

ABERDEEN CITY COUNCIL

His Majesty's Theatre,  
ABERDEEN, 20<sup>th</sup> April, 2008

MINUTE OF SPECIAL MEETING OF ABERDEEN CITY COUNCIL

S e d e r u n t :

Lord Provost Peter Stephen, Chairperson;  
Depute Provost John West; and

COUNCILLORS

GEORGE ADAM  
YVONNE ALLAN  
SCOTT CASSIE  
RONALD CLARK  
NORMAN COLLIE  
NEIL COONEY  
JOHN CORALL  
IRENE CORMACK  
WILLIAM CORMIE  
BARNEY CROCKETT  
KATHARINE DEAN  
ALAN DONNELLY  
JAMES FARQUHARSON  
NEIL FLETCHER  
GORDON GRAHAM  
MARTIN GREIG  
JAMES HUNTER  
LEONARD IRONSIDE

MURIEL JAFFREY  
GORDON LESLIE  
ANDREW MAY  
MARK McDONALD  
ALAN MILNE  
JAMES NOBLE  
GEORGE PENNY  
JOHN REYNOLDS  
RICHARD ROBERTSON  
JENNIFER STEWART  
JOHN STEWART  
KEVIN STEWART  
WENDY STUART  
KIRSTY WEST  
JILLIAN WISELY  
WILLIAM YOUNG  
and  
IAN YUILL

Lord Provost Peter Stephen, in the Chair

## Council Meeting, 20th April, 2008

With reference to Article 8(g) of the Minute of Meeting of Council of 25<sup>th</sup> April, 2008, and in accordance with arrangements made pursuant thereto, the Council convened this day at His Majesty's Theatre, Aberdeen, for the purpose of admitting Scotland The What? as honorary Freemen of the City of Aberdeen.

The proceedings were opened with the singing of a hymn, and after a prayer by the Reverend Stephen Taylor, City Chaplain, the Lord Provost said:-

"My Lords and Ladies, Members of Parliament, Members of the Scottish Parliament, fellow Councillors, distinguished guests, ladies and gentlemen.

I am absolutely delighted to welcome you all to this historic ceremony at which the Freedom of the City of Aberdeen is being bestowed on George Donald, William "Buff" Hardie and Stephen Robertson, a trio of men whom we've come to know and love as Scotland the What?

Today is a very rare and special occasion and because of Scotland the What's strong links with His Majesty's Theatre that stretch back many, many years there could be no better stage for this Conferral, and I am thrilled that the City Council working with theatre management has helped make this a very special day in the history of Aberdeen.

And was it not just wonderful to watch the archive footage of Scotland the What? provided by kind permission of STV and to hear laughter once again fill this magnificent theatre.

The City of Aberdeen is proud of its long and distinguished history. It has many fine traditions which we jealously guard with commitment and honour. Foremost amongst these is the Conferral of the Freedom of the City on those who in the Council and its citizens hold in high regard and to have accomplished eminence in many fields of public service and achievement.

The Freedom of the City is by far the highest honour the City of Aberdeen can bestow. It dates back to the 12<sup>th</sup> century. The Freedom Roll contains the names of many great people who have commanded the admiration of the City, the nation and the world. Those honoured in the past 100 years include Winston Churchill, Nelson Mandella, Mikhail Gorbachev, Sir Alex Ferguson and The Highlanders, 4<sup>th</sup> Battalion of the Royal Regiment of Scotland.

Today the Scotland the What? trio, loons fae oor corner o' Scotland, will join this distinguished Roll.

Robert Gordon's College schoolboy, William "Buff" Hardie and Stephen Robertson from Aberdeen Grammar School, first met in Aberdeen University's charities shows in the 1950s. Not long after a young man called George Donald from the Gordons School in Huntly provided material for the 1954 show.

## Council Meeting, 20th April, 2008

There was then a link with producer James Logan that materialised in the Aberdeen Revue Group which featured, for more than a decade some of the best Revue and popular entertainers in the city. There were many regular appearances at many different venues in the North East, before the Revue Group gave a final performance called "Going, Going" in Aberdeen Arts Centre in 1967.

The fact that all of them were now family men and also had career commitments led Buff, Steve and George, along with their producer James to take a difficult decision to see farewell to their hobby with an appearance at the Edinburgh Festival Fringe in 1969 under the new title Scotland the What? The question mark always appears in the title as it is based on the ditty:- "Some say Scotland the Brave but we say Scotland the What?" Rave reviews brought them back for a second helping in 1970, where they were again the hit of the Fringe.

