



# Sandy Strang

**So where are our  
Holyrood heroes?**

# Scotland needs a Braveheart to stir the masses

THE tartan bunting's on hold. The saltire flags lie hidden in the closet. Dancing in the street's in abeyance. Holyrood's second anniversary passes with neither bang nor whimper. Ignore the smug official upbeat spin. Indifference abounds. We remain underwhelmed.

Oh how we crave some stirring statesmanship. How desperately we need the emergence of a charismatic leader, a Braveheart Macmillan, a Churchillian figure of imposing stature. And what happened to the Scottish tradition for fiery, tub-thumping radicals? Where's the Maclean or Maxton rabble-rousing the punterate?



**"Donald Dewar's untimely passing left an incalculably huge hole"**

Tommy Sheridan might well have taken the oath of allegiance to the accompaniment of a clenched-fist salute, but you don't earn your street-cred Trotskyite spurs on mere gesture politics. A warrant sale crusade's hardly a re-enactment of Red Clydeside.

Like that ludicrously irrelevant fox-hunting bill, it smacks of Krushchev's line about politicians being men who promise to build bridges when there's no river.

There's a mundane mediocrity about our current crop of MSP personnel. Too few enlightened Renaissance men or women about.

Too many of the present crew recall Art Buchwald's rejoinder that he always wanted to get into politics but he was never light enough to get into the team.

Perhaps we shouldn't have expected otherwise. The major criterion for initial MSP selection was merely proven party loyalty. The system encouraged time-served placemen. The occupation profile was damagingly limited – mostly councillors, trade union officials or local authority employees.

Also our prevailing culture continues to endorse a widespread cynicism about the entire political process. Politicians everywhere are universally derided. It's a career that's become increasingly less attractive to the talented.

The dearth of MSPs of desirable range and depth is palpably obvious in debate. First Minister McLeish himself personifies the Adlai Stevenson adage that when political ammo runs low, inevitably the rusty artillery of abuse is wheeled into action. Criticism is frequently met, not with informed, weighty discussion, but mere insult.

Donald Dewar's untimely passing left an incalculably huge hole. He might well have struck a rather incongruous John Cleese-type figure – a baldy, beaky, bookish bloke

hinged at the knee – but he was a genuine statesman who had Scotland writ large through his blood like Blackpool rock.

Arguably he carried a torch for universal Scottish social justice more valiantly – and articulately – than any Scot since James Maxton. He shuffled off this mortal coil far too early for his country's good.

We do need to be tolerant of



**THE BIGGER PICTURE:** Rembrandt's Diana at her Bath.

Picture: BRITISH MUSEUM

## Plumping for reality

"I DON'T like this slimming business. It's no natural. It's absurd, nay a tragic business when fashion fads interfere wi' the shape o' the human body. Gie me a lass that's plump. I like a womanly woman. Nane o' your walking sticks for Harry Lauder."

Yes indeed, it was the great man himself speaking, back in 1934 in Ticklin' Talks.

Sir Harry would assuredly endorse the admirable Julia Lloyd Williams' Rembrandt's Women exhibition currently at the Capital's National Gallery. Not a stick-insect sylph in sight. It's an eclectic plethora

of non-PC sagging women, pendulous breasts, heavy bellies, gargantuan thighs, every line and wrinkle recorded.

Yet the word on the street is that many women have felt an instant empathy with the Rembrandt warts-and-all treatment.

Ask a toad, wise Voltaire once said, what is beauty and he'll answer that it's a female with two great eyes coming out of her little head, a large flat mouth, a yellow belly and a brown back.

Beauty was ever only in the eye of the beholder. Rembrandt was certainly some beholder. See, and judge for yourself.

fledgling governments and those would-be leaders who take the whips of scorn on their behalf. Two years isn't long in the history of a nation, or for the emergence of substantial political heroes.

The 1707 Act of Union was initially hugely unpopular here, contemptuously derided by Burns as an affront to Bruce and Wallace.

Willie McIlvanney once rightly

said that it would be far better for our sense of Scottish self-identity to have no parliament at all than to have one that was a laughing stock.

Well, infant Holyrood is categorically no Aunt Sally object of derision. But we do urgently require some home-bred statesmen to enhance its gravitas. Sorely wanted: a Caledonian Cicero or two. Now.