Sir Roddy MacSween

Born 2nd February 1935, Isle of Lewis; died 11th December 2015, Glasgow.

Roddy was President of the Royal Philosophical Society of Glasgow from 2009 to 2012. During his term in office he guided the Society through important changes to its constitution which were necessary under new legislation to become a Scottish Charitable Incorporated Organisation. He was also responsible for the appointment of a professional administrator to assist with the running of the Society. In these matters and in many others he brought to bear the experience of a lifetime as leader of numerous academic, medical, statutory and charitable bodies.

Born a son of the manse and being a native speaker of Gaelic, he had the precision in English that comes when it is acquired as a second language. His authorship which included the standard textbooks in pathology and liver disease, seemed effortless. He was educated at Inverness Royal Academy and at the University of Glasgow where he was president of the Liberal Club, an aspect of his life which will be unfamiliar to many who knew him. In 1984, already a professor, he was appointed head of the department of pathology at the Western Infirmary, Glasgow. He became a world expert in diseases of the liver and in the years leading up to his retirement when he was already more than fully committed to onerous appointments as president of both the Royal College of Pathologists and the Academy of Medical Royal Colleges as well as the chairmanship of committees of the General Medical Council, he continued to spend some of each Sunday in the hospital examining and reporting liver specimens, many from international sources. He was knighted for his services to medicine and pathology in 2000 and received a DSc from Glasgow University in 2007.

His even-handed sense of fairness and his calm enthusiasm were subsequently put to good use by several advisory bodies and charities, including Tenovus Scotland, which he served as chairman.

He was dedicated to golf but it was not without hazard. At one stage he spent many weeks travelling between London committee meetings with a plaster cast on his leg after trapping his foot in a rabbit hole while golfing in Kintyre where he and his wife Marjory had a holiday house. Uncharacteristically he hit the headlines in 2009. The Daily Mail announced “Top Scientist in Balloon Crash Terror on Nile Trip” when the hot air balloon carrying Roddy and Marjory fell from the sky.

Members will recall his stylish presence at the meetings of the Society. At the AGM in March 2014, the last meeting he was able to attend as he was already unwell, he encouraged the Council to put the financial reserves to good use. His prompt resulted in the introduction of a programme of Research and Study Grants.

He accepted his increasing disability with resignation and his faith gave him the strength to endure the final difficult months. He is survived by Marjory, their two children and five grandchildren.

A full obituary was published in The Herald on December 16th 2015. There will be memorial service in Glasgow University Chapel on February 19th 2016 at 11am.