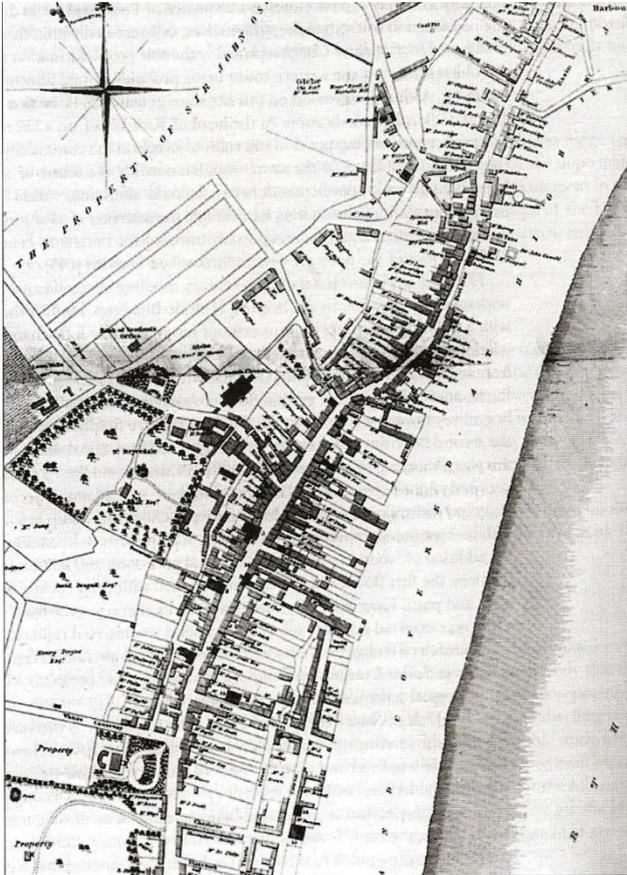




The Three little Words than led to Rain on the Promenade's Parade



For many years, many decades, possibly even centuries, the people of Kirkcaldy wished a seawall. Winter tides swept high into the hinterland, leaving the devastation and destruction that only water can produce. On top of that the foreshore was no better than a coup, with any number of wrecks washed up and left to rot alongside the uncontrolled dumping of all manner of household and industrial waste.

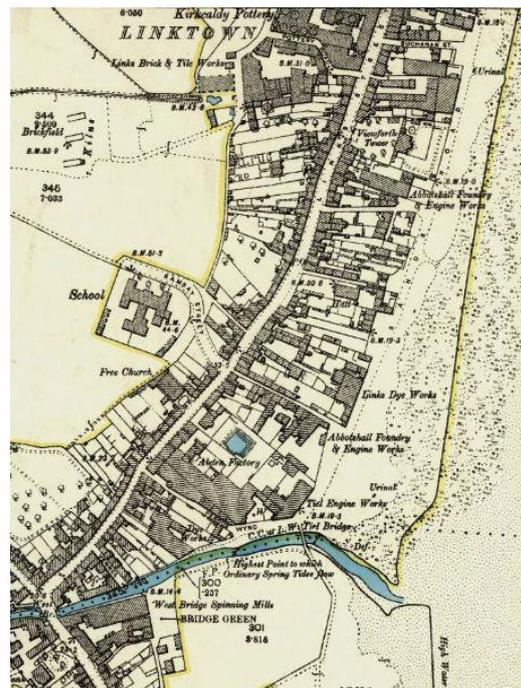
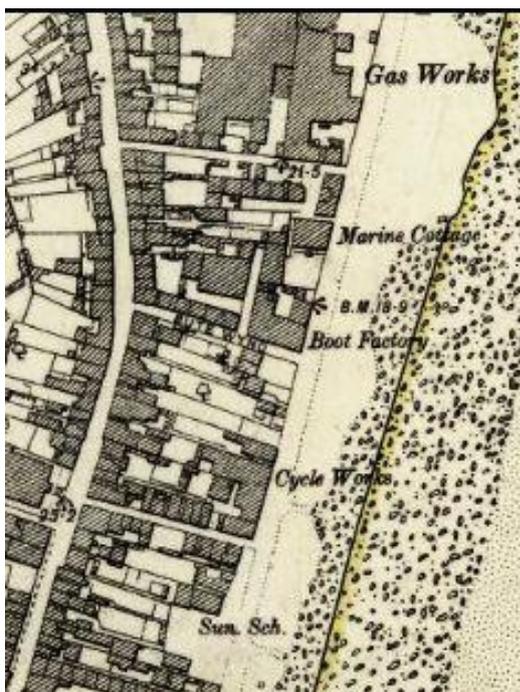
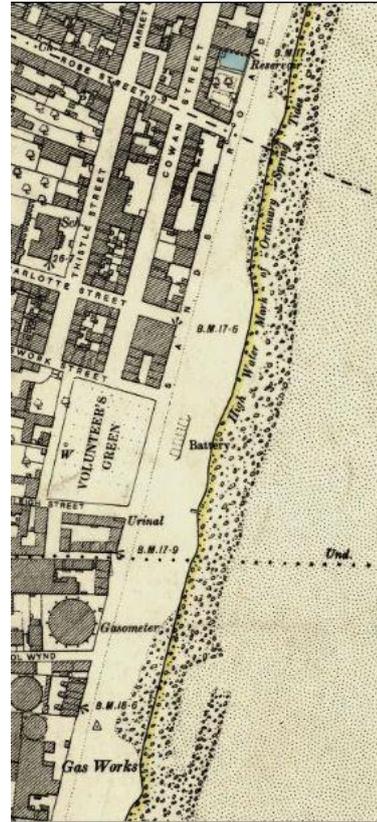
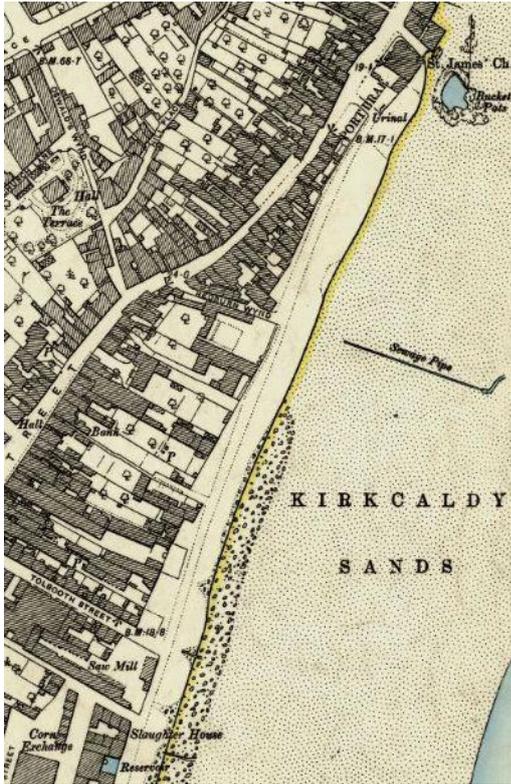


Wood Map 1824

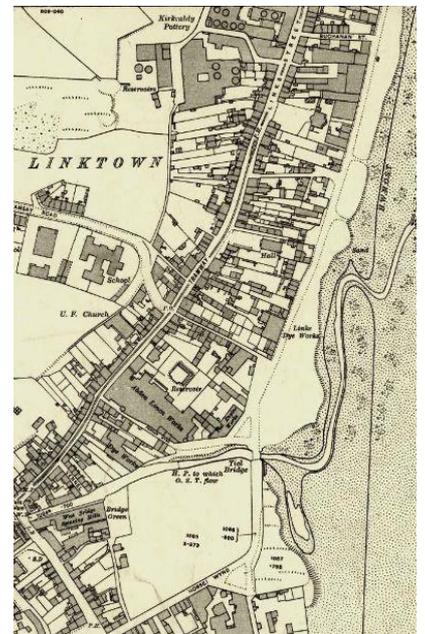
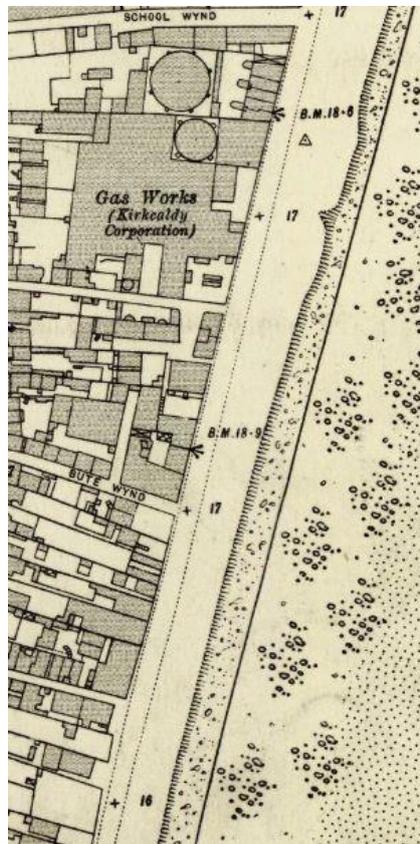
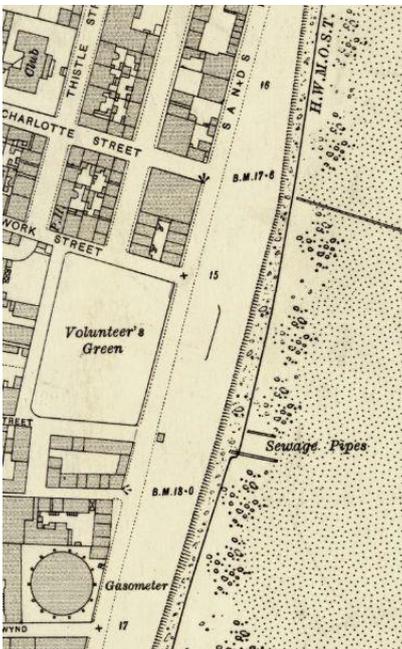
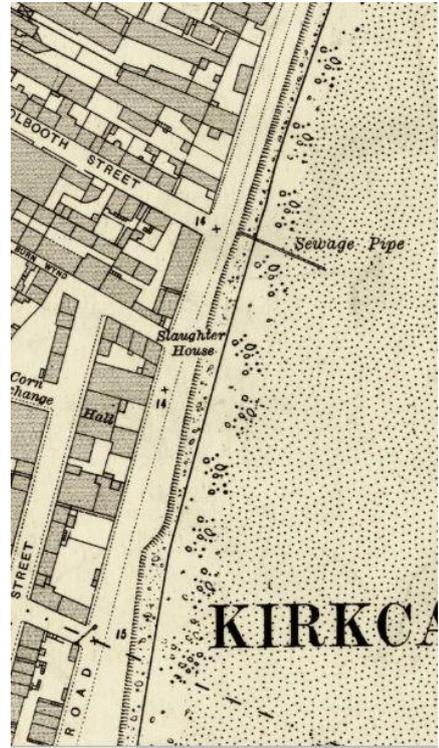
Reader's letters to the press even carried tales of nocturnal sounds of fornication and copulation emerging from these wrecks. Something had to be done and 1904 and 1914 saw opportunities to build the long-awaited wall, thereby enhancing the area. The 1914 plan by 'Sang and Lockhart' came very close. The Town had the money, all was ready to go, but Archduke Franz Ferdinand's

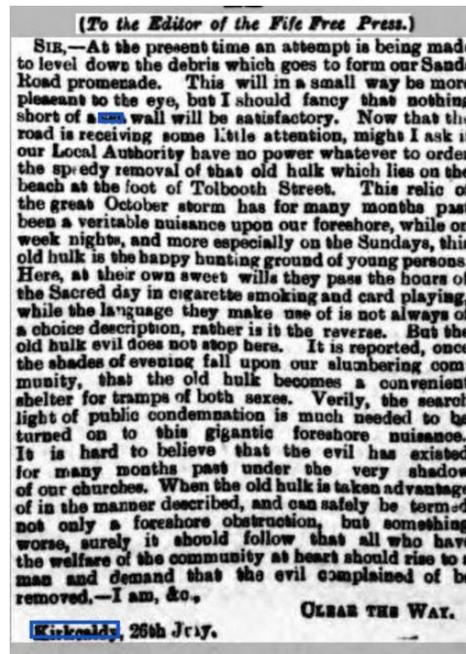
demise put an end to that. However, when peace was restored and when the initial boom years had subsided into depression and unemployment – our story can commence.

