

John Meikle VC
Morag Cross August 2014

*****VC12.1**

John Meikle VC, MM, was one of many recruits so anxious to join up that he lied about his birth date. He pretended to be nineteen (the minimum age to fight overseas), when he was actually only sixteen years old. One historian has estimated that over 250,000 recruits were underage, defining 'boy soldiers' as those under eighteen, the lowest official age for enlistment. [Source: Richard Van Emden, 2012, *Boy Soldiers of the Great War*, London, ppix, 358-65, 368-72].

*****VC12.2a, VC12.2b or VC12.2c use one or more**

John Meikle's gravestone does not record his age, and contemporary newspapers report him as being twenty-one at death. Even his own regiment were unaware of his true age as late as 1934, when a brief biography appeared in The Seaforth Highlander's journal, *Cabar Feidh*. This made Meikle one of the youngest-ever recipients of the Victoria Cross. Of the 628 Crosses awarded during the Great War (excluding the 5 in for the White Russian Campaign of 1919), only around 25 went to men under twenty years of age, including Meikle. [Sources: *Glasgow Herald*, 17 Sept 1918, p4; *Dundee Courier*, 18 September 1918, p3; 'A 4th Seaforth Highlander VC', *Cabar Feidh* [Regimental Journal], Vol IV, September 1934, p24; Iain Stewart, 'The Victoria Cross' Website Curator, Personal Communication, 25 August 2014, and www.victoriacross.org.uk/vcross.htm].

*****VC12.3 a, b, c, d - use VC12.3a, and any others required**

John Meikle was born in September 1898, at Freeland Place, Kirkintilloch, to John Meikle senior, who was originally from Linlithgow, and his wife Jane Hollywood, whose family was of Irish ancestry, although living in Campsie parish. John Meikle senior was a carter, whose first wife had died in childbirth in the early 1880s. He had subsequently joined the army, leaving his daughter to be cared for by his parents, while he served in Burma with the Royal Garrison Artillery. This daughter, Jane, or 'Jeanie' Meikle eventually married a coalminer, and raised her own family in Larkhall. In 1890, John Meikle senior married Annie Hollywood, a watchmaker's daughter, from Kirkintilloch, and the couple were living with the Hollywoods at 5 Cowgate, Kirkintilloch, in the 1891 census. [Sources: Birth, death and census data, www.scotlandspeople.gov.uk, accessed 8 August 2014; 'Sergeant J Meikle VC', *Ross-shire Journal*, 1 November 1918, at www.rossandcromartyheritage.org, accessed 9 August 2014].

*****VC12.4**

The Meikles had twelve children, of whom John was the fifth. His parents had the misfortune to lose four of their children in infancy, a common occurrence in poor families with limited access to healthcare. Only the three youngest, Mary, Job and Janet, lived beyond the age of thirty. [Sources: Census, Birth and Death Information, Valuation Rolls, www.scotlandspeople.gov.uk, accessed 11 August 2014; Mr J D Meikle, personal communication, 12 August 2014; J R MacLeod, 1992, *Portrait of a Soldier: Sgt John Meikle*, VC MM, Dingwall, pp2-3].

*****VC12.5**

John Meikle senior worked for the nearby Perry & Hope's Forth and Clyde Chemical Works, which made phosphates as food preservatives and baking additives, as well as fertilisers, metallurgical and

cleaning products. In 1900-01, the company moved their factory to Nitshill, south of Glasgow, and the Meikles followed, leaving Kirkintilloch in April or May, 1901. [Sources: Valuation Rolls, 1901 Census, www.scotlandspeople.gov.uk, accessed 11 August 2014; *1900 Valuation Roll for Kirkintilloch*, p45, *1901 Valuation Roll for Kirkintilloch*, pp45-6, East Dunbartonshire Archives, Kirkintilloch; Thomas Watson, 1894, *Kirkintilloch: Town and Parish*, Glasgow, p343; Angus McLean (editor) 1901, *Local Industries of Glasgow and the West of Scotland*, Glasgow, p166; *Glasgow Post Office Directories 1899-1904*].

***VC12.6

In Nitshill, the Meikles lived first in Dunlop Street (1903), and then Main Street, (1905), and finally by 1908 had moved to 1 Office Row, in Victoria Road, Nitshill. Meikle Road was named in tribute to John when a new council housing scheme was erected in Nitshill in 1938-9. Along with his siblings, John Meikle junior attended Lavern Public School, as well as Pollokshaws Primitive Methodist Chapel. The family were deeply religious, and travelled three miles there and back each Sunday. The Methodist minister Rev F J Sainty remembered them as 'among the most faithful adherents [being present] Sunday after Sunday, throughout the year.' [Sources: Birth Information, Valuation Roll 1905, www.scotlandspeople.gov.uk, accessed 11 August 2014; 'Sergeant J Meikle VC', *Ross-shire Journal*, 1 November 1918, at www.rossandcromartyheritage.org, accessed 9 August 2014; Mr J Salkeld, personal communication, 7 August 2014; Mr J D Meikle, personal communication, 8 August 2014; *Glasgow Post Office Directory 1939-40*, p54; *Glasgow Post Office Directory 1940-1*, p68].

