

Obituary: Agnes Walker (March 1930 - August 2011)

Edna Stewart

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Agnes had many and varied interests, and as a result had acquired friends from a variety of backgrounds. She really loved people and greeted acquaintances so enthusiastically whenever she met them.

Agnes was the eldest daughter of James and Elizabeth McDonald. She was educated at Hutchesons' Girls Grammar School, where she was the first science dux. Having also passed her music grades to a high standard she chose science as her future. Her studies at Glasgow University were interrupted for a year when she contracted TB, so she settled for an ordinary B Sc. Her first post was at the National Engineering Laboratory in East Kilbride. She gave up work to marry Norman Walker and raise a family - a daughter followed by three sons. She spent holidays at Norman's second home, Abernethy House, which later became a Christian Outdoor Centre. While there she made contact with the outdoor centre at Glenmore Lodge, and used to lead students from Moray House on expeditions to the Cairngorms to study the plant life.

Her determination to continue her academic studies led to the breakdown of her marriage. She worked in the Botany Department of Glasgow University with Dr Jim Dickson researching the ancient history of bogs and lochs using pollen identification, and gained an M Sc. Her PhD was in a different field and at Belvidere Hospital - the reactions of tumours (in mice) to hypothermia.

The post of Assistant Keeper of Natural History at Kelvingrove was an ideal one for Agnes. She focussed on the botanical side, and set up many exhibitions, one of the most important being that on the Scottish Thistle. For this she drove to Blair Castle and was allowed to transport in the boot of her car a valuable historic painting in which the thistle is depicted. During this time she also gave lectures on Botany and Fungi for the adult education department of Glasgow University. She joined the Glasgow Natural History Society in 1969 and was a member of Council from 1990 – 1992. At the time of the Glasgow Garden Festival, Agnes designed a poster on the Classification of Flowering Plants, which was published by the Natural History Museum in London.

Having been a member of the Botanical Society of the British Isles for some years, in 1989 she was appointed recorder for vc 103, Mid Ebudes, which comprises the

islands of Mull, Coll and Tiree. She organised several recording meetings in these islands, which were attended by many expert botanists. On Tiree the outdoor centre which she had hoped to use was not ready, but Agnes organised a stone barn beside the guest house to be supplied with electricity and tables set up with microscopes to help identification of plants in the evening. On the last night, a ceilidh was held in the same barn.

After she retired from her job at Kelvingrove, Agnes took a course on computing, and also acquired a knowledge of how to computerise music. Her technical expertise enabled her to work with Dr Kenneth Elliot who had been for many years restoring the works of Robert Carver, Scotland's greatest 16th Cent. Composer. With the help of others in GU music department, he succeeded in his ambition and the complete works were published and are being widely performed.

Through friendship with Mrs Dudgeon of Helmsdale who started the herb garden at Timespan Museum in Helmsdale, Agnes developed a great interest in herbs. She researched the use of herbs in Scotland, for both medicinal and culinary purposes. This resulted in the beautifully illustrated book a "Garden of Herbs". The illustrations were from Nicolas Culpepper's Herbal (no copyright needed) and some by her friend Anita Pearman. She gave a talk on this subject in the Royal College of Physicians and Surgeons of Glasgow and was shown a notebook of herbal remedies from 18th Cent. Scotland. She had transcribed this for issue as a CD when she suffered the severe stroke which put an end to her many activities.

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