

Victoriana - Businesses in Moray

(L-R: Walkers Shortbread, Baxters of Speyside, Gordon & MacPhail, Johnstons of Elgin)

Walkers Shortbread

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1898-1930

The Walker's story begins in 1898 when the twenty-one-year-old Joseph Walker opened the doors of his own bakery with a loan of £50 and the ambition to bake 'The World's Finest Shortbread'.

In the first year of business, Joseph used every spare moment to perfect his shortbread recipe. It was time well spent. Soon, shooting parties from the local estates were making detours just to visit Joseph's bakery.

As word spread and demand for his quality shortbread increased, Joseph took the first steps to expanding the business by moving to a larger shop in the Speyside village of Aberlour and investing in a horse and cart to deliver his baking further afield.

1930-1950 / The War Years

During the 30s, the business – like Joseph's family – was expanding. Two of his sons – James and Joseph – joined the company, bringing fresh ideas with them.

By 1936 they had introduced three valuable additions to the Walker's setup: a range of cakes, a selection of confectionery and...the company's first delivery van. Now that Walker's produce could be sold at ever-greater distances the prospects for expansion were looking promising. Then came the war.

Wartime rationing and their commitment to the Home Guard meant that Joseph's sons couldn't develop the business or their range of products as they would have liked. Despite these adversities, however, they kept the business going and their customers happy by supplying them with

the same tasty breads and oatcakes to which they had become accustomed.

1950-1970 / From Aberlour to Harrods

While some manufacturers began to cut corners by using margarine instead of butter, Joseph believed that people still appreciated the care that went into making a superior product like Walker's Shortbread. And he was right. That's why, even after Joseph Walker died in 1954, his sons knew better than to alter a winningly simple recipe consisting of just four ingredients: flour, pure creamery butter, sugar and salt.

As demand grew so did the business. By 1961, all three of James' children – Joseph, Marjorie and James – had joined the company, making the third generation of Walker's working for the family firm.

The workforce was now almost one hundred, and Walker's had a fleet of 14 vans as well as shops in Grantown and Elgin. Local grocers began stocking Walker's products, and the family had to invest in bakery machinery to help them meet demand. Naturally, they baked to the same high standards, simply on a larger scale. Soon their shortbread was on the shelves of fine food stores all over Britain.

By the 1970s, Joseph's grandchildren had begun exporting Walker's Shortbread to over 60 countries around the world – all of it still baked to his original recipe, of course.

1970-1990 / Growing Success

By 1975 Walker's had outgrown their extended bakery and moved to a custom built factory. This gave them the extra space and facilities needed to develop new products such as our delicious Chocolate Chip Shortbread and speciality biscuits.

Many of the people who worked for Walker's during this time are still with us today; most are local folk who often come from the same family – mothers working alongside daughters, fathers and sons. Community values have always been central to life in the Scottish Highlands and the same is true of our business. Now, as a hundred years ago, Walker's test every new product in Aberlour's Village Shop. Though today our customers are based all over the world, our products are still given their

first seal of approval by the villagers of Aberlour. That way we can ensure that each cake and biscuit offer a real taste of Scotland.

1990-2008 / Delivering Goodness

Whether it's enjoying one of our traditional varieties or new products like our luxurious almond, ginger and chocolate covered shortbread, Walker's reputation has continued to grow as new customers the world over discover the quality of our baking.

This has been recognised by industry over the years too, with Walker's picking up numerous international accolades including five gold Mondiale medals and the Food from Britain Innovation Award.

2008 – Present Day

Much has changed since Joseph Walker baked his first batch of biscuits over a century ago. But, although we've updated many of our methods and are constantly adding exciting products to our range, some things remain a constant; Joseph's grandchildren and great-grandchildren have always remained true to that original ideal – to bake 'The World's Finest Shortbread'.

In fact, when the family opened another factory at Elgin to produce their popular new range of shortbreads and biscuits, it was only on the condition that they would continue using the finest ingredients: plump fruits, aromatic spices, chunks of real chocolate and wholesome nuts.

Baxters of Speyside

In 1868 George Baxter borrowed £100 from his relatives and opened a small grocery shop in Fochabers. His motto was “be different, be better”. George’s wife, Margaret, started making jams and jellies in the back of their shop. When the fine quality of these preserves attracted the attention of the Duke of Gordon and his friends, the Baxter reputation began to spread.

In 1914 George and Margaret’s son, William, married Ethel and shortly after they bought a plot of land from the Duke of Gordon and built a small factory. While Ethel supervised the jam making in huge copper pans, William travelled all over Scotland by train and bicycle, selling his wife’s delicious preserves. Each evening he dutifully wrote home with a list of orders he had taken that day.

Moray has an abundance of superb quality produce – vegetables and fruits from farms, game from moors and woods, beef cattle, salmon from the Spey, lobsters, crab, scallops and prawns from the coast. Using the local foodstuffs and cleverly blending old ideas with new, Ethel created an exceptional range of soups, among them the famous ‘Royal Game’ Soup. She also pioneered the canning of soft fruits when the process of canning was in its infancy. Her talents as an innovator combined with her husband’s brilliance as a salesman, made Baxters a formidable force. Before long orders came flooding in from famous establishments like Harrods and Fortnum & Mason in London.