Ordnance Survey 1894



Ordnance Survey 1913





Letter to Fife Free Press 1899

A requisition was signed and presented to the Town Clerk of Kirkcaldy on the 19th September 1921. The requisition was signed by 15 members of the Council, including three Labour members. It asked for a special meeting on the Council to arrange for carrying out the scheme for the development of a sea wall and promenade – in conjunction with the Government’s scheme for the relief of unemployment. Given that the requisition had been signed by a majority of the Councillors, it looked as if the scheme should get the “green light”.



As a result of the requisition a special meeting of the Town Council was held on Thursday September the 22nd 1921. A recommendation of

the Provost's Committee was submitted, "That on condition that the Sands Road Scheme was accepted by the Government as an approved scheme that will rank for a grant in respect of relief work, the Town Council proceed with the construction of a sea wall and esplanade on the foreshore from the harbour to the Tiel Burn". In addition it was recommended that Messrs Blyth and Blyth should be appointed engineers for the work and they should submit a report as soon as possible. The anticipated cost was £100,000. (In 2020, that would equate to almost £5 million pounds.

Messrs Blyth and Blyth moved quickly and on the 8th October they carried out a site visit to start compiling their report.

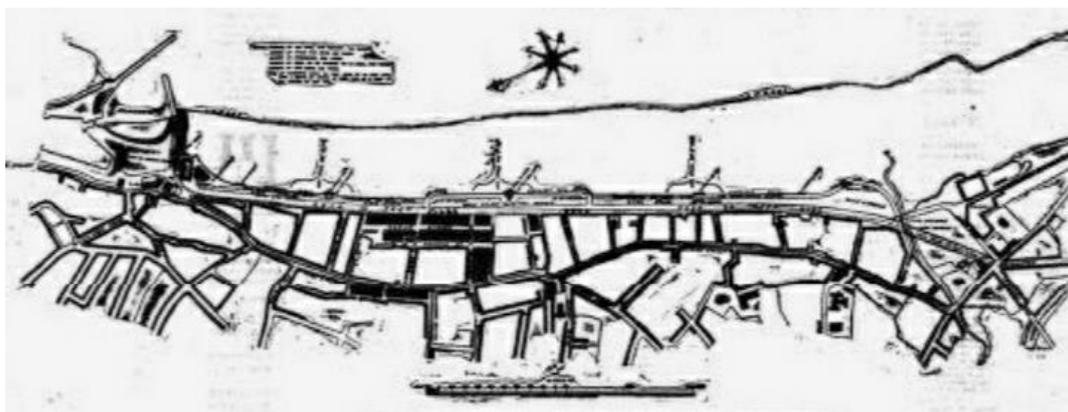
The Fife Free Press of the 12th November 1921 devoted significant space to the report under the heading "Kirkcaldy Beautiful!" and explained that the content came from a letter dated 3rd November from Messrs Blyth & Blyth, as to the Sands Road Wall and Esplanade.

Before going into the report in detail, the firm mentioned that when Provost Kilgour had recently called at the firm's offices, he had expressed the opinion that the sea wall work and the



Blyth & Blyth offices - 135 George Street, Edinburgh

proposed road improvements should be kept separate. However since compiling their report “we happened to meet Sir Henry Maybury, Director of Roads, Ministry of Transport, and in conversation with him we mentioned this scheme. He informed us that any scheme for unemployment relief entailing road works would when the application for a grant was made would be put before him. He advised, and we strongly agree with him, that the two schemes, viz., the sea wall and the new road, should be put forward as one and not as two separate schemes.



The Report from Messrs Blyth and Blyth

“We reproduce above a plan of the proposed sea wall and esplanade at the Sands Road, which at a glance shows the immense improvement which this project will accomplish. Substantially the Provost’s Committee have approved the scheme with a few alterations and alternative suggestions. The following report by Messrs Blyth and Blyth, however, will inform the public of the main points.

“As you will see from our report, we have estimated for the sea wall, promenade, swimming bath, access to beach and other relative works only, and have prepared no estimate



for the widening of the Sands Road or the making of a new road on extension thereof to Bridgeton. Should you desire to have an estimate for this

work, we can provide one and send it to you in a few days.

“We are of the opinion that the scheme is one, which if carried out, will be of material benefit to the town of Kirkcaldy. All the property situated along the Sands Road will inevitably increase tremendously in value due to all risks of flooding being removed, and to the greatly improved amenity of the district; besides this the amenity of the whole town will be increased in as much that this area, which is merely a rubbish tip at present, with a very indifferent sea beach will become a fine promenade with wide open spaces on the landward side and a very improved beach.

The Grand Opening



“Although Kirkcaldy is well provided with parks and open spaces, it has no suitable place for

September 24th 1892

recreation near the sea, and sea air and a clean beach are important factors in maintaining the health of the town, and are very popular ones, more particularly with the children, who prefer a beach to parks and playgrounds, where usually such restrictions prevail as to make them afraid to enjoy themselves, lest they infringe the byelaws. Besides, this improved beach will induce visitors to come to Kirkcaldy during the summer months, which in itself; will be an asset to the town.

“In terms of your minute to us we have examined the late Mr Lumsden’s plan showing a sea wall some 70 to 100 feet from the building line, and after due consideration and for the reason after stated we have decided on the position which is shown on the plan. The difference in cost is so small that the additional benefit of obtaining an increased width of from 30 to 100 feet of reclaimed land should not be ignored. You will observe that we have shown, in place of the narrow roadway known as the Sands Road, a new road 60 feet in width all along the building frontage, an in continuation, an entirely new road from the Tiel Burn to the main Burntisland – Queensferry road at Bridgeton, thus forming a new relied road through Kirkcaldy. This new road would entail the purchase of some small properties at Bridgeton, and the building of a bridge over the Tiel Burn. The remainder of the route being through unbuilt on land, should not be an expensive matter. In our opinion this new road and the widening of the existing Sands Road to 60 feet,

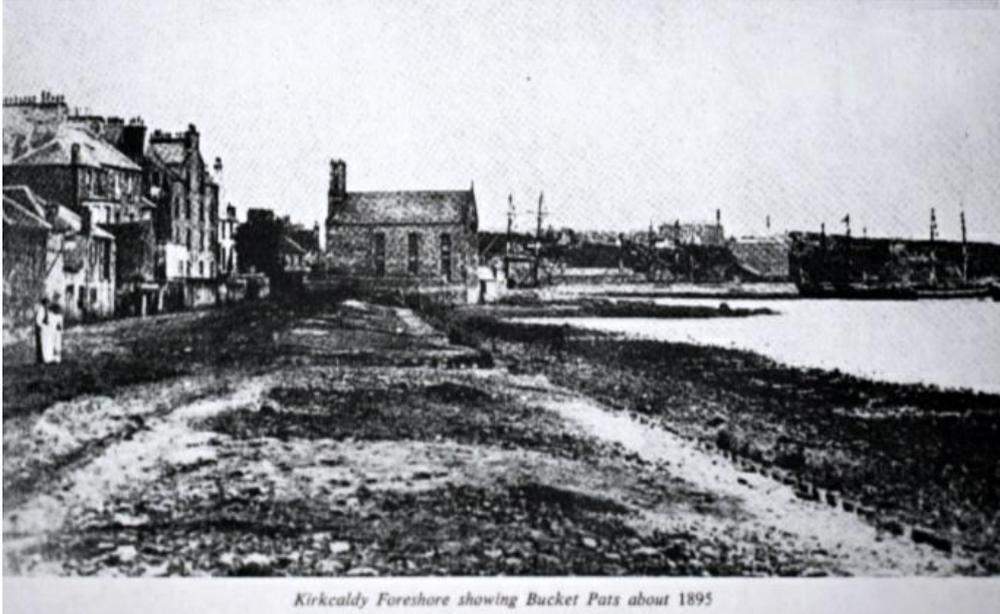
when properly protected from the sea, would in itself be a great boon to the town, and is in itself we think, sufficient to warrant the building of the sea wall. All over the country, road traffic is rapidly increasing, and the through roads in all



Volunteers' Green—Battery taken about 1894

towns are becoming more congested, with the result that Local Authorities are compelled by the necessity of the case to provide new relief or arterial roads to lessen the congestion. Kirkcaldy is itself perhaps one of the worst examples of such congestion, the High Street and its continuation Links Street, are

narrow and crooked, and as they are the route of tramway lines and the principal shopping streets, there is very little room left for through traffic. If this relief road by the shore be made, the benefit to through traffic will be manifest, and shopkeepers in the main streets, and the inhabitants of the town generally who use these streets, will benefit considerably by the removal of the through traffic. We think, therefore, that this new road and the widening of the Sands Road should form an integral part of the scheme, and although in preparing our estimates we have not included this work, should you desire to have an estimate of it, we shall endeavour to supply it without delay. We may



mention the necessity for such a road has had a predominant place in our minds when fixing the position of the sea wall, as once the road is made the traffic along it will be very considerable, and it is well to have a considerable space laid out in grass or otherwise between the traffic and the promenade. With the wall in this position there will be no surplus excavation to dispose of, in fact banking will be required.

“With regard to the provision of a swimming pond, we have perused the Kirkcaldy Swimming Club’s letter to the Town Council dated 29th September, 1921, a copy of which we received from the Town Clerk on the 18th October, and have considered the provision of bathing facilities in the scheme. We see every reason why such accommodation should be given, and we have therefore included an open air swimming pond at the north end and near the harbour. Although the provision of this pond increases the whole

cost of the work slightly it will be money well spent, and will encourage swimming and promote cleanliness generally. The details of the pond and arrangements of sluices for filling and emptying can be settled later, when it is decided if you wish a purely tidal pond or one that will be available at all states of the tide. The latter type would entail the services of an attendant for the regulation of the water, but we think it would be preferable to a tidal pond and much more satisfactory in every way. We have therefore provided sufficient for this type in our estimate. In the event of a tidal pond being decided on the estimate would be reduced accordingly.

“As regards the type of sea wall, which we propose to use along the sea front is a solid concrete wall with a parapet 3 ft. 6in. High or 8 ft. 6in. above high water. This wall would extend from the harbour to a point about 230 yards south of Buchanan Street, and from there, as the ground is higher, and there is no rock for a foundation within a reasonable depth, we propose to use a system of reinforced concrete piling. In this section we do not consider it at all likely that the front will be exposed to the action of the sea, and we would therefore dispose of the parapet. Towards the Tiel Burn you will observe that the line of piling takes a sweep outward, this is for the purpose of reclaiming as much ground as possible without additional expense, as we think this land may be useful in the future and can meantime be used as a playground.

“We have purposely avoided a straight line sea wall as we consider the various curves in it will prevent a continuous current along the wall in either direction, and they at the same time can afford favourable opportunities for forming stairways and cart access to the beach.



“All along the wall from end to end we propose to lay an asphalt promenade 30 feet wide, at a level of 5 feet above high water of ordinary spring tides, and the parapet wall will be 3’6” above this level. We consider asphalt much more suitable and cheaper than granolithic for such purposes. In our experience, granolithic when laid on a soft embankment such as this, more especially when affected by the sea has a tendency to sink in places, crack and break up generally; it is difficult to repair satisfactorily, and consequently never looks well. Asphalt also will inevitably sink at places, but it can be restored at little cost, and without affecting its appearance.

The Scheme at a Glance

Estimated Cost,.....	£89,300
Less Pond,.....	<u>8,000</u>
	81,300
Cost Sands Road,.....	13360
Tiel Bridge and Road,.....	<u>11670</u>
Total,.....	£106.330

“At the landward side of the promenade we propose to erect a low parapet or coping about 15 inches high to intercept any water which may come over the outer parapet wall during heavy seas.

“Between the promenade and the outer side of the proposed 60 feet road, a space at the north end (harbour) of 30 feet wide has been left and at the south end (Tiel Burn) 45 feet wide. For a length of quarter of a mile in the centre opposite the Volunteers Green we have made this space 70 feet wide to give accommodation for the market, which we understand is held there regularly.

“Two cart accesses to the beach have been provided, one opposite Rose Street and one between School Wynd and

Gas Wynd, and several stairways for the public at suitable intervals along the wall.