***VC12.7

John Meikle was a keen football player, and supported the local amateur Lavern Victoria Football Club, and as a child, acted as their errand-boy, looking after their hamper at their Holm Park ground (the team allegedly disbanded in 1909). As a teenager, he was pictured in a football strip (unidentified), probably for a local juvenile team, which included Nitshill Royal Victoria (founded c1910). [Sources: J R MacLeod, 1992, *Portrait of a Soldier: Sgt John Meikle*, VC MM, Dingwall, pp3-4; Brian McColl, John Byrne *et al*, 2014, *All-time Scottish Football Club Directory*, [pdf database], and Jackie Heaney *et al*, 1984 and 2006, *Glasgow Junior Football League 1895-1927*, <http://scottish-football-historical-archive.com>, accessed 13 August 2014; J B Hunter, 'Memories of Old Nitshill', *Greater Pollok Kist: Community Museum*, www.pollok-kist.co.uk, accessed 12 August 2014; *Daily Record*, 24 April 1914, p7].

***VC12.8

When he left school, Meikle became a clerk at Nitshill Station for the Glasgow, Barrhead and Kilmarnock Joint Railway (which was co-owned by the Caledonian Railway and the Glasgow and South Western Railway Companies). Here, he earned 7/6d per week, of which his prudent mother saved some on his behalf. [Sources: J R MacLeod, 1992, *Portrait of a Soldier: Sgt John Meikle*, VC MM, Dingwall, pp4, 9; 'Caledonian Railway', and 'Glasgow and Kilmarnock Joint Railway', *A History of Britain's Railways*, www.railbrit.co.uk, accessed 12 August 2014; *Dundee Courier*, 18 September 1918, pp3 9; *Glasgow Herald*, 2 February 1920, p13].

***VC12.9

John Meikle was, like so many young men at the start of the war, motivated by patriotism to 'do his bit' for his country, and join the colours. He attempted to enlist, but was rejected due to his obvious youth, and small stature. He reportedly asked his mother to make him porridge in order to help him to grow larger and stronger. Eventually, the recruiting sergeant for The Seaforth Highlanders at Maryhill Barracks was persuaded to sign him up, but Meikle had to lie about his age (he was only 16 years and five months old). On 8 February, 1915, he was enrolled in the 4th Battalion of The Seaforth Highlanders, a Dingwall-based territorial unit which had been in France since 1914. However, Meikle remained in the UK, having said that he was 18, which was still a year too young to serve overseas. [Sources: Mr J Salkeld, personal communication, 7 August 2014; Memorial inscription, Station Square, Dingwall; 'The Seaforth Highlanders', *The Long Long Trail: The British Army in the Great War of 1914-1918*, www.1914-1918.net, accessed 10 August 2014].

*****VC12.10**

The week after their son joined up, the Meikles suffered the tragic loss of the first of four adult daughters to tuberculosis, or consumption, a disease rife among the crowded dwellings of the working classes in Glasgow. Margaret Banks Meikle, a thread-mill worker, died on 18 February 1915, aged just eighteen. She had been ill for some nine months, and her brother had been in the army for only ten days. [Sources: Register of Deaths, www.scotlandspeople.gov.uk, accessed 26 July 2014].

*****VC12.11 Dingwall departure**

Meikle's personal military service record, along with many others, was destroyed in an air raid during World War 2. However, it is known that he 'joined the 2/4 Seaforths ... was trained at Bedford, Fort George and Blair Atholl, being one of the hardy band to cross the Grampians on the long trek between the Fort and Blair.' [Sources: 'A 4th Seaforth Highlander VC', *Cabar Feidh* [Regimental Journal], Vol IV, September 1934, p24;].

*****VC12.12 Blickling hall**

The 2/4th (Ross Highland) Battalion was quartered at Pitlochry in October 1915, and moved to Norwich in March 1916, and Kelling, in Norfolk, in June. Rifle ranges and practice trenches, dug by troops in training for the Western Front, can still be seen on Kelling Heath. Finally, in July 1917, the 2/4 Seaforths were stationed at Blickling Park, Norfolk (now a National Trust estate). [Sources: 'A 4th Seaforth Highlander VC', *Cabar Feidh* [Regimental Journal], Vol IV, September 1934, p24; 'The Seaforth Highlanders', *The Long Long Trail: The British Army in the Great War of 1914-1918*, www.1914-1918.net, accessed 10 August 2014; WW1 practice trenches, Kelling Heath, NHER Nos: 38414, 38418, 35551, *Norfolk Heritage Explorer*, www.heritage.norfolk.gov.uk, accessed 12 August 2014; J Albone, S Massey and S Tremlett, 2007, 'Case Study XXII: Kelling Heath', *The Archaeology of Norfolk's Coastal Zone*, Norfolk Museum, [PDF version 2011], pp124-5, Fig 11.2, www.english-heritage.org.uk/publications, accessed 12 August 2014].