At the end of World War II, the next generation of the Baxter family, Gordon and Ian, joined the family firm. In 1952, Gordon met and married Ena Robertson. Theirs was to become an exceptional business partnership.

The 1970s and 1980s saw the business expand even further. Baxters traditional soups were well established and as consumer tastes became more exotic, so the products developed to meet demand.

In the 1990s the fourth generation of the family took over the business, maintaining that innovation and quality are key to the continuing success of the Baxter brand.

Items on display

1. Photographic print of Ethel and George Baxter.
2. Two ceramic jars containing Baxters *high grade, home-made preserves*.
3. George Dobie of Paisley cigar/tobacco cutter; Dobie's were famous for their Four Square range of blends.
4. Photograph of Baxters shop and staff, including William, George Snr and George Jnr Baxter (the boy is W. Mathieson, who worked for the firm from 1888 – 1950).
5. Paper bag of flour sold by *George Baxter & Co wholesale & retail family grocers, tea, wine and spirit merchants, Fochabers*.
6. Wooden rolling pin.
7. Page from an account book, dated 1879.
8. Coffee beans specially packed for George Baxter and Sons, Fochabers and metal coffee grinder.
9. Accounts book from 1895 to 1897
10. Various receipts dated 1898 (some with postage stamps)
11. Jam making pan with masher
12. Meat slicing machine
13. Photographic print of Ena and Gordon Baxter, with the Gordon and Ena Baxter Foundation logo. The Foundation supports a wide range of causes across the North of Scotland; it was founded to "*spread a little fertiliser*" in local communities, supporting good causes across a broad range of themes and activities that demonstrate a positive and lasting impact for people living locally. The late Gordon Baxter, CBE, was a loyal supporter of Elgin Museum and The Moray Society until his death in February 2013 aged 95.

Gordon & MacPhail

Mr Gordon meets Mr MacPhail

In 1894 Mr. James Gordon and Mr John Alexander MacPhail shook hands on a business partnership and one of Elgin's most iconic businesses was born. From the brand-new premises 38-40 South Street, the two men planned to sell high-quality groceries and fine wines to customers locally and nationally.

In the first week of May 1895, however, their plans were nearly foiled when the fledgling company's application for a license to sell alcohol was vehemently opposed by local Temperance campaigners. Nonetheless, a journeyman and two apprentices were hired, and on 24th May 1895, Gordon and MacPhail officially opened.

Mr Gordon's experience in the trade enabled him to select bacon, tea and coffee of the most excellent quality. As was the fashion for Scottish wine merchants at the time, Mr Gordon had also learnt to select whiskies and how to blend malts with lighter Lowland grain whiskies to make the popular blended whiskies of the day. Assisting him in this work was John Urquhart, an apprentice who had joined in the business at the age of 15 in 1895, and from Mr Gordon, the young John would have learned quickly about the business of buying and maturing the whiskies.

Gordon & MacPhail's entry into business could not have been timed better, with the Phylloxera pest having caused great damage to the European vineyards and in particular French Brandy vines. At the time, Brandy was the favoured tippable of the middle and upper classes and blended Scotch whisky was conveniently placed to slip into the vacuum created by the sudden dearth of Brandy.

A haven in uncertain times

Unfortunately for the flourishing whisky industry, 1899 proved to be a disastrous year. In Leith, the collapse of the fraudulent Pattison blending company coincided with years of over-production that left the market flooded with now worthless whisky. Banks, which had for so long been happy to extend credit to the industry, suddenly withdrew it, and many distilleries and merchants faced ruin.

With an increasingly healthy grocery business, Gordon & MacPhail could have accepted the depreciation of their large stocks and abandoned the whisky trade altogether; however, knowing that their customers still appreciated choice local malts, Gordon & MacPhail maintained their interest in this side of the business and continued to buy stocks of whisky.

In March 1915, at the age of 35, John Urquhart, one of the original apprentices, became senior partner of Gordon & MacPhail. Although the First World War ushered in a period of contraction for the whisky industry, John had formed strong working relationships with distilleries through the first decades of the twentieth century.

When times were tough, Gordon & MacPhail's success had a large impact on the wider community of Moray, and several times the company saved cash-starved Speyside distilleries from closure by placing substantial filling orders.

The business grew during the 1920s and 1930s and in 1933, John Urquhart's youngest son, George joined the business. Like his father before him, George began at the bottom, cleaning the marble counters, stacking shelves and unloading carts full of goods. He also learnt the different qualities of top quality and ordinary coffee, about how to blend teas, and which whiskies to make ready for sale.

A renaissance for single malt whisky

During the Second World War, Gordon & MacPhail's extensive stocks of whisky provided a valuable resource for the country and large quantities of whisky were shipped to the United States in order to earn dollars to put towards the war effort. But John and George Urquhart also continued to fill casks during the war years, one of the few enterprises to do so, and the large stocks that they accumulated throughout this difficult period meant that the company was one of the few to have healthy stocks when peace was finally declared in 1945.

