

Introduction

Invergordon, with its deep harbour, was of vital importance in World War I as a large fuel depot and repair base for the British Fleet. The once quiet town was changed almost overnight by the influx of thousands of Naval and Army personnel, with over 250 Metropolitan police keeping order in the dockyard. Late in the war Americans arrived, stationed at Dalmore near Alness to assemble mines which were loaded at Invergordon. Russian troops and migrants also passed through the port.

A large number of town centre buildings were taken over or built by the Navy as engineering works, stores and offices. The dockyard alone employed over 4,000 personnel, including women. Two floating docks were installed at the end of the West Pier. Land was reclaimed from the shoreline (roughly the present road) to its present area, requiring tons of soil brought in on a specially constructed railway line.

Large camps were needed to house the dockyard workers and the army. Two new hospitals were built, and the Masonic Lodge taken over as a third. For entertainment there were new cinemas, theatres, dance halls, bowling, cricket, football and tennis clubs, and a church recreational hall.

After the war many buildings were destroyed or sold off, but by exploring the sites on the leaflet you will come across remnants of this important era.



This leaflet was researched and produced by a local group led by Susan Kruse of ARCH, funded by the Heritage Lottery Fund First World War Then and Now programme. Participants would like to thank Invergordon Museum, Invergordon Archive, Alan Kinghorn and Rona Thomson for use of their photos. Thanks also to Allan Kilpatrick of the RCAHMS (now HES) for advice during the project.



Further information about the sites described in this leaflet as well as others can be found at Invergordon Museum and Invergordon Archive (www.theinvergordonarchive.org.uk). Binders created by the group have been deposited at Invergordon Museum and Invergordon Library. Information about individual sites has also been submitted to the Highland HER (her.highland.gov.uk) and Canmore (canmore.org.uk) heritage databases. See also the booklet produced in 1994 by Park School on *Invergordon: the Great War 1914-1918*. All photos are from Invergordon Museum unless credited otherwise.

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Invergordon WORLD WAR I TRAIL



Oil tanks

The oil tanks dominate the landscape at Invergordon ³⁴. Storage tanks were constructed to hold the large quantities needed by the naval ships, 10 before World War I and then a further 31 during the war. They had camouflage paint. All but one survive.

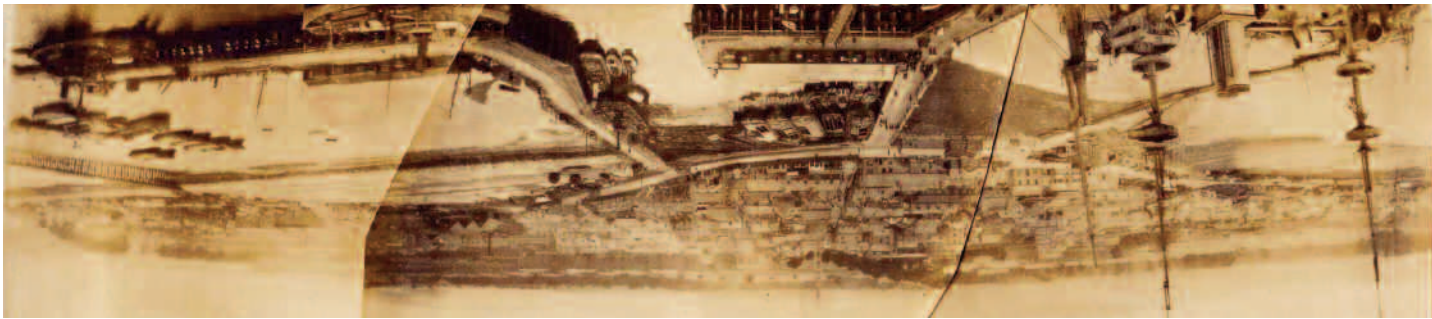
Natal Garden

The Natal Garden ²² commemorates the sinking of HMS Natal in December 1915 just off Invergordon, with the loss of over 400 military and civilian lives. The explosion, probably due to faulty cordite, happened during a party. Visit the display at Invergordon Museum to find out more. War memorials are at the end of the High Street ²⁷ and in St Ninian's Church ²⁸.

Other World War I sites to visit in the area:

Rosskeen cemetery is to the west of the town, and has a number of war graves. Well preserved World War I and World War II defences are on both the North and South Souters. Mines were assembled at Dalmore—after all the whisky had been moved. World War I training trenches survive still at Rhicullen and Broomhill to the north of Invergordon.

Invergordon Archive - from photo in Invergordon Museum



As the population swelled from around 1100 to around 20,000, housing was a major issue. Some hotels such as the Commercial Hotel ¹³ and the Royal Hotel (burnt down in 1973) were taken over for accommodation and canteens – and to control alcohol sales. A number of wooden barracks were built for the 2,000 army personnel ⁸. Dockyard workers were housed on three ships at the west pier ¹⁸, and then in 22 timber hutments ³⁰. In addition, 126 houses ³² were built for married dockyard workers, and six large houses for officers ³¹. The ships were taken away and the hutments were sold after the war, but the cottages and officer's housing are still used today.



