

Siol nan Gaidheal

Wendy Wood

Wendy Wood - Patriot and Nationalist

Wendy Wood was born Wendy Meacham in 1893 in England. Her maternal grandmother was a highland crofter's daughter called Eilidh Ross, who apparently spoke more Gaelic than English. Eilidh Ross died in childbirth delivering Wendy's mother. Wendy's maternal grandfather was an artist by the name of Peploe. After the death of Eilidh Ross, his first wife, he remarried and had a studio in Italy. The Peploe's were probably related to the Scottish artist Samuel John Peploe who was part of a group of painters known as the Scottish Colourists.

Wendy's concern for Scotland was nurtured by her parents: her mother told her stories about William Wallace; she was told never to call any place "home" except Scotland; and her father regularly told her off for omitting post-vocalic/r/in pronunciation. In 1913 Wendy and her husband went on a tour of the highlands in their car. She visited the Wallace monument and was inspired by it. She joined the Scottish League about 1916, the Home Rule Association in 1918, and then the Scottish National Movement led by Lewis Spence in 1927. The National Party of Scotland started in 1928, formed from the Scots League, The Scottish National Movement, The Home Rule Association and the University Nationalist Association. Wendy threw herself into the NPS.

Wendy's first public speech took place at Inverkeithing Town Hall. She spoke for twenty minutes. Wendy spoke at public meetings all over Scotland. In 1957, she spoke at 73 public meetings, and her average was 32 per year. Very often, Wendy walked from place to place, speaking in public places. Later on, with her own Scottish Patriots, she had a "propaganda van" which slept two plus a bell-tent which slept six. The van went away to do a meeting every night for two weeks and the "collections", paid for the petrol. The first trip was to the Borders, the next to the Aberdeen area. "Extra work" on their travels involved pulling down the lightning conductor from the statue of the Duke of Sutherland at Golspie.

In 1931, Wendy was unhappy with the way in which the National Party ignored the plight of Scotland's youth and she started Scottish Watch. At one time, this youth organisation was larger than Baden Powell's Scouting movement. Leading academics were recruited to teach young people about Scotland's history and culture. Prof. Frazer, author of the Golden Bough, taught folklore, Francis Scott taught music, and Marion F. MacNeil taught cookery. Scottish Watch had its own tartan, and organised Scottish dancing outside Holyrood House in Edinburgh with a team of pipers. After each dance, the dancers took someone new from the audience, so doubling the size, until the whole street was full. This was the origin of the present Scottish Country Dancing in Princes Street Gardens. The dancing also took place on the Castle Esplanade. They were forced to start dancing classes to cope with demand. Scottish Watch membership rose to 3,000 and the Daily Record gave it a whole free page every week. At this time the Daily Record was a pro-nationalist newspaper (unlike the slavishly pro-Labour toilet roll it has now become) and Wendy was paid £3.00 a week for travelling expenses to organise Scottish Watch. The editor of the Record encouraged the idea of a "Trade Ship". This was a ship loaded with Scottish-made goods, Scottish industrialists and personalities. It was designed to "sell" Scotland to the world. Baden Powell came to Scotland in an attempt to stop the Scouting movement from losing members to Scottish Watch. The Scouts henceforth adopted a slightly more Scottish identity.

In 1932, at the Annual Bannockburn Rally, Wendy led a group of people through the gates of Stirling Castle and hauled down the Union Flag and replaced it with a large Lion Rampant. Ten years later, Wendy was told by the Quartermaster Sergeant of the Argylls, who garrisoned Stirling Castle, that the Lion Rampant flag had been kept and that it would be flown on "the right day".

In the House of Commons an English MP proposed the sending of an English regiment to Stirling Castle, this didn't happen, but the Argylls were eventually exiled to Plymouth. The National Party of Scotland expressed its disapproval of Wendy's actions and a member of the NPS spat in Wendy's face in Princes Street. At the Bannockburn Rally, John MacCormick had angered the miners by sending a telegram of loyalty to the King, so miners in Fife urged Wendy to lead them. She left the NPS and went to campaign

amongst the Fife miners. She formed The Democratic Scottish Self Government Organisation in Fife, and their biggest opponents were the Communists and the SNP.

Wendy always seems to have felt inhibited by the SNP, except in its earliest days. Wendy had tried unsuccessfully to persuade the SNP to send someone to the USA to rouse the American Scots. On inheriting some money, Wendy booked herself independently on a three week long trip to the USA in 1947. She was booked to address twenty meetings, but these were mysteriously cancelled at the last minute. As she stepped onto the tarmac at New York airport, Wendy therefore knew no-one in the whole of the USA and had absolutely nothing organised. Being dressed all in tartan, Wendy was instantly befriended at the airport by a Scotswoman living in New York. Very quickly she was introduced to numerous prominent Scots in New York and a series of public meetings was organised. A group called The Thistle Guildry booked some very large venue's such as the New York Opera House and these were packed out. One press headline read "Tartan Whirlwind hits New York". On leaving the USA, Wendy was given the large thistle brooch which she wore constantly in her bonnet from that day. She was also told that the reason her initial speaking tour had been cancelled was that she had been to prison. The SNP benefitted financially from the tour and Wendy was appointed their liaison officer. However, the SNP refused to accept further help from the Thistle Guildry and John MacCormack refused to go to the USA as their guest. At this time the ejection machinery of the SNP was being overworked due to internal feuds. At one meeting at which a particularly dedicated member was expelled, Wendy stood up and said "You'd expel Wallace!" At that moment another party member who agreed stood up and emptied a large jug of water over the Chairman. Wendy's days in the SNP were numbered. Later, Wendy formed the Scottish Patriots because she felt that the SNP was becoming too concerned with purely electoral matters and had put cultural matters to one side. She was regarded as something of an embarrassment by the SNP and did not fit into a disciplined party structure.

