



Constable 83 John Duncan (1926 - 2008)

Edinburgh City Police 1947 - 1975

by John A. Duncan of Sketraw, FSA Scot.



John Duncan was born at Cairnorrie Croft, Methlick, Aberdeenshire on the 14th January 1926 to Harry Milne Duncan, born at Burn End Croft, Fyvie, 14th July 1885 - d.1963 and Eliza Bella Gammie, Little Fortry, Grange, Banffshire born 1 April 1892 -d.1994 married 12th June 1925. John was one of five sons and two daughters born to Harry Milne Duncan a Blacksmith at the time at New Byth, Aberdeenshire.

Harry Milne Duncan's first wife, Jane Simpson, had four children; William, Elizabeth, George and Harry. Jane, born at Karaven, New Deer, Aberdeenshire 16th March 1887 and married Harry on the 28th March 1909 but sadly died of puerperal eclampsia just after childbirth on the 8th Oct 1922. John, Charles and Elma were of the second family born to Eliza Bella Gammie.



Cuminstown Primary School, Aberdeenshire 1938

Although John was born at Cairnorrie Croft most of his youth was spent at Cuminestown after his father Harry Milne Duncan purchased Sealscrook Farm in 1930. He attended Cuminestown Primary School and later Turriff Academy. John was a bright scholar and on leaving School in 1941 the headmaster suggested to his father, Harry, that he should continue his education with a view to eventually attend University. Times however were hard, the country was at war and for the family this suggestion was financially impossible. In order to assist the family coffers, John set aside any further ambitions towards any higher education he may have had and started work as a farm hand at Woodhead of Laithers, Turriff. During his time there, on more than one occasion he tried to enlist in the Army but was turned down because he was in a reserved occupation. Desperate to fulfil a patriotic urge he joined the Home Guard instead in 1943; thus serving his country in both a reserve occupation and as a uniformed volunteer.



John Duncan at the family farm Sealscrook, Cuminestown 1946

John enjoyed working the land and living in rural Aberdeenshire but he was unsettled and felt he could do more with his life. After some consideration and encouragement from his family he joined the Scottish Police Force in March 1947. His parents were extremely proud of him and he was amongst those who were the first intake to be trained at the Scottish Police College at Tulliallan Castle, Kincardine, Fife. He went on to join the Edinburgh City Police (now Lothian & Borders) at the end of his training.



Scottish Police College, Tulliallan Castle, Kincardine, Fife 1947

Constable 83 John Duncan's Police beat was in the Grassmarket in Edinburgh's old town. The Grassmarket was not such a prestigious place in 1947 as it is today with places like the Castle Trades Hotel, a hostel for the city's less fortunate, old warehouses and run down tenement buildings. While on duty in 1956 one of John's lungs collapsed and when in Hospital they discovered he had chronic Rheumatoid Arthritis; he thought that was the end of his Police career. His senior officers however, had noticed that he was quite clever academically and suggest he take up a post within A Division, the divisional headquarters at Braid Place, Newington, Edinburgh (now closed). John spent the next 19 years in the station and retired from the Force in 1975 holding the position of Chief Clerk - a total service of nearly 30 years.

John's Police Medal for Exemplary Police Service >





John & Margaret's Wedding 1949

John married Margaret Joan Stark, born in Edinburgh, 31st October 1929, on the 17th December 1949 and they had three sons, [John Alexander](#) b.1953, Malcolm Stewart b. 1961 and Bruce Greg b.1964. On his retirement from the Police John decided to move back to the North East of Scotland with his wife Margaret and their two youngest sons.

Although he would have liked to purchase a small farm in Aberdeenshire and return to farming this was not possible due to his Arthritis so he chose instead to become the proprietor of the Bognie Arms Hotel, Forgue, Huntly. This he found was more than suitable as it also had a substantial farm steading with a few acres of land that allowed him to keep a handful of cattle and sheep. He finally retired to Huntly in 1989 after 14 years at 'The Bognie' as it was known.

John lived for a further 18 year after his retirement but his health was not good and he suffered a number of illnesses including a stroke and a brain tumour not long after leaving The Bognie. John may not have enjoyed good health during his final retirement but he never lost his sense of humour or his passion for knowing what was going on in the local farming community.

Due to increasing deterioration in his health he spent the last year of his life at the Meadows Nursing home, Huntly. He passed away on the 18th of January 2008 at the age of 82.



The Bognie Arms Hotel, Forgue by Huntly, Aberdeenshire 1979