“We have also provided a sandpit where children can play during the period when the beach is covered by the tide; also a site for a gymnasium for children and to exercise after swimming and sites for shelters and seats at intervals on the promenade. We have also shown a possible site for a bandstand with seats round it, but this may not be required.

“We estimate the total cost of the works mentioned above and shown in the accompanying plan, including all the necessary drains, gullies and gratings at £89300.

“We consider that work such as this should be carried out by contract and not by direct labour. Whilst not anticipating any difficulties as regards the sea work, absolute safety is never assured until the work is complete, and it must be borne in mind that any loss or damage where direct labour is concerned is a direct loss to the town; where contract work is being carried out the loss or damage falls on the contractor. Apart from this the work could not be so efficiently, so economically, or so speedily carried out by direct labour as by a contractor. In any case the unemployed, except skilled men, can only be used for unskilled work, and a large portion of skilled men will be required. In addition the provision of the necessary plant

will be an expensive matter, and it may be absolutely useless to the Corporation after the work is completed.

“Whilst the winter season is not the most suitable time to commence such a work, under the present circumstances we see no reason, if due care and precautions are exercised, why a start should not be made forthwith. Except for gales, there is no risk of damage by the sea, and there is always the liability of these occurring at any time. Being so close to the sea, the risk of frost affecting the building of the concrete wall will be practically negligible. Even if the work is commenced in January, by the time it is fully developed a period of six weeks to two months will have elapsed, when the worst of the weather will be over.

“The number of men that can be employed will depend largely on the number of points on which the work is started. We recommend that a start is made with the piling at the south end, also with the wall at the north and south ends, and when the worst weather is over, a start should be made about the centre of the wall, working both ways. Besides this there is a considerable amount of necessary work to be done such as collecting plant, bringing in materials, clearing the ground, etc., and we think that at least 100 men could be started at the beginning, the number being increased to 250 or more in the spring in order to finish the work by the autumn. If the new road and the widening of the existing Sands Road are to be made a

further 150 men could be employed for three to four months.

“In conclusion we consider the whole scheme, comprising both the road and the sea wall, one which will be of great value to the community, and that both should qualify for grants at the present time; that they will help unemployment, and that they should be proceeded with.”

Further Report from Blyth and Blyth dated 8th Nov.



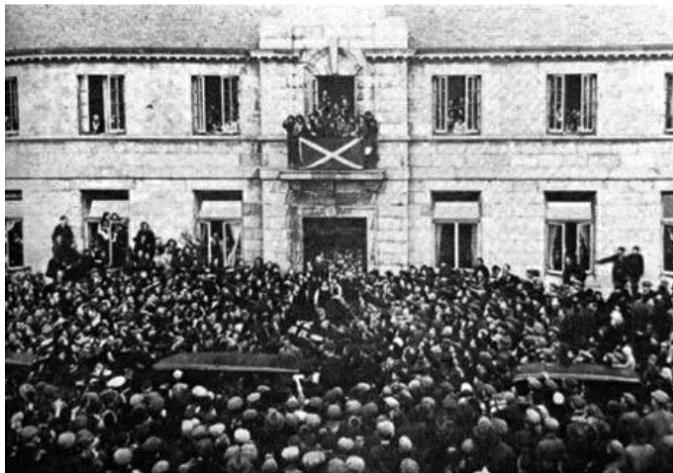
Provost Kilgour had made the journey to Edinburgh the previous Friday to discuss plans. A further report was received dealing with the proposed new road and upgrading the existing portion:-

“We have now had the necessary levels taken and a survey made, have prepared estimates of the cost of the new road works proposed in our report. From the Tiel Burn to Bridgeton we estimate that to make a new 60 ft. road and a new bridge over the Tiel Burn will cost £11,670, and that the widening of the existing Sands Road to 60ft., would cost a further £27960. This latter figure is the cost of making an entirely new road, taking up the present road and replacing it with a new road bottomed and surfaced throughout. We have made no allowance in our estimate for the value of any material in the existing road, nor for kerbs, channels or

drain pipes therein, as we understand that these are all in such bad condition that they would not be worth replacing on the new works. On the other hand if you are of the opinion that the life of the road is good enough for years yet, it would be extravagant, we think to take up and replace it now. In which case the existing road could be left and the widening carried out now. We estimate the cost of this widened portion only, including kerbs, channels and necessary drains, at £13,360. It would certainly not be so satisfactory as remaking the whole road, but it would save expenses now and still find work for a large number of the unemployed”.

The Scheme Recommended

So it is time for a decision and the Provost’s Committee meet for that purpose. “Mr Blyth of Messrs Blyth and Blyth was in attendance and the plan was carefully considered



Planned site of outdoor pool - became the YWCA building

and approved generally. Councillor Wm. Napier suggested that the proposed swimming pond to be deleted, which would offer a saving of £8000. He held that proper municipal

baths could be provided on a site behind the Opera House.

Provost Kilgour agreed, and added that it would form the commencement of improved buildings along the foreshore.

The Committee were of the unanimous opinion that the proposed swimming pond should be deleted from the scheme, and that consideration is given to baths.

In view of this they thought the proposed promenade should be carried on straight to the west pier of the harbour, instead of being curved off as per the plan.

On the matter of a cart entrance at the Port Brae, it was agreed that this should not be provided, as there would be stress from the weather at that point. It was further proposed that the sand-pit for children be abandoned on account of the fact there is ample foreshore. Regarding the bridge over the Tiel Burn and the new 60ft wide road, the Committee were of the opinion that that proposal should be placed before the Government along with an alternative that the road should be carried along the shore and emerge by Horse Wynd to Bridgeton, for which purpose land would have to be secured at the west end to widen the road and dispense with the curve. On the question of lifting and relaying the entire Sands Road at a cost of £27,960, the Committee were of the opinion that the road should simply be resurfaced, and put into proper condition, at a cost of £13,360, or a saving of £14,500.

It was agreed to use solid concrete for the sea wall instead of reinforced concrete.

The Committee resolved that an early meeting of the Town Council should be held to consider the scheme along with their recommendations, and it was agreed that a special meeting be held on Monday”.

On Monday the 14th November, The full Council met and the recommendations were passed. So now there was a determination to see the project under way to both enhance the shore and relieve unemployment. It all looked hopeful and promising, especially if grant confirmation could be secured quickly.

That promising position dissipated somewhat at a meeting of the Town Council in early December, which saw a member suggest that many townsfolk believed that the Council was only playing with the project, when “Councillor Young asked the Provost, what was being done to counter these suggestions. The Provost said that the best way to answer this was to detail the proceedings to date”. The following is a summary of the timeline.

November

14th Saw the scheme approved.

15th Saw the Town Clerk to write for the application forms.

19th Forms received then given to Burgh Surveyor to complete.

22nd Provost spoke to Town Chamberlain regarding loan funding.

23rd Town Clerk discussed loans with Town Chamberlain.

25th Completed forms received from Burgh Surveyor and had to be written out in triplicate.

26th Provost signed the forms, and Messrs Blyth and Blyth contacted to forward plans and estimates to accompany application.

28th Blyth and Blyth were phoned to chase up plans.

29th Plans received by special messenger, and that same day, all the documentation sent to Unemployment Grants Committee.

December

9th Letter received from Grants Committee seeking further information and said information was posted back on the same day.

“The Provost, went on to say that he was disappointed these stories were circulating, and astonished, that anyone could think that the Council were not in earnest. Provost Kilgour stated that it was impossible to hurry these matters along any more than had been done, and in his experience, he knew of no scheme which had been carried out with greater expedition than the Sands Road.

The Town Clerk added that it was true that a public board in Kirkcaldy had written to him complaining about the delay, but he had sent them a diary of the proceedings which they could see for themselves.

Councillor Young said he hadn't suggested that the Town Council were not in earnest. He had merely repeated criticism he had heard outside". (Fife Free Press 17th Dec. 1921).

However, only ten days later there was joyous news for the Fife Free Press to report on the final day of 1921. Under a large headline readers learned that:-



Unemployment Grants Committee Give Approval.

"Official intimation was received in Kirkcaldy yesterday that the Unemployment Grants Committee had given their approval to the scheme for the improvement of the Sands Road and the formation of an esplanade, recently submitted to them by the Corporation. Work in connection

with the scheme will be pushed on as rapidly as possible, and it is fully anticipated that a start will be made in the early days of the New Year”.

The same edition carried a lengthy interview with Treasurer Reekie which had taken place on the 26th. The newspaper described him as being particularly happy. “We have received intimation today that the Sands Road improvement scheme has been approved by the Unemployment Grants Committee, and, needless to say, I am very pleased.”

“Do you think there has been any undue delay?”

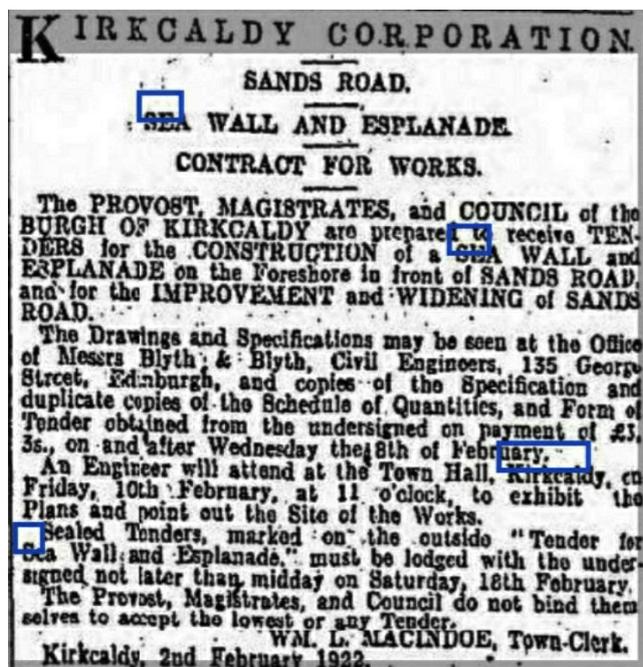
“No,” I have absolutely no complaint on that score. It was, I think, on 1st December that the plans and estimates were forwarded, and considering the many schemes on which

they must decide, the Grants Committee have reported with reasonable expedition.”

“And there was no delay on the part of the Town Council?”

“None whatsoever, why, it was only on the 13th September that I

determined on the policy, and the 15th September that I



communicated my ideas to the Provost. Special meetings were immediately called. The Town Council supported the proposal with unanimity and it was carried through with wonderful despatch.”

It appears clear that the Council did not feel there had been undue delays.

Many newspapers, including the Scotsman, carried an advertisement, by Kirkcaldy Corporation, which had been issued for publication on the 2nd February 1922. The advert was seeking tenders for the construction of a Sea Wall and Esplanade, together with improvements to and also the widening of the Sands Road.

Drawings and specifications could be seen at the offices of Blyth & Blyth at 135 George Street, Edinburgh. Forms of Tender could be obtained at the same address on payment of £3. 3s.



An engineer would attend Kirkcaldy Town Hall on the 10th February, from 11.00am, to exhibit plans and, point out the site of the works.

Offers were to be lodged with the Council by midday on Saturday 18th February and marked “Tender for Sea Wall and Esplanade”. The Council clearly stated that



they were not bound to accept the lowest tender or any tender.

Saturday the 25th February saw the Fife Free Press carry a report on a special meeting of the Town Council on the 20.th It was at this meeting that Blyth and Blyth reported on the tenders received. Twenty seven had been received by the closing date. The engineers had checked the seven lowest offers and they reported that Sir Robert McAlpine & Sons were by far the lowest offer. The figure was £96,089 6s 5d. The closest figure to that was from Messrs Shanks and McEwen which came in at £102,000. Chas. Brand & Co came third at £104,731. The engineers suggest that the two lowest offers were from firms of repute and they felt that no further offers need be considered. Messrs McAlpine had carried out a great deal of work for the engineers, but they understood that Messrs Brand were perhaps better known to the Council, and, so they might prefer that firm to carry out the work. They pointed out that the difference in the estimates between McAlpine and Brand was around £9,600, which was a considerable sum, but they were leaving the decision to the Council.

The Provost went over the offer in some detail and then remarked "he thought there was no need to labour the position. It was their absolute duty to accept the lowest tender in this case. It was fortunate that the lowest

tenderer was a firm well known throughout the country, able financially and otherwise to undertake the work satisfactorily. He accordingly moved that they should accept Messrs Sir Robert McAlpines' tender. Baillie Gourlay seconded.