*****VC12.13 trenches june 1915**

Meikle, who had by now trained as a Lewis (machine-) gunner, was sent to France on July 30 1916, and transferred to the 1/4 Seaforth (Ross Highland) Battalion, who had been fighting on the Western Front since November 1914. By mid-1916, they were part of the 154th Brigade of the famous 51st Highland Division, and Meikle arrived at the height of the Battle of the Somme, where his new unit

had just left the trenches and were recovering at Meault from a 'heavy barrage of gas shells'. Despite this, they still 'won the Brigade tug of war on the 29th' of July. The Seaforths later took part in the Battle of the Ancre [River] in November 1916, during which the 51st Division captured Beaumont Hamel. This action is still remembered with in a striking bronze statue of a Highlander by Scots sculptor G H Paulin, 1924) at Newfoundland Memorial Park, near Beaumont Hamel. [Sources: '26-31 July 1916', *War Diary, 4th Battalion, The Seaforth Highlanders*, Vol 22, 1-31 July 1916, WO95/2888/1, National Archives, London; 'A 4th Seaforth Highlander VC', *Cabar Feidh* [Regimental Journal], Vol IV, September 1934, p24; 'The Seaforth Highlanders', and 'The 51st (Highland) Division in 1914-1918', *The Long Long Trail: The British Army in the Great War of 1914-1918*, www.1914-1918.net, accessed 10 August 2014; Stephen and Susan Cocks, '51st Highland Division Memorial', 21 July 2010, 'Tommy at War', [Battlefields Blog], <http://blog.guidedbattlefieldtours.co.uk>, accessed 25 August 2014].

*****VC12.14 Newfoundland Park memorial**

Meikle was evidently very highly-regarded, popular with his comrades, and capable of showing considerable initiative while under pressure. In autumn, 1917, Meikle demonstrated great courage in gaining the Military Medal. As so many of these decorations were given, the individual circumstances of their award are generally unrecorded. His family knew that although he was only a corporal, Meikle had taken command of his platoon, 'after all the officers had become casualties, and successfully carr[ied] out the raid'. Relatives have suggested Meikle's actions were during the Battle of Passchendaele (part of the Third Battle of Ypres) in late October 1917. However, the *Ross-shire Journal* of 1918, and the regimental magazine in 1934, both record that he received the medal on 20 September 1917, during the Battle of the Menin Road Bridge, an earlier phase of the Third Battle of Ypres. [Sources: J R MacLeod, 1992, *Portrait of a Soldier: Sgt John Meikle, VC MM*, Dingwall, pp5-6; Mike Brown, 'Victoria Cross Hero John Was Just 18', *Evening Gazette* (Middlesbrough), 9 May 2014, p10; *London Gazette, Second Supplement*, Issue 30424, 12 December 1917, p13017; *Edinburgh Gazette, Supplement*, Issue 13178, 13 December 1917, p2565; *Glasgow Herald*, 14 December 1917, p5; *Ross-shire Journal*, 1 November 1918, at www.rossandcromartyheritage.org, accessed 9 August 2014; 'A 4th Seaforth Highlander VC', *Cabar Feidh* [Regimental Journal], Vol IV, September 1934, p24].

*****VC12.15 Meikle in group on right**

The 4th Battalion War Diary (official military record of the day's events kept by an officer on pre-printed forms) recounts the Battle of the Menin Road Bridge, during which Meikle's initiative earned him his decoration. It was written by Major M Jobson, of the 4th Battalion. From 16 to 19 September 1917, the battalion had been practising attacks while living in tents behind the lines at Siege Camp, near Elverdinghe, Belgium. On 20 September, they took part in the assault on the Langemarck-Ghelluelt trench system, during a short break in the rain on a notoriously muddy battlefield. [Source: *War Diary, 4th Battalion, The Seaforth Highlanders*, Vol 36, 1- 30 September 1917, WO95/2888/1, National Archives, London].

*****VC12.16 Pic from War Illustrated**

The attack commenced at 5.40am, and despite fierce opposition, their objectives were captured in under an hour. After various enemy counter-attacks, Jobson writes:

'4.45pm 11 hostile aeroplanes flew low over our lines between 3.45pm and 4.15pm. Enemy shelling heavier since 3.45pm. 6.10pm Reported that enemy had made a strong counter attack driving in the forward posts ... 6.59pm Reported holding line in advance of White House-Pheasant Farm-Cemetery on left. Two platoons counter attacked on right and re-established the line driving the enemy back into our barrage and inflicting heavy casualties. Nothing of incident occurred during the night.'

