

In memoriam

HUGH DOUGLAS WELSH
Honorary President 1956-69

Hugh Welsh, President of the Club from 1938 to 1946 and Honorary President from 1956, died at Aberdeen on 27 January 1969, aged 82.

In later years he was unable to participate in Club excursions but he was a regular attender at indoor meets and general meetings. Each year he took his place at the top table on the occasion of the annual dinner, where it was his privilege to say grace. Many will recall with appreciation the peculiarly appropriate words which he always used:

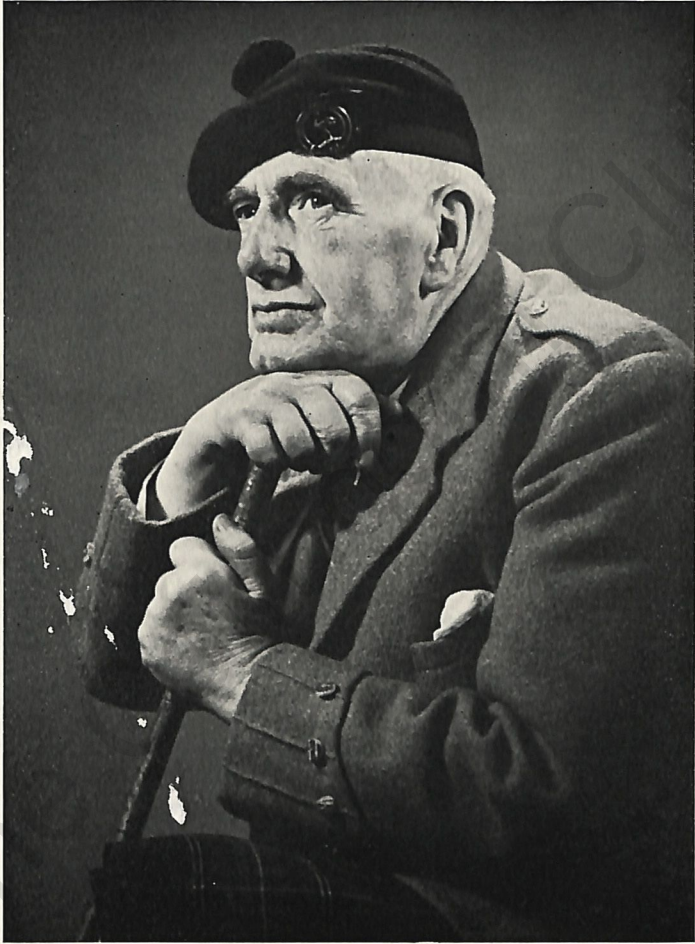
We who are privileged to tread the high places and are humbled by the glory and majesty of the Creator's handiwork on earth and in the heavens give thanks for the many favours bestowed upon us, and ask a blessing on the fruits of the earth of which we are now to partake.

His death came less than nine months after the Club had held a complimentary dinner in his honour to mark the completion of sixty years' membership. (He had joined in 1908). This was held in the Treetops Hotel, Aberdeen on 17 May 1968. Alan C. R. Watt, president, was in the chair and the company of about sixty included six past presidents, in addition to the guest of honour, viz. E. B. Reid, W. M. Duff, A. L. Hay, Robert Bain, J. E. Bothwell and R. A. Gerstenberg. It is unfortunate that the very happy recollections of this function—believed to be the first such event in the Club's history—are now tinged with regret and a very real sense of loss.

In proposing the toast of 'Hugh Douglas Welsh', the president made passing reference to his career at the North of Scotland College of Agriculture and the Macaulay Institute, his interest in music as composer as well as critic and connoisseur, and his devotion to An Comunn Gaidhealach, but stated that these other strings to his bow were muted that night. The president continued:

It is to his lifelong devotion to the high and remote places, his love of the lingering echoes from the corries, his abiding interest in those who frequent the hills and his rare gift of conveying his enthusiasm to others—it is to such things that I would refer.

As regards mountains, Hugh Welsh has been something of a specialist. No peak-bagger nor ardent disciple of Sir Hugh Munro, he has largely confined his affection to the Cairngorms and to his second love—The Cuillin.



Hugh Douglas Welsh

From time to time he has forsaken the granite of the former for the gabbro of the latter, the mod inconst. of the Shelter Stone for the fleshpots of Sligachan—but never for long.

