling of Passengers	(7) AGES OF PASSENGERS						(8) Country of Last Permanent Residence?	(9) Country of Intended Future Permanent Residence?							
						Adults of 12 yrs. and upwards	Children between 1 and 12	Infants	Country of Last Permanent Residence?	England	Wales		Scotland	Ireland	British Possessions	Foreign Countries				
		53 MAC BEATH, BARBARA	Badcall, Scourie, Lairg,	"	None,	25														1

Fig. 58. Passenger List Extract from the SS Metagama.

Arrival in Scotland is 23 December 1922.

(Source: www.findmypast.co.uk)

Discovery of Robert's Watch

Among the personal possessions that Barbara McBeath took with her when she returned to Scotland was the Victoria Cross and other war medals, the engagement ring and the silver tea set. For reasons unknown, however, the watch was left behind.

In 2013, in a lucky twist of fate, the watch turned up in Vancouver and is now with the Vancouver Police Department. The story is told in a Vancouver Police press release dated 29 November 2013.

"A mixture of good timing and coincidence has brought a fallen officer's watch to the Vancouver Police Department, and ultimately the Vancouver Police Museum.

"Constable Don Tymchyshyn was off-duty and having a drink at a local pub when he overheard a conversation about an antique watch that once belonged to Vancouver Police Constable Robert McBeath who was killed in the line of duty in 1922.

"The constable approached the man who was speaking. Soren Lyth told him that his father had been a watchmaker and the watch had been in their family for 30 years. The family was not sure where the watch came from and when they tried to do some research, they didn't find anything".

Figs. 59 and 60 show the front and rear of the watch; the photos were taken at Vancouver Police Headquarters.



Fig. 59 . Engraved face of watch.
(Source: Vancouver Police Department)



Fig. 60. Watch face.
(Source: Vancouver Police Department)

Legacy of Robert McBeath—Vancouver

Robert McBeath continues to be remembered by the Vancouver Police Department. The lobby of Police Headquarters is a tribute the force's fallen officers. (Fig. 61)

The main patrol boat of the Police Marine Unit is called the R.G. McBeath. (Figs. 62 and 63) Launched in 2008, it helps patrol over 100 miles of coastline.



Fig. 61. Lobby of Vancouver Police Headquarters. Robert McBeath's photo is at the far left. (Source: Kinlochberrie High School)



Fig. 62. R.G. McBeath. (Source: Vancouver Police Department)



Fig. 63. R.G. McBeath. (Source: Kinlochberrie High School)

Legacy of Robert McBeath—Kinlochbervie

In 1918, when Robert McBeath was honoured by the people of Eddrachilles parish, his old school master, Alexander Macrae told the audience:

“The recommendations of his commanding officers are well known to you all, will remain green in your memory, and I have no doubt will be rehearsed ad verbatim at many a fire-side ‘Ceilidh’ in the glens and corries throughout the western Highlands, and especially in the hamlets of our romantic parish, by generations yet unborn, when we are dead and forgotten”.

Sadly it was not to be the case. Over time the memory of Robert McBeath faded until hardly anyone in Kinlochbervie had heard of him.

The revival of Robert’s name in his home village of Kinlochbervie came about almost by accident. A local resident, on a visit to Canada, happened to read an article about McBeath in a police magazine and brought a copy back. Many local people were surprised to discover that a Victoria Cross winner had come from their village.

In the 1990s, George Doull, who was then the Chair of the Kinlochbervie Community Council, began to campaign for local recognition for Robert McBeath. When a new seven-house development was built (about 2000), it was named “McBeath Court”.

Since then, Kinlochbervie High School has taken up the challenge to honour Robert McBeath. It began in 2006 when the S3 History Class entered Channel 4 Television’s “Lost Generation Schools Competition”. The task was to “create a short project about the lost generation who fought in the First World War”. About 1,000 pupils participated nationwide. The school’s very moving Power Point presentation was the top Scottish entry and in the top 5 in the U.K. *Fig. 64* is a photo of the girls standing outside McBeath Court.



Fig. 64. S3 History Class.

(Source: Power Point Presentation, 2006)

The story of the S3 History Girls was published in the Sunday edition of a major Vancouver newspaper under the heading “Teens Want Cop’s Legacy to Endure”. (*Vancouver Province, 4 June 2006*) This was the beginning of a continuing link with Vancouver. Emails of

support began to arrive at the school and from time to time, Canadian visitors came to see Robert's home village.

At the same time, we contacted Steve Gibson of the Vancouver Police Department who had been researching the life of Robert McBeath and had published a tribute on the internet; Mr Gibson provided us with a large number of scanned documents relevant to Robert's life in Vancouver. He was also pivotal in initiating a link between the school and the Vancouver Police Department.