***VC12.17 Meikle in battle dress

The post-war battalion history tells 'Ammunition had ... run short, and every round had to be taken from the dead and wounded ... [there was] a prodigious expenditure of ammunition', but strategic high ground overlooking Poelcapelle had been won. The following day, The Seaforths were relieved and returned to their camp for 'baths, cleaning and resting up'. The casualty list shows that between 19 and 23 July, 4 second lieutenants were killed, 41 'other ranks' were killed, 15 were missing and 153 were wounded. When his parents asked Meikle how he had received his bayonet wound, he dismissed it as unimportant: 'Oh, I just pulled [the bayonet] out'. [Sources: *War Diary, 4th Battalion, The Seaforth Highlanders*, Vol 36, 1-30 September 1917, WO95/2888/1, National Archives, London; J R MacLeod, 1992, *Portrait of a Soldier: Sgt John Meikle, VC MM*, Dingwall, p5; M. M. Haldane 1928, *A History of the Fourth Battalion, The Seaforth Highlanders*, London, pp232-3].

***VC12.18 pipes drums

Meikle was unlikely to have won the Military Medal during Passchendaele [12 October, and 26 October – 10 November]. On 12 October, no attacks were led by The Seaforths themselves. The 4th Seaforths were in training and resting in billets at Izel-les-Hameaux from 28 October until 10 November, and so missed the fighting, and the other dates are recorded as 'qui et on our front'. Thus, Meikle was awarded the Military Medal for his actions near Langemarck on 20 September, after which he was sent home on leave to recover from his injuries. It is unclear whether he personally fought with The Seaforths at Cambrai, the first major tank battle of the war, in November, or if he had already returned to Glasgow. [Sources: *War Diary, 4th Battalion, The Seaforth Highlanders*, Vol 37, 1-31 October 1917, and Vol 38, 1-30 November 1917, WO95/2888/1, National Archives, London; 'The 51st (Highland) Division in 1914-1918', 'The Battles of Ypres 1917 ("Third Ypres")', and 'The Cambrai operations', *The Long Long Trail: The British Army in the Great War of 1914-1918*, www.1914-1918.net, accessed 13 August 2014; M. M. Haldane 1928, *A History of the Fourth Battalion, The Seaforth Highlanders*, London, p239-40].

***VC12.19 Cambrai

While John Meikle was in Nitshill in November 1917, the Distinguished Soldier's Fund Committee presented him with a gold watch, on behalf of his fellow villagers in the local public hall. David Perry, his father's employer at the Nitshill chemical factory, 'cordially congratulated Corporal Meikle on his bravery'. The watch, engraved with the initials 'JM' is still a treasured family heirloom. This was Meikle's first lengthy visit home since 1916. [Sources: J R MacLeod, 1992, *Portrait of a Soldier: Sgt John Meikle, VC MM*, Dingwall, p6; *Ross-shire Journal*, 1 November 1918, at www.rossandcromartyheritage.org, accessed 9 August 2014; *Glasgow Herald*, 17 September 1918, p4; 'A 4th Seaforth Highlander VC', *Cabar Feidh* [Regimental Journal], Vol IV, September 1934, p24].

***VC12.20 Perry

When Meikle returned to France, he had been promoted to sergeant; his company commander, Captain Claude Hamilton-Harris (who survived the war), explained his leadership qualities:

'I cannot praise sufficiently his beautiful character or describe his wonderful personality. Let it suffice you to know that he won his stripes at a very early age and that was due to his capabilities as a soldier, his great knowledge as a Lewis Gunner and the respect and esteem that he won from older men under his command.' [Source: Letter from Capt Claude Hamilton-Harris, 5 August 1918, to Mrs Annie Meikle, Office Row, Nitshill, Private Collection].

*****VC12.21a and VC12.21b use both – pic of gold watch**

In 1917, Before Meikle received his own promotion, his platoon sergeant was Yorkshireman George W Scurrah (who survived the war). He said of Meikle during that period:

'He was the most practical man in the Battalion with the Lewis Gun and I only wish most of the other men had hearts like him. He was out here for the purpose of winning the war, and always talked and thought that way, whereas some of the men we have now – well – it breaks my heart every time I think of them.' [Source: Letter from CSM G W Scurrah, (201236), 2 Company, 4th Battalion, The Seaforth Highlanders, 27 July 1918, to Mr J and Mrs A Meikle, Office Row, Nitshill, Private Collection].

*****VC12.22 at billets in France**

Early 1918 saw The Seaforths in billets and trenches around Demicourt and on the Beaumetz-Vaulx line, a relatively quiet period for them, in the area between Cambrai and Bapaume in north-eastern France. On 21 March, they then moved to the Beaumetz-Morchies line and endured heavy fighting during the ensuing Battles of St Quentin and Bapaume. Casualties recorded by the Battalion between 21 and 27 March included 29 men killed, 129 missing, and 204 just 'missing', further details of their fates being unknown. [Sources: *War Diary, 4th Battalion, The Seaforth Highlanders*, Vols 40 (January), 41 (February), 42 (March), 1918, WO95/2888/1, National Archives, London; 'The 51st (Highland) Division in 1914-1918', and 'The First Battles of the Somme 1918', *The Long Long Trail: The British Army in the Great War of 1914-1918*, www.1914-1918.net, accessed 13 August 2014].

