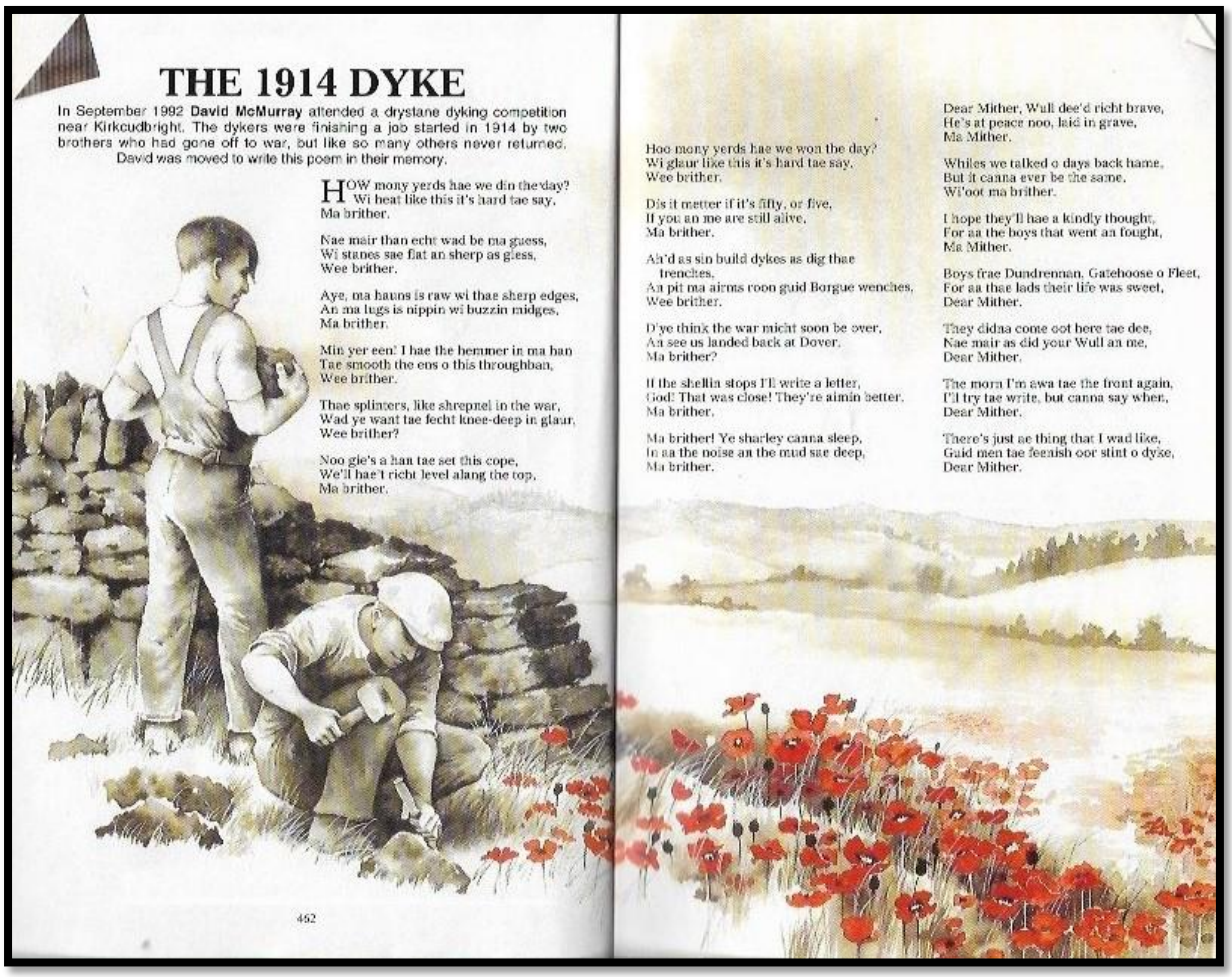
The 1914 Dyke

In 1914 two brothers started the construction of a drystane dyke somewhere in Galloway. The names of the brothers and the location of the dyke seem to be unrecorded. The brothers became soldiers before they completed the dyke and both were killed in action.

The dyke remained incomplete until September 1992 when a dyking competition was held somewhere near Kirkcudbright at which the completion of the dyke was undertaken.

David McMurray attended the competition, was touched by the story of the brothers, and was moved to write a poem which has been recorded as “The 1914 Dyke”.

The poem was printed in the November 1995 edition of “The Scots Magazine”, and this is copied below.



THE 1914 DYKE

In September 1992 **David McMurray** attended a drystane dyking competition near Kirkcudbright. The dykers were finishing a job started in 1914 by two brothers who had gone off to war, but like so many others never returned. David was moved to write this poem in their memory.

HOW mony yerds hae we din the day?
Wi heat like this it's hard tae say,
Ma brither.

Nae mair than echt wad be ma guess,
Wi stanes sae flat an sherp as glass,
Wee brither.

Aye, ma hauns is raw wi thae sherp edges,
An ma lugs is nippin wi buzzin midges,
Ma brither.