The Vancouver Police Department made an amazing video for the people of Kinlochbervie. Narrated by Chief Constable Jim Chu, the film told the story of Robert's life and contained movie clips of the funeral procession. Special tribute was paid to the S3 History Girls' desire to remember Robert in Kinlochbervie.

In 2009, the high school embarked on a project to build a memorial cairn and hold an exhibition. The cairn was built by pupils under the supervision of master drystone waller George Gunn of Thurso. At the very top of the cairn are three stones from Robert's Burnside house. *Fig. 65* shows Kinlochbervie pupils building the cairn, *Fig. 66* shows the finished cairn and *Fig. 67* shows the plaque .

There was a large turnout to see the unveiling and attend the exhibition. As part of the un-

veiling ceremony, Vancouver musician Bruce Coughlan performed his song *Robbie McBeath* which he had written especially to honour Robert and his Kinlochbervie origins.

In 2010, the school installed an information board beside the cairn which tells the story of Robert McBeath. In addition, a picnic stop was created with the help of local volunteers.

Also in 2010, planning began for a school trip to Vancouver so that pupils could learn more about Robert's life and death in Canada. We received huge assistance from the Vancouver Police Department (particularly Steve Gibson and Jeff Campbell) and generous financial support from the Vancouver Police Pipe Band and others.



Fig. 65. Kinlochbervie pupils building the cairn.
(Source: Kinlochbervie High School)

Prior to the trip, Jeff Campbell initiated a project to build a memorial cairn in Vancouver that would be identical to the one in Kinlochbervie. Dedicated “in memory of our fallen colleagues”, our pupils brought three stones from Robert’s house to be built into the cairn and were honoured to participate in the official unveiling. (Figs. 67 and Fig. 68)

On our field trip in 2010 and again in 2014, pupils were warmly welcomed by members of the Police Department who organised various activities for the group. The pupils have been to Robert’s grave, toured the crime scene, visited the Police Tactical Training Centre, seen the watch, rode on the RG McBeath patrol boat, learned about Vancouver in the 1920s and been interviewed on the radio.



Fig. 66. Kinlochbervie Cairn
(Source: Kinlochbervie High School)



Fig. 67. Plaque on Cairn
The Gaelic words “Nar Cuimhne” can be translated as “Always Remembered”
(Source: Kinlochbervie High School)



Fig. 68. Kinlochbervie pupil piping in Vancouver
(Source: Kinlochbervie High School)



Fig. 67. Vancouver Cairn
(Source: Kinlochbervie High School)

Kinlochbervie pupils have also visited a Vancouver secondary school and were paired with Vancouver pupils for various police-sponsored excursions. In addition to learning about Robert's life in Vancouver, the trips have enabled young people to visit a major city on another continent and have experiences that are removed from the remote and rural place where they live.

In Kinlochbervie, we continue to research the life of Robert McBeath. The task has been made easier by the growing amount of information available on the internet—particularly genealogical and other databases—and the ease of email. We have been contacted by descendants of Robert's half-siblings and we have been sent new information and photos.

Our links with the Vancouver Police Department remain strong. A field trip later in 2017 will introduce another group of pupils to the city. In addition, current and retired police officers have made visits to Kinlochbervie as have members of the Vancouver Police Pipe Band.

In 2009, Vancouver musician, Bruce Coughlan, wrote a song entitled "*Robbie McBeath*" in which he calls him "the bravest of Sutherland men". He pays tribute to the two main chapters of Robert's life – a soldier in World War 1 and a police constable in Vancouver.

The last verse links the two places and reads:

"Now the flags are half-mast in Vancouver City

A sombre procession begins

To honour their Constable Robert McBeath

They've gathered in tribute to him

As you walk down the strand at Oldshoremore

As the sun sinks in to the west

Think on the bravest of Sutherland men

And of gallant young Robbie McBeath"

(Words by Bruce Coughlan)

The pupils of Kinlochbervie High School find it easy to identify with and be moved by Robert's story – a spirited teenager from an isolated rural place who followed his dreams. They are proud of him and feel a connection. His story also touches on many educational themes, including boy soldiers, World War 1, life in the northwest Scotland in the early 20th century and migration.

We hope that the real legacy of Robert McBeath is that "his spirit lives on".

Appendix

The Puzzle of Robert McBeath's Birth

Robert McBeath came to Kinlochbervie as a very young child but no one was able to say with certainty where and when he was born. "McBeath" is a relatively common name in north east Scotland and there were several possible candidates. It wasn't until the publication of the 1911 census that the search could be narrowed. When the death registration became available in an online database, his original identity as Robert Shepherd could be confirmed. Online databases also enabled the collection of data about Robert's birth family

Fig. 1 is his birth certificate, *Fig. 2.* is his death registration *and Fig. 3.* shows information about his half-siblings.