*****VC12.23 church at Bapaume**

In April, during the Battle of Estaires (part of the larger Battle of Lys), the 4th Seaforths were ordered to Mesplaux Farm, near Le Touret, where they beat off repeated German incursions between 9 and 11 April, before laying barbed wire along their entire front on a single night. From this one engagement alone, The Seaforths suffered 245 'other ranks' [troops other than commissioned officers] killed, wounded or missing. [Sources: *War Diary, 4th Battalion, The Seaforth Highlanders*, Vol 43, 1-30 April 1918, WO95/2888/1, National Archives, London; 'The 51st (Highland) Division in 1914-1918', and 'The Battles of the Lys', *The Long Long Trail: The British Army in the Great War of 1914-1918*, www.1914-1918.net, accessed 13 August 2014].

*****VC12.24 bayonet**

The Second Battle of the Marne was the turning point for the Allies in the War, and became known as the last great German offensive. By 20 July 1918, Meikle and his unit (No 2 Company, 4th Battalion), were with the 51st Highland Division in the French Aisne-Marne Sector, and would defend the Ardre Valley. The official battalion account of Meikle's last days is laconic:

'19th July 1918 ... in wood north of Champhillon. Fine weather & very warm. Proceeded to line in evening and heavily shelled on way up. 1 killed, 1 wounded & 1 accid. [accident].

20th July. Fine morning. The Battn attacked enemy lines. On right 62nd Division ... [we] captured 72 prisoners including 2 officers. Our casualties heavy. Held up on our right owing to the 62nd Div having to retire, on our left owing to French giving wrong jumping-off point but made good progress in spite of these obstacles. Laid mines through Bullin ...

21 July 1918 Bois du Courtron. Dull day. 152 & 153 Brigades attacked enemy on our left but made very little progress.

22nd July 1918. Bright day. Usual intense shelling by both sides but nothing of importance to report.'

[Sources: *War Diary, 4th Battalion, The Seaforth Highlanders*, Vol 46, 1-31 July 1918, WO95/2888/1, National Archives, London; 'The 51st (Highland) Division in 1914-1918', and 'The Battles of the Marne 1918', *The Long Long Trail: The British Army in the Great War of 1914-1918*, www.1914-1918.net, accessed 13 August 2014].

*****VC12.25a and VC12.25b use both necessary to story Fampoux Cross with piper**

It was John Meikle's comrade, Company Sergeant Major G W Sturrah, (who was only 23 years old himself), who wrote most movingly to Meikle's mother, recounting an eyewitness version of events: *'It is with the deepest regret that I write to you to inform you of your dear son 200854 Sgt Meikle, J, of his death, (killed in action) on the 20th July. We were on this day attacking a strong enemy position, and your dear lad behaved as gallantly as ever Britisher did. He single handed knocked out an enemy machine gun post and its crew. Knocking out with a walking stick he always used to carry and was afterwards rushing another similar post when he was killed by Machine Gun fire. His death was instantaneous.'*

*****VC12.26a or VC12.26b use one or the other Fampoux Cross**

'His body was unable to be recovered as we were held at this point, myself and another Sergeant of our Company was out twice afterwards at night times trying to recover, but with no avail, as it was a death trap. We have recommended him for the Victoria Cross, which of course will never replace Johnnie, but it may, if it is awarded, bring a little solace to you.'

'I sincerely hope I have not been to [sic] hard and crude with this letter. I am not much of a letter writer, just rough and ready, another mother's son here because duty called, war worn a bit after nearly three years, but hoping for the best. I should like a photo of Johnnie very much if it would not inconvenience. ... PS I have told you one or two things I am not supposed to do by Army Regs so act accordingly.' [Sources: Letter from CSM G W Scurrah, (201236), 2 Company, 4th Bn, The Seaforth Highlanders, 27 July 1918, to Mr J and Mrs A Meikle, Office Row, Nitshill, Private Collection; Census Data, www.ancestry.co.uk, accessed 14 August 2014].

*****VC12.27 London Gazette official citation**

The formal citation or description of the deed for which Meikle was awarded the Victoria Cross appeared in the Government's journal of record, the *London Gazette*, on 16 September, 1918. There were two separate actions of 'most conspicuous bravery and initiative' by Meikle attacking enemy gun positions when his platoon was threatened:

'He emptied his revolver into the crews of the two guns and put the remainder out of action with a heavy stick ... Very shortly afterwards ... Sjt Meikle seized the rifle and bayonet of a fallen comrade and again rushed forward against the gun crew but was killed ... His bravery allowed two other men' to capture the position. [Sources: *London Gazette, Fifth Supplement*, Issue 30903, 16 September 1918, p11075; *Edinburgh Gazette*, 20 September 1918, Issue 13323, p3497].

