

Trades House of Glasgow

The Story of Deacon Alexander Walker C.B.E., D.L., J.P., F.S.I.



Craig R Bryce
Trades House Honorary Archivist

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Deacon Alexander Walker C.B.E, D.L., J.P. F.S.I. (1886 – 1945)

Deacon of the Incorporation of Cordiners 1928

Birth of Alexander Walker

Alexander Walker was born on 28th of March 1866 at 27½ Crown Street, Hutchesontown. His father was called Andrew Walker and his mother's name was Agnes Wilson and they were married on 31st December 1858. (He used to recall that his mother would speak of the public executions she could see from the house). His father, Andrew Walker was a "tobacco spinner" (i.e. a person who made and sold tobacco products).

Brothers and sisters

William Wilson Walker born 1863 in Hutcheson Town, Glasgow

Agnes Wilson Walker born 1868 in Calton, Glasgow

Margaret Wilson Walker born 1870 in Calton, Glasgow

James Aikman Walker born 27 Sep 1872 in Calton, Glasgow,

Early Years

He was educated at Wilson's School – a free, school located at 87 Montrose Street, Glasgow. Alexander left school at the age of twelve to become a "van boy with a Queen Street firm". However, after a few months he entered a lawyer's office and later spent five years training in general law business at the firm of W.B. Paterson.

1871 Census

By 1871 Alexander was living at 168 Gallowgate with his parents, his older brothers William aged seven and two sisters Agnes aged three and Margaret aged one. There was also two boarders staying in the house.

1881 Census

In 1881, 15-year-old Alexander was still staying with his parents Andrew and Agnes and his two brother William Wilson Walker (17) and James A Walker (8) along with his two sisters Agnes (13) and Margaret (11). Alexander was listed as a Law Clerk at this time.

Early Law Employment

In January 1884, Alexander entered the service of the Corporation of Glasgow in the Town Clerk's Office under Sir James Marwick. In the same year, aged 18, he matriculated at the University of Glasgow in the Arts Faculty. His class for his first year was "Junior Humanity". He subsequently attended classes in Scot's Law and in 1888 was awarded a prize for "Eminence in Class Examinations" and also received a prize awarded by the Faculty of Procurators of Glasgow. The following year he was placed in the "Eminently Distinguished" category after the Ordinary Class Examination in Conveyancing. He was now a "law student" still living at 168 Gallowgate with his mother, brothers and sisters.

1891 Census

The family circumstances appear very similar to that of the 1881 census except that his father does not appear on the census. There is no record of him graduating from the university although he was able to enrol as a law agent and a "writer".

Marriage

Alexander was 30 years old when he married Jessie Winchester at Loanhead, Rathven, Banff on the 2nd of June 1896. Jessie was 25 years old, born on 8th June

1870 at 8.45 a.m. in Bucks, Banff. At the time of her marriage, she was a schoolteacher and the daughter of a farmer, John Winchester and Jessie Reid, Alexander's address at the time was 146 Onslow Drive, Glasgow and he gave his occupation as "solicitor". His younger brother James was a witness.

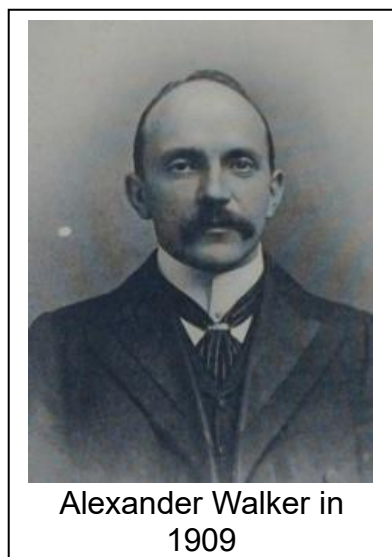
City of Glasgow Burgess 1899

Alexander's father, Andrew, became a Burgess and Guild Brother of the City of Glasgow as a Far Hand on 17 May 1899, he enrolled as a member of the Incorporation of Cordiners. On 2nd June 1899 all three brothers became Near Hand Burgesses of the City of Glasgow, all becoming members of the Incorporation of Cordiners on the same date.

Census 1901

The 1901 shows Alexander in his new home, Loanhead, along with his wife along with his son Alexander R. Walker aged 3 years and his daughter Lillias Walker aged 20 months. He was also employing 1 servant, 19-year-old Alice Bell. Alexander's employment was "Writer" at this time.

Further Employment



1905, Alexander was appointed Depute Town Clerk in Glasgow and three years later was promoted to City Assessor at a salary of £750 rising to £900 a year. His entry in the Glasgow Post Office Directory for 1908/09 was, Walker, Alex., writer, lands valuation and registration of voters assessor, and surveyor of assessments, City Chambers, 249 George Street; house, Loanhead, Giffnock.

Figure 4. Alexander Walker in 1909. Who's Who in Glasgow, 1909.

"This was the beginning of Mr Walker's most outstanding work in the civic service. Within a very short period he instituted what were regarded as almost revolutionary changes in the sphere of valuation and rating, including a revision of the rating of the various trading departments of the Corporation and a claim from them for amounts greatly in excess of what they had hitherto been paying. The result of these changes was to bring about a considerable reduction in the rates. Within this brief period also he instituted changes in the manner of collecting assessments which proved a great convenience to the citizens and led to a conspicuous increase in the amount collected".