**Sir Robert
McALPINE**

Councillor Nairn asked if they could have details of the estimates of any local contractors. There were three and the least expensive was from Alexander Fraser of Kirkcaldy but came in at £134,000.



“The Clerk then stated that it was a condition of acceptance that the work start before February 28th 1922, a start to mean that the contractors have a reasonable amount of

plant on the ground, and at least 20 men at work by the time stated.

Councillor Ferguson asked if there was anything about the date when the work would finish. It was stated that the date was the 29th February of next year. There was a penalty per day for any delay beyond that.

Councillor Nairn asked if there was anything mentioned regarding the employment of local labour except what was in the contract. Was there any suggestion that local labour be employed?

Mr Blyth the engineer, stated that he had spoken to the contractors who had been in his office, and he had said to Messrs McAlpine that it was expected they would employ as many local men as they could get”.

The position of Inspector for the work was also discussed. Blyth & Blyth had submitted a letter recommending one of



their regular inspectors – a James A. Craib, who had been with them for the sea walls at Methil, Leith, Denbeath and Seafield, and whom they considered the best man for the

works. The Committee unanimously appointed the gentleman at £6 6s per week from the 1st March. There had been some agitation for a delay, as there were three unemployed men believed to be Clerks of Work, who were

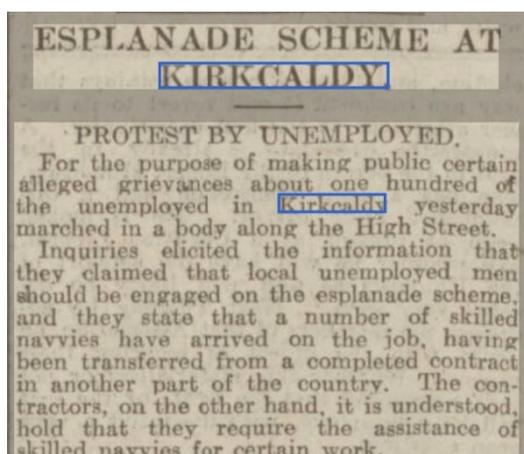
signing on at the Labour Exchange. The engineer had made it clear that Craib was the man he wanted and could rely on him. He (Blyth) was responsible for giving them a good job.

“The Provost then announced that in connection with the work, Mr Blyth had informed him that he had engaged a very experienced engineer to be resident on the job all the time. This was at his expense, and it was as well that the Council should understand that the engineers were doing their best to see that the work would be carried out in a very satisfactory way”.

On the 17th March 1922, newspapers carry a notice signed by William Macindoe, the Town Clerk that due to the



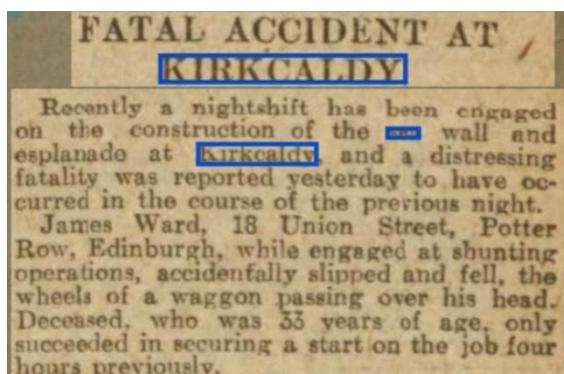
construction of the sea wall and esplanade there will be no Links Market this year, something not repeated until this very year (2020)!



The 15th April sees a march, reported by the Courier, of around 100 unemployed men along Kirkcaldy High Street. Their grievance is that local

unemployed men should be engaged on the work. They believe that a number of skilled navvies have arrived from a completed contract. On the other hand the contractors state that skilled men are required for certain parts of the works.

The problem is exacerbated by the belief that nationally labourer's wages will be reduced, and this will of course affect the men working on the sea wall. It is made clear that the Manager of the Labour exchange is sparing no effort in trying to get work for the men on his books. He has been invited to send along three to four men each morning to see if they can secure a fair trial and then work. One of the issues suggested, is that many of the men have been out of work for a considerable time and find the heavy work very testing. However, only six weeks into the work, the sea wall is appearing above sea level at the Port Brae end and the outline of the esplanade is coming into view.



On Saturday the 29th April 1922, the Fife Free Press reported a tragic accident. "The construction of the sea wall and esplanade of Kirkcaldy has not been long

under way until the enthusiasm displayed by the townspeople in the scheme has been marred by a

distressing fatality. A night shift has been engaged on the work recently and, on Tuesday night Jas. Ward, 18 Union Street, Pottery Row, Edinburgh, one of the men involved in shunting operations, accidentally slipped and fell beneath the wheels of a wagon which passed over his head. The deceased was 33 years of age, and it is stated had only been successful in securing the job four hours previous to meeting his death. The occurrence cast quite a gloom over those who almost daily watch the progress of events”.

The Fife Free Press carried an interesting article on the 6th May 1922 under “Sands Road – Hopes and Fears”:-

“From two different angles the Sands Road attracts attention this week. The first view is not a pleasant one, in that it contemplates the withdrawal of the Government Grant in respect of the sea wall scheme. That was the fear voiced by the Local Employment Committee, which seems in some dubiety regarding the stipulation which refers to the employment of ex-servicemen. It ought to perhaps be pointed out that that the terms of the actual contract between the parties have little or nothing to do with the Government. Its duty ends in assuring itself that the conditions qualifying for a grant are observed. Of these conditions there can be no possible manner of doubt. Meantime, in order to ensure that the grant is not jeopardised, whether such is the case or not – the

Employment Committee has been instructed to write to the Town Council.

“The second angle of vision holds something of allure before the eyes of the community. We have received a communication which informs us that Kirkcaldy is being included in a guide to holiday resorts in the East of Scotland. So now that it has come we will try to bear our fate with fortitude. Somebody has been letting out about the foreshore scheme, and much as Kirkcaldy folk are inclined to scepticism, outsiders take a more encouraging and optimistic view. We have at last begun to arrive, and there seems every prospect that the foreshore scheme is going to do something for us. Indeed, it would seem that every prospect pleases, and only the pessimist is vile”.

The 20th of May 1922 saw a furious but well constructed letter sent to and published by the Fife Free Press from James Smith, Chairman, Kirkcaldy Trades and Labour Council.

Speaking at the opening of the **Labour** Exchange for **Kirkcaldy** yesterday afternoon, Provost Munro Ferguson naturally referred to the present labour troubles and spoke in serious tones of the selfish and unpatriotic action of those who are causing so much suffering to the people in general by refusing their work. The Provost alluded to the Trades Disputes Act as a measure which might have to be reconsidered in the light of recent events.

The letter commenced with a recap that the project would only go ahead if a grant was available from the Government. This grant was to relieve

unemployment and the whole purpose was to relieve local unemployment. Mr Smith suggested that at the outset very few local men had been engaged but, thanks to the efforts of the Manager of the local Labour Exchange this had improved slightly. He accepted that the contractors had gone some way to fulfilling their part.

But he moved on to ask the question “so what happened to these men who did have the doubtful good fortune to get a job?

“They were put to the very hardest kind of work – to work under gangers, who were not local men, who did not know the nature of nor sympathise with local men, and who in some cases, appeared to resent the employment of local men. Now, consider the condition of unemployed men in general. Many of them have been out of work for more than twelve months and many have wives and families to keep from the pittance of the unemployment fund.

“It is a well known fact that when a man is idle for some time, he is not able to perform a full day’s work for the first few days after he starts again, and this is true even when the man has been well fed and well cared for – yes, even when he has been on holiday for a time. So we can realise how much more severe it will be for a man to try and perform a full day’s work at the start when his idle time has been spent in privation and suffering.”

Mr Smith argued that “employers knew that on a return from holiday, output did not reach full production until men were back into their full working habits”.

He maintained that the local men were not being given this opportunity. Instead they were being forced on until breakdown took place, or dismissed before this occurred on the basis they were unfit for work. He suggested they were then replaced by people who were not local and may or may not have been unemployed. He was of the firm belief that many would believe that the Contractors were correct in dismissing men who could not do a full day’s work from the beginning, and that he should not have to take on men that he believed were not capable of doing such work from the beginning.



”The Contractor would never have had the job at all only for the necessity of providing such men with work. The Government would not have promised

a grant other than on the basis that such men would have employment provided for them. The contractor was bound to be aware of this when he offered for and accepted the

contract, so that he ought to provide fair, reasonable opportunities for these men to get accustomed to the work, which I am sure they would soon be able to perform efficiently, and in a satisfactory manner.

“About the hours of working, several men are working fourteen hours out of the twenty four. Some were working from seven to eight hours on, and then, having four to five hours off. Going and coming at all hours, the full round of the clock. Is this as it should be – men working fourteen hours per day while other men are still on the Labour Exchange or the Parish Council? Can’t a fairer division of the work be made, with justice to the men and the chance of greater profit to the contractor? He could have men who only performed eight hours work out of the twenty four, whom I think would be better able to do a full day’s work than the man who is working fourteen out of twenty four”.

The letter went on in critical tones regarding the Town Council who were accused of employing Clerks of Work to ensure that the contractor was keeping to the terms of the actual construction, but doing little or nothing in ensuring that the main objective was being met – the alleviation of the unemployment situation. He then issued a chilling message that “if this sort of thing continues, the Government will be entitled to withhold their grant, and I understand that there is a Committee looking into these issues at this very moment.”

His were strong words and included:-

“The Town Council does not know how many unemployed are engaged on this work; they do not know how many ex-servicemen are on this work; they have instituted no means of gaining and keeping themselves up to date with such knowledge.

“It just amounts to this, that the contractor has got the job on the cheap, and he is not concerned as to the real object for which the work was undertaken, and the sooner the Council employs a Clerk of Labour to see that the local men – and they should all be local men – get a fair opportunity, the better.

“Give the unemployed a few days to get hardened up again, and they will be all right. To say they won’t become efficient, profitable workmen is humbug: I don’t care who says it. The ability which Kirkcaldy men lack is the ability to understand and appreciate their own ability.



“In 1914 I had known Kirkcaldy men being in a front line trench within fifty days of joining up. They had to learn soldiering, and able to practice it with ability within that time of seven weeks, and I think it is agreed that it takes longer to become an efficient soldier than it does to become an efficient and profitable labourer. If they could do these things, and they could because they have

done them - give them a chance to get into work now. I know the work can be done with local men as efficiently, as profitably and with greater satisfaction to the Kirkcaldy ratepayers.

“So I ask the Town Council, while erecting a monument to the heroes who have died, to give some time to consideration of the struggle for existence of the heroes who are still alive. – Yours etc.”

The above were strong and harsh words. Looking purely at the element of the labour involved it cannot be argued other than that this was the initial intention and driving force behind the project. Did the possibility of the completed project attracting visitors and holidaymakers to the town – become the uppermost consideration?

More concern was brought to bear at the Town Council meeting on the 10th July 1922. Councillor Laing suggested that other relief works should be considered following the great dissatisfaction with the labour situation at the Sands Road. He proposed that any labourers employed on these proposed works, should have a residential qualification of having lived in the Town for the last six months.

However, a more immediate problem was starting to surface. The Unemployment Grants Committee had written

on the 8th July asking for the Council's observations on the lack of ex-servicemen employed and the fact that so few local men appeared to have been engaged. The Committee believed that possibly this contract (L1269) was not fulfilling either requirement.

At the same meeting it was revealed that the Contractor had also written to the Council, pointing out that they always tried to use local labour, but sadly, many of those put forward were not capable of carrying out the work required. However they did maintain that they were adhering to clause 122 of the contract which stipulated the percentage of ex- servicemen who should be employed. This was where the problem lay and one which Councillor Nairn highlighted – instead of stating that 75% be the minimum figure, the Council document had the words “up to 75%” which is a far different thing.