*****VC12.28a or VC12.28b use one or the other**

Captain Claude Hamilton-Harris, Meikle's company commander, wrote:

Your son on the fateful day did deeds which will last forever in the memory of all who knew him. ... He single handed killed the crews of two enemy machine guns ... to let his company advance. Later when making another similar attempt he fell. ... It is the wish of every officer and man that this gallant and courageous work will be fully rewarded. He was laid to rest in the military cemetery as you later will be notified of the exact spot.'

'To replace him is an impossible thing ... I have been writing of our loss, but all the time dear Mrs Meikle I have in my mind the great and terrible loss has befallen you. Such a lad I can picture at home and therefore my heart goes out to you and your'. [Source: Letter from Capt Claude Hamilton-Harris, 5 August 1918, to Mrs Annie Meikle, Office Row, Nitshill, Private Collection].

*****VC12.29 pic with unidentified friend**

Mrs Annie and Mr John Meikle Senior were devout Methodists, and had been unhappy about their son not telling the truth about his age, in order to enlist earlier he should have done. They were also troubled that their son had been awarded a pension with the Victoria Cross, which Mrs Meikle refused to accept, feeling that it was tainted by the killing that inevitably formed part of any war. John Meikle VC MM had made a will on 3 August 1916, days after his arrival in France. It said simply: *'In the event of my death, I give the whole of my property and effects to my mother, signed J Meikle'*. [Sources: Soldier's Wills, John Meikle, SC70/8/842/108, www.scotlandsppeople.gov.uk, accessed 25 July 2014; Mr J D Meikle, personal communication, 8 August 2014; Mr J Salkeld, personal communication, 7 August 2014].

*****VC12.30a or VC12.30b use one or the other Pollokshaws Church memorial**

Annie Meikle, 'being a thrifty woman with very strict principles', had been saving her son's pay which he had been sending home to help support his family. She donated the accumulated funds to two local churches, including Nitshill United Free Church, where it paid for new electric lighting. Mrs Meikle's own place of worship, Pollokshaws Methodist Church purchased a new pulpit bible and preaching scarf in memory of John Meikle, and put the remainder towards a new organ. The Meikles attended Pollokshaws until the 1960s, and Job Meikle, younger brother of John, created a scale-model of the original building. The model and bible are still owned by the present-day congregation, although the actual church attended by John Meikle was demolished in the 1960s. [Sources: Soldier's Wills, John Meikle, SC70/8/842/108, www.scotlandsppeople.gov.uk, accessed 25 July 2014; J R MacLeod, 1992, *Portrait of a Soldier: Sgt John Meikle*, VC MM, Dingwall, p9; Mr J D Meikle, Mr A J Meikle, personal communications, 16 August 2014; Jack Gibson 2010, *Pollokshaws: A Brief History*, p22, [pdf document], *Pollokshaws Heritage Group*, www.pollokshaws.org.uk, accessed 16 August 2014; Elizabeth D Smith, Pollokshaws Methodist Church, personal communication, 24 August 2014].

*****VC12.31 Edinburgh memorial**

The loss of their son was compounded for the Meikles by the death of their daughter Jane Hollywood Meikle, only four months later, on 5 December 1918. The second of their children to die of tuberculosis, Jane was, like her sisters, a threadmill worker, and was twenty-seven years old. [Source: Register of Deaths, www.scotlandsppeople.gov.uk, accessed 26 July 2014].

*****VC12.32 father**

The family did not attend the official presentation of John's VC at Buckingham Palace, as they were unable to afford the associated expense of new clothes, and accommodation in London. As their daughter Jane was also seriously ill with TB by late September, and with their religious reservations about violence, the family discreetly chose to receive the decoration during a local parade at Maryhill Barracks on 28 October 1918. 'The Victoria Cross was handed to Sergeant Meikle's father', by General Sir F W N McCracken, the head of the army in Scotland. [Source: *Glasgow Herald*, 29 October 1918, p3; *Kirkintilloch Herald*, 30 October 1918, p2; Mike Brown, 'Victoria Cross Hero John Was Just 18', *Evening Gazette* (Middlesbrough), 9 May 2014, p10; Register of Deaths, www.scotlandsppeople.gov.uk, accessed 26 July 2014].

*****VC12.33 bronze plaque**

Due to his exceptional valour, several memorials were erected to John Meikle VC, MM. In 1919, his father's employer, chemical manufacturer David Perry, commissioned William Kellock Brown, a highly-regarded Scottish sculptor, to design a bronze relief portrait of Meikle. The plaque was unveiled in Hurler and Nitshill Public Hall on 10 May, 1919, the same place in which the soldier had received his gold watch two years earlier. Later that year, on 8 October, businessman Allan Kirkwood of Darnley House, Nitshill (owner of local Arden Lime Works), unveiled a large photograph of Meikle in Lavern Public School, of which he was a former pupil. [Sources: *Glasgow Herald*, 13 May 1919, p5; 'Captain George Notman Kirkwood', *University of Glasgow Story*, www.universitystory.gla.ac.uk, accessed 17 August 2014; J R MacLeod, 1992, *Portrait of a Soldier: Sgt John Meikle, VC MM*, Dingwall, p9].