With an eye for a winner James F. Donald, Director of His Majesty's Theatre invited them in 1971 to try out a couple of nights hastily booking an extra date such was the demand from the public.

A whole new future opened up for this close knit group of friends and from 1983 the Scotland the What? trio filled His Majesty's for a six week season every second year. In each two year cycle there were also bookings at all the major theatres in Scotland and some notable performances in London. The trio were so successful that they gave up their day jobs to perform full time. At the time Stephen Robertson was a solicitor, Buff Hardie was the Secretary of the North East Hospital Board and George Donald was a teacher.

Illness brought about the retirement in 1993 of their Director, Manager, Agent and close friend James Logan and highly respected television director Alan Franchi took up the reins.

For over 25 years the trio played to sell out audiences from Bangkok to London. In 1994 each member of the trio was awarded an honorary masters degree from the University of Aberdeen.

In 1995 they retired from touring with their comedy routine. The last performance of Scotland the What? was here at His Majesty's Theatre on 25<sup>th</sup> November, 1995, the show as you will no doubt know was aptly called "The Final Fling".

The Queen awarded all three members MBEs in 1995, from her birthday honours list.

When Sir Alex Ferguson was given the freedom of Aberdeen City in 1999 Scotland the What? came out of retirement and gave a private performance to the former Dons Manager.

Looking back over the trios career it is little wonder that these comedy legends are being honoured here today. Perhaps the only question is why it has taken so long.

Council Meeting, 20th April, 2008

The Freedom of the City is conferred on them today in recognition of their services to the fine arts, the Doric language, North East of Scotland culture, promotion of the city and, above all for makin' a'body laugh.

The Scotland the What? trio has won a special place in the hearts of people of the city and the north east. Their appeal is such that their career has taken them around the world. Aberdeen's Freemen and Women have come from all walks of life and individuals who receive the Freedom of the City traditionally become a Free Burgess and Guild Brother. In ancient times Aberdeen was created a Royal Burgh by the Crown of Scotland. The Burgess held his land as a direct tenant of the Crown. In time the Burgess became a privileged person with an exclusive right to trade within a certain area. Every right, however, was counter balanced by a duty and it was a duty of the Burgess of old to give military service to the crown in times of upheaval and strife.

Those admitted to the Freedom Roll have been those of whom the citizens of the Royal Burgh of Aberdeen have the highest regard. Conferrals of the Freedom of the City were made and I quote " In token of the most devoted love and affection of the most distinguished respect".

There is little doubt that the Scotland the What? trio has won that right".

On this day, the Twentieth of April, 2008, it is my pleasure to call upon the Chief Executive, Douglas Paterson, to read the Burgess Tickets and sign the Rolls.

Thereupon, the Chief Executive read the terms of the entry in the Burgess Register which, on signature, would formally confer upon Scotland the What? The Freedom of the City. The text on the tickets were as follows:-

At Aberdeen the Twentieth day of  
April in the year Two Thousand and  
Eight in the Presence of the Lord  
Provost and other Members of  
Aberdeen City Council

WHICH DAY

The Council did and do confer upon

George Donald,

Member of the Order of the British Empire of "Scotland the What?", was admitted and received as a Free Burgess and Guild Brother of the City and Royal Burgh of Aberdeen in recognition of his service to the Fine Arts, the Doric language and North East of Scotland culture; of his promotion of the City and above all, for makin' a'body laugh.

Council Meeting, 20th April, 2008

Extracted from the City Records  
and the City Seal hereto affixed.

DOUGLAS PATERSON  
Chief Executive

At Aberdeen the Twentieth day of  
April in the year Two Thousand and  
Eight in the Presence of the Lord  
Provost and other Members of  
Aberdeen City Council

WHICH DAY

The Council did and do confer upon

William "Buff" Hardie,

Member of the Order of the British Empire of "Scotland the What?", was admitted and received as a Free Burgess and Guild Brother of the City and Royal Burgh of Aberdeen in recognition of his service to the Fine Arts, the Doric language and North East of Scotland culture; of his promotion of the City and above all, for makin' a'body laugh.

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Chief Executive

At Aberdeen the Twentieth day of  
April in the year Two Thousand and  
Eight in the Presence of the Lord  
Provost and other Members of  
Aberdeen City Council

WHICH DAY

The Council did and do confer upon

Stephen Robertson,

Member of the Order of the British Empire of "Scotland the What?", was admitted and received as a Free Burgess and Guild Brother of the City and Royal Burgh of Aberdeen in recognition of his service to the Fine Arts, the Doric language and North East of Scotland culture; of his promotion of the City and above all, for makin' a'body laugh.

