

# Happy birthday to an Edinburgh fitness institution

The sporting and fitness institution that was the Edinburgh Club before morphing into “The Club” is celebrating 60 years since it was founded by judo legend, George Kerr, CBE, 10<sup>th</sup> dan.

Birthday tributes and congratulations have been pouring in, some from those who have been members almost since the club's inception in Hanover Street, moving on to Hillside Crescent before finding a home in West Bowling Green Street, Leith, where fitness instructor Davina French took over the reins from George in 2019.

Despite the change of ownership George Kerr, now aged 86, still drops by to monitor junior judo and that is only to be expected according to Derek Kerr (no relation) who, as a teenager in 1965, joined what was the Capital's first club of its type.

“I have experienced both continuity and change. It was all about George but obviously in a good and positive way. George set the culture and made it feel as if it was ‘our’ club” said Derek.

He went on to note how business trends were recognised and introduced with such innovations as the personal trainer, jacuzzi, squash and ladies only classes featuring pop mobility and Zumba all based around the central core of judo where

George excelled.

Indeed, the Edinburgh Club might not have happened far less flourished had jealous international rivals not successfully opposed George's entry into the 1964 Olympics while European champion on grounds that he had "professionalised" himself through coaching.

The snub seemed to galvanise George, now the President Emeritus of Scottish Judo, in a business sense and many who never set foot in the Edinburgh Club will recall his cheeky marketing campaigns with banners hanging outside premises proclaiming slogans such as "if you like a little chocolate on your biscuit join our club" – a blatant reference to a popular advertising slogan at the time adopted by a major food company.

Partly due to George Kerr's charisma famous figures from the world of sport and entertainment would drop by.

These included Edinburgh-born footballer Graeme Souness, swimmer Sharon Davies and the late Hibs and Scotland star Erich Schaedler.

Davina French recalls Ray Wilson, front man from the band Genesis in succession to Phil Collins, working out at the club.

Today, in the new premises, fitness instructors include Tom Philip, a Scotland rugby internationalist with a glowing future until injury cut short his career.

What others say about the Edinburgh Club.

Pauline Kerr (George's wife and herself a fitness specialist) said: "We've taken The Club through all the phases and crazes of the past six

decades: from the huge popularity of squash to the aerobics boom of the 1980s with leg warmers and leotards; on into the

90s with step, spinning and body-pump; and onward again to pilates, personal training, sport-specific workouts and Zumba's."

Tricia Donald who is a long-standing member said: "My late husband, Crawford, was trained, encouraged and inspired by George Kerr at The Edinburgh Club and gained his University Blue for Judo.

"My key memories are of energy and laughter combined with a friendly atmosphere and professional training."

Scott Bisset, fitness manager, said: "George Kerr is easily the most charismatic person I've ever known, and the facilities and the atmosphere he created at The Edinburgh Club were unique.

"Always much more than a gym, a place for connecting people and making friends."

Ogilvy Gray: "My late wife, Anne, was a member and also George's accountant. This was in the late 1980s. She had to work hard to keep George's accounting practices in line; he said she was one of the few women who frightened him.

"Anne persuaded me to join not long before the Hillside Crescent club closed and we all moved down to West Bowling Green Street.

"We had great times."

And where does new owner Davina French see the club going in the short and longer term? She said: "We just want to ensure the club remains that friendly gym it has always been."

Do YOU have memories of the ground breaking Edinburgh Club? Let us know.