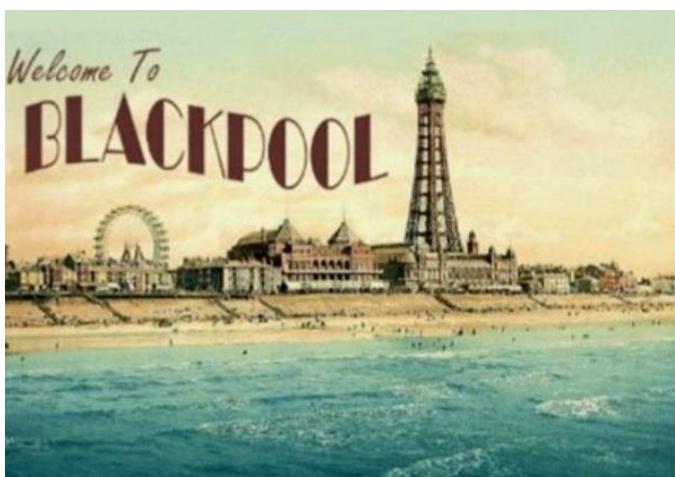
The Provost thought that pressure should be brought to bear on the Contractor to employ more local men but, he also stated that all the correspondence should be forwarded to the Unemployment Grants Committee. His argument being, that the contract with the disputed clause had been submitted to the Committee in the application process, and they had not objected to it when approving the grant. This suggestion was adopted and the correspondence forwarded.



The Free Press on the 22nd July 1922 carried an article which mentioned a picture postcard of the sea wall. M & L Page of the Harbour Post Office had sent the newspaper a collotype

postcard of the new sea wall at its east end. The paper commented that “no native of Kirkcaldy who had left the “Lang Toun” even twelve months ago would recognise his birthplace. Taken from an original viewpoint the broad sweep of the stairs fronting the sea wall are shown, with the Opera House and the Port Brae in the background. It is quite an inspiring view and well affords to townspeople abroad the fine progress the ancient burgh is making”.

The Courier on the 26th July 1922 took the opportunity to do a “Special” on the sea wall to date. It was written under the



fascinating headline - “Opportunity to Create a Fife Blackpool” and, as well as dreaming of tourism utopia gave an up to date account of progress – “The construction of the sea

wall and esplanade at Kirkcaldy was undertaken by the Corporation as a relief scheme for unemployment in the burgh. The contract of £95,000 is being undertaken by the well known public works contractor Sir Robert McAlpine and Sons, of London and Glasgow. "The first sod was cut about the end of February at the harbour end of the scheme. The first concrete was laid on the stepped wave slope about the end of March, showing that the contractors wasted no time in making a start. At this east end of the scheme the rock is not very far below the surface of the ground, and outcrops at places, so it was no difficult matter to find good foundations here. As the works proceeded westwards the excavations gradually became deeper, until, after some seven hundred feet, it became necessary to resort to steel sheet piling for the trench. For a long stretch the work was always under several feet of water at high tides, which necessitated a considerable amount of pumping. About a thousand feet of the wall has been completed and most of the filling behind this portion has been done. On this stretch the sea always comes up to the wall at high tide, but further west there is always a stretch of dry sand, except when very high tides are running.



"The engineering effect of the stepped wave slope and the function of the bullnose in the parapet were well illustrated

recently when a very high sea was running. The waves swept beautifully round the wave slope, and breaking on the wall were deflected with very little of the spray coming over on to the esplanade. About the foot of Tolbooth Street a stairway to the beach has been constructed. This stairway is semicircular in plan with a staircase on each side. Opposite Rose Street the wall is stepped seawards for some thirty feet, and this wider area extends as far as the gasworks. At each end of this extended area there is a cart slipway to the shore. At the centre of this wide portion of the esplanade, there is a stairway similar to the one already mentioned. Behind this stairway on the esplanade is the site of the new bandstand.

“The excavations have now reached as far as the gasworks, and as a considerable portion of the wall has been constructed at the west end, there is little over a quarter of a mile to be done to close the gap. As the rock is about twenty feet below ground level at this point, the excavations are very deep. As most of the trench is below sea level, pumping has to be carried out continuously. The extreme west end of the scheme is to be carried out in reinforced concrete on piles, as the average depth of sand here is thirty feet. For some weeks the contractors have been casting the Ferro-concrete piles on the site. Behind the wall will be a thirty foot promenade stretching all the way from the harbour to the Tiel Burn. The Sands Road is to be reconstructed and the space between the promenade and

the road will be used for that old Kirkcaldy Institution – the Links Market.



“The west end of the wall sweeps seawards in a wide semicircle, forming a wide open space for the use of itinerant entertainments which visit the

town from time to time.

To Rival Blackpool

“Nothing of striking geological significance has been found so far in the execution of the work. A small seam of coal was struck at the Tiel Burn end, but this did not last for long, as the work proceeded eastwards. It is evident however, from several outcrops that this coal seam



extends for a considerable distance south of the burn.

“The new road is to be carried as far as Bridgeton, opening up the Esplanade to the coast road. The road will be carried over the Tiel Burn by a new concrete and steel bridge. Some alterations and improvements in the building line behind the Esplanade and the planting of open spaces with trees would make the promenade the boulevard of Scotland!



“What is wanted is some enterprising company to construct a pier and a pavilion and provide entertainment; in fact, to make Kirkcaldy a veritable Blackpool on the north of the Forth”.



Concerns regarding the labour being employed again made headlines in August 1922 when the Fife Free Press made mention of a question being asked in Parliament. Kirkcaldy's first Labour MP – Mr. T Kennedy, 'asked the Ministry of Labour, if they could state the percentage of local men employed by the contractor in the carrying out of the work on the new sea wall and esplanade at Kirkcaldy; what number of unskilled workers from Ireland and other districts had been and were engaged on the works in question; and how many men were now in receipt of unemployment benefit within the district of Kirkcaldy rating authority.



Dr. Macnamara (Minister of Labour 19th March 1920 – 19th October 1922) said that from enquiries which had been made locally it had been ascertained that a number of Irishmen were employed on the project in question. As the work was being carried out by contract, it was not a condition of the grant that labour should be recruited through the employment exchange. The attention of the Unemployment Grants Committee had, however, been

drawn to this matter, and it was understood they were in communication with the local authority.

LABOUR AT KIRKCALDY SEA WALL.

Mr KENNEDY (Lab., Kirkcaldy) asked the Minister of Labour if he would state the percentage of local men employed by the contractor in the carrying out of the work on the new sea wall and esplanade at Kirkcaldy; what number of unskilled workers from Ireland and other districts have been and are engaged on the work in question; and how many men are now in receipt of unemployment benefit within the district of the Kirkcaldy Rating Authority.

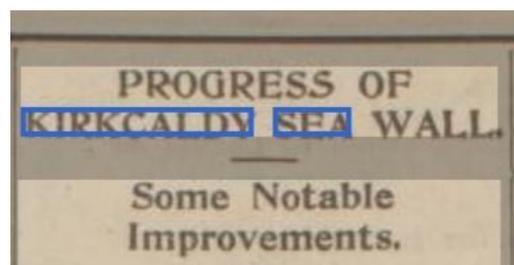
The MINISTER of LABOUR (Dr Macnamara) writes in reply:—From inquiries which have been made locally, it has been ascertained that a number of Irishmen are employed on the scheme in question. As the work is being carried out by contract it is not a condition of the grant that labour should be recruited through the Labour Exchange. The attention of the Unemployment Grants Committee has, however, been drawn to this matter, and it is understood that they are in communication with the Local Authority in regard thereto. The number of men in receipt of unemployment benefit within the district of the Kirkcaldy Rating Authority is

The number of men in receipt of unemployment benefit is 1590”.’

It does seem that attention was perhaps being deliberately drawn to the employment aspect. That said, it is only fair and reasonable that those elected to serve working people, or committees to assist the unemployed

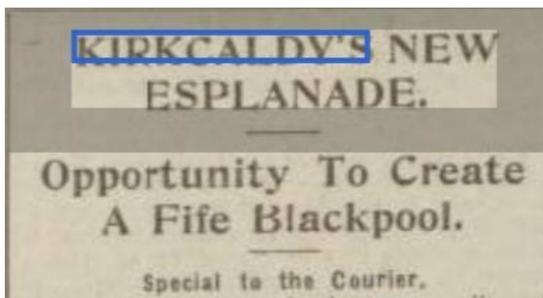
should have that as their principal focus, and not on longer term tourism benefits.

The Courier of the 29th August 1922 updated its progress report. Matters had certainly moved on, the retaining wall had now been completed and work on the parapet wall was well in hand. The paper suggested that the wall was being built at around five hundred feet per week and that there was now only a matter of a few hundred feet to be completed. “A very considerable amount of the filling in behind the sea wall has been done and the Esplanade roughly levelled out. The filling is putting a different aspect on the work, and shows to better advantage the extent of



the scheme. Advantage is already being taken of this very rough promenade.

“One very noticeable feature of the foreshore now is that it is always clean. Before the construction of the wall the beach was more or less always strewn with ashes and other refuse. In fact, the shore was a complete coup. As each winter’s tides washed away large tracts of the bank more refuse was dumped to make up for the loss. This fact of cleanliness on the foreshore cannot but be appreciated locally.



Much improvement is required in the building line to bring it up to what should be the background for an Esplanade. Given time, however, there is little doubt that the improvements will come now that the Esplanade is here.”

The Bombshell Lands and Explodes

But disaster was looming large, starting with a meeting of the Provost’s Committee on the 18th September. A letter was read from the Unemployment Grant’s Committee which, had been received some days previously and harked back to the July correspondence:-

“I am directed by the Unemployment Grants Committee to refer to their letter of the 8th July last, and to your letter of the 11th July (with enclosures) in reply thereto regarding the execution of Scheme L1289, and to state that in accordance with the information contained therein, and with certain other information which has been placed at their disposal by the Ministry of Labour, they have fully considered the contractor’s apparent failure to give the requisite preferences to ex-servicemen for recruiting labour for the work upon this scheme.

“The Committee’s attention has been drawn to the fact that the contractor appears to have imported a large proportion of the unskilled labour required for this work from outside the Kirkcaldy District, in which circumstances the Committee are of the opinion that not only that the Contractor has thus acted contrary to clause 121 of the contract, but that the Contractor’s inability to employ more than 105 out of a total of 280 men engaged was due primarily to the importation of labour above mentioned. In reminding your Council therefore that the grant conditionally authorised in respect of this scheme was expressly made to assist the Council in some measure to alleviate the serious unemployment generally existent in the Kirkcaldy district, and in particular amongst ex-servicemen, the Committee feel that the conditions attached to the grant can in no sense be said to have been fulfilled.

“I am therefore to state that the Committee regret that it will not be competent for them to give effect to the grant conditionally authorised in my letter of the 22nd December last, in respect of the scheme, which letter I am to request you to be so good as to cancel forthwith.”

“The Council then wrote to the contractor on the 14th September in the following terms – “I enclose a copy of a letter received from the Unemployment Grant Committee, in which they state that you have contravened clause 121 of your contract, and in consequence thereof the committee have cancelled the grant of money which they gave the town. The Town Council beg to intimate to you that they hold you responsible to them for the loss of the grant and for all other loss and damage which they may sustain in consequence of your failure to observe clause 121 of the contract. The Town Council further call on you to observe that clause in the contract in future to full extent. The Town Council have all along understood from your representations to them that you were fulfilling the clause, but it now appears from the Unemployment Grants Committee letter that you have not done so as a matter of fact.

In turn the contractor responded with - We are in receipt of your letter of today’s date (14th September) together with a copy of the letter from the unemployment Grants Committee. They are being forwarded to our Glasgow office

for their attention. In the meantime we wish to state that we neither accept the statements made regarding us in these letters nor liability for any loss of grant.”



This certainly put the ‘cat amongst the pigeons’ and it was agreed that The Provost and Town Clerk should travel to London to meet the authorities in an effort to resolve the situation. The Councillors also had all correspondence on the subject going back to the 22nd December last placed before them. Councillor Westwood was the most vociferous regarding the situation and “hoped that it was only a prospective withdrawal, but at the same time wanted to protest at being kept in the dark in connection with the clauses in the contract. He understood in relation to information he had received, that certain individuals were being blamed in connection with the matter. He realised that after all was said and done it would not be wise to make matters more difficult for those who were negotiating, He was desirous that the whole of the Council, however, should get to understand what was going on and that the almighty Provost’s Committee should submit things that they had been doing to the almighty Town Council, which, after all had to govern the actions of the Provost’s Committee”

The debate went on in these terms but it was clear that the time for fault and blame was in the future and, to this end Councillor Westwood commented “everyone is anxious that the money be saved, if it could be saved at all. It was not time for recrimination now. They might have their fling when matters were settled up What mattered was that the grant, and it was hoped the Provost and Town Clerk could achieve this.

