

Atholl Laurence Cunyngham, 20th Lord Forbes

CHAPTER XXII

ATHOLL LAURENCE CUNYNGHAM, 21ST LORD FORBES

BORN September 14th, 1882. Succeeded January 31st, 1916.

Died November 26th, 1953.

HE was the eldest son of Atholl Monson Lord Forbes, being educated at Winchester and Christ Church, Oxford. After leaving Oxford, he studied abroad with a view to entering the diplomatic service; however, in 1905, at the age of 22, he joined the 2nd Battalion Grenadier Guards, later becoming adjutant of the 3rd Battalion Grenadier Guards and then Regimental Adjutant. In 1915 he became very ill with nephritis and inflammation of the gall bladder. Later, when passed fit, he was posted to the staff of Headquarters London District before joining the staff of XIV Corps in France; but in 1917 he again became ill and was invalided home. After recovering from his illness, he was given command of the Reserve Battalion Grenadier Guards till 1919, when he resigned his commission with the rank of Major, as he had succeeded his father in 1916 and wished to attend to the management of his estates, consisting of Castle Forbes, Brux, and Littlewood.

In 1914 he married Mabel, second daughter of the 3rd Earl of Lichfield, from Shurgborough, Stafford, by whom he had two sons:

Nigel Ivan, born February 19th, 1918;

Malcolm Atholl, born December 9th, 1928; died March 6th, 1929.

He has spent most of his boyhood at Brux with his parents, but after succeeding his father in 1916, he and his wife moved to Castle Forbes where they lived for the remainder of their lives, except for the period of the World War, 1939-1945, when he loaned Castle Forbes to the Department of Health as an Auxiliary Hospital for convalescent servicemen.

During this period he and his wife resided at Finzeauch, formerly the Manse to the Free Kirk, which had reverted to the Estate two years previously when the Free Kirk was no longer used for religious services.

As a result of two deaths in quick succession—that of his uncle and then of his father, Atholl was faced with very heavy capital taxation; this, coupled with the fact that both Horace Courtenay Lord Forbes and Atholl Monson

THE HOUSE OF FORBES

Lord Forbes had given extremely generously to the Episcopal Church, made it necessary for him to sell the Estates of Littlewood and Brux. He sold Littlewood to Sir Alan McLean in 1922 and Brux to Dr. Ewan Forbes—Semphill, who later became Sir Ewan Forbes, Baronet.

Soon after coming to live at Castle Forbes, he embarked on an extensive re-forestation programme which he continued till he handed over Forbes Estate to his son, Nigel, in 1947, so as to mitigate taxation. It was a great sadness to him that over 100 acres of standing timber was blown down or badly damaged during a very severe gale, with gusts up to 120 miles per hour, on 23 January, 1953. He also started a farming enterprise based on an outwintered suckler herd and cereals at Castle Forbes Home Farm and the castle policies.

Meanwhile, his wife developed a garden at Castle Forbes which became well known for its fine herbaceous borders.

During their time at Castle Forbes they carried out considerable modernisation to the Castle, mainly in the form of bathrooms, wash-hand basins, and central heating, as well as in 1925 bringing electricity to the Castle and the Home Farm by installing a powerful turbine at the old sawmill lade above Craigpot on the River Don. This remained till mains electricity was connected after the World War. Atholl and his wife entertained at Castle Forbes many distinguished people, including Queen Mary, Lord Baden Powell (Chief Scout) and Mr. Neville Chamberlain when he was Prime Minister.

He was a Representative Peer for Scotland 1917-1924, and a Justice of the Peace and Deputy Lieutenant for Aberdeenshire. In 1934 the Prime Minister, Mr. MacDonald, informed him that he wished to submit his name to the King for appointment as Lord Lieutenant for the County of Aberdeen, but he declined the honour.

He took on many public duties and did much work for charities. He was a member of the Aberdeenshire County Council, Chairman of the Don District River Board, Chairman of the National Playing Fields Association (Scottish Branch), President of the West Aberdeenshire Conservative Association, and County Commissioner, Boy Scouts. In addition, he was Chairman of the British Sugar Corporation (Scottish Board) and a Board Member of the North-ern Assurance Co., Ltd. (Aberdeen Branch). He was a keen sportsman, enjoying stalking, shooting and fishing, as well as being a lover of music.

He always put duty before self interest and was renowned for his courteous manner as well as for the help he gave to others. He was a very popular laird, and did much to improve Forbes Estate.

Atholl died on 26 November, 1953, and was buried in the Old ruined Church in the policies of Castle Forbes.