By the end of the war, the world was drinking blended whisky; single malt was something that remained known only in the northern regions of Scotland and to ardent connoisseurs. Although the firm made their own

blended whisky, it was their malt in which they continued to take the greatest pride.

By 1956, when George succeeded his father as senior partner following John Urquhart's death, Gordon & MacPhail held the largest range of bottled malt whiskies in the world!

New generations

As the company has grown, two generations following George have joined the fold in turn, overseeing the growth in the popularity of single malt whisky worldwide that has characterised the second half of the twentieth century. New markets have been found in Japan, Canada, France, Germany, Switzerland, Italy, Spain, Portugal, Denmark, Singapore, Malaysia, Taiwan, New Zealand, Hong Kong and Estonia; and the expansion continues to this day.

In 1993 the company purchased the mothballed distillery of Benromach, Forres. Drawing upon generations of expertise in the whisky industry, Benromach was carefully re-equipped and was officially re-opened by HRH Prince Charles in 1998.

Today, Benromach proudly hand-crafts a whisky made slowly, the time-honoured way, recreating the classic Speyside style that John Urquhart would have recognised.

Items on display

1. Photograph of Gordon & MacPhail's shop and staff, 1895
2. 'Moray Brand' earthenware bottle, c1890s
3. Willow-pattern tea packet
4. Sikes hydrometer set (used to measure the specific gravity of liquids)
5. Glass bottles c1930s
6. Gill measure
7. Glass bottle c1940s
8. Strathisla 1937 'deluxe' bottle and engraved tasting glass
9. Photograph of the fourth generation Urquhart family in the cask warehouse
10. Whisky barrel stave made into a tea-light holder
11. Whisky flagon

12. Boxed MacPhail's whisky bottle

Johnstons of Elgin

Johnstons of Elgin is the UK's last remaining vertical woollen mill and the only one to carry out all processes, from raw material to finished garments.

The business was started in 1797 by Alexander Johnston, a determined entrepreneur. Born in Aberdeenshire in 1774, he was involved in milling, trading, in herring, hats and tobacco, and shipping. He established markets in Glasgow, Edinburgh and London.

The mill was originally sited at Newmill, Elgin for several reasons – the availability of a skilled workforce, the proximity of the sea (for transporting goods and raw materials) and the River Lossie itself, which would provide power. Initially, investment in the mill was modest until, in the late 1830s, Alexander gained full tenure and began to put money into the business. Johnstons prospered and investment in buildings, equipment and land was maintained.

In 1846, Alexander's son, James, took over the business and expanded exports into France, Germany, Italy, South America and Japan. The company began to experiment with exotic fibres such as alpaca and vicuna. In 1851, Johnstons started weaving cashmere, the first company in Scotland to do so.

In the two centuries following the foundation of Johnstons of Elgin, the company has been owned and run by just two families – the Johnstons and the Harrisons.

Items on display

1. A petition from 1863 from the mill workers, requesting shifts to change from 6am-7pm to 6am to 6pm
2. Photograph inside the mill, with workers, Victorian
3. Photo of James Johnston, son of Alexander the founder
4. Assessed taxes slip, 1860-61
5. Payment document for vicuna wool, 1858
6. Model of a loom
7. Woven tweed swatches from Victorian period
8. A Diploma won by Johnstons in the Paris exhibition of 1868. They had first exhibited in 1855.

9. Cashmere samples

Items on display on top of the Businesses in Moray cases

Above these cases are some miscellaneous 19th and 20th century objects from our stores:

Copper Measures

From ½ gill to 1 gallon. Marked Alexander Ross, brass founder. His business was in Greyfriars Street in Elgin until sequestrated in 1901. The measures were donated by Elgin Trading Standards Office via Moray Museums Service.

ELGNM:2010.13.11-15

Crimping Machine

Thought to date from c1870, it was used to produce the many small pleats on dresses, aprons and caps. Turning the handle pushed the cloth through the rollers, like a mangle.

ELGNM: 1974.14

Chest

Red, decorated, bride's box from Mozambique from the collection of Mrs Janet Taylor Levack (nee Brander), of Lossiemouth (1842-1927). She travelled the world with her Sea Captain husband.

ELGNM: 2011.21

Portrait

Portrait of Sir George A. Cooper, Bart. (1857-1940) of Hursley Park, Hants and the The College, Elgin. Solicitor, Elgin benefactor and donor of the Cooper Park, Elgin which opened in 1903.

ELGNM: Unaccessioned

Weighing Scales

Slater's improved family scale No50 to weigh 28lb by 2oz. Brass dial with a hinged cover.

ELGNM: 1996.18.16

Boots

These riding boots were part of the Royal Army Veterinary Corps uniform belonging to Major Ian Robertson. He worked on finding a way to cut the vocal cords of mules and donkeys during World War II so they would be unable to make a noise whilst in the jungle which would give the British army's location away to the enemy.

ELGNM: 2001.28.17

Hat

Top hat and case, donated to the museum with other Victorian gentlemen's clothing.

ELGNM: 1977.126