It is significant that his spiritual home has been the Etchachan—Shelter Stone—Loch Avon area. The Club was formally founded in Aberdeen in January 1889 but the preliminary junketings of the founders took place in June 1887 on the Dairymaid's Field at the head of Loch Avon. It was only seventeen years thereafter that Hugh Welsh paid his first visit there—in 1904—and for many years his brother and he were wont to spend a fortnight each year camping in various parts of the Cairngorms but principally in this area. Like the founders of the Club, he drew his inspiration from there and was imbued with the same spirit. One can readily imagine with what facility and community of feeling he proposed the toast of 'The Founders' on the only occasion when the memory of these stalwarts has been honoured—at the Jubilee Dinner of the Club in November 1938.

On one of these camping holidays—in July 1907—the Welsh brothers organized an 'At Home' at the Shelter Stone to which various guests were invited and for which function there was a formal menu, a wine list, and musical programme. The last of these was as follows:

'During the banquet the wind will play selections among the precipices, while the solitary bee will play a bugle solo. Trains in Aviemore, if heard, will accompany now and again on their whistles.'

These were the days! In some respects things were very different—Donald Fraser reigned supreme at Derry Lodge and the bothies at Corrou and Glen Einich were occupied by persons quaintly styled 'watchers'. There were no modern refinements such as foot-bridges, no locked gates and no cars to spoil the Derry road. Some things, however, were no different: snow fell in July, and not infrequently it rained for days on end. One of Hugh Welsh's excursions is comparable with some of the odd things that go on these days such as walking for six hours in torrential rain or members voluntarily exposing themselves to blizzard conditions. It is encouraging to know that our honorary president sometimes indulged in activities no less perverted. (See 'A Daft Day'—vol. XIII, no. 74, p. 166.)

His article concludes 'In spite of the discomfort, we had had a wonderful day, a day we will look back upon with great pleasure'. Such a conclusion will come as no surprise to members of the Cairngorm Club: to others it would provide evidence for summary certification!

Hugh Welsh's presidency—covering as it did the war years—was the longest in the Club's history. For many years he led excursions and contributed articles to the *Journal*. He was a pioneer in the giving of illustrated talks on the hills. His 'Echoes from the Corries' was a means of introducing many to the attractions of high places. At one time he was known in Club circles as 'St. Christopher', the patron saint of travellers.

Throughout his life Hugh Welsh has been an adopted resident of Braemar and his kenspeckle figure has been well known to more than one generation of natives and visitors. Resplendent in his kilt, he is not averse during his annual stay in Braemar to being photographed as a representative native!

However, if Braemar has been his headquarters, it is Inverey that has

regularly been his advanced base. He was a friend of Mrs Gruer at Thistle Cottage until she died in 1909, and for the next thirty years he was a close buddy of the indefatigable Maggie Gruer, who acquired an almost legendary fame for her hospitality to climbers. She held court seated on a chair by her fireside, and following her death Hugh Welsh acquired this chair. He has now presented it to the Club, and it is being used to-night for the first time as the president's chair on a formal occasion.

When he retired from the presidency in 1946, it was said of Hugh Welsh by his successor: 'If he has no first ascents to his credit, he has certainly done more towards spreading an interest in hill walking and mountaineering into a widening community than has anyone in the Club since its inception.' This was said over twenty years ago but it is still true. No Club function is complete without him and I trust that he may long be spared to encourage and inspire us with his unrivalled knowledge and experience and to delight us with his company. Quite uniquely, he personifies all that the Club stands for.

The toast was honoured by the company with enthusiasm, and Hugh Welsh then replied in reminiscent vein. His humorous sallies, his apt quotations, and his lyrical descriptions of some of the moments during his long experience on the hills which lingered in his memory combined to set the seal on a memorable evening.

Unfortunately our honorary president was not long spared after this function. In his will he bequeathed to the Club Maggie Gruer's chair and such of his books and lantern slides as would be of interest to the Club. In fact he had presented the chair and many of his books and slides to the Club during his lifetime and these now form an important part of the Club library.

JAMES GRAY KYD, C.B.E., F.F.A., F.R.S.E.

As briefly reported in the last issue of the *Journal*, J. G. Kyd, the senior member of the Club, died in Sussex on 25 June 1968, aged eighty-five. Born in Aberdeen, he was with the Northern Assurance Co. Ltd. there until about 1912. He then held actuarial posts in Ireland and London and he was Registrar-General for Scotland from 1937 to 1948, when he retired and went to live in England. He rose to the top of his profession and was president of the Faculty of Actuaries in 1944-46. It was at his instigation that the mammoth task of preparing the Third Statistical Account of Scotland was undertaken. The First Statistical Account was prepared between 1791 and 1798 and the Second between 1834 and 1845; he suggested that the middle of the twentieth century was a suitable time for putting on record a further comprehensive study