Housing

Stores and Offices

The railway came to Invergordon in 1863. During the war many sidings and extra lines were built to serve the repair base, including tracks onto the piers (see map overleaf), to move personnel, stores and to provide access to heavy engineering workshops. The line was at capacity, with trains supplying parts, ambulance and leave transports, as well as normal services. Civilians needed passes to travel by train or road.



Numerous buildings were taken over by the Navy to become stores for engineering parts, foodstuffs etc.

The building next to The Ship Inn ¹⁶ was an office for foodstuffs. The present Travis Perkins building ⁹ and Oakes Villa Stores ²⁶ also survive, and were ideally placed as they both had their own railway sidings. Some buildings became naval offices, such as those at the corner of the High Street and King Street which became the Superintending Chief Engineers offices ¹¹ and drawing office ¹².



Alan Kinghorn

The presence of the army in Invergordon is often overlooked. There was a large camp, with many huts in the Cromlet area **8** as this photo shows. The camp was used as a training unit for the 3rd Reserve Battalion of the Cameron Highlanders prior to their deployment to the Western Front. After the war these huts were sold and quickly disappeared. In the foreground is the 19th century ferry slip **17** for the ferry to the Black Isle. It is now completely engulfed by new developments at the port.

The Invergordon Arts Centre **10** was built as the Town Hall in 1871. During World War I it was, one of three cinemas in town.



John Campbell-Smith

The La Scala cinema **14** could seat 600. It burnt down in the 1920s. The Britannia picture house, somewhere on Clyde Street, was known as the ‘Bug House’; it too no longer survives.



Rona Thomson

The Masonic Lodge **15** was built in 1901, but taken over by the military as a detention hospital for army personnel.



© RCAHMS (Aerofilms Collection)

A large YMCA which could accommodate 2500 men stretched from Clyde Street to Outram Street **23**. It burnt down in 1978.

Please note that many buildings are still in use, while others are unsafe. Please respect private property and do not enter buildings.

The Custom House **20** was taken over by the military to become offices for the Captain of the Dockyard. It has been altered, with entrances blocked in the front.



20

The current Park Primary school **4** housed both primary and secondary pupils before the war. Various army personnel between 1914 and 1918 occupied the school.

A wooden American YMCA was built in a corner of the school playing field **5**. It was demolished after the war.



Invergordon Archive

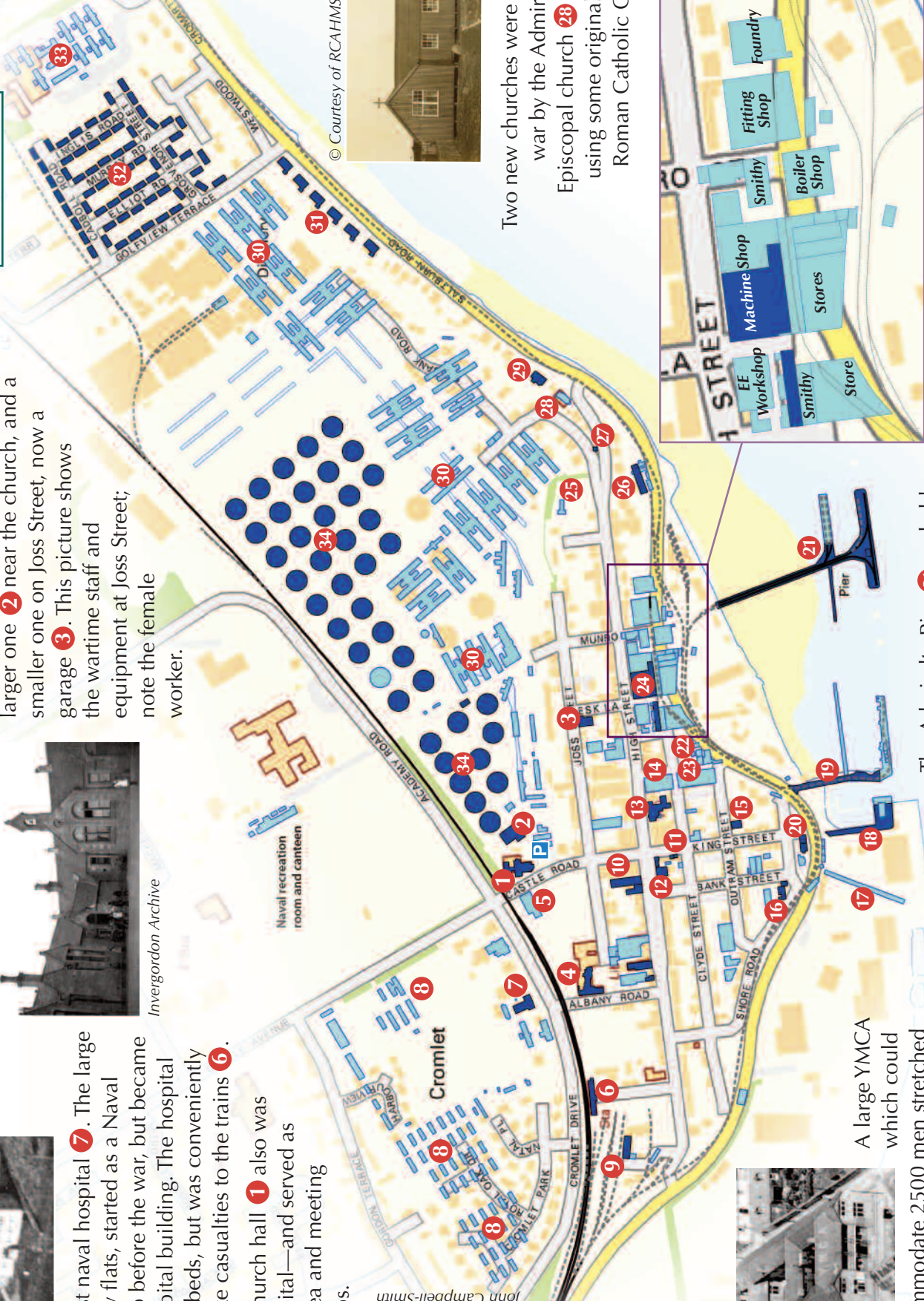
This is the first naval hospital **7**. The large building, now flats, started as a Naval Officer’s Club before the war, but became the main hospital building. The hospital only held 50 beds, but was conveniently located to take casualties to the trains **6**.