Min yer een! I hae the hemmer in ma han
Tae smooth the ens o this throughban,
Wee brither.

Thae splinters, like shrepnel in the war,
Wad ye want tae fecht knee-deep in glaur,
Wee brither?

Noo gie's a han tae set this cope,
We'll hae't richt level alang the top,
Ma brither.

Hoo mony yerds hae we won the day?
Wi glaur like this it's hard tae say,
Wee brither.

Dis it metter if it's fifty, or five,
If you an me are still alive,
Ma brither.

Ah'd as sin build dykes as dig thae trenches,
An pit ma airms roon guid Borgue wenches,
Wee brither.

D'ye think the war micht soon be over,
An see us landed back at Dover,
Ma brither?

If the shellin stops I'll write a letter,
God! That was close! They're aimin better,
Ma brither.

Ma brither! Ye sharley canna sleep,
In aa the noise an the mud sae deep,
Ma brither.

Dear Mither, Wull dee'd richt brave,
He's at peace noo, laid in grave,
Ma Mither.

Whiles we talked o days back hame,
But it canna ever be the same,
Wi'oot ma brither.

I hope they'll hae a kindly thought,
For aa the boys that went an fought,
Ma Mither.

Boys frae Dundrennan, Gatehoose o Fleet,
For aa thae lads their life was sweet,
Dear Mither.

They didna come oot here tae dee,
Nae mair as did your Wull an me,
Dear Mither.

The morn I'm awa tae the front again,
I'll try tae write, but canna say when,
Dear Mither.

There's just ae thing that I wad like,
Gaid men tae feenish oor stint o dyke,
Dear Mither.

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In June 2024, David Hume, a historian from Northern Ireland, came across the above article and wanted to complete the story.

He wanted to know : Who were the brothers that started the dyke ?
Where was the dyke ?
Who was David McMurray ?
Was the “Wull” in the poem the name of the 1st brother to be killed ?
Borgue, Dundrennan & Gatehouse are mentioned in the poem – were these places where soldiers came from or where the dykers lived ?

Personal Recollection

Stuart Nichol is a Gatehouse builder and a well-known dyker. He had previously heard the story and thought that the dyke was on Lennox Plunton Farm (between Gatehouse and Borgue), but he thought that the dyke was never completed. He said the Farmers were well-known dykers with a distinctive style having built many fine dykes in the Lennox Plunton area.

Lennox Plunton Farm has been owned by the Sproat family for many years. **John Sproat** is very interested in local history, but he knew nothing of the dyke or the brothers' story and he doesn't remember his father mentioning it.

Local Brothers who were soldiers

Surname	**1st names**	**Info about the brothers**
Farmer	Eugene & John *Anwoth & Girthon War Memorial*	Parents James & Elizabeth had 9 children. Lived at Woodfoot. In 1911 census Eugene was 26, when John was 22 and Cecil 14. James, Eugene & John were listed as drystone masons. Cecil enlisted in 1915 and died in 1916 aged 19. Eugene enlisted in 1914 and died in 1918 aged 34. John enlisted in 1916 and he survived.
McQuarry	Lauchlan & William *Anwoth & Girthon War Memorial*	Both McQuarries were farm labourers. Lauchlan died in 1915 at Loos, France, age 39. William died in 1917 (age 29) in Belgium.
Shaw	Thomas & William *Anwoth & Girthon War Memorial*	Tom Shaw enlisted in 1915 and died in France in 1917, age 20. We have no details of William Shaw but his family believe he was killed aged 17, yet his name is not on the War Memorial.
Nelson	Thomas & William *Anwoth & Girthon War Memorial*	Thomas & William Nelson both enlisted in 1915. Both brothers emigrated to Canada prior to the start of the war. They were both killed by the same blast in 1915.
Hogg	Andrew and Henry *Borgue War Memorial*	Family were from Dromore Farm, Kirkcudbright. Both killed in 1917 but Andrew died in East Africa and Henry in France.
McKie	Robert & William *Twynholm War Memorial*	Robert enlisted in 1914 and was killed in Palestine in 1917. William also enlisted in 1914 and died in 1918 in France. Family were from Ingleston & Campbeltown.
McQueen	Frank & William *Kirkcudbright War Memorial*	Frank McQueen died in 1916. William's death is unknown.
Paterson	William & John *Kirkcudbright War Memorial*	William was killed in Turkey in 1915, age 29. John died in France in 1918, age 37.
McMillan	Charles & William	details unknown.
Graham	Alexander & William	Alexander died in France in 1918, age 19. A William is listed but there are no details. They could have been brothers.

None of the above pairs of brothers meet all the criteria laid down by the details in the poem. Principally the poem suggests that the first brother to die was "Wull" (presumably William), after which the other brother wrote home to their mother. It is possible that David McMurray, author of the poem, used "poetic license" in naming one of the brothers as Wull.

Below is a transcript of the Scots Magazine article.

The 1914 Dyke

In September 1992 David McMurray attended a drystane dyking competition near Kirkcudbright. The dykers were finishing a job started in 1914 by two brothers who had gone off to war, but like so many others, never returned. David was moved to write this poem in their memory.

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