

## YESTERDAY'S NEWS.4

Last time, we ended with a 1917 cutting about an aircraft that had been paid for by donations from Tiree. In this issue and the next, we will rewind the time machine three years, and look at the island at start of the Great War.

Within weeks of the German invasion of Belgium, a group had been formed on Tiree to support those serving in uniform, particularly those with a Highland connection:

### **'COMFORTS FOR OUR SOLDIERS**

A public meeting was held in Hylipol Parish Church to consider what steps should be taken in Tiree to assist in the present national crisis. The Rev. Alex. MacBean M.A. presided, and the meeting was addressed by Lady Frances Balfour and Mr Guinnis, Scarinish Hotel. Mr H. MacDiarmid, Island House, moved that the School Board, Parish Council, and Nursing Association [which raised money to pay for the island nurse] form themselves into a central Committee. Mr MacLean, teacher, Balemartin, seconded, and the resolution was unanimously adopted. A similar meeting was held at Kirkapol, at which the Rev. D. McInnes B.D. presided. The Central Committee met at Scarinish Hotel, when the Rev. D. McInnes was elected secretary for the east end of the island, and the Rev. Alex. MacBean for the west, with Mr MacDiarmid, Island House, treasurer. Local committees, including collectors, were appointed for each township, and it is gratifying to report that the Island of Tiree is responding heartily to the call.' (*Oban Times and Argyllshire Advertiser*, 5 September 1914, 6)

Lady Frances Balfour, the aunt of the tenth Duke and younger sister of Lady Victoria, was a frequent visitor to The Lodge on Gott Bay. As we shall see, her son was in uniform. Forty-nine-year-old Francis Gunnis from Chiddingstone in Kent held the shooting rights on Tiree, and was a regular guest with his wife Ivy at the Temperance Hotel. For many years, a sundial presented by the family stood outside the bank. The ministers of both Kirkapol and Heylipol parish churches were to the fore, as was the island's factor. Roderick MacLean from North Uist was the head teacher at Balemartine School.

Lady Balfour's son was in the army. Within weeks, she had received bad news:

### **'LADY FRANCES BALFOUR'S SON WOUNDED**

Second Lieutenant Oswald H. C. Balfour, of the 60th Rifles, was wounded in the Battle of the Aisne on September 14th. He is the younger son of the late Colonel Eustace Balfour, ADC, and of Lady Frances Balfour, and is a nephew of the Right Hon. A. J. Balfour [Prime Minister from 1902 to 1905]. He was born in 1894, and received his military training at Sandhurst. His wound, fortunately, is not serious, the bullet having struck him on the lower jaw below the

mouth. The bone was broken, but has now been set. Lieutenant Balfour is at present in a hospital near Paris. He is expected to return shortly to Scotland' (*Oban Times and Argyllshire Advertiser*, 3 October 1914, 5).

The First Battle of the Aisne took place between 12 and 15 September 1914. The Germans had occupied high ground behind the Aisne River in France. The British Expeditionary Force suffered huge losses on what became the Western Front. Oswald Balfour survived the war, dying in 1953.

### **'COMFORTS FOR THE SOLDIERS**

A general meeting of the Association formed for the purpose of providing comforts for the soldiers was held in the Scarinish Public Hall on Tuesday, 17th inst. [probably the Church of Scotland Hall at the pier]. Lady Frances Balfour, who travelled specially from London for the purpose, presided. The treasurer, Mr MacDiarmid, Island House, reported that the total sum collected in the island amounted to £101 10s 6d [the equivalent today of £14,000]. The sum spent on material for shirts and socks was £48 2s, leaving a balance of £53 8s 6d. The joint secretaries for the east and west ends of the island respectively, the Rev. D. McInnes, B.D. and the Rev. A. MacBean, M.A., reported that the total work done was 472 pairs of socks and 83 shirts. Of that total, 264 pairs of socks and 65 shirts had been sent to Lady Elspeth Campbell, Inveraray Castle [a daughter of the ninth Duke], and forwarded from thence to the Argyll and Sutherland Highlanders stationed at Bedford. Of the goods still on hand, the meeting unanimously resolved to send 50 pairs of socks to the 60th Royal Rifles, to which regiment Lieut. Balfour, a son of Lady Frances Balfour, is attached, he being at present at home recovering from wounds received at the Battle of the Aisne, having been mentioned in despatches by Field Marshal Sir John French. It was resolved to send the remainder of the finished work to the Argyll and Sutherland Highlanders at the Front. The money on hand was disposed of as follows: £5 for more shirting material; £15 for wool for body belts and scarfs; and £6 for tobacco for the Argyll and Sutherland Highlanders at the Front: £15 to the Belgian Repatriation Fund; leaving a balance on hand of £12. At the close of the meeting Lady Frances Balfour gave a brief account of the history of the London Scottish, from the raising of the 1st Battalion up to the other day when the regiment withstood the fierce attacks of the Germans in overwhelming numbers under the personal supervision of the German Emperor.' (*Oban Times and Argyllshire Advertiser*, 28 November 1914, 6)

Rather than just buying goods for the soldiers, islanders had sewed shirts and knitted socks.

While the First World War and the Covid pandemic were quite different, it is interesting to compare the ways the island responded to these international crises. In both cases, the island quickly rallied to form a new committee. But in 1914, leadership came from an aunt of the Duke of Argyll living in London, the factor and two Church of Scotland ministers. It was a world

of powerful institutions and respect for authority. Tiree's Covid response was—partly because it had to be—entirely home-grown.