

Old German "Bertha" Gives Dornoch a Dilemma

For the second time this century, a "spoils of war" 150mm German field gun is proving an embarrassment to the citizens of Dornoch.

Last time — in 1921 — they dumped the gleaming small sister of Big Bertha into the Witch's Pool near Well Street in Littleton.

Now that it was uncovered again this week, the problem for the community council, the Dornoch Heritage Society, and all the locals is: "Should we put it on show again — or hide it away?"

District Councillor David Shepherd is in no doubt. "With the salt sea air, the metal and woodwork will crumble very quickly. We want to cover it in grease to preserve it, keep it safe in the council yard then decide in due time what will happen to it. I'm sure some military museum would take it."

In the meantime, he plans getting in touch with the Royal Artillery Institute in Woolwich to learn more of the gun's history and how it came to Dornoch in the first place.

Mr Jimmy Bell, president of the parish Heritage Society, is more cautious. "There is certainly historical significance in the gun, and particularly the town's people's reaction to it long ago, so I think we should wait to hear how the people feel today before talking about restoration."

Mr Bell was summoned to the Witch's Pool — named after the burning of Jenny Horne near the spot in 1722 — on Monday morning, shortly after Bonar Bridge excavator driver George Ross pulled the heavy field piece out of the swamp. His boss, contractor David Mackay of Birchwood has been engaged by the Royal Dornoch GC to clear out the spring-fed swamp in order to reposition the 17th tee to its original stance, with the pool restored as a hazard. How effective could be judged from

the number of old golf-balls that emerged with the gun carriage, plus some old bent rifles disposed of by the former Sutherland Constabulary.

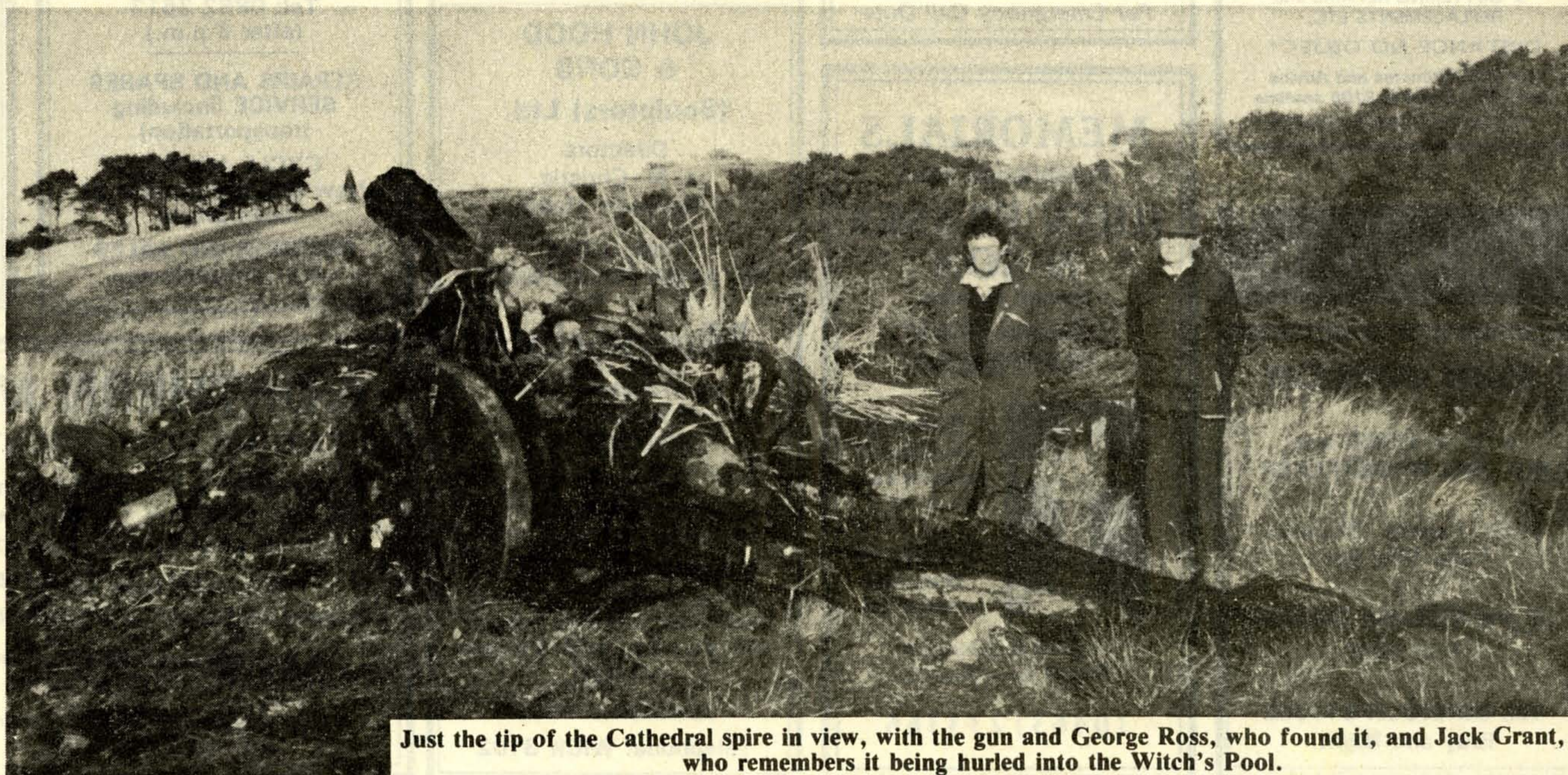
Retired grocer Jack Grant, Tigh-an-Allt, Bridge Street, recalled how the gun was displayed after the First War, and how it was disposed of in 1921, when he was just a schoolboy. Three captured guns were presented by the War Office to the Royal Burgh as a display of humbled German pride — two were positioned behind a fence outside the Drill Hall and the other across the Square beside the fountain on the Cathedral green. Mr Grant, a member of the famous 5th Seaforths in World War II, added: "I remember the night the ex-Servicemen got oiled up in the Eagle Bar and decided to get rid of them. It was a beautiful Saturday night and all the men from the sur-

rounding country were in town as well. They got blethering and someone said that these guns could well have been the ones that had killed their mates in the trenches.

"When they started to trundle them away, more and more people joined them until there was a huge crowd which completely daunted the only two constables on duty. They could do nothing to stop the mob in their intent.

"The only man who remained cool was John Sutherland, the famous secretary of the golf club, who had himself lost a son in the war. He made sure that the guns were rolled well away from the greens and fairway of the course."

Two of the guns were dumped in a quarry and later recovered for scrap. But everyone seemed to have forgotten the one in the Witch's Pool ... until last Monday.



Just the tip of the Cathedral spire in view, with the gun and George Ross, who found it, and Jack Grant, who remembers it being hurled into the Witch's Pool.