*****VC12.34 railway station**

John Meikle was the only Scottish railway employee to gain the VC during the war, and naturally his former railway colleagues wished to commemorate him at Nitshill Station, where he had been a ticket-clerk. Monumental sculptors Scott & Rae, of Eglinton Toll, produced a rough-hewn granite monolith [slab], with a rifle and laurel wreath in relief, inscribed 'Erected by his Railway Comrades'. It was unveiled on the platform of Nitshill Railway Station on 30 January 1920 by Lady Lorimer, from Glasgow. This was Dame Mary, wife of locomotive builder Sir William Lorimer, a director of Glasgow and South Western Railways, (joint-owners of Nitshill Station), rather than Violet, the wife of War Graves Commission architect Sir Robert Lorimer. The 'impressive ceremony' was attended by 'the pipe band of the Black Watch and ... the Caledonian Railway Boy Scouts', and the Pollokshaws Methodist minister. [Sources: Photographs April 2014, Martin Briscoe, 'Dingwall Station Road Memorial', Canmore ID 332936, www.rcahms.gov.uk, accessed 17 August 2014; *Glasgow Post Office Directory 1920-1*, p588; Register of Deaths, www.scotlandspeople.gov.uk, accessed 17 August 2014; 'Lorimer, Sir William', and 'Lorimer, Sir Robert Stodart', *Who Was Who*, Oxford University Press, online edition, April 2014, www.ukwhoswho.com, accessed 17 August 2014; *The Scotsman*, 2 February 1920, p6 and 8 January 1931, p7; *Evening Telegraph*, 2 February 1920, p3; *Glasgow Herald*, 2 February 1920, p13; *Sunday Post*, 1 February 1920, p4].

***** use VC12.35c with name of Meikle on inscription, along with either VC12.35a or VC12.35b**

Meikle is also listed on Nitshill's own village war memorial, along with his schoolfriends who joined the armed services. This was also sculptured by Scott & Rae, based on the 9th-century Dupplin Cross (now displayed in St Serf's Church, Dunning, Perthshire). The design was a simplified version taken from J Romilly Allen's 'Sculptured Stones of Scotland', a 1903 catalogue of early-medieval sculpture that provided the inspiration and patterns for many World War I memorials all over Scotland. The Nitshill cross was carved from Creetown granite, and bears 48 names from the 1914-18 conflict, including John Meikle VC MM. By coincidence, it stands opposite the railway station where he was once employed. Surprisingly, Meikle does not appear to have been listed on the Glasgow and South Western Railway Memorial formerly at St Enoch Station, Glasgow and now at Ayr Station, although he was their only employee to win the Victoria Cross. [Sources: J McGinlay, A MacLennan, A Brown, 2006-7, 'Nitshill', *Scottish War Memorials Project*, <http://warmemscot.s4.bizhat.com>, accessed 18 August 2014; J Romilly Allen, 1903, *Early Christian Monuments of Scotland*, Vol 2 (Part III), pp319-24; 'Dupplin Cross', Canmore ID 26594, and 'Dunning, St Serf's Church', Canmore ID 26683, *Canmore*

[Online Heritage Database], <http://canmore.rcahms.gov.uk>, accessed 18 August 2014; 'Glasgow & South Western Railways', *Scottish War Memorials Project*, <http://warmemscot.s4.bizhat.com>, accessed 19 August 2014].

*****VC12.36a or VC12.36b one or the other - Divisional window**

The Meikles were to lose another two daughters to the scourge of tuberculosis; at the same time as the various memorials were erected, their daughter Annie Hollywood Meikle, had been suffering from for 7 months. Annie was an ironmonger's assistant, and died at home in 1920, at 17 years of age. In May 1923, her sister Jessie Hollywood Meikle, another threadmill worker like two of her deceased sisters, was the last daughter to die of TB. She was aged thirty. Captain Hamilton-Harris of the 4th Seaforths had written of John's death in 1918 that prayed for Mrs Meikle '*in your days of sorrow and [that God would] help you to bear the great burden you have so suddenly been asked to bear.*' They must indeed have called on their religion for support in these further terrible unforeseen losses among their children – tuberculosis, or consumption, had now claimed four girls. [Sources: Letter from Capt Claude Hamilton-Harris, 5 August 1918, to Mrs Annie Meikle, Office Row, Nitshill, Private Collection; Register of Deaths, www.scotlandspeople.gov.uk, accessed 26 July 2014].

