

# Buchan the trend A man of many talents

by Lauren White



The author of *The Thirty-Nine Steps*, **John Buchan** had a soft spot for *The Borders* and its beautiful landscapes.

Novelist, historian, journalist, poet, politician; **JOHN BUCHAN** is one of Scotland's most famous literary sons and he has strong ties to the Borders. The son of a Calvinist Presbyterian minister, he died **Lord Tweedsmuir, Governor-General of Canada** and led an extraordinarily varied life.

Born in Perth in 1875, he was brought up in Kirkcaldy but spent many summer holidays with his grandparents in the Borders. It was here that he developed a love of walking, and the scenery and wildlife he discovered on his walks would go on to be featured in his writings.

He studied at the University of Glasgow, read classics at Oxford and read for the bar, practising only briefly before becoming a publisher. He spent some time as a government administrator in South Africa at the end of the Boer War, contributed to *The Spectator* and was the war correspondent for *The Times*.

It is for his writing that Buchan is most famous, however. He wrote his first in 1896 and his most famous in 1915; the iconic *The Thirty-Nine Steps*. A sequel to the gripping spy thriller, *Greenmantle*, came the following year.

During his career, Buchan published well over 100 books, only 40 or so of which were fiction, and the John Buchan Society has said that "*Buchan's historical novels deserve a far greater readership, as do his biographies and historical studies, still regarded as classics of scholarship.*"

Able, ambitious and hard working, Buchan also had a strong social conscience; he supported women's suffrage, free trade and national insurance. Canadian Prime Minister **William Lyon Mackenzie King** said of him: "*I know no man I would rather have as a friend, a beautiful, noble soul, kindly and generous in thought and word and act, informed as few men in this world have ever been, modest, humble, true, man after God's own heart.*"

He married into the aristocracy, had four children and was popular in his role in Canada, travelling across the country to connect with its citizens. Buchan died of a brain haemorrhage in February 1940, soon after signing Canada's entry into WW2. He was 64.

Today, the John Buchan Society celebrate the life and legacy of this extraordinary man, and The John Buchan Story is an informative museum in Peebles devoted to his life and works.