

100 YEARS AGO (September 8, 1910)

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The proposal now afoot to erect a memorial to Sheriff McCulloch at Dornoch recalls the sad story of the most appalling drowning disaster which ever occurred in the North of Scotland. On the morning of a Tain Market day in 1809 a great crowd of Sutherland people, as usual, went over the Meikle Ferry, and in the evening they lined the beach and crowded into the ferry boat.

Sheriff McCulloch took his place in the stern of the boat and entreated the people not to overcrowd it, but, as they were anxious to get home, they would not be denied, and so, with gunwales all but flush with the calm water, the boat was pushed off.

About half-way over, the boat gave a sudden lurch and went down. A small boat quickly put off from the Tain side and one young hero on it plunged into the sea and, one after the other, he got four persons into this small boat but on his fifth attempt he was seized in the death grip by one of the struggling mass and drowned with the others. A record made at the time shows that 99 persons in all were lost - 43 men and 56 women. Twelve were saved. Of the drowned, 56 belonged to the town and parish of Dornoch, 24 to Creich, 10 to Golspie, 7 to Rogart and 2 to Lairg.

About the last body to be recovered was that of the popular Sheriff, and the particular spot where it lay was discovered in a dream. A friend of his dreamed that the Sheriff told him, among other particulars, where his body lay, and that no fish had touched his body, though they had mangled those of others. The spot was searched, and the dream was realised in every particular.

A Meikle Ferry Fund of nearly £3000 was raised for the sufferers, and this tragic story is still told with awe by the old people on the banks of the Kyle of Sutherland.