The Fife Free Press of the 23rd September contained a lengthy and measured article under the headline of a “Special Report to the Fife Free Press”. The piece opened in language unlikely to be seen in our local paper again – “Hope deferred, it is said, maketh the heart sick, and judging from what a Fife Free Press representative gathered in the course of conversation and enquiry this week relative to their position, the heart of our local unemployed is not only sick but well-nigh broken. They think that their hopes are not only dented, but blasted. In coming to this conclusion one must have a great deal of sympathy with them. Many of them did their bit in the Great War, were spared to get through and came home only, as one remarked to me the other day, to find their misery perpetuated tenfold. In the battle line they were hailed as the saviours of the Country but in peace time they appear to be the superfluous which no one wants. When one

comes to view the local situation it is anything but bright, and the decision of the Unemployment Grants Committee to withdraw the monies for the Esplanade project, is regarded by them as a knock-out blow, in that looming in the future they have visions of increased rates through a scheme which was originally intended to relieve their distress.

“It is not so long ago, when the Town Council decided to go on with the work that their hopes began to rise. Shortly afterwards they discovered that the cause for rejoicing was not as great as they first anticipated, and their disappointment resulted in demonstrations for recognition. The Local Unemployment Committee, whose duty is to look after their interests, let us not forget, championed their cause; the Town Council it is known sympathised with them also; but what has it resulted in – the bombshell we announced last weekend.”

The writer suggested that although things looked bleak especially with the potential of an increased rates burden – it might not turn out to be as bad as it looks. The suggestion was “that they adopt the old soldier’s ditty and ‘turn the dark clouds inside out till the boys come home,’ – not till the boys come home, but till the Government are, we hope, brought to realise their responsibilities in the matter.”

The paper again suggested that this was not a time to apportion blame; more the situation was to be regretted.

They viewed it as absurd to suggest that The Local Unemployment Committee and the Town Council had been working against the unemployed. Their stance was that this had to be either a misunderstanding or a flaw in the terms of the contract. They believed that if it was the former, it could be remedied by the cancellation of the letter of withdrawal, or 'if it be the latter there is still room for discussion as to who is the responsible party, for it has been publicly admitted that the terms of the contract were approved by the Unemployment Grants Committee, and having approved them they can hardly turn round now and repudiate their entire liability. This is a point which our local Council members may be expected to make the most of. They will at any rate have the support of the majority of ratepayers in whatever steps they determine to take to vindicate their right to the claim.'"

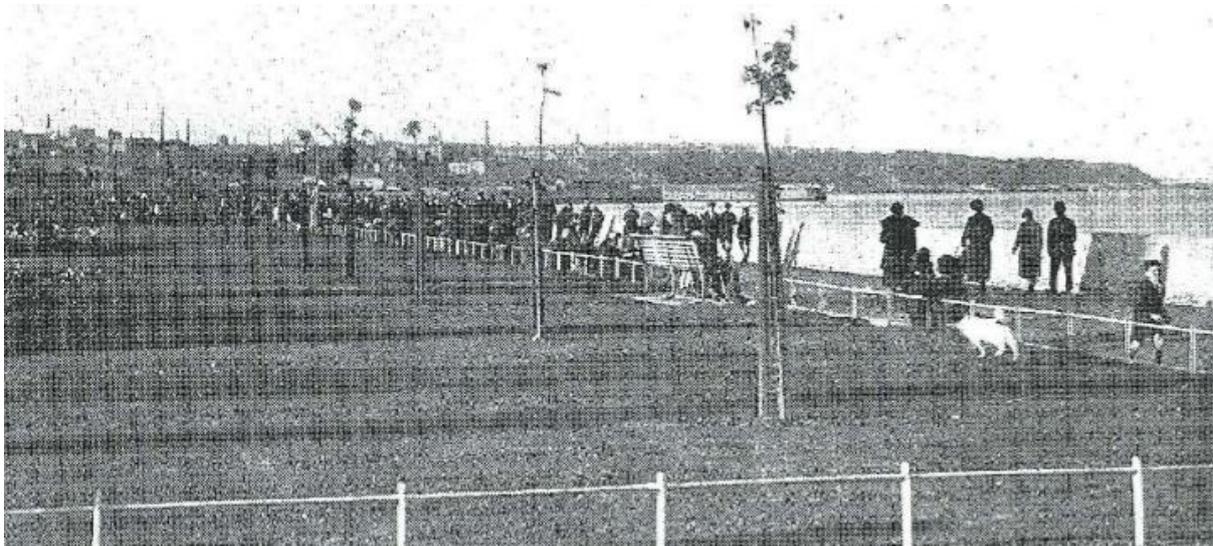
The article was intent on maintaining a balanced view, taking into account the pressure which was now on the Council. They again reinforced their opinion that nothing was to be gained by recrimination references, especially from those who were not and could not be aware of the actual facts. They did concede however that given the sums involved it was perhaps natural behaviour. They also pointed out that even to the uninitiated eye the difficulties faced by the contractors in the early stages had to be taken into account. There could be no argument that in building the wall particularly demanded the use of skilled navvies

well used to working in conditions of discomfort and hardship. They took the stance that there was still a great deal of work to be done, and that this perhaps lighter work might be more suited to the class of unemployed in the town. It was felt that there was still opportunity to be grasped “to utilise that labour to the utmost extent.”

There was a suggestion from Treasurer Reekie at the Provost’s Committee meeting that week, that a number of factors had to be considered and these would be brought home by the deputation going to London. One of these was the use of sub-contractors who were not on the books of Messrs. McAlpine, but should certainly be taken into account. “There is the quarrying of whinstone used in the building of the seawall, the carting of that material to the site, and also the carting of large stones used as backing, and which were removed from Dysart beach. This at any rate to the casual observer would appear as labour engaged in the scheme. Many believe that if this is admitted to by the Unemployment Grants Committee, it will put a different complexion on affairs. Then of course, there is the road making which is now in progress, for the bottoming of which a lot of carting is required. These although possibly being afterthoughts, are important points and well worth following up.

“The community can rest assured that no effort will be spared on the part of its representatives to see the matter

through to a satisfactory issue. The Grant, certainly from present appearances, looks in danger, but surely hopes can be entertained that an arrangement can be come to on the matter. Whatever transpires, the people at any rate do not wish the fulfilment of the scheme to be tampered with. It has been their dream for so long, and it is certainly unfortunate that just as it seemed to be realised this misfortune has come along. As a matter of fact the



improvement of the appearance of the seafront is already so pronounced that the great majority would willingly go to the length of paying the additional tax to have it carried out in its entirety. For while Kirkcaldy with its hives of industry may not appear to strangers as an ideal holiday resort, it assuredly will strike them as a much more favourable and attractive place than formerly, in which to make, at any rate, a short sojourn, and the more who can be drawn to visit the “Lang Toon” the greater prosperity the future does hold for it.

“From what I could gather there is no intention on the part of the town’s representatives that the scheme should suffer. They are alive to the importance of it, and the benefit it would eventually prove. The prospect of losing assistance of £85.000 is appreciated to the full, for it is recognised on our current valuation it would mean an addition of 5.1/2d per pound on the rates, but in regard to this there is a feeling of optimism, which I may add, I share. Surely the brains of our leading citizens who evolved this venture can be relied upon just as well to meet this unexpected turn of events, and who knows that they may yet come out on top even in conflict with those of a Government Department. The Sands Road now in process of transformation must be gone on with. To delay would mean additional cost. Despite the bombshell, and without allotting blame, the people are practically of one accord summed up in the simple phrase – let us have our Esplanade.”

There does not appear to be a great deal recorded immediately following the above, with only some questions being asked by Councillor Westwood in relation to the contract details at the October Council meeting. It has to be assumed that negotiations were going on in the background. However a letter was received from John Bryce, Iron founder, protesting against Messrs. McAlpine and Sons placing an order for the cast iron gullies in connection with the road making on Sands Road, outside

Kirkcaldy district, although they quoted for the work before the contract was fixed and then gave them a reduced price last month. The letter was passed to the Provost's Committee.

However, a report of the 21st October meeting of the Local Unemployment Committee appeared in the Fife Free Press. Mr Cochrane, the Manager of the Exchange thought there was very little prospect in this coming winter for many or any of the 1350 registered as unemployed. He went on to say that there would be a great deal of suffering unless the local authority pushed forward with ideas for road making and resurfacing, together with making some roads more suitable for vehicular transport. He thought it important that this should be forcibly stressed to the Council. Mr Lockhart who was presiding doubted if much could be done until the issue of the sea wall was resolved. He also reiterated that there had been three or four approved schemes going on in the town, despite the contentious issues with the wall. He had some good news however and that was that the contractor would now come to the Exchange to get his labour from the unemployed.



Mr Lockhart commented that now in these schemes all labour had to be sourced from the Exchange and from local unemployed. Mr Cochrane thought it possible that this change may well have been a direct result of the Kirkcaldy situation. It was agreed that discussions should continue and the following month they should drawn up a list of potential works. The idea was to submit the ideas to the appropriate Burgh and district authorities.

The December 1922 meeting covered a little different ground after a full and detailed discussion on the material to be used on the new Esplanade, which was of course. the old and now to be extended Sands Road. After some exchanges regarding the quality of bottoming they moved on to discuss the surface. There were two distinct arguments one for the use of tar, while the other favoured the new asphalte as provided by the British Pioneer Asphalte Company. The discussion went in circles until it

was deferred for a month to secure reports from other towns who had used the more expensive asphalt. This was followed by a report on the suggested lighting to be used. Quotations for poles and lanterns had been secured from eight different firms. To this was added the possibility of using the lamps which had recently been removed from Princes Street Edinburgh. However, at 26 foot high they were considered too massive and unsuitable, therefore were discarded. The quotes received ranged from £6.17s to £22.10s per pole with brackets and lanterns in place and delivered to Kirkcaldy. There was also a suggestion that the old gas lamps have new lanterns fitted to them but again this was discarded, as the wish of the majority was an elaborate pole in keeping with the enhanced area. After careful consideration it was agreed that Messrs Cable Accessories Company Ltd. offered the best option. The poles were only 15 feet from the ground and are exactly the same as the new lights installed in Princess Street. The cost was £13.05.06d per pole and delivered to Kirkcaldy. The original scheme was for 40 poles each 50 yards apart but there was an acceptance that this might have to be varied after a full survey. One of the highlights of the meeting was the handsome tribute paid to Joseph Westwood by Provost Kilgour. Mr Westwood had just secured a seat in Parliament and the Provost felt it only right to congratulate the gentleman. The Provost did indicate that Mr Westwood and himself failed to agree on many matters but “ from the time

he had known Mr Westwood he had formed a great opinion of his ability and powers of reasoning; and he had no doubt that in the great assembly to which he had



been elected he would do honour, not only to his party, but to the race from which he sprang, and possibly take a position in future worthy of himself (applause). Note – he certainly did – rising to Secretary of State for Scotland.

To add insult to injury the Town Council meeting on the 16th February 1923 saw a letter from ‘The Office of Woods’.



content stated that it had been brought to the attention of Sir George Leveson-Gower, of that Department, that the sea wall, promenade and other works are to a large extent on foreshore or reclaimed foreshore and as such belong to the Crown, and should not have been commenced without the consent of the Department. The letter went on to point out that it will

now be necessary for the Town to purchase the land between the newly reclaimed ground and the new wall. The Office was instructing Mr G. Carfrae of Edinburgh to survey

and value the land. Unless the sum was paid by the 31st March 1923 interest at 6% would be added.