Robert Gordon McBeath was born in the Scottish fishing village of Fraserburgh on 5 December 1897. His birth name was Robert McBeath Gordon Murison OR Shepherd. His mother was Williamina Shepherd (maiden surname Murison). The name of Robert's father was not recorded. Further Williamina declared that her husband Robert George Shepherd, "is not the father of the child" and that "she has not been living with her husband for several years".

Robert's mother, Williamina Murison, was born in Fraserburgh in 1865. Her parents were William, a ship's captain and his wife Mary. Williamina married Robert George Shepherd in Fraserburgh in 1883. He was a tin case maker from the east end of London. By 1891, they had four children—Alexander (born in England) and Isabella, Christina and Henry (all born in Fraserburgh).

Around 1893, Robert Shepherd moved to Dundee taking the children with him. In the 1901 census, he was living there with the three youngest Shepherd children.

Alexander, the eldest, was not with them in Dundee but the 1901 census listed a 15-year old Alexander Shepherd who was born in England and was a "boy under detention" on the Empress Industrial School ship in the Firth of Clyde near Glasgow. This was a training ship for destitute or homeless boys and at this time prepared them for the Merchant Navy.

Back in Fraserburgh, Williamina Shepherd had at least four more children: James Barrie (born 1894), **Robert McBeath Gordon** (born 1897), William (born 1900) and Alister Barrie (born 1904). The last names of all four children was entered as "Murison or Shepherd". On all of the certificates, the space for the father's name was left blank. With the eldest child, however, Williamina pursued a successful paternity action and the father's name (James Barrie of Fraserburgh) was added as a "corrected entry".

In the 1901 census, Williamina was living alone in Fraserburgh and was a herring and white fish worker. The two eldest (James B. Murison and **Robert Shepherd**) were living as "boarders" in separate households in villages near Fraserburgh (Rathen and Strichen respectively). Her youngest child, William Murison, was only a few months old and had been informally "adopted" by a childless Fraserburgh couple.

Around 1905, Williamina moved to Dundee taking her youngest son Alister with her. In the 1911 census, Williamina was a jute worker in Dundee. Alister had died but her son James Murison (age 16) had moved to Dundee and was living with her.

What happened to the two boys that Williamina left behind (William and Robert) when she moved to Dundee?

Although William was adopted, his adoptive mother died the following year and attempts to find William in the official records have not yet been successful.

In the 1911 census, **Robert McBeath Gordon** was living in Kinlochbervie as the "adopted son" of Barbara MacKenzie. His name was shown as Robert McK McBeath. He arrived in Kinlochbervie sometime between 1901 and 1905.

Williamina reconnected with her husband and other children in Dundee in the mid-1890s but we don't know if they ever lived together again. Robert Shepherd died some time between 1906 and 1915.

Williamina died in 1933.

Did Robert know anything about his parents and siblings? On his marriage certificate in 1919, the place for parents was left blank. But on his death registration in 1922, his wife filled in his correct birth date and named his mother as Mina Shepherd and his father as simply McBeath. A likely scenario may be that members of Robert's birth family made contact after he won the Victoria Cross (an event that was widely reported in the newspapers).

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1897. BIRTHS in the Parish of Townburgh in the County of Angus

No.	Name and Surname	When and Where Born	Sex	Name, Situation, or Rank or Profession of Father, Name and Maiden Surname of Mother, Date and Place of Marriage	Signature and Qualification of Informant, and Birth date, if not of the House in which the Birth occurred
385	Robert McBeath Gordon Murison or Shepherd	1897 Dec. 1st Tifft Ch. o' M. P. M. Ball Street Townburgh	M	Williamina Murison, married on 7 th September 1888 to Robert George Shepherd, Townburgh, who the declarer is not the father of the child & further that she has not been living with her husband for several years	Williamina Murison or Shepherd Mother

Fig. 1. Birth Certificate of Robert McBeath Gordon Murison or Shepherd
(Source: www.scotlandspeople.gov.uk)

DISTRICT REGISTRAR'S OFFICE
RECEIVED
 OCT 12 1922
 DISTRICT REGISTRAR'S OFFICE

FORM 6. PROVINCE OF BRITISH COLUMBIA 88020
CERTIFICATE OF REGISTRATION OF DEATH

If in Municipality _____ Name _____ Registered No. *88-22*
 (For use of Registrar of Vital Statistics only)