The nearby church hall **1** also was briefly a hospital—and served as recreation area and meeting room for clubs.



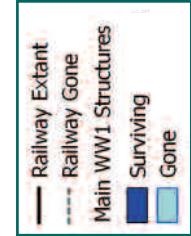
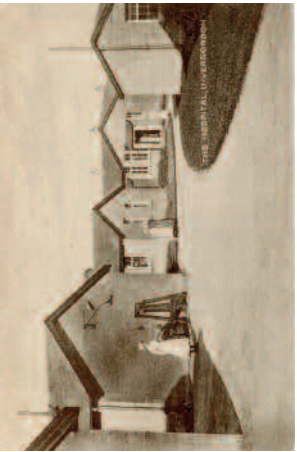
© Courtesy of RCAHMS

Two power generation stations survive, the larger one **2** near the church, and a smaller one on Joss Street, now a garage **3**. This picture shows the wartime staff and equipment at Joss Street; note the female worker.



The Admiralty Pier **21** probably dates to just before WWI. It has been rebuilt, but the west jetty with its wooden pilings may be original. Two earlier piers were also used **18** **19**, one with two floating docks for repairs.

This is the second naval hospital **33**, completed after the war. It could accommodate 250 beds. Later it became a county hospital and was only rebuilt in 2005.



Invergordon Archive

The six officers’ houses still survive **31**, as do the 126 dockyard cottages **32**.



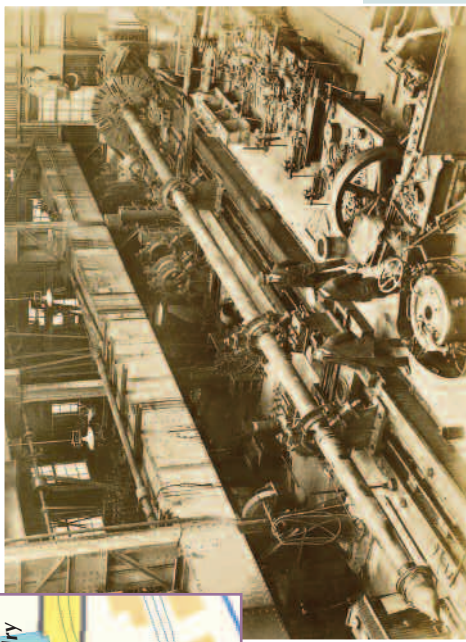
Invergordon Archive

© Courtesy of RCAHMS



Two new churches were built during the war by the Admiralty: St Ninian’s Episcopal church **28** now rebuilt but using some original features, and a Roman Catholic Chapel **25**, now demolished.

Tucker’s Inn was formerly the YWCA **29**. Women came to Invergordon during World War I to carry out work usually undertaken by men: builders, dockyard workers, even engineers. Some were accommodated in the YWCA, which is still a hotel.



© Courtesy of RCAHMS

This area **24** was a vital part of the repair facilities for the port. There was a foundry, fitting shop, two smithies, machine shop (the site of the old bone mill) and smaller workshops, many with railway lines going into the buildings. Only parts of the machine shop and a smithy survive. Most buildings were originally longer, extending to the shore, and gates restricted access from the High Street. The picture shows the interior of the fitting shop. Only foundations of one wall, the concrete floor, and a section of old railway are left.