Wendy had two spells in prison. Her first experience of jail was as an untried prisoner at Saughton Prison in Edinburgh. She had attempted to disrupt a meeting of the Blackshirts at the Mound in Edinburgh and was arrested for possible breach of the peace.

Wendy decided that women's conditions in prison were in need of reform and she determined to get herself arrested to expose conditions. At this time the National Insurance Board was moved from Scotland to Newcastle and Wendy refused to pay her National Insurance and was duly charged. She was offered sixty days in prison or a £15 fine. Wendy returned the £15 cheques that supporters were sending in and chose to go to Duke Street Prison in Glasgow. On leaving prison, Wendy set to work on the Prison Commissioners and she eventually received a letter saying that Duke Street Prison was to be demolished and that a new Women's Prison was to be built at Greenock. In 1951 Wendy was found guilty of inciting the crowd in Trafalgar Square prior to a Scotland vs. England football match and again refused to pay the £5 fine. Due to excessively rough treatment at her arrest, Wendy began her sentence in the prison hospital at Holloway in London. Life in the English prison was not made easy for her because of her nationalist views.

Wendy was a suspect in connection with the removal of the would-be Stone of Destiny from Westminster Abbey in 1950. This was because of an unsuccessful attempt by the Patriots to remove the English Coronation Stone from Kingston-upon-Thames. This stone stands on a site adjoining the modern Guildhall and it was used to crown Anglo-Saxon kings. Wendy was asked by the police to make public the fact that she had a .22 gun with a licence, in order to discourage acts of violence which had been threatened against her person. At this time she was living alone on her croft in Moidart. In fact, Wendy had nothing to do with this Stone until shortly before it was placed at Arbroath Abbey for return - something she was not in favour of.

In 1961, Wendy addressed the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland. It was unusual for a woman to address the Assembly from the Bar on any matter not connected with Church organisation. She asked the Kirk to recall the undissolved Scottish Parliament. The Church and Nation Committee of the Kirk put forward a motion in support of Scottish Home Rule, and this was accepted by the next General Assembly. In 1968, the Church of Scotland again endorsed its policy of Home Rule for Scotland.

In 1970, Wendy had her autobiography published when she was 77, she was decorated by France for her services to Scotland,

receiving the Commander Companionette of the Order of St. Lazarus of Jerusalem. Wendy's fame is illustrated by a letter she received from Switzerland: this letter was simply addressed to "The Famous Madame Wendy Wood, Scotland".

Wendy stood for election twice: she stood for the Edinburgh town Council in 1935, and as an Independent in the Bridgeton, Glasgow parliamentary by-election after world war 11. She gained over two and a half thousand votes at Bridgeton and saved her deposit.

Scottish Nationalists insist that Berwick belongs to Scotland. Berwickshire? is in Scotland but its county town is Duns, not Berwick as one would expect. The New Bridge over the Tweed at Berwick opened in 1928 by the Prince of Wales has the English coat-of-arms on the south side and the arms of Scotland on the North side. Berwick was the HQ of the Scottish regiment, the KOSB. The local professional football team is in the Scottish League.

In a Treaty of 1189, Richard Coeur de Lion, King of England, made it clear that Berwick belongs to Scotland by "perpetual hereditary right". The signposts denoting "England" three miles north of the Tweed at Berwick have been regularly blacked out by Scottish Nationalists. The poet and anthropologist Lewis Spence made a good job of it around 1935. Wendy herself chopped down the sign and placed it in the middle of the bridge over the Tweed at Berwick.

In June 1959, two members of the Scottish Patriots, with Wendy's advice, went to Berwick to saw down the signs. These were Donny Paton and Tom Cavanagh. When arrested, they refused to stand for the magistrate or to speak in court. When Wendy Wood walked in, they stood up and saluted her, thus challenging the authority of the English court on Scottish ground. They were taken to Durham jail and subjected to some rough treatment for ten days. As well as being beaten up, they were forced to sew mailbags, denied pen and paper, denied contact with a solicitor, refused proper eating utensils, and forced to drill for half an hour. On entering the jail, they were shown the prison rules in Gaelic. When they were returned to court, they were fined £30 and released. This experience certainly proved the old

saying about "not all the English are like that, look at the Geordies?" indeed.

Towards the end of her life, Wendy went on hunger strike to attempt to force the government to honour pledges on Scottish Home Rule. Having failed to affect these people's conscience, she eventually abandoned the strike. She died in 1981 at the age of 88. Wendy had a memorial service held for her in the Highland Tolbooth Church in Edinburgh.

Despite her formative years being spent almost entirely furth of Scotland, Wendy Wood became one of the most persistent and enthusiastic proponents of Scottish Culture and Nationalism. Her forceful personality and her personal courage made her enemies as well as admirers. Among her friends she counted the author Compton MacKenzie, who shared her political views and who dedicated his book "Moral Courage" to her.

In the first half of this century, there were very few active Scottish Nationalists and many more of them were artists and writers such as Lewis Spence, Hugh MacDiarmid and Wendy herself.

Wendy's literary works are enjoyable easy reading but she is at her best in those passages where she becomes almost mystical when dealing with Scotland's folklore and history. She could tell a simple story well.

The Constitution of the Scottish Patriots states that "In the event of the demise of the Scottish Patriots Organisation, any funds and assets belonging to the organisation shall be donated to the Saltire Society or, in the event of the demise of that society, to a similar body whose purpose is the preservation of the Cultural Identity of Scotland"