

Colonel Robert Walker

Colonel Robert W Walker was the oldest son of George J Walker and continued with the family business of farming and land valuation. He was of the eighth and final generation of the Walker family to work and live in Portlethen. Colonel Walker had one younger brother, John W Walker who also worked in the family business but he died in 1926 at the age of 46 when he was struck by a car on the Aberdeen-Stonehaven road near to the grounds of his residence at Hillside House, Portlethen.

Like his father before him, Colonel Walker was the head of the well-known firm of Messers Walker and Duncan, architects, civil engineers and land surveyors which had been founded by his father. Colonel Walker joined the firm as a "lad" and remained there throughout his life.

He followed in his father's footsteps too, in ownership of the famous herd of Aberdeen Angus cattle at Mains of Portlethen before they were dispersed in 1933. One year later he gave up the tenancy of Portlethen and gave up farming altogether so that he could give all his attention to estate management and focus fully on the business of Walker and Duncan. In 1934 the lands and farms that for many years had been in the possession of the Walker family passed on to the Shand family who continue to farm the same lands today

Throughout Scotland Colonel Walker was recognised as one of the most progressive men in the farming industry. In this, as in other directions, his counsel and practical help were always widely sought and willingly given. A typical example of this was his chairmanship of the local committee responsible for the arrangements of the Highland Show in Aberdeen in 1935

His professional skill and experience were often given for the good of the community. In Kincardineshire, he served for a number of years on the Education Authority

His sterling business qualities were valued on numerous boards of directors. He was chairman of the Northern Agricultural and Lime Company, of the Central Mart, a director of Aberdeen Journals Ltd and a director of the Northern Assurance Company.

Colonel Walker was associated with soldiering for over 30 years and in the First World War he commanded an Aberdeen battalion of Volunteers and later he was Territorial Lieutenant-Colonel in the Gordon Highlanders.

Although perhaps not as involved in local community matters to the same extent as his father and grandfather before him, he was still regarded as a stalwart of the district of Portlethen and was as well respected as his forebears. However, on selling his lands and farms in 1934, he moved away from the local area and lived in nearby Deeside.

As Colonel Walker did not have any children, the final link between the Walker family and Portlethen ended when he died in February 1947



fishing vanished slowly and by the time of the First World War they had almost disappeared. The villages, once so thriving and populous, declined as the younger fishermen and their families made their way to Torry or Footdee or elsewhere in Aberdeen.

NOTED CATTLE BREEDERS

On the agricultural side, the main feature of the past century has been the almost total disappearance of the small croft, absorbed into the larger farms, few of which, however, are really extensive. The largest is Mains of Portlethen, which runs to about 300 acres; most of the others are around 100 acres. As in most farming communities, business is at present prosperous, after many hard and difficult years. The majority of the farmers now engage in dairying, and with the various estates being sold in the past few years, most of the farms are in the possession of the occupiers.

One or two farmers, however, continue to concentrate on beef, notably Mr. Jas. Nicol of Clashfarquhar, who worthily maintains the reputation for 'Blacks', so long borne by the Walker family of Mains of Portlethen and Hillside House. The Walkers were undoubtedly the best known family in the district during the past century, not only because of the great renown they won in agricultural circles but also because of their interest in, and development of, the affairs of Portlethen. Mr. Robert Walker (d. 1873) erected a memorial stone in memory of Chas. A. Ewen, schoolmaster in this district for upward of 40 years, who died 29th November, 1855, aged 64. Mr. Walker also laid the foundations of the land valuation business, still carried on under the name of Walker & Duncan, Golden Square, Aberdeen.

The Aberdeen Angus herd of cattle is supposed to be the oldest in Scotland, a herd being in existence at Mains of Portlethen in 1780. Referring to Mr. Walker's success in the showyard, Mr. McCombie in *Cattle and Cattle Breeders* says 'It would be endless to attempt to sum up his victories — local, national and international — they are spread over such a large surface.'

Robert Walker's work and reputation were carried on with distinction by Mr. G. J. Walker, who not only excelled in the field of agriculture but proved a wonderful benefactor to Portlethen generally. He presented the church with communion vessels in 1886 and a harmonium in 1889. A new roadway to the church was built in 1897, on the advice and the plan of Mr. Walker, and in 1898 a pipe organ was also presented. Mr. Walker likewise designed the local hall, known as the Jubilee Hall, the foundation stone of which was laid in 1889. It is a spacious building over 70ft in length and has proved of immense value in the parish. A keen volunteer and crack shot, Mr.

PHOTO

SEE NORMAN

Walker commanded the first volunteer camp in Scotland on the Hill of Clochdighter in June 1869. He was presented with an illuminated address in 1898 by the people of Portlethen in recognition of his services. He died in 1914. His son, Mr. Robert Walker, who died a few years ago, carried on the farm at Mains of Portlethen, although he himself resided outside the parish.

The fame of the Aberdeen Angus cattle is now worthily maintained by another very old Portlethen family — the Nicols of Clashfarquhar (farquhar = hollow), who carried off the supreme Championship R.A.S.E. in 1950 and the Royal Highland the same year.

Mains of Portlethen is now occupied by Mr. John Shand, one of the leading farmers in the north-east and Chairman of the N. E. Agriculture Committee. He has a noted herd of Friesians, thereby carrying on the reputation of the late Mr. James Findlay of Balquharn (i.e. the farm inside the cairn). Among other outstanding names are the Alexanders of Causeyport which is situated on what was at one time a large marshy piece of land called the Haremoos. From this moss peats were conveyed to Aberdeen, whose citizens laid a firm 'causey' roadway over the moss in 1684 and built thereon a 'port' in order to uplift toll dues. Nicol of Barclayhill, Shepherd of Cairnrobin, Begg of Mill of Findon, Ritchie of Mains of Findon, Strachan of Whitebruntland, Hutcheon of Bourtreebush, Watson of Cookston and Duncan of Blackhill have farmed extensively in the district during the past century, in recent years concentrating mainly on dairy farming. The farms are almost completely mechanised and few horses survive. Incidentally, it is interesting to note that no longer ago than March 1918 therewere no motor lorries in the district, and only one motor car, which belonged to Mr. Jas. Findlay of Balquharn.

FISHING

The story of the fishing villages — Findon, Portlethen and Downies — is in two parts — a story of intense activity and abundant life, of prosperity and numerous families in the first half of the period covered by this *Account* — of crowded villages, of considerable numbers of yawls and smaller boats, most of which were usually run as a family concern, being manned by members of the same family who worked the boats, sharing expenses and profits, all busily engaged in line fishing and in curing. However, with the coming of the steam drifter and trawler and the general changes which resulted with the centralisation of the fishing industry in Aberdeen, fishing gradually died out in the villages and the fishing families, the younger generation in particular, made their homes in that city, especially in the Torry district.

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