The rights to the minerals under the land would remain with the Crown and astonishingly they added provisions prohibiting the building on what would be the Council's own land



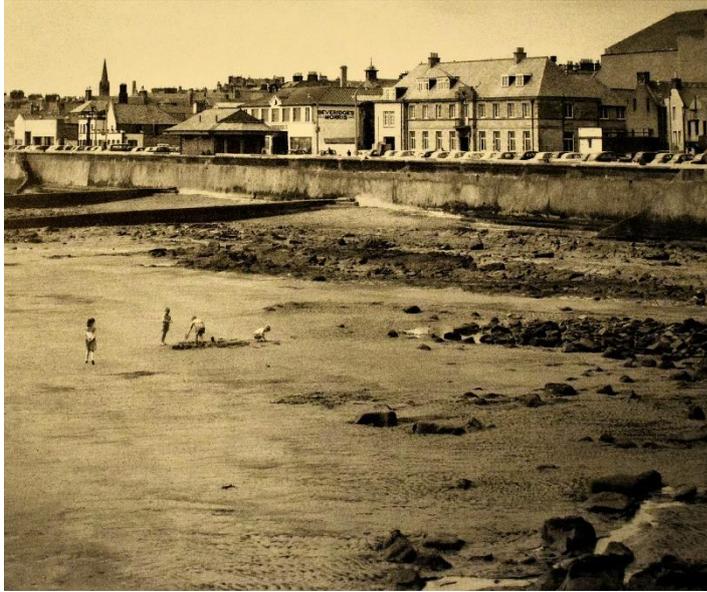
anything other than the sea wall, embankment, seats and conveniences normally found on any open promenade. The disposition would be drawn up at the Council's cost.

The 16th June saw after copious correspondence, the offer from the 'Office for Woods' – 1.040 acres from the Tiel Burn to the royalty boundary between Gas Wynd and Burleigh Street at a cost of £31.04.0d. The other portion extending from the royalty boundary to the Port Brae measured 2.8 acres and the cost being £86-05.0. The surveyor had found a further two small patches close to the Port Brae. These were measured as .04 and .144 of an acre and the costs were £1.07.06d and £4.06.06 respectively, Mr Carfrae's expenses amounted to £5.10.6d. This whole episode cost the Town £108.04.06d. (At some stage this prohibition of building must have been rescinded to allow car parks and the Country Bus Stances to be erected)

The 12th May 1923 saw another visit to London by the Provost and Town Clerk to meet Mr Rey, Secretary of the Grant Committee. It transpired that Mr Rey thought it possible that Grant might be provided from the point when the wall was completed, and when it was accepted that the requirement of 75% employment of ex-servicemen was being met. The delegation rejected this offer / suggestion out of hand. (Fife Free Press}

The 12th June 1923 saw more determination to try and secure the full grant. A deputation consisting of Provost Kilgour and the Town Clerk had set off for London for an interview with the Unemployment Committee. The result was that the Council were to submit a statement outlining their case. The statement was carried in full by the Courier but can be summarised as follows:-

The opening gambit was that much of the project was below the high water mark. This meant that the first work had to be the building of the sea wall and work was carried out night and day on this aspect as the tides permitted. This excavating required a degree of skill but allied to that a huge degree of physical strength was needed to stand the arduous nature of the work. There was no time to train men gradually to get accustomed to the work. If a storm had blown up, there was no telling what damage could have been done to the structure. The Council had been advised that the physique of the ex- servicemen applying rendered



many incapable of the demanding trench work involved. A number of men who were taken on soon left of their own free will, the work being too heavy and unsuitable for them. The report

also pointed out that the contractor entered into an arrangement with the Labour exchange where 8 labourers were sent to the site each morning. Some 80 – 100 men were taken on in this manner. The men engaged turned out to be so unsuitable that the practice fell away. The belief that Irish navvies were imported was strongly denied by the contractors. They did employ skilled Irishmen but the common practice of these men was to work a few months in this Country and then go back to work on their crofts in Ireland. It is the earnest belief of the Council that when the work is completed the figure of ex-servicemen employed will be very close to the 75%. The content ended with confirmation of receipt of the report by the Unemployment Grants Committee.

On the 30th August 1923 some good news was reported in the local press. Space was initially devoted to going over old

ground in relation to the grant, and indicated that a total loss would have resulted in 5.1/2 pence in the £ being added to the rates. Hope was then offered in the following paragraph;-

“Needless to say, at the time the news came as a bombshell to the ratepayers, but since that time the Council and other leading citizens have been busily at work in endeavouring to save a portion of the grant and, the offer which has now been received from the Unemployment Grant Committee shows that the committee, although somewhat reluctant, are prepared to consider making a grant of some 50% of what would have been payable had the conditions been satisfactory throughout”. The lengthy letter carrying this news confirmed the Grant had been approved on the 22nd December 1921 and then withdrawn in full on the 11th September 1922. Reference was made to the raft of correspondence and interviews which had taken place especially figures supplied by the contractor that the objections which the committee had, had largely been eliminated by December 1922. In view of the circumstances the committee were prepared to reconsider their earlier decision of full withdrawal of the monies, and all work done after the 14th December 1922 would rank for full grant. The letter made it clear that the monies originally sanctioned were only for work done until the 31st March 1923 (scheduled date for conclusion of contract). However, the committee were prepared to sanction the work from that

date until the completion of the work. This extension was to a degree granted with some hesitation as the original application indicated the work would only last nine months. In effect it lasted 16 months and in the last few months unemployment in the town had not reached a high level. The committee noted it had been given assurances that the work would be completed by the 31st July 1923. The default position adopted by the Committee was that of the 16 month duration of the work, eight and a half had been unsatisfactory, but the final seven and a half had met the conditions. It was on this basis that the offer of 50% would be made. In order to proceed they sought confirmation of the percentage of unemployed local men together with ex-servicemen employed on the project during the final period. Certainly progress, but what would the Council's stance be? Accept the lower figure or attempt to secure the full grant



through legal channels? It was anticipated that these matters would be decided at the Council meeting on the 10th September. There was also the question of the

official opening – scheduled for the 8th October - what would happen there?

The 4th of September saw a large meeting in the Pathhead Hall in relation to the loss of the grant. The principal speakers were Councillor Laing and Tom Kennedy who was the prospective Member of Parliament. The meeting was held under the auspices of the Labour Party. Councillor Laing suggested that at the next monthly meeting of the Council “the foreshore question would be examined from the rock bottom to the finished article”. “He was sure, he said, by that time they would know where the bungling lay. The conditions of contract he described as a disgrace. He maintained that the contractor was not to blame. He was there in a position of private enterprise, and he took every advantage of the looseness of contract.” Mr Kennedy also referred to the loss of 50% of the grant. “The terms of contact, he said, were on record, and it was a perfectly easy thing for anyone without prejudice to examine them and to come to a conclusion whether they had been fulfilled or evaded” He went on to ask people to watch what the Council did next – would they accept or reject the offer of 50% of the grant. If they rejected the offer and went to law, it would almost certainly lead to an exposure of what went wrong and who was responsible. If they accepted the offer they were saddling the burgh with an unwanted burden on

the rates and the responsibility was theirs. If this came to pass, then the people must demand to know who was responsible for this imposition on the rates, an imposition which in his judgement, ought to have with ordinary foresight been avoided.

“He hoped that the Unemployment Grants Committee would yet be brought to realise that the community should not be made to pay for the shortcomings of individuals and the public representatives in a matter of that kind, but that the scheme should be regarded as a public enterprise indulged in by the community in order to partially meet the difficulty that had a national origin, for which the local community should not be called upon to pay.”

Monday the 10th September saw scenes almost without parallel in the Town’s municipal history. A crowd of around 1000 had been gathered in front of the Town House, clearly intend on obtaining entry to the night’s Council meeting. The cause was the earlier indication by the Labour Party that the loss of grant monies would be discussed from start to finish. Entrance was gained some ten minutes before the start, and in minutes more than 400 people had secured admittance, with more than that number still in the street. The seats of some members were annexed by women, but thankfully order prevailed. Some members whose seats were occupied simply sat on the table. The room was stifling, there were no spaces, but eventually, after some

arguments and a vote to continue/adjourn the meeting- the decision was to press ahead. The motion to continue was passed by 15 votes to 11. The windows had been flung open for air, and those outside realising there was no hope for entry. had gone home.

The first business related to an attempt to replace the name 'Sands Road' with 'Marine Parade'. This got nowhere and the original name suggested – 'The Esplanade' – was agreed upon. The next step was accepting the recommendation of the Provost's Committee that the official opening should be abandoned. It seems that the appetite to celebrate had been dampened by the controversy



Business then moved on to apportioning blame. Councillor Westwood was vigorous in condemning at every stage the lack of the words – “not less than” in the contract. In his eyes it was this omission which was the root cause of the town's woes. Councillor Nairn maintained that the Councillors had not yet seen the full terms of the contract between

the Council and the contractor. However the Provost and the Town Clerk were determined to establish how to take matters forward rather than indulge in the 'blame game'.

This motion was passed and it was agreed the Town Clerk would report back after a thorough examination of the circumstances. The meeting closed and despite the public ‘invasion’ – all was carried out in an orderly manner.

Thursday, September the 20th saw more activity being reported by The Courier. The report saw that on the recommendation of the Town Clerk, that Sir Robert Hutchison the M.P. for the Burgh should be asked to raise the question in Parliament. (See below for who was eventually asked in December to do this). Mr Macindoe had written in fairly terse terms to the Secretary of the Unemployment Grants Committee asking the following:-

‘Is it possible to raise an action against the Crown to decide the validity of the claim? In which country should the claim be raised – Scotland or England? Against whom should the action be raised? What style of action should it be – a Petition of Right or otherwise? Finally if the Council were to raise such an action and it was unsuccessful would the 50% grant still be available?’



The Town Clerk went on to say that he had also suggested that he travel to London to discuss the above points. He then mentioned that he had in fact received a reply from the Committee telling him they saw no merit in such a visit. Their view was that the questions raised in his letter were legal ones, and that the Committee could not and would not be able to answer them. They saw no purpose in a meeting in these circumstances. Mr Macindoe went on to say that it was impossible to get counsel's opinion until they knew if the matter was to be regulated by an English or Scottish law, and whether jurisdiction be in an English or Scottish court. Until he had this knowledge, he could not approach counsel. He did feel that it the case was to be raised against

the Unemployment Grant Committee it was possible / probable that the contractor might join in.



They had to secure answers to these questions and he asked for authority to request Sir

Robert to raise the question in Parliament. Agreement was secured.

The situation however took a turn for the worse at a meeting on the 15th September reported on by the Fife Free Press. Here we saw blame surfacing, and heated exchanges between councillors. It appears fair to say than many had only recently had sight of all the paperwork, which until then appears to have been the province of the Provost's Committee.

What is certain is the loss of the grant had been as a result of a small number of words missing in the contract. The contract was worded "up to 75%" as opposed to "up to not less than 75%". There can be no doubt that the two statements can be construed differently, and this was where all the issues had their roots. Councillor Nairn accepted it was made inadvertently, but none the less it gave the contractors the "ability to play ducks and drakes so

far as that contact was concerned.” He could see that it should have been in the contractor’s interest to employ as many local men as possible to keep costs down and comply with the requirement of 75%.

When the case was being made, and it was one he did not accept, that local labour could not do the job, it was himself and Sir Robert



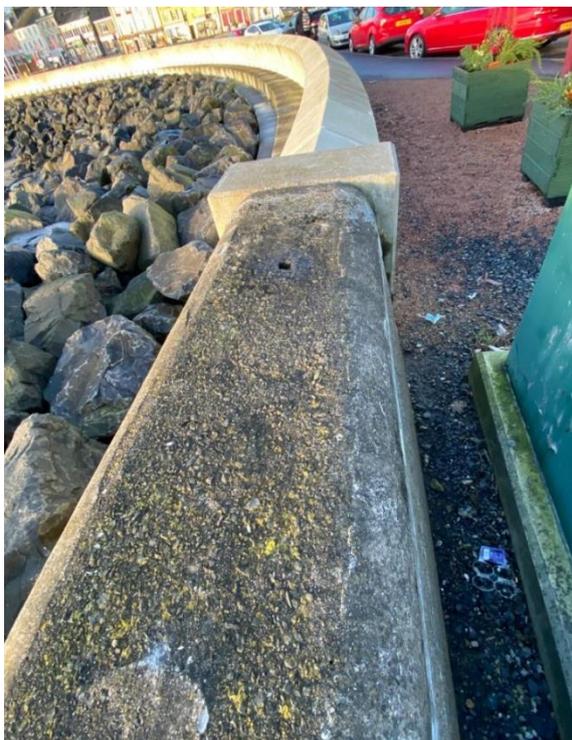
Lockhart who drew the Provost’s Committee’s attention to the lack of local men on the project. Much had been said both publicly and privately about this, and indeed members of the Provost’s Committee were blaming them both for raising the matter. However, he still believed that given a reasonable chance that local labour could have carried out the task just as efficiently and the situation would never have arisen. He felt that the Provost’s Committee had not acted quickly enough when the situation with regard to the percentage of local labour being used first surfaced. Their failure to act quickly and redress the percentage was a critical error. Indeed he was prepared to say;-

“That the responsibility lay, not with the individual members of the Town Council, but those of the Provost’s Committee and the Town Clerk, under whose guidance they were acting, and principally the magistrates who were giving a lead to the full council.”