Council Meeting, 20th April, 2008

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DOUGLAS PATERSON  
Chief Executive

Thereafter, Lord Provost Stephen, the Chief Executive, George Donald, William “Buff” Hardie and Stephen Robertson signed the Burgess Roll.

The Lord Provost then presented each of the recipients with a silver casket bearing the City Crest and suitably inscribed.

George Donald, William “Buff” Hardie and Stephen Robertson in acknowledging the honour which had been conferred on Scotland the What? by the Council responded in song and thereafter said:-

**William** “So far, so good. But now we have a problem. Singing the song was one thing, but we do feel we owe it to our fellow citizens to make a speech as well.

**George** Which is not easy when there are three of us.

**Stephen** However, the Council’s Archivist has come to our rescue apparently there is a Civic Ordinance of the 12<sup>th</sup> century which prescribes as follows:-

**William** Whereas there may in time come in an occasion which the freedom of the city is conferred on three strolling players – howsoever unlikely, indeed unbelievable, that may seem;

**George** such strolling players may, on grounds of great age, serious infirmity or loss of short term memory, be permitted to share the reading of a joint acceptance speech;

**Stephen** and moreover, on grounds of failing eyesight, to use their ain specs.

**William** Provided always that the freedom ceremony take place in one of Aberdeen’s great architectural gems – Archibald Simpson’s Music Hall;

**Stephen** Frank Matcham’s His Majesty’s Theatre

**George** Stewartie Milne’s Kepplestone flats

**William** and here we are at His Majesty’s, with manuscripts of different colours symbolising, we hope, the spirit of political harmony which permeates this whole occasion.

## Council Meeting, 20th April, 2008

- Stephen** May we begin by referring to the magnanimity of our hosts this afternoon, Aberdeen City Council, who have honoured us today despite having suffered 40 years of jibes and insults at the hands of a certain Councillor Swick, a dodgy venal, corrupt but – let us hasten to stress, totally fictitious character.
- George** We are very grateful to the Council, not just for the honour, but also for their decision to hold the ceremony not in the Music Hall, where it normally would have taken place, but here in His Majesty's, which of course holds such a special place in our affections. Our love affair with the theatre began more than 50 years ago with our association, one way or another, with Aberdeen University Students' Show – probably the greatest undergraduate activity in the whole world.
- Stephen** Probably? Nae doot about it.
- George** By a happy coincidence this year's Students' Show has just ended its week here at His Majesty's, as we were able to tell this morning from the state of the place when we got here.
- William** Ah, yes. It brought it all back. Happy days. Cos, ye see, His Majesty's was the scene of our Salad Days.
- Stephen** Less so perhaps for George, who had had an earlier career in entertainment as a child prodigy. Not for nothing was he known as the Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart of the Huntly Harmonica Band.
- George** Mind you, our Salad Days lasted longer than most people's – it took us nearly 20 years to get to the Edinburgh Festival Fringe.
- Stephen** That was 1969, and we were in a wee church hall where the sets and costumes normally associated with the glitter of show business were restricted in our case to three tired dinner jackets –
- William** One of which belonged to Steve's dad.
- George** And that was the one Buff was wearing.
- William** Anyway Jimmy Donald of His Majesty's Theatre caught the show on one of what he liked to call his scouting trips, and he told us he would like to put it on here. Out modest wee show in this place? Could it be, we wondered, that Jimmy Donald, for the only time in his life, had lost the place?
- George** Well, if he had, it was an aberration which, for us, had the happy result that His Majesty's became our home venue for the next 20 odd years.

