

# Sorley Maclean and the Edinburgh Seven to be honoured with plaques



Some of the most important historic figures to Edinburgh will be recognised by three new plaques to be installed across the capital.

Historic Scotland's Commemorative Plaque Scheme will honour the contributions to Scottish society of Sorley Maclean, Baroness Florence Horsburgh, and a group known as the Edinburgh Seven, who were the first women to be admitted on a degree programme at any university in Britain. They are three of eight historical groups or figures to be recognised by the scheme, now in its fourth year. The intention is to celebrate the life and achievements of significant historic figures, through the erection of a plaque on the home where they lived, or a building synonymous with their achievements.

Nominations for the scheme are submitted by the public before an independent panel of experts review and select the final recipients. Sorley Maclean was one of the most significant Scottish poets of the 20th Century and once taught English at Edinburgh's Boroughmuir High School. Recognised all over the world for his contribution to Scottish culture, his Gaelic language poetry explores the beauty and passion of love, as well as the horrors of war, which he experienced first-hand in the western desert in World War Two. He died in 1996 at the age of 85. His plaque is set to be installed in Viewforth, Bruntsfield.

Baroness Florence Horsburgh was a Scottish Unionist Party politician and champion of social welfare issues, born in 1889. She introduced a private members bill in Parliament which eventually led to the Adoption of Children Act (1939), and was promoted to a Commander of the Order of the British Empire (CBE) for her services. She also played a prominent role in the preparation and development of a scheme which eventually led to the formation of the National Health

Service. She died in 1969 and her plaque is set to be installed in East Camus Place, Edinburgh.

The Edinburgh Seven were the first group of matriculated undergraduate female students at any British university. They began studying medicine at the University of Edinburgh in 1869 amidst a storm of public criticism. Although ultimately thwarted in their attempts to graduate as doctors, the campaign they fought won them many supporters and gained national attention. It put the right of women to a university education on the political agenda, and in 1877 legislation was passed to ensure women were no longer denied the chance to study at universities.

The latest round of plaque recipients were announced by Cabinet Secretary for Culture, Europe and External Affairs, Fiona Hyslop at a ceremony in the University of Edinburgh Anatomical Museum this morning. Speaking at the ceremony she said: "This latest round of plaque recipients celebrates a range people from different walks of life and various periods of Scottish history. It's especially encouraging to see a greater representation this year for women, including Florence Horsburgh, who championed social welfare in the 20th century; Christian Missionary Jane Haining, who sadly lost her life in Auschwitz concentration camp; and of course The Edinburgh Seven, who in 1869 blazed a trail which eventually led to legislation allowing women to finally be admitted to universities in this country.

"Other recipients of the plaque include Henry Bell, the Scottish engineer who introduced the first successful passenger steamboat service in all of Europe; Aviation pioneer Andrew Blain Baird; the founder of the Boys Brigade, Sir William Alexander Smith; Gaelic poet Sorley Maclean – arguably one of the most influential Scottish poets of the 20th century; and the shipbuilder (amongst other things) best known for designing the Cutty Sark, Hercules Linton.

“I hope that today’s announcement will lead to a far greater recognition of the contribution each of these remarkable people have made to Scottish society and, in many cases, to the wider world.”

Martin Ross, Policy and Projects Manager at Historic Scotland said: “In the last four years the number of nominations to the scheme has grown rapidly, and this latest round produced a wide range of potential recipients, from a broad spectrum of society. The end result is eight recipients who have undoubtedly contributed significantly to the advancement of their particular field, both in Scotland and further afield. In many cases their legacies continue to make a difference, many years later.

“I would like to thank all those who submitted applications, and remind them that nominations for the next round of plaques are being accepted from the end of this month.”