*****VC12.37a and VC12.37b use one or the other - sister and plaque**

The various commemorations of John Meikle were moved in later years due to redevelopment of their original sites. The granite pillar from Nitshill Station platform, unveiled in 1920, had been vandalised by 1971. To safeguard the memorial, his family arranged for its removal to Dingwall, the town where The Seaforths were based on 4 August 1914, when war was declared. It was 'handed over to the care of the 4th Battalion Seaforth Club' by British Rail, and the relocated stone was unveiled by Simon Calder, who had 'fought alongside Meikle fifty-three years before'. The bronze relief from the Hurler and Nitshill Public Hall was eventually placed in Lavern Primary School. In 1957, the school incorporated the outline of a Maltese or Victoria Cross into their blazer badges. When Lavern Primary closed in 1997, their original photographic portrait of Meikle and the bronze plaque were both given to Dingwall Museum. [Sources: J R MacLeod, 1992, *Portrait of a Soldier: Sgt John Meikle*, VC MM, Dingwall, pp14-15; J R MacLeod, personal communication, ; Ian Smith, 'Plaque will complete Highland Museum Tribute', *Glasgow Herald*, 30 September 1997, at www.heraldscotland.com, accessed 18 August 2014; Gerald Gliddon 2013, *VCs of the First World War: Spring Offensive 1918*, Stroud, p258].

*****VC12.38 VC medal**

The Victoria Cross medal remained with the family until November 1972, when John Meikle's two sisters and brother donated it to the 4th Seaforth Highlanders Reunion Club in Dingwall, to ensure its long-term preservation on public view. Dingwall Town Council 'was setting up a museum ... Sgt Meikle's medals would have a proud ... place in the ... home of the Regiment ... Dingwall was regarded ... as the heart and soul of The Seaforth Highlanders'. The presentation ceremony observed a two-minute silence in tribute to Meikle. The medals (including the Military Medal) are now on display in Dingwall Museum. Meikle's granite memorial in Station Square sits alongside the makeshift wooden cross from Fontaine Notre-Dame, France raised in honour of those killed in the Battle of Cambrai (1917). The cross was re-erected on a stone plinth in Dingwall, and unveiled in March 1925, inscribed 'Re-erected here by the 4th Seaforth Reunion Club 1914-1918'. [Sources: J R

MacLeod, 1992, *Portrait of a Soldier: Sgt John Meikle*, VC MM, Dingwall, p19; 'Seaforth Highlanders Memorial Cross', (QZP40_CARD_0387), *Am Baile: Highland History and Culture*, www.ambaile.org.uk; Mr John Salkeld, personal communication, 7 August 2014; J R (Ian) MacLeod, Dingwall Museum, personal communication, 15 July 2014; 'Restored Cambrai Cross Returns', *Ross-shire Journal*, 9 June 2014, www.ross-shirejournal.co.uk, accessed 19 August 2014; 'Dingwall, Station Road, Seaforths Memorial', Canmore ID 106292, *Canmore* [Online Heritage Database], <http://canmore.rcahms.gov.uk>, accessed 19 August 2014; M. M. Haldane 1928, *A History of the Fourth Battalion, The Seaforth Highlanders*, London, pp255].

*****VC12.39a and VC12.39b - use VC12.39a (wooden cross) and use the second pic (French town) if required**

John Meikle was originally buried under an inscribed wooden cross at Jonchery-sur-Vesle in a temporary grave, as was the unavoidable practice under battlefield conditions. His body was later exhumed around December 1919, along with many others, and re-interred in the formally-established British military cemetery at Marfaux, Marne, by the Imperial War Graves Commission. In an instance of the random chances of war, the adjoining grave is that of an unknown 4th Seaforth Highlanders lance corporal, whose body lacked an identification disc, but who fell at the same place, and would have been known to Meikle. The family did not know of their brother's resting place until Mr Job Meikle received details in 1964, nearly fifty years after he was killed. [Sources: 'Concentration Documents: Burial Returns, 8 December 1919', 'Grave Registration Report No 24, Dept Marne, Commune Marfaux', 'Headstone Schedules: Marfaux, p26', and 'Meikle, John, Casualty Details', *Commonwealth War Graves Commission*, www.cwgc.org, accessed 19 August 2014; Letter from office of Director General, Commonwealth War Graves Commission, to Mr Job H A Meikle, Glasgow, 29 May 1964, Private Collection].

*****VC12.40 cemetery**

John Meikle was an amateur poet, and some of his work, reflecting his strong religious convictions, survives in letters home. He wrote, on 4 March 1918,

*'I fought in a battle today, mother
The enemy's fire was strong
The shrapnel screamed overhead, mother
And shrill was the bullet's song ...
So rejoice with your wayward lad mother
Who has found his God at last
Who after your loving prayers, mother
Into Light and Life has passed'.*

Ian MacLeod of Dingwall Museum and The Seaforth Highlanders Association wrote a short biography of Meikle in 1992, called 'Portrait of a Soldier', published by Dingwall Museum Trust. The Kirkintilloch Herald reported Meikle's death, as a former local resident, beside another article titled 'The Toll of Freeland Place', about the death of a Tank Corps private. 'It is doubtful if any similar stretch of the town has given so many soldiers to the army and paid such a price ... as Freeland Place has done'. This was the street in which Meikle was born in 1898. [Sources: J R MacLeod, 1992, *Portrait of a Soldier: Sgt John Meikle*, VC MM, Dingwall, p16; *Kirkintilloch Herald*, 30 October 1918, p2].

*****VC12.41 gravestone**