

Editorial

Welcome to the 2004 edition of the Club Bulletin. We hope you will find it as interesting as ever.

We were not long into the New Year before learning disturbing news of Dame Jean Maxwell-Scott's inability to preside at the Annual Dinner on Friday, March 12th. and after some nine weeks in the Edinburgh Royal Infirmary of her subsequent and much lamented death on May 5th.2004. This is very much the end of an era and a visit to Abbotsford will never again be the same without the welcoming greeting from Patricia and now Jean This issue is dedicated to her memory and we are most grateful to Sir Hew Hamilton-Dalrymple and Professor Ian Campbell for their contributions.

We have managed through the courtesy of the various contributors to obtain all the transcripts of the exceptional speeches/lectures given to Club members since November last year and are pleased to reprint these herein.

We are also glad that our pleas last year for contributions from members did not fall on deaf ears and this edition contains four interesting articles; we hope this may encourage other members to put pen to paper or fingers to their word processors and furnish us with further material next year.

You will be pleased to hear that the club is indeed continuing to flourish and we expect to enrol some 20 new members each year. To this end Council endeavours to arrange several interesting meetings annually and the venue of the New Club has made these enjoyable literary and social occasions.



The Late Dame Jean Maxwell-Scott

When Sir Walter Scott knew his death was close in 1832, he was in the Mediterranean where friends had taken him in a hopeless effort to renew his energies, sapped by ferocious overwork and a series of strokes. Since his sudden financial ruin in 1826 Scott had worked himself without mercy to pay off the accumulated enormous debts he had run up in the building and adornment of his border castle, Abbotsford near Galashiels, and it was to Abbotsford that he begged to be taken to die. There, serene at last in its grounds and woods, within earshot of the Tweed, Scott died peacefully.

How appropriate that his last direct descendant, Dame Jean Maxwell-Scott, should have experienced the same peaceful last few hours in Abbotsford this week when, after a long and vexatious hospital illness, she was allowed home to the castle she had devoted her life to, where she died quietly during the night within earshot of the Tweed. For thousands of visitors over the years the Maxwell-Scott sisters Patricia and Jean had been the first welcome they had to Scott's ancestral home, a tourist mecca for those who know Scott's work (and of all Scottish authors he must be the most internationally known) and for those who simply wished to see one of Scotland's most extraordinary castles. The sisters not only lived in the castle (and for the castle) but they were there to welcome guests in person, to show them round and answer their questions. Many were welcomed to tea in the family quarters, to admire the pictures, to hear about the generations of Scotts, to be helped in their researches and their writings – for Abbotsford held, and holds, a unique library of Scott books and artefacts. To see Scott's daily surroundings was one thing: to see them in the presence of his descendants, quite another. The sisters' private library and picture collection was shared with many enquirers: Abbotsford is an open castle to an extraordinary extent, and has suffered for it in the occasional theft. Scott (a busy working lawyer in Edinburgh most of his life) came to it whenever he could at weekends and in vacations, relished its views (he longed to own all the land he could see), worked in the woods despite his physical disability (he had a deformed foot), and entertained largely the rich and the famous, many of whom were to write of the experience, the hospitality, their astonishing host who appeared to spend all day and much of the evening with his guests, yet find time to pour out the extraordinary productions of 'the author of Waverley' in the early hours before the guests were up. His own incomparable journal brings the life of Abbotsford vividly back to the reader today.

All these remains of Scott's career were open in the summer months, and Abbotsford has opened again in 2004 despite Dame Jean's illness. The coach loads will return after the funeral, the work of editing Scott's novels will continue, the Scott library at Abbotsford will continue to be catalogued. But declining visitor numbers were a real concern, and without a direct descendant in residence, things will change. How, is not yet clear.

