

DIGGER driver Mr George Ross expected to find a few old golf balls when he began clearing out the Witch's Pool on the Royal Dornoch course — but he was thunderstruck when out of the water came a heavy-calibre German gun from World War I.

But the mystery of the pool was soon solved by old soldiers in the area — and a tale unfolded of a night of drama in 1921.

Three captured horse-drawn guns were presented to Dornoch after 1918. Two were placed in front of the Drill Hall and one on the Cathedral Green.

World War II Seaforth Highlander Mr Jackie Grant remembers them as a child. "We used to play soldiers on and around them," he said. "But I remember the night the ex-Servicemen got oiled up in the town's Eagle Bar and decided to get rid of them."

"They considered that these guns might well have killed some of their mates."

## Here's how to hit the 17th hole at Dornoch

There were too many of the ex-Servicemen for the two police constables in the town to do anything about it, so the guns were trundled off to the quarries.

"John Sutherland, the golf club secretary, guided the gun parties to the holes in order to keep them off the greens and tees, in case of damage," said Mr Grant. "The two constables just went along as witnesses, but nothing more was said about the incident."

About the same time, according to Mr Alex James Sutherland, Brora, a German gun was hurled off the main bridge in the town into the River Brora.

Mr James Bell, president of Dornoch Heritage Society, said he would wait to hear what the community felt about restoring

the artillery piece before committing his society to any course of action. "There is certainly historical significance in the gun, but I think we should wait to hear how the people feel today," he added.

Mr Ross, from Bonar Bridge, is employed by a contractor to clear the Witch's Pool because the golf club plan to restore the old 17th tee.

The pool is near the spot where the last woman to die as a witch in Scotland, Jenny Horne, was burned to death in the 17th Century.

■ Right: Digger driver Mr George Ross (left) and former Seaforth Highlander Mr Jackie Grant with the World War I gun dumped in the Witch's Pool at Royal Dornoch in 1921.

DN444. 2004. 118. out.



## Gun that sank when resentment surfaced

By DAVID ROSS

A PIECE of German heavy field artillery from the First World War has been recovered virtually intact from Royal Dornoch Golf Club's Witch's Pool, nearly 70 years after it was thrown in by the local people in a wave of anti-German sentiment.

The pool, where the last woman in Scotland to be condemned as a witch was burnt at the stake, is being dredged as part of a development at the course.

The gun came to be in the pool because, after the armistice in 1918, three horse-drawn German field guns were presented to Sutherland's royal burgh by the War Department, which had taken them back from France as war reparations. Two were placed in front of the local drill hall and one on the green at Dornoch Cathedral.

They came to be regarded as symbols of the German militarism which had claimed so many of Sutherland's young men.

This came to a head one night in the summer of 1921. The town's former grocer, Mr Jackie Grant, said: "I would only have been about nine at the time, but I remember it was a beautiful Saturday night and all the men from the surrounding country had come in to town and gathered at the Eagle Bar, which is still here."

"They got blethering in the pub about the guns, and somebody said that these

could be the very guns which killed their friends.

"So a few of them decided to shift them, and as they tried to the crowd grew and grew till in the end there must have been hundreds of people.

"All the bairns of the town seemed to be there, although it would have been after nine at night by the time they were actually moved.

"The police were there, but they were keeping a low profile . . . well, because there was only two of them to keep a low profile.

"The golf club secretary, John Sutherland, who had lost a son himself in the war, guided the people with the guns across the course avoiding the greens and tees in case of damage."

Mr Grant, who fought with the Seaforth Highlanders in the Second World War, said that two of the guns were taken across to an old quarry, only to be removed for scrap in the last war, while the third was thrown into the pool amidst cheers.

A similar fate is understood to have befallen another German field gun farther up the coast at Brora.

Two rifles, believed to have been dumped in the pool by police as illicit firearms, have also been found during the dredging.

Mr Jim Bell, chairman of Dornoch's heritage society, now intends to ensure that the field gun stays in the burgh, since it had been given to it in the first place.



Mr Jackie Grant looks over the German field gun that has been pulled out of the Witch's Pool beside the 17th tee at Royal Dornoch Golf Club.

Picture: JAMES GALLOWAY