During his time in office the valuation of Glasgow more than doubled to over 11 million pounds.

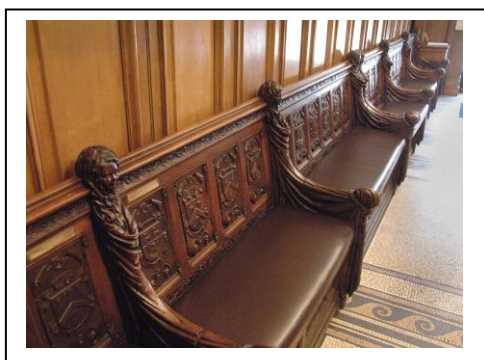
In 1914 he was appointed a J.P. for Glasgow and moved to 18 Queens Gate, Dowanhill. About this time, he spent three months in America and Canada investigating various systems of rating and municipal administration. During the First World War he was secretary and treasurer of the committee of magistrates set up by Glasgow Corporation to look after the welfare of Belgian refugees around 20,000 of whom had fled to Scotland after the occupation of their country. A large number of them settled in Glasgow and a sum of £500,000 was raised for their welfare by Glasgow Corporation. At the same time a committee of ladies was set up

to organise sales of the various goods produced by the refugees, to visit and superintend the refugee hostels and “many other tasks”.

Towards the end of the war, Alexander Walker was employed by the Admiralty to organise the introduction, housing and feeding of the additional labour coming to work in the Clyde shipyards. As a result of carrying out these duties, he was awarded a CBE. in the Birthday Honours of June 8th 1918. His wife, along with three other members of the “ladies committee”, was awarded an MBE. in 1920. Later Alexander was appointed Commander of the Order of the Crown of Belgium and a Member of the Order of St. Sava of Serbia, for his work as Honorary Secretary of the Glasgow-Serbian Relief Committee. His wife and the three other ladies were awarded the Queen Elizabeth Medal by the King of the Belgians and were personally thanked by him for their work with the refugees when they visited Belgium.

Alexander was a Fellow of the Surveyors’ Institution of London (F.S.I.) and a member of the Royal Scottish Automobile Club. He was President of the National Association of Local Government Officers and in 1920 was appointed Honorary Solicitor in Scotland by NALGO to advise on aspects of law pertaining to Scotland. He held this post until 1925.

Trades House Bench

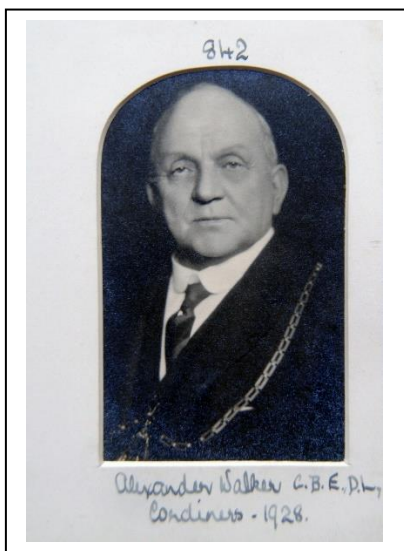


It is likely that this connection with the Belgium refugees led to him having two benches made which he later presented to the Trades House in 1937.

The magnificent oak carved benches were made by refugee Belgium wood carvers during World War 1. There are 34 carved back panels each displaying a different crest. These include the crests of the 14 Incorporations, The Trades House, The Merchants House, The University of

Glasgow, and the arms of a number of different towns. Kirkcaldy sits next to Bruges, Mons and Leige, all Belgium towns and may have been included as a reference to Robert Adam’s birthplace.

Deacon of the Incorporation of Cordiners



Alexander Walker had been a member of the Incorporation of Cordiners since 1899 and in 1926 he became the Collector of the Incorporation and as was the way he became Deacon of the Cordiners in September 1928 and was a member of the Incorporation of Bonnet Makers and Dyers.

Through his wife’s connection with the North East, he served for many years as a director and president of the Glasgow Angus and Mearns Benevolent Society, and was instrumental in bringing help to natives of Angus, in whose welfare he took a very keen interest. He was also an “enthusiastic freemason”.

In 1928, it seems that Alexander Walker received an offer of an appointment with a London firm at a salary of £3000. He duly submitted his resignation to the Corporation. However, prior to the council meeting which would “decide his fate” he had given his promise to members of the Corporation that if the Finance Committee’s recommendation (to accept his resignation and to pay him three months salary in lieu of notice) was not approved he would remain with the Corporation. It would seem that this was not approved, and he remained in post.



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Museums Collection

He retired from his post with Glasgow Corporation in 1935 but continued as a solicitor with offices at 141 Bath Street.

It seems likely that his portrait was painted to commemorate his retirement and may even have been commissioned by Glasgow Corporation. He was described as being “short and plump, like an elderly Puck who does not look like a financial genius”.

On the 21st of September 1943 Mr. Alexander Walker, Esq. of 20 Queen’s Gate, Glasgow presented a portrait in oils of himself by J. Raeburn Middleton. The portrait was probably painted about 1936 when Walker was 70.

Death of Alexander Walker C.B.E., D.L.

Alexander Walker died suddenly on 20th November 1945 during a visit to his daughter in Northwood, Middlesex. His body was cremated at Golders Green cemetery on the 24th November. An obituary was published in the Glasgow Herald. He was survived by his wife and two married daughters. His only son, Mr A. Reid, C.A., died in July, 1944.