

Obituaries

Mary Bell MBE

Tireless promoter of Scottish business interests abroad

Mary Bell, Scottish Council Manager of Trade Missions.
Born: 9 June 1933 in Murree, Pakistan. Died: 30 December 2021, aged 88

Mary Bell, who received an MBE for her work at Scottish Council Development and Industry over nearly three decades, has died aged 88.

She joined the SCDI in 1959 and became Manager of Trade Missions promoting Scottish businesses around the world. She organised missions to more than 20 countries during the 1970s and 1980s including Japan, Indonesia, Egypt, the USSR, Oman and South Korea. During this period many Scottish industrialists keen to find new export markets found the SCDI an invaluable ally in promoting trade links. She was awarded an MBE for services to Scottish Exports in 1977.

Born in Murree, Pakistan, in 1933, Mary Bell was three when she came to the UK with her parents, brother and sister. The family settled in Devon before the war broke out. Her father, a Royal Artillery officer awarded an MC in 1917, returned to the front line in 1940 as an officer in General Fortune's 51st Highland Division. The Division was encircled and forced to surrender at St Valery in 1940 after the evacuation of Dunkirk. Her father survived, one of the lucky



↑ Mary Bell pictured on a mission to Nigeria in the 1970s

few who made it back to the UK. After the death of her parents in the late 1950s she moved to Edinburgh, where she had a strong family connection. Her direct ancestor Benjamin Bell of Blacket House, considered the first Scottish scientific surgeon and one of the founding Fellows of the Royal Society of Edinburgh, spawned a 19th-century surgical dynasty with his son, grandson and great-grandson all becoming Presidents of the Royal College of Surgeons in Edinburgh, a subject which Mary Bell researched in some

depth. She also had a lifelong fascination with Dr Joseph Bell, the surgeon from the same family who taught Arthur Conan Doyle and was the inspiration for Sherlock Holmes.

She was 26 when she reached Edinburgh and had already worked for the Council of Industrial Design and ICI's overseas department. Her first job at the Scottish Council was temporary but she soon became a key member of the organisation, appointed Manager of Trade Missions in 1971. She was a quietly formidable force

at the male-dominated SCDI and recalled that many of her male colleagues were reluctant to travel to places where they thought the hotel standards might be insufficient. By contrast, Mary Bell relished the opportunities for travel that were on offer, often finding time to combine her official work around the world with promotion of the Soroptimists, the global women's organisation that she supported all her life. When she received her MBE in 1977 she received notes of congratulations from the heads of many Scottish-based businesses, thanking her for the way she dealt with Mission arrangements and supported their export activities.

She was a strong supporter of the English Speaking Union and an active member of St Mary's Episcopal Cathedral in Edinburgh for many years. She was also passionate about Shetland, where she had family ties to the Bruce family and where her uncle Robert Bruce was Lord Lieutenant. She first visited the Islands aged four, and returned on many occasions.

Mary Bell died in Murrayfield Nursing Home. She is survived by six nephews and nieces and 11 great nephews and nieces. A service of remembrance will be held at the Cloister Chapel in Warriston Crematorium at 12.30pm on Friday 21 January.

ANDY DUFF