

Hercules Ross ((His son Horatio purchased Netherley House))

Hercules Ross returned to Scotland in 1782 an extremely wealthy man. He was elected an Honorary Burgess of Glasgow and promptly purchased the Estate of Rossie in Angus, where he built for himself Rossie Castle.

He had been consulted by Lord Grantham, Foreign Secretary in the Shelbourne Ministry, on matters relating to the Spanish Colonies and the West Indies, and in 1787 he placed his expertise at the disposal of Lord Carmarthen. Hercules Ross also gave evidence before the Select Committee of the House of Commons in support of the Abolition of the Slave Trade. This ultimately led to Thomas Clarkson declaring "Having now mentioned the principal facts contained in the evidence offered to Parliament by the petitioners of Great Britain, on behalf of the abolition of the slave trade, we cannot close this compilation better than in the words of Hercules Ross who says, finally, as a result of his observations and most serious reflection, he hesitates not to say, that the trade for slaves ought to be abolished, not only as contrary to sound policy, but to the laws of God and Nature, and were it possible by the present enquiry to convey a just knowledge of the extensive misery it occasions, every Kingdom of Europe must unite in calling on their legislatures to abolish the trafficking of humans for a life of Slavery ."

Ross unsurprisingly found he was no longer "persons grata" with a number of his acquaintances in Jamaica from his former Kingston days. He was made an honorary and corresponding member of the Society for the Abolition of the Slave trade.

During a stay on Exmouth Moor Horatio Nelson wrote to Hercules Ross telling him that his letter had arrived and found him in this remote corner, where he had been for a fortnight enjoying the benefit of his first summer in West India:

"We shall rest all next Sunday at Bath on our way to London, and I shall enjoy the pump room to see if you and Mrs Ross are at Bath, and should that be the case, I will have the satisfaction of taking my old friend by the hand. You have given up all the tolls and anxieties of Business, whilst I must still buffet the waves in search of what? That thing called honour!"

In August 1805, 56 days before the battle of Trafalgar, Ross wrote to Nelson of his hope that "there still remains some great action to be achieved worthy of my fame and that one fine day I will be able to introduce my boy Horatio, as fine a fellow as can be imagined to his Godfather."

Horatio Ross was the only son of Hercules Ross of Rossie, and Henrietta Ross nee Macrae. He was born at Rossie Castle on the 5 September 1801 and baptised on the 27th day of October. Horatio was named after his first Godfather.

His Godfathers were The Right Honourable Lord Viscount Nelson and John Parish Senior, Merchant in Hamburg. His Godmothers were The Right Honourable Lady Jane Stewart and The Right Honourable Countess of North Esk.

A story developed that when Horatio was six, his father got him to present Colours to the Rossie Regiment of Yeomanry, but that when they fired a volley the boy fled in terror. His enraged father ordered a servant to fire a musket several times over his head daily which unsurprisingly made him even more frightened. The story goes that one day, the servant made him fire the gun at a sparrow, which he hit and killed. In that moment he found his menier. When his father died in December 1816, Horatio was served as his heir to the Rossie Estate.

Horatio joined the 14th Hussars in October 1820, but had no taste for barracks life and went on half pay as an Infantry Ensign in November 1823. He was known afterwards as Captain Ross. Between 1825 and 1830 he became a notable figure in the world of sport, making and winning matches for large sums of money in steeplechase, shooting and rowing, at which he excelled.

In 1833 Horatio married Justine Henriette MacRae daughter of Colin Macrae of Inverinate who was Chief of clan MacRae. They had five sons.

From 1832 to 1834 Horatio served as Member of Parliament for Aberdeen, Montrose and Arbroath having ousted Sir James Carnegie. During this time he presented and cordially supported a petition from Aberdeen woollen manufacturers against the extension of the bill to restrict the hours worked by children in cotton factories in Scotland. If it was, it would have facilitated the introduction of Poor laws into Scotland, which were considered a curse. He did concede that some Glasgow cotton factories might need regulation. He was also involved in the Ministerial majority against the Irish union of Parishes bill.

Horatio Ross sold Rossie Estate in 1845 and purchased Netherley Estate near Stonehaven for £33,000 from John Silver, Grandson of Alexander Silver, another son of the soil who at a very young age worked his way to the West Indies, made his fortune and returned home.

After living a quiet lairds life for 18 years Horatio came again to public notice in 1862 as the captain of the Scottish rifle shooting team which competed against England for the Elcho Shield.

Throughout his life, Horatio proved his sporting prowess and photography talents. In 1826 he won one of the First Steeplechases against a Captain Douglas. He was a superlative sporting shot, possibly only surpassed by his son Edward. There was a 1400 yard range on their Netherley estate and he shot with great success at distances up to 1800 yards using targets on boats moored in the Montrose basin.

He and his sons regularly beat all before them at the most prestigious annual rifle competitions at Wimbledon, London and he represented Scotland in shooting championships. Perhaps his most remarkable feat with a rifle was performed in 1867. In that year he won the cup of the Cambridge Long Range rifle club against nearly all the best shots in the three kingdoms. The competition extended up to eleven hundred yards – a test of nerve and judgement and most of all eye sight, which would seem wholly impossible for any man in his sixty sixth year!

On his 82nd birthday Horatio killed 82 grouse with 82 shots. He shot his last Stag in 1884 and died in Rossie Lodge, Inverness-shire. In 1899 the *English Illustrated Magazine* described him as “undoubtedly the Deer stalker of the Century”.

It is suggested that for a bet, Horatio once walked from Banchory to Inverness without stopping, a distance of 97 miles.

Horatio became a founding member of the Photographic Society in 1856 and later became it's President.