## Council Meeting, 20th April, 2008

- Stephen** We thank Jimmy Donald for his early faith in us, his friendship and his financial acumen.
- William** In which connection, we recall the happy occasion years later, in 1994, when as four new honorary Masters University graduates, we three and Jimmy, on our way from Marischal College to the official lunch at King's, shared a taxi, in respect of which short journey could we remind Jimmy that he's still £2 light in the kitty.
- George** There are many others whom we would like to thank for their contribution to Scotland the What? saga.
- Stephen** Which come to think of it, is a highly appropriate choice of word. Obviously we can't thank all these people individually – valued friends and supporters from way back
- William** but we do feel a small spate of thanks you's coming on. We know now what an Oscar winner must feel like. We never won an Oscar of course. But we came close. We were nominated in the category of Best Production in a Foreign Language,
- George** so eyes down for a new Oscar style thanks you.  
First of all to the backroom boys:  
To Peter Garland, our long time stage manager – loyal, reliable, resourceful, streetwise, unfazed by any venue, be it the West End of London or the wrong end of Rhynie.
- William** Thanks next to our sound wizard, David Eastwood.  
Scotland the What? was all about words – spoken and sung. And thanks to David Eastwood's meticulous expertise all of them were heard most of the time – and if they weren't it was our fault. One year we did the show at the Queen Elizabeth Hall on the South Bank near the National Theatre.
- Stephen** The Director of the National Theatre at that time was Sir Peter Hall, recently in the news for criticising inaudible mumbling of the current generation of actors. Well, one evening Sir Peter came in and stood at the back of our show for half an hour or so, and on the evening declared "Thank God for actors who are audible! Just a pity they weren't comprehensible. Never mind. Well done. Bravo!" The great man's praise should have gone to David Eastwood, as does ours today.
- George** Our thanks to our dear friend Graham Hunter, who has been our business manager since the first foray to the Edinburgh Festival Fringe in 1969. Graham came to the job as innocent, as a lamb to this thespian slaughter. He had no idea what went on behind the



## Council Meeting, 20th April, 2008

scenes in a show. As he said himself, "It was my first experience of the back side of show business."

**Stephen** Well, that's not how we would have described our show, but it's how he described it and still does, come to think of it, maintaining sternly that the test of true friendship is never to flinch from the truth.

**William** Graham has, throughout, been a huge asset to the show not just for his efficient conduct of the business side of the operation but also – beyond the call of any business manager's duty – simply for his people skills, for being an agreeable interface with the public, box office staff and theatre management wherever we went.

**George** It was our great good fortune that what people experienced of Scotland the What? away from the stage was, in the person of Graham, the acceptable face of the Aberdeen legal profession. Not just acceptable face – the actually pleasant, courteous, helpful, if ever so slightly and very occasionally loquacious face of the Aberdeen legal profession.

**Stephen** Who next to thank? Ah! Alan Franchi. Scotland the What? was, first and foremost, a live theatrical entertainment. But when eventually we were dragged screaming before the television cameras, it turned out to be a very happy experience, as our programmes on Grampian Television were directed by Alan Franchi, a man of charm, style and, fortunately for us, no little patience and tolerance. From the start we saw eye to eye with Alan on just about everything, except running orders. Running orders could be an area of prolonged and torturous debate. Take the running order for our hogmanay show of 15 years ago – this show was transmitted on 31<sup>st</sup> December, 1993, but the running order still hasn't been finalised

**William** but we're working on it. We reckon two or three more lunches and we'll have it sorted. Having survived the thankless trauma of directing us for television, Alan accepted our invitation to direct our last theatre show. We thank him for being brave enough to do so even though he knew he was taking the place of the irreplaceable, following the lamentable illness and untimely death of James Logan. James was our producer, artistic director, agent, press officer, script editor, manager, lighting designer, property master and our regular plenipotentiary envoy to the dress circle bar. He was, in other words, our factotum extraordinaire, though he himself summed up his role as "I dust the piano, and on bad nights sell the ice cream." Of course he did himself an injustice: in addition to the various specific jobs that we've just listed, he was someone who had the precious ability to galvanise others.

## Council Meeting, 20th April, 2008

A doer himself, he got us going when there was things to be done. "Fizz, lads," he would just say before the show. "Lets have some joie." He wasn't fluent in French, but he liked joie. He himself had joie in abundance – it was almost overpowering sometimes – say when Buff and I would meet for a script writing session of a morning. We'd begin with the discipline of a half hour coffee break, during which we would read the papers and then engage in a serious discussion on the previous evening football – (in the 1980s the football news was always good) - then in the middle of the furiously hectic activity James would burst in with an exciting report on the administration front. "Nothing but good news lads", he would say, concealing from us for example, that the advanced booking for the Gaiety Theatre, Ayr, was hovering at one percent capacity, and it wouldn't have been that but for a bus load of old age pensioners from Saltcoat.

The galvanising aspect of James' character also had the effect of moving three of us out of our comfort zone as performers, so that George found himself singing songs in an Italian accent and a Glasgow accent; Steve effortlessly widened his range of zoological characters from a jessie 14<sup>th</sup> century spider to a nesty 20<sup>th</sup> century parrot; and Buff increased the number of characters he could play, switching amazingly from an ill-natered inhabitant of Hilton Drive to an ill-natered inhabitant of Hilton Road.