Dame Jean Maxwell-Scott was 80, and had been at the heart of Abbotsford as a living memorial since 1954 when the sisters inherited it from their father Major-General Sir Walter Maxwell-Scott. Patricia had been briefly married; Jean never married and there are no children. Together, they made running the estate their lives and Dame Jean continued the tradition on the death of her older sister in 1998. In their hands the gardens and grounds were developed, the interior tactfully modernised and business encouraged – for keeping Abbotsford open was a business, one which suffered badly in the aftermath of terrorist attacks and foot-and-mouth scares. Both sisters cultivated a slightly otherworldly air which belied shrewd business sense. Both showed exceptional kindness and generosity to scholars and students, and acknowledged their responsibility to Scott's reputation. Dame Jean cheerfully allowed access to her private library, answered countless questions from media and newspaper sources as well as from individuals. It was entirely fitting that she should have been chosen as President of the Edinburgh Sir Walter Scott Club for 2003-4, and a real disappointment to all that she was unable to deliver the presidential address in March 2004.

Jean Maxwell-Scott was a retiring person, but she lived a full life. As lady in waiting to Princess Alice, Duchess of Gloucester ("my boss") she took a full part in public life: she was a popular public figure in the Borders. She had a keen interest in horses, a keen interest in gardens. Her home was full of family photographs, many of them recent. She was a gracious hostess, a devoted and hard working guardian of her family's legacy, diffident, charming, a marvellous friend.

Ian Campbell, May 2004

Service of Commemoration

Jean Maxwell-Scott

A very moving Funeral Mass was celebrated on Friday, 14th May 2004, at the Church of Our Lady and St. Andrew, Galashiels, in the presence of a large congregation of relatives and friends of Dame Jean; included among these were many members of the Club. The Tribute was delivered by Sir Hew Hamilton-Dalrymple to whom we are grateful for permission to reprint the following words:

"In October 1998, we all assembled here to pay our last respects to Patricia Maxwell-Scott and to pray for her soul. Now, only 5 1/2 years later, we meet again to do the same for her sister, Jean. It is fitting that we do so in this fine church, built by their great grandfather, James Hope Scott, in the 1850s when, in 'Victorian parlance', he came across to Rome with John Henry Newman, Manning and others in the religious controversies of those times.

In 1998 Lord Minto paid a moving tribute to Patricia, particularly concentrating on her public work, both in the Borders and in other parts of Scotland, and on her magnificent achievement in restoring Abbotsford in so many ways over the last 50 years – something she could not have done without the unstinting and unselfish support of Jean. It is a story well known to everyone here today.

So I would like, in my turn if I may, give a rather more personal account of the life and achievements of the younger sister of this remarkable Borders family, a family that has been greatly loved by people of all walks of life, not because of their position in life but because of their great qualities of friendship and compassion to all and everyone.

Jean was only two when her mother died, and although Sir Walter married again in 1928 and settled at Abbotsford, Jean's upbringing was not, shall I say, an easy one. Her father was 48 when she was born and her stepmother came from a cosmopolitan background and a rather different culture, but the girls were happy. In my mother's photograph album there are many photographs of the girls on the beach at North Berwick or later playing tennis with my two sisters, who were their exact contemporaries. My mother acted as an 'escape valve' for Patricia and Jean and they repaid her a hundred-fold later in life with kindness, love and hospitality.

Patricia and Jean were sent to a convent boarding school at Westgate-on-Sea, but in Jean's case this was abruptly cut short when the Battle of Britain began – Westgate, opposite Dunkirk was hardly the place to be for education, or any other purpose in the summer of 1940. So Jean completed her schooling with my younger sister at my home at Leuchie. Then, with the war still on, she trained to be a V.A.D. at her cousin's home at Keir, near Stirling – at this time an auxiliary hospital – and this continued until 1946.

With Patricia away, first in Canada and then in London, Jean was with her father and step-mother at Abbotsford until 1954, when Sir Walter died and Patricia took over control of the house. This began what can only be called: the remarkable story of the last 50 years promoting the life and home of the great Sir Walter Scott.

In 1958 Jean was invited to become a Lady-in-Waiting to the Duchess of Gloucester, the start of a long and happy association that lasted nearly 45 years. She was, in the words of one of her colleagues in the household: 'the model of a Lady in Waiting – totally discrete, wonderfully loyal, never pushing herself forward'. She accompanied the Duke and Duchess of Gloucester all over the world. When the Duke of Gloucester died she travelled in the winter with Princess Alice to Australia and South Africa for holidays, which she greatly enjoyed. Many of us have seen Jean following behind Princess Alice, tall, erect, unfailingly elegant, and immaculately but simply turned out – but if you caught her eye, you could well get a wink. She never ever gave herself airs and graces.