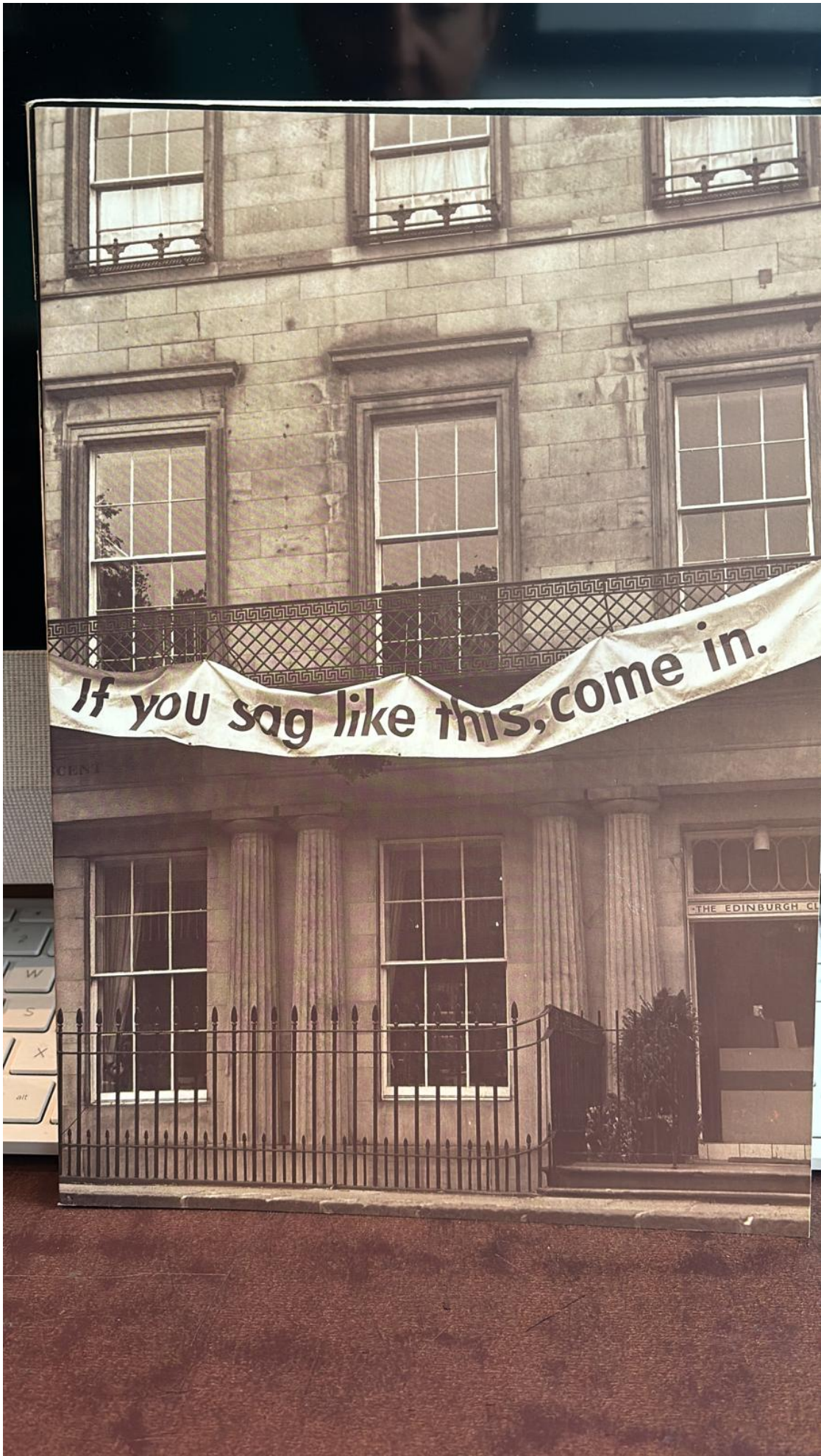


The great Dr George Kerr, wh spent over four years in Japan perfecting judo technique and who was an initial inductee to Scotland's Sports Hall of Fame



Davina French who, in 2019, took over from George and Pauline

Kerr to launch "The Club" as a direct descendant of the venerable "Edinburgh Club".



If you sag like this, come in.

THE EDINBURGH C...



The Edinburgh Club was famed for its humorous advertising campaigns designed to get the local population fitter.