

# Caledonian Hotel unveils the Billy Garioch Suite in tribute to former concierge



The iconic Caledonian Hotel at the west end of Princes Street has renamed one of their fifth floor suites in tribute to former concierge Billy Garioch who retired in March after 50 years of loyal service.

Billy 65 joined the hotel as a fifteen year old straight from school, and has witnessed almost half of the building's 110 year history, including numerous VIP guests from the political and showbiz world.

Ironically, Billy only intended to stay for a few months as he explained: "I had planned to start an apprenticeship at Ferranti when I was 16 and my time at the Caley was intended to fill the few months until I was old enough. I stayed for 50 years.

"At that time it was the Princes Street railway station hotel. I started as a page boy and the hotel was like nothing I had ever experienced before. It was the epitome of luxury then and with the recent £24m refurbishment, The Caledonian, a Waldorf Astoria Hotel as it is now, is still the most luxurious in Edinburgh.

"I thoroughly enjoyed my time at the hotel. I met some amazing people and have some cherished memories. I am touched and delighted that the hotel has done this for me and now I wish future guests an enjoyable stay in my suite. In fact to tell you a secret, I stayed in the suite last night."



The fifth floor suite with panoramic views of the Castle and Princes Street was formally unveiled by General Manager Dale MacPhee who said: "I have to say that I wasn't born when Billy started at the Caley, but during his time here, he became one of the most memorable parts of the hotel. Many of our guests have told us how much they will miss his welcome on arrival. We are delighted to be able to rename one of our suites in recognition of his loyal service and to ensure that his association with 'The Caley' continues.

Over a glass of champagne, Sky Television presenter David Tanner conducted a question and answer session in front of a number of invited guests including Helen, Billy's wife of 43 years.

✖ Recalling his first day, Billy said: "When I walked in here it was like walking into Buckingham Palace. I didn't even know what a page boy did then my boss Mr Pringle came in to interview me but only said three words to me which were 'Get a Haircut.' I went home and my father put a bowl round my head and cut it.

"When I returned the next day there were four of us with the pillbox hats and uniforms with shiny buttons. Mr Pringle was like a sergeant major and every time he wanted you he would tap his pencil on the desk. He demanded that we call him sir.

"All the staff were like a big family and my wife Helen's mother and grandmother worked in the hotel and I got called down one day by her grandmother and we have been married 42 years."

At that point Helen interrupted and pointed out that it was actually 43 years to the amusement of the guests.

✖ Billy then continued: "We used to have a contract with EMI Records and all the pop stars came here. There was an incident with the Bay City Rollers who were young scallywags and they would sit in the lounge and look round the corner

causing the young girls waiting outside to scream.

"They didn't go out to sign autographs and asked to be let out of the back door so they were pretty unpopular as far as I was concerned. And then you had Cliff Richard who was playing at the cinema up the road. The Shadows were with him and there were two girls from Glasgow who waited outside all night for his autograph. I actually told him this and he asked me to bring them in so I did and he gave them tea and coffee and signed records for them and that is probably why he is still a star.

✖ "I was also here when President Gorbachev visited and also Nelson Mandela. It touches my heart to see Nelson Mandela in his current condition. He was fantastic, He didn't have the security that other world leader had and he wanted the staff to line up and he thanked us all for his stay here. It was a gesture that not many people did at that time.

Billy's former colleague at the hotel Thomas Stewart said: "The 18<sup>th</sup> March this year was probably a day Billy was looking forward to, but for us it was a sad day. We had over 250 year of experience in the one department, so to lose such an icon from the team was sad. There's a saying in Edinburgh 'Billy from the Caley' and this is him. It's been an honour to be part of his life and he is just a phone call away of we need him. He had everything indexed in his head and we constantly relied on him to keep us right. To be able to share in Billy's time at the Caley for me and my colleagues is just tremendous.

"I can't believe that I am standing here with my colleague and his name is on that door. What a story I have to tell when I come up to the fifth floor and people ask who was Billy Garioch.

"We have the Robert Louis Stevenson suite on the first floor and also the Sir Walter Scott suite, but now we have the Billy Garioch suite. It's just tremendous."