John P Mackintosh ‘40
Years On’
His life, legacy and lasting influence

A Passion for Politics and People

2018 marks the 40th anniversary of the untimely death of the leading academic, politician, writer and political thinker, John P Mackintosh MP.

Born in Simla, India in 1929, John Mackintosh first came to Edinburgh at the age of 11 and went on to study history at the University of Edinburgh (1946) before reading Philosophy, Politics and Economics at Balliol College, Oxford (1950-52). The following year, he attained a postgraduate degree from Princeton University.

John Mackintosh died in 1978 at the age of 48. At the time, he was Chair and Professor of Politics at the University of Edinburgh, balancing his academic career alongside his duties in the House of Commons and as a devoted constituency MP.
He had first been elected Labour MP for Berwick and East Lothian in 1966, holding the seat until February 1974 and again from October 1974 until July 1978.

His ability to encourage political debate, cooperation and new ideas crossed the political divide and influenced the thinking of those of all political persuasions and none. A great orator, prolific writer and renowned international lecturer, Mackintosh was an expert on Africa and was strongly critical of the apartheid system. He was also passionately pro-European, and campaigned energetically for British membership of the then European Community.

He was an early exponent of devolution and a leading voice for many years in the campaign for a Scottish Parliament. His ideas and writings have had a lasting impact and influence, and his words are engraved on the threshold of the Donald Dewar Room in the Holyrood Scottish Parliament building:

![Engraved words](image_url)

Earlier in his career, Mackintosh had been Professor of Politics at the University of Strathclyde and senior lecturer in government at the University of Ibadan, Nigeria. His seminal thesis, ‘The British Cabinet’, was published in 1962 and he first wrote on devolution in 1966, with the publication of his book, ‘The Devolution of Power.’ Other works include ‘The Government and Politics of Britain’ (1970); ‘Nigerian Government and Politics’ (1968); and ‘British Prime Ministers in the Twentieth Century’ (Editor-1977).
A prolific academic writer, he authored scores of academic analyses and was a regular columnist in The Times and The Scotsman newspapers. John Mackintosh was also an accomplished broadcaster and lecturer, appearing regularly on television and giving public lectures. He was also Editor of The Political Quarterly, and Chairman of the Hansard Society.

A legacy of political debate

John Mackintosh’s legacy has lived on in many ways, not least through the prestigious John P Mackintosh Memorial Lecture, jointly organised by the University of Edinburgh, the local East Lothian lecture committee and East Lothian Council. Over the years, the lecture has provided a platform for many prominent public figures from Scottish and UK politics and the wider international stage. Among them have been former, serving and future Prime Ministers, Cabinet Ministers, First Ministers, party leaders, academics, economists, distinguished authors and journalists.

After his death, two volumes of essays were published: "Mackintosh on Parliament and Social Democracy," edited by David Marquand (1983); and "Mackintosh on Scotland," edited by Henry Drucker (1982). In addition, John Mackintosh has left behind a huge body of published work, academic papers, notes and personal letters. Much of this is deposited in the National Library of Scotland, and is a valuable source of research for today’s historian, writer and political thinker.

John Mackintosh’s influence extends across Party and other boundaries. Above all, he exemplified the importance of political thought, ideas, co-operation and debate. The late First Minister of Scotland, Donald Dewar, described him as
“...something of a prophet, a mighty champion of reform at a time when constitutional change was not an approved and certainly not a fashionable cause. At the core he always placed democratic control, the empowering of the people... His vision was good government, an equitable democracy, that elevated, created opportunity for the citizen.”

‘40 Years On’

40 years on since John Mackintosh’s death, the 2018 anniversary allows us to examine contemporary politics through the lens of the prescient article of the same name which he wrote for the Political Quarterly in 1970 at the age of 40.

Above all however, the 2018 anniversary is an opportunity to look to the future and to consider the question: ‘Where now for democracy?’ In doing so, we can also consider the extent to which many of the questions Mackintosh posed and the
arguments he advanced – particularly on the future of social democracy, the Scottish constitutional question, and European cooperation – have retained their relevance for the politics of today and tomorrow.