

Jack Henderson

gamekeeper and poet.

John Henderson (always known as Jack) had a very unfortunate start to life. He was the youngest of a family of seven. Sadly his father John died two months before Jack was born on 26th December 1911.

Ivan Henderson, one of Jack's older siblings emigrated to New Zealand in 1920. In 1923 his mother Margaret and the rest of his family also emigrated to New Zealand leaving Jack in Gatehouse. We believe he was raised by Charles Henry and his wife Letitia at 33 Catherine Street and also by Wellwood and Lizzie McMurray.

Jack lived in Gatehouse all his life, working for Mrs Murray Usher as a gamekeeper. He married Christina Grace Duncan (Chris) on 21st July 1936 and they had a son Neil in 1937. They lived at Eastview, Castramont Road.

Chris Henderson with a kid goat at Loch Whinyeon.



Jack had a skill as a poet. After his death his family published some of his poems as well as the following obituary.

Jack Henderson 1911 - 1989

Jack Henderson was born on 26th December 1911 at West View, Gatehouse of Fleet, he attended the local school and on leaving at around the age of 14 began work as a kennel boy on Cally estate.

Over the years Jack progressed to head Gamekeeper on the estate with responsibilities for cover shoots, fishing and deer stocking etc., he had a keen interest in wildlife and always carried his camera at the ready to photograph anything unusual, many of his photographs have appeared in various publications.

During the war years being medically unfit for active service Jack was a member of the Royal Observer Corp. and on numerous occasions acted as guide to the RAF rescue team from Stranraer when there was a plane lost in the Fleet Valley or Cairnsmore area.

During Jack's years on Cally Estate many of his poems were addressed to his employer Mrs Murray Usher as he found it easier to vent his feelings in rhyme than any other means and as Mrs

Murray Usher responded in rhyme most of their serious discussions and disagreements over the years were conducted in this manner, an example is contained in the book.

Jack obtained a certificate of merit for his 50 years plus service to Cally estate during July of 1986, unfortunately he suffered from depression and his health deteriorated until his death on 16th December 1989.

This obituary comes from a publication called "Poems by Jack Henderson, a Galloway Gamekeeper" which was published in 1994 (it is now out of print but is still available in second hand bookshops).



Along with his duties as gamekeeper he 'looked after' young James Murray Usher and became good friends with many of the 'fishing and shooting' visitors to the Cally Estate. He had strong opinions about many things, particularly the mass planting of conifers by the Forestry Commission and the policy of killing goats in their territory. He wrote several articles for the Galloway News under nom de plumes such as 'Gallovidian' or 'Iain Fraoch ', keeping his identity hidden from his employer.

The Forestry Commission was a topic he discussed in verse with his employer Mrs Murray Usher. He also made his opinions clear to her on the employment of Italian waiters in the Murray Arms Hotel and on the political topics of the day.

The following are 2 verses taken from one of his poems called "**Forestry Commission - 50th birthday**"

Verse 1

All ye who love the bonny hills
With granite outcrops grey,
Come feast your eyes on paradise
Before it fades away

Verse 9

Be thankful Gallovidians,
For you at least have seen,
Beauty before it's burial
Beneath a shroud of green.

Despite their differences of opinion, Jack had a great respect for his employer and would pen amusing verses for her birthday and other occasions. She would sometimes answer her gamekeeper by replying in verse. A verse of one of his poems is used on the memorial stone to Mrs Murray Usher at the Knocktinkle car park on the Lauriesston Road.

In 1986 Jack received a long service award from Mrs Murray Usher for his work for the Cally Estate.

Jack died on 16th December 1989 and is remembered along with Christina and Neil on a gravestone at Girthon Cemetery and also on a memorial stone in a dry stone dyke beside the pathway which leads up to Loch Whinyeon.



In Memory of
Jack Henderson
1911-1989
Associated with The Cally Estate
for over 50 years.

Other examples of Jack's poems can be found in the section on Mrs Elizabeth Murray Usher.