If in City or Town *Vancouver* Street _____ House No. _____
 Name _____

If in hospital or institution, give name *H. Paul Hospital* _____
 2 NAME OF DECEASED *Robert Gordon McBeath* _____
 Residence *1308 Howe St.* _____
 (Usual place of abode)

PERSONAL AND STATISTICAL INFORMATION					MEDICAL CERTIFICATE OF DEATH		
3 SEX <i>M. Scotch</i>	4 RACIAL ORIGIN <i>Scotch</i>	5 Single, Married, Widowed or Divorced (Write the word) <i>Married</i>			20 Date of death <i>October 9th</i> 19 <i>22</i>	(Month, day and year)	
6 BIRTHPLACE (Province or Country) <i>Scotland</i>					21 I HEREBY CERTIFY, that I attended deceased from <i>inquest</i> 19 <i>22</i> to <i>Oct 10th</i> 19 <i>22</i> that I last saw h. alive on _____ 19 <i>22</i> and that death occurred on the date stated above, at <i>3 A.</i> m.		
7 DATE OF BIRTH (month, day and year) <i>Dec 5-1897</i>					The CAUSE OF DEATH was as follows: <i>Homicide by a 173 revolver shot wound</i>		
8 AGE	Years <i>24</i>	Months <i>10</i>	Days <i>4</i>	If less than one day. _____ hrs. or _____ min.			
9 LAST OCCUPATION OF DECEASED <i>Police Constable</i>					CONTRIBUTORY <i>Harmachy & Brock</i>		
(a) (Trade or occupation or kind of work) _____ (Kind of industry) _____					(duration) _____ yrs. _____ mos. _____ dys		
(c) From _____ to _____ (Date from which to which so employed)					(duration) _____ yrs. _____ mos. _____ dys		
10 FORMER OCCUPATION OF DECEASED					22 Where was disease contracted if not at place of death? <i>Cor David & Lawrence Ho.</i>		
(a) (Trade or occupation or kind of work) _____ (b) (Kind of industry) _____					Did an operation precede death? <i>No</i> Date of _____		
(c) From _____ to _____ (Date from which to which so employed)					Was there an autopsy? <i>Yes</i>		
11 LENGTH OF RESIDENCE (In years and months)					(Signed) <i>Thomas J. Kelly</i> M.D.		
(a) At place of death _____ (b) In province <i>3 years</i>					Address <i>1200 Blenheim St.</i>		
(c) In Canada (if an immigrant) <i>3 years</i>					Date <i>October 11th 1922</i>		
Parents	12 Name of father <i>MacBeath</i>					State the Disease causing Death, or in death from Violent Causes, state (1) Means and Nature of Injury, (2) whether Accidental, Suicidal or Homicidal.	
	13 Birthplace of father <i>Scotland</i>					23 District Registrar's Record Number <i>1265</i>	
	14 Maiden name of mother <i>Mrs. Thipud</i>					24 Filed <i>10th</i> Oct 19 <i>22</i> <i>Anthony</i> District Registrar	
	15 Birthplace of mother <i>Scotland</i>						
	16 Informant's name <i>Barbara MacBeath</i>						
Address <i>1308 Howe St.</i>							
17 Relationship to deceased <i>Wife</i>							
18 Place of burial, cremation or removal <i>Mountain View Cemetery</i>							
Date of burial <i>Oct. 12th 1922</i>							
19 Undertaker <i>Central of Hanna St. Vancouver, B.C.</i>							

SEC. 46—Vital Statistics Act makes it the duty of the Undertaker or person acting as Undertaker to obtain all the particulars required in the "Certificate of Registration of Death" and to file the same with the District Registrar who shall issue the burial permit. (OVER)

Fig. 2. Death Registration of Robert Gordon McBeath
 (Source: British Columbia Archives)

Robert Gordon McBeath and his siblings			
Name	Date of birth	Place of birth	Father
Alexander Shepherd	1885	England	Robert George Shepherd
Isabella Wiseman Shepherd	1886	Fraserburgh	Robert George Shepherd
Christina Cardno Shepherd	1888	Fraserburgh	Robert George Shepherd
Henry Fyfe Shepherd	1891	Fraserburgh	Robert George Shepherd
James Barrie Murison or Shepherd	1894	Fraserburgh	Father recorded as a corrected entry: James Barrie
Robert McBeath Gordon Murison or Shepherd	1897	Fraserburgh	Father not recorded
William Murison or Shepherd	1900	Fraserburgh	Father not recorded
Alister Barrie Murison or Shepherd	1904	Fraserburgh	Father not recorded

*Fig. 3. Robert Gordon McBeath and his siblings.
(Source: Compiled from information on www.scotlandspeople.gov.uk)*