The meeting continued in that vein with the three Socialist members continuing to focus of the missing words “not less than” and the consequences of their omission. The Provost and the Treasurer fought back by suggesting that there was little or no difference between the terms “preference for not less than 75%” and “preference up to 75%”. It was accepted that the Town Clerk had earlier approached the distinguished Scottish Counsel – Hugh P. MacMillan- for an opinion, and which favoured the Council’s stance. However the very sharp and astute Westwood made the point that “They had counsel’s opinion but was it infallible? Many a time public money had been spent in taking counsel to try and get more money and the lawyers were always the winners.” His belief was that they should accept the £40,000, when by not doing so they would stand to lose, and the lawyers stand to gain. It was his conviction that he must place responsibility on the Provost’s Committee and the Town Clerk, for not having seen that the conditions of contract were such that they were in accordance with the possibility of earning the full grant of £80,000 promised if the employed up to not less than 75% of ex-servicemen. This was one of the most acrimonious points in the saga.

Strident tones and heated exchanges were the order of the day. The strange thing is that so few of the Council spoke – the whole debate it appears heard very few voices – The Provost, The Town Clerk and Treasurer Reekie on one side of the argument - Councillors Westwood, Nairn and Laing on the other. In the eventual vote only the three dissenting voices, plus Councillor Thomson, were against the decision not to accept half the grant.

In amongst all the disharmony and rancour there was a more positive and heartening message in the Courier on the 19th September under the heading - “Strong Finish.” The point being made was that despite the worries that a portion of the grant was in danger of being lost – “the Civic Fathers were intent on putting a good finish to the work. The roadway along the sea front is now brightly illuminated



with electricity, numerous standards have been erected to hold life saving appliances, shelters are under the course of construction and sample seats have been put in place for trial and inspection. Regarding the latter a suggestion may not be out of place. It is not very interesting to sit and look at

a thick block of concrete and if seats were put in situation on the ground between the roadway and the promenade, if raised slightly in order that the water was visible – they would be much more popular.”

The Dundee Courier updated the position on the 10th December. The Town Clerk was determined that the opinion of counsel should be sought and suggested some names that could be approached. In particular he



mentioned the name of Sir John Simon who had a record of successful challenges against governments. It had been agreed previously that Parliament should be the first port of call but a general election being called had delayed matters and the Town Clerk wished to put the options before the council again. Almost astonishingly there had been General Elections in 1921, 1922 (December) and 1923 (November) which led to delays. Mr Macindoe had now assured himself that an English Court not Scottish had to hear the case. The sums involved were significant and it was for this reason that he wanted legal opinion. His intention was to meet one of the learned barristers along with Provost Kilgour. At this stage of course the Unemployment Grant Committee had

offered half the sum but the Town Council were determined to pursue the full sum although they risked the loss of the 50% offered.



On Monday December the 18th December 1923, The Courier reported that at the Council meeting that night it had

been determined that they would ask two M.P.s to raise the question of the withdrawal of the grant in Parliament before considering legal action. The two individuals were Tom Kennedy the member for Kirkcaldy Burghs and Joseph Westwood the Kirkcaldy councillor who had secured a seat in Parliament in November 1922, representing Peebles and Southern Midlothian. (There had been a change in the Kirkcaldy M.P. since September's deliberations. Twelve days before. On the 6th December, a general election had been held. Tom Kennedy, in regaining his seat, had replaced Sir Robert Hutchison as Member for the Burgh. This election was the last to be held in the month of December until 2019.) The Town Clerk had suggested taking an opinion from Sir John Simson but the decision of the members was to ask questions in Parliament first.

The Fife Free Press of the 9th January shows us how things have changed in the intervening century. Eight lads appeared in the Police Court before Baillie Scott – their crime? Playing football on the promenade, on a Sunday. Six were fined 5/- or 5 days, the other two 2/6d or 5 days.



The New Year saw mention on the 15th January 1924 in the Courier of the Unemployment Grants Committee again. This time it was in relation to the construction of 6 tennis courts and a pavilion in Gallatown Park and a grant towards the cost had been secured. The Council had instructed the Parks Superintendant to plough, level and sow the ground together with the Burgh Surveyor seeking estimates for fencing the park as had been agreed with the trustees of the Earl of Rosslyn.

The 11th March 1924 saw Kirkcaldy make a further approach to the Unemployment Grants Committee with the twin

intention of relieving unemployment, but also enhancing the town's water supply. Although Provost Kilgour advised the Kirkcaldy and District Water Committee that Kirkcaldy was not short of water, it was as well to be prudent. Expansion would in time require more water, and when grants were available they should be made use of. The scheme was to raise Arnot reservoir by 25 feet giving an increased capacity of 150,000,000 gallons. The cost would be £85,000 and the grant set at 65%. On the basis of confirmation of grant availability, the Provost moved that the scheme should have an immediate start. Baillie Blyth seconded and the proposal was carried. (Courier 12th March 1924).



The Fife Free Press carried yet another acrimonious exchange on the 15th March 1924. This stemmed from a report by the Town Clerk on the ins and outs of the whole sorry saga. However, before the meeting on Monday the 11th, the paper had printed the whole of his report. The report had raised Councillors Nairn and Laing to near apoplexy. There is little doubt that the publishing of the report in the press also caught the Provost on the hop.

Councillor Nairn's opening salvo was "The Town Clerk has gone out with his sphere in insulting every member of the Town Council. Take his second paragraph – 'few, in any, of



the Town Council, and none of the politicians, and none of the public were aware of the correct facts of

the case.' That is pure arrogance. This matter has been dealt with by every member of the Council over the past year and for him to come along and say few knew anything about it was a disgrace."

This was the tenor of the whole debate with Messrs. Laing and Nairn launching blistering attack after attack on the Town



Clerk. In particular the Town Clerk had no confidence in negotiating with the Unemployment Grants Committee and wished to stop Mr Kennedy and Mr Westwood having discussions with them. He believed that their request to them was to raise the matter in the House and not to negotiate out with the Chamber. Mr Nairn went as far as

suggesting “not another Town Clerk in Great Britain would have done it – he has insulted the whole of Kirkcaldy Town Council.” The Provost accepted that at the December meeting it had been agreed that they should not prosecute any legal proceedings or take any action in that direction. However it was also clear that as reported by Mr Macindoe that neither M.P. had raised the question in Parliament. After this tense, heated and terse episode it was agreed to refer the matter back to the Provost’s Committee to determine the next steps. Councillors Nairn and Laing refused to vote.

The 2nd April saw the Courier reporting that the withdrawal of the grant would almost certainly end up in Court unless the Unemployment Grant Committee withdraw the cancellation. The Town Council had been buoyed by the fact that Mr Hugh MacMillan, who is now the Lord Advocate to the present government, had previously taken a view which was favourable to the stance of the town. On top of this, and at the suggestion of the Town Clerk, Mr Macindoe, it had later been agreed to consult the eminent counsel, Sir John Simon, who it is understood, is of the opinion that the Council has been well advised in the procedures they have adopted up to the present, his only difficulty being like that of the Town Council, as to whom they should sue – the Crown or the Unemployment Grants Committee. Simon was very confident especially as he looked closely at the figures in relation to unemployed local men being involved in the

contract. His view was local men who only lasted a day or a few days were to his mind employed on the contract. As it was accepted that the contract had been properly run from December 1922 – he believed that it could be demonstrated that the first part of the contract could be shown to have almost certainly met the requirement when every man who had been employed on the project, no matter for how long, was taken into account. He was also warm to Treasurer Reekie’s belief that the sub-contractors working on carting etc. could well be construed as involved in the contract as a whole.



The Courier of the 14th April indicated that the Council still had an appetite to relieve unemployment in any grant aided way possible. Two

schemes seeking grant approval were already at the Ministry of Transport. These were the widening of both Abbotshall and Oswald Roads. The Council had also agreed to a submission to the Unemployment Grants Committee for the following - Resurfacing of Nicol Street, Forth Avenue North and South and also Park Road. A submission was also made for the widening of Bennoch Road at both its



junction with Victoria Road and close to the site of the war memorial. (Courier, 14th April 1924).

Fortune Favours the Brave

On Tuesday the 24th July 1924 a telegram from received from Mr T.B. Kennedy, the M.P. for Kirkcaldy Burghs giving the joyous news that the Unemployment Grant Committee had sanctioned payment in full – some £85.000. Negotiations had been ongoing for nearly two years and the withdrawal of the



grant had the potential to put 5 1/2d per £ on the rates. The whole episode certainly caused financial consternation to the council. The project had after all only been sanctioned on the basis that the Government Grant would cover 65% of the cost + interest over a 15 year period. Treasurer Reekie at the outset had calculated an annual repayment of £8717.

The Government share would therefore be £5666 with the Council meeting the other £3051. The loss of the grant portion equates to £187,000 today. The Council had been budgeting on meeting the full cost of the project so the Town could look forward to a reduction in the rates.

On Monday the 8th September 1924 the end arrived as the Dundee Courier reported the following day.

Provost Kilgour was able to announce that the Unemployment Grant Committee had determined that the vexed grant had been paid in full. He remarked “that it closed a controversy of the greatest moment

to the town”. He then went on to pay tribute to figures that had been identified as having played a great part in securing the decision. These included Lord Dalziel, Sir Robert

Hutchison, Mr T.B. Kennedy M.P. and Joseph Westwood M.P. He also mentioned the eminent counsels – Sir John Simon and Mr H.P. MacMillan whose opinions had helped the Council adopt their strong stance. He moved on to the



Town Clerk who “had been attacked for incompetency and mistakes but had been vindicated and placed on a higher pedestal than ever as their local advisor. In proposing a special vote of thanks to Mr Macindoe he was sure he was interoperating the feeling of the Council and had much pleasure in doing so”. As could possibly be expected, both Cllrs. Nairn and Laing dissented, but the motion was still passed.

Conclusion

Without a shadow of doubt a well intentioned scheme turned sour. The construction of what is still a pleasant walk even after nearly a century dissolved into anger and recriminations. These included a protest march, invasion of the town house, the cancellation of the opening ceremony and raised and heated voices in the Council Chamber.

These are all exceptional and unique circumstances in the town’s civic annals. The arguments and disagreements have long since been lost in the mists of time but the wall, promenade and Esplanade still stand firm, although efforts to glamorise the name still persist. Whether it be Waterfront of now, or the Marine Parade of a century ago – nothing will turn Kirkcaldy into a holiday resort or a quaint East Neuk Village. Kirkcaldy seafront has always had the frontage of an industrial townscape and landscape. It is what it is and will always be known as “The Prom”. That is our heritage – a town that made things – built things –

engineered things - imported things and exported things, not a beauty spot. This town we love was built on its near 400 year old harbour and its many dozens of factory chimneys billowing unhealthy smoke and dust to the four winds. Above all it is a sad reflection, in fact almost a crime that townspeople can no longer walk to the end of its pier. We should celebrate Kirkcaldy for what it was and what it is – not some ethereal conception of what some would like it to be, but never can be. For all its warts – it is Kirkcaldy – it is the ‘Lang Toun’ and that is enough. As you walk the prom remember the strain, the struggles and the savagery of the elements faced those hundred years ago. Its building was not all plain sailing.

But hey – we have the 1.6 million Waterfront! Somebody watching too much Marlon Brando and not enough Geordie Munro?

Acknowledgements

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Fife Cultural Trust for Fife Council. Pages 4, 7, 12, 32, 40, 53, 59, 66, 73.

Blyth and Blyth. Pages 5,16,23.

**Peter K. Livingstone. (A History of Kirkcaldy 1843-1949)
Pages 9 & 10.**

Kirkcaldy Civic Society. Pages 56, 37 & 39.

Eric Eunson (Bygone Kirkcaldy) Page 68

www.npg.org.uk Provost Kilgour. Page 81.

**Joseph Westwood MP. Pages 47 & 58 Courtesy of
Westwood Family**

Everipedia.org. Henry Dalziel - Page 81.