Obviously Scotland the What? would not have happened without each of us. But equally it would not have happened without James. The four of us were all in it from the start. While the job of trying to create laughter is – if not a serious business – at least a frivolous business to be taken seriously, the whole Scotland the What? operation, which had began as a group of friends indulging in an enjoyable hobby, never stopped being great fun. James was invariably at the centre of the fun, especially when there was anything to celebrate. He should be with us at this celebration today. However, even now, we shouldn't wonder if he's up there looking down with Harry Gordon, explaining to Harry Gordon that this part of our acceptance speech is too long. Well, we don't care. And sadly James isn't here to give us a telling off for it.

We're getting near the end of our thank yous. And at this point we'd like to say a word about our wives, and acknowledge the wonderful support they have given us over the years. As they cheerfully waved us goodbye at the start of the first Edinburgh venture in 1969, we suspected that they were quite happy to get us oot aman' their feet for a whilie. What they didn't realise was that they weren't waving in one week of tranquillity, they were waving goodbye to 25 years of normality. But they were always on our side. Their criticisms were always valuable, always perceptive, always constructive, if

## Council Meeting, 20th April, 2008

occasionally embarrassingly frank. And sometimes downright rude. We were reminiscing the other day. (It's all that's left for us now.) And we recalled an occasion near the end of our final fling here in 1995. One evening after the show we were having supper, the six of us, and as we lingered over our coffee Steve pushed back his chair and address George and me. "You know, lads" he said, "we've been very lucky". And the three wives blushed and preened themselves, anticipating some affectionate words of praise. "Yes", he went on, "We've been very lucky. We've all kept our hair."

To our final and most important thank you, which is to the City of Aberdeen itself. One way or another, we all belong here. It's always been our city, and after today it will mean even more to us, for we do realise it has changed. It is no longer the city of Raggie Morrison and Cocky Hunter. It's true Union Street's nae fit it wis. There no longer is an E&M's doorway for the convenience of the Celtic supporters. Of course the City has changed – and not always for the better. But certainly not always for the worst. Since we were young it has, to the general good, acquired an international dimension. Inabootcomers have come inaboot. But our home-grown hame-ower loons who have had the initiative to stay put, have met every challenge, many have prospered hugely and merited the highest accolade one Aberdonian can give to another: "They've deen nae bad, hiv they?"

But to get back to those inabootcomers, those people with strange accents and sometimes foreign tongues who have come to study, work, and live here. They have liked what they have found here, reopening our eyes to the qualities that Aberdeen has always possessed. And when they depart again, these inabootcomers, they remember. They remember with respect and affection, what, in the new currency is called "City and Shire" but what in auld money we called Aberdeen an twa mile roon. So it's not just the Aberdonian who thinks of Aberdeen as a special city. Steve has a story that he told us on his return from a holiday in Perth, Western Australian, two or three years ago.

One morning in Perth I was stopped in the street by a very pleasant Malaysian gentleman seeking directions. He said, "excuse me. You live here?" I said "No, I am a visitor." "A visitor?" he said. "Where you come from?" "I come from Scotland." "Ah, Scotland, where about in Scotland?" "Aberdeen." "Aberdeen", he said. "Aberdeen! Aye, aye, fit like? Is wonderful place, Aberdeen. I Malaysian. Study engineering Aberdeen University. My wife and I marry in King's College Chapel. We have two sons – Malcolm and Duncan."

Clearly Aberdeen meant a lot to that family in a faraway corner of the world. And they are surely representative. Because Aberdeen is a city of character and individuality that people remember; it is a city of

## Council Meeting, 20th April, 2008

consequence, influence and importance beyond its size. And it is that city that has conferred on us the honour of its freedom today. It is an honour we are happy to accept with pleasure and pride. And that is why our final expression of thanks goes to you, Lord Provost, and through you to your Council, and to the folk – the Fittie folk, the Kitty folk, the country folk an all our fellow city folk – here in a typical Scotland the What? audience is where City and Shire come together.

To all you folk, many, many thanks from us all”.

Following the response archived footage of Scotland the What? was shown.

The Lord Provost then called for three cheers for the City’s youngest Burgesses, a call which brought forth an enthusiastic response. Thereafter the benediction was pronounced and the National Anthem sung. Following which the proceedings terminated.

- **PETER STEPHEN, Lord Provost**.