She was absolutely devoted to Princess Alice and, indeed, showed this great affection in later years when Princess Alice came to stay at Abbotsford in the autumn – visits much enjoyed by them both.

And Jean's tours of duty as a Lady-in-Waiting – at the start one month on, one month off – led to a happy pattern of life at Abbotsford, where Jean ran the outside (the gardens, the hens and the like). Patricia and Jean were, therefore, never long enough together to get in each other's way or to jarr on each other's nerves – not always easy for two strong-minded ladies. As they grew older, harmony and happiness prevailed to their benefit and to that of Abbotsford in general.

But life for Jean was in no way all duty and hard work. Although an immensely private person, who knew her own mind, she greatly enjoyed the social scene and, on those occasions, she could light up the company with her vivacity and charm. But it was her love of horses (a hobby she shared with her great friend, Susan Wyhowska), which gave her most enjoyment and pleasure. Their three-day eventer,

Sir Wattie, born on the great Sir Walter Scott's birthday (hence his name) is a story all its own. Suffice to say that his successes at Badminton and other three-day events – always ridden by Ian Stark – were followed by his being a reserve at the Los Angeles Olympics, and winning the silver medal six years later at Seoul. Many will have seen Sir Wattie, in retirement, quietly grazing below the house at Abbotsford beside the Tweed.

Sir Wattie's success opened up a happy additional hobby for Jean and Susan, judging at various fences at three-day events all over the country – until that pleasure became a burden when more regulation was introduced. What fun they had had.

Jean, like her sister, was involved in many charities. I will only mention one, because it was very close to her heart – The Scottish-Polish Friendship Fund. She supported it for many years and became its president in 1984. She greatly helped with fund-raising events at Abbotsford. When the Fund closed down in 1992, with the fall of communism, she was awarded the gold medal of service by the Polish government in exile.

The last few years were a great strain on Jean when she had to look after Abbotsford on her own, and the responsibility undoubtedly took its toll. But, thanks to the wonderful support of Jeanette, Larry, and all of their devoted staff, they kept the place going in the difficult times following the 9/11 terrorist attack and the foot and mouth crisis. Throughout the long season (theirs was from March-November) Jean continued to welcome hundreds of visitors to her beloved home, and to introduce them to the memory of the great Sir Walter Scott.

And now Jean has gone to meet her Maker. A devoted catholic, in the tradition of her family, the chapel at Abbotsford meant so much to both sisters. It was fitting, therefore, that Jean's body lay there last night, as had Patricia's before her funeral. Her last illness, despite the devoted care of the medical staff at both the Borders General Hospital and the new Royal Infirmary at Edinburgh was, as we Catholics would say, her 'purgatory on earth' – but the Lord was good to her and, thanks to many people, but particularly to Susan Wyhowska and Anna Hepburn Scott, she got home to Abbotsford where, as always, she received devoted care from Jeanette and her nurse, Fiona. Father Creanor anointed her and she passed away peacefully in her own bed, in her beloved home, at 3am on Wednesday morning. At the back of the Order of Service, you will find a quotation from Sir Thomas More, one-time Lord Chancellor of England. Do please read it because I cannot imagine a better way to remember Jean. May she rest in peace."

At the termination of the service a large cavalcade of cars followed the cortege to Dryburgh Abbey where Dame Jean was laid to rest beside her elder sister Patricia who had predeceased her by some 6 years. The graves lies close to that of their great-great-grandfather, Sir Walter. Among the many wreaths and floral tributes was one from the Edinburgh Sir Walter Scott Club which, in addition to the icon of Sir Walter and Spice, bore the words: "In Fondest Remembrance and in Gratitude for a Life devoted to the Memory of Sir Walter". There followed a reception in the Dryburgh Abbey Hotel.