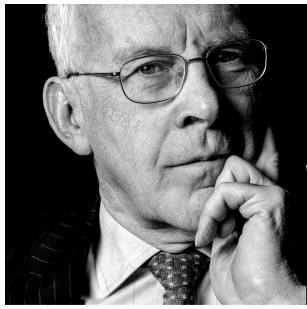




Sir Ian Wood KT GBE 1942 - 2026

BIOGRAPHICAL NOTE: SIR IAN WOOD, 1942 – 2026

Sir Ian Wood, who has died at the age of 84, was one of Scotland's most influential industrialists, philanthropists and public servants. Over six decades, he transformed a family-owned Aberdeen marine business into a global engineering company, helped shape the future of the UK's energy industry, and devoted the latter part of his life to creating opportunities for young people and improving communities in Scotland, Africa and beyond.

Few individuals have left a greater imprint on modern Aberdeen. Through his leadership, vision and determination, he helped establish the city as one of the world's leading centres of offshore energy while championing its transition towards a more diverse and sustainable economy.

Born in Aberdeen in 1942, Ian Clark Wood was the middle child of John and Margaret Wood and was raised, alongside his sisters, Meg and Lorna, in a family with deep roots in the city's fishing and maritime industries. He was educated at Robert Gordon's College, later graduating from the University of Aberdeen with a first-class honours degree in psychology in 1964. A gifted sportsman throughout his school and university years, he excelled at rugby, playing lock forward for the North & Midlands District XV, including in a match against the All Blacks at Pittodrie Stadium in 1972.

Following graduation, Sir Ian joined the family fishing and marine engineering business, becoming managing director of John Wood and Son (latterly JW Holdings) in 1967 where he oversaw significant expansion. He continued as Chairman of the legacy business, the Don Fishing Company Ltd, until his death; it remains one of Scotland's leading fish selling and vessel management companies.

Under Sir Ian's leadership, the business diversified from its traditional roots. When the North Sea oil and gas industry was still in its infancy, he saw an opportunity that others missed, reorientating the business to meet the needs of the emerging energy sector – despite the reservations of his father, John.

John Wood expressed concern about attaching too much importance to oil, but his son was confident that Aberdeen's future lay in energy – a judgement that would define both his career and the fortunes of the city over the next four decades.

Rapid growth followed, with Wood Group becoming a stand-alone company in 1982 focused on delivering engineering, oilfield logistics and drilling services to domestic and global markets. Wood Group's success helped anchor wider development of Aberdeen's world class energy supply chain.

The most challenging episode of Sir Ian's career was the Piper Alpha disaster of 1988 in which 39 Wood Group employees were among the 167 men who died. Normally a man of contained emotions, Wood was deeply affected by the events of that day. Family recall that he spent

weeks afterwards making personal visits to bereaved families. The tragedy led him to become a champion of improved offshore safety.

When Wood Group became a public company in 2002 it marked another milestone in its remarkable growth. By the time Sir Ian stepped down as Chief Executive in 2006 and as Chairman in 2012, the business had become one of the UK's leading international engineering companies, joining the FTSE 100 and employing more than 42,000 people across more than 50 countries. Recognition followed his achievements. Sir Ian was appointed Commander of the Order of the British Empire (CBE) in 1982, knighted in 1994 for services to the offshore oil and gas industry, inducted into the Offshore Energy Centre Hall of Fame in Houston in 2009, appointed Knight Grand Cross of the Order of the British Empire (GBE) in 2016, and in 2018 became a Knight of the Order of the Thistle, Scotland's highest order of chivalry – an honour bestowed personally by Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II.

Those close to Sir Ian knew, however, that titles and commercial success were never what defined him.

In 1970, he married Helen Macrae and in the years that followed they welcomed three sons, Nicholas, Graham and Garreth. He cherished his family, taking immense pride in their endeavours. Although Sir Ian worked long hours during his sons' early years, he always found time to support their rugby matches and enjoyed taking them to Murrayfield to watch Scotland play. Holidays, usually spent in active pursuits, reflected his lifelong love of sport and were an opportunity to give his family undivided attention.

In his working life, Sir Ian set exceptionally high standards for himself and expected the same of others. He disliked complacency, challenged conventional thinking, and was impatient with excuses. Early morning meetings could be long and demanding, decisions were rigorous and expectations were clear.

Yet beneath that formidable exterior was a deep loyalty to colleagues and friends, a dry sense of humour, and a genuine delight in seeing others excel. He challenged people, not to diminish them but because he believed they could achieve more than they imagined.

He upheld the Aberdonian reputation for thrift in his business and personal life, avoiding the more ostentatious trappings of wealth. His signature style was a blue V-neck jumper, often draped over his shoulders. He had a tendency to lose these; more than once, Aberdeen Airport staff reunited them with their owner on his return journey.

He was also a creature of habit. Tea and biscuits were a daily ritual, and he was loyal to a few favourite local restaurants where his preference was for plain fare. It was not unusual for him to request an omelette, including when invited to dine at Michelin-starred establishments.

Sir Ian's interests and influence extended well beyond business. Success in business gave him the freedom to devote the later decades of his life to public service and philanthropy, allowing him to put into action his belief that wealth carried with it a responsibility to create opportunities for others.

In 2007, with Lady Helen, he established The Wood Foundation. Together they pioneered an approach to venture philanthropy that combined long-term investment, practical expertise and high expectations to help people build better futures for themselves.

In Scotland, the Foundation introduced the Youth and Philanthropy Initiative (YPI), inspiring hundreds of thousands of young people to engage with social issues and charitable giving, and working with schools to support young people develop skills in enterprise and STEM and improve their employability. The Foundation also made major gifts to youth sport initiatives across North-east Scotland, NHS Grampian, Robert Gordon's College, Albyn School, and Robert Gordon University, which Sir Ian proudly served as Chancellor from 2004 to 2021.

Internationally, the Foundation built enduring partnerships in East Africa, most notably in Rwanda, where it continues to work with more than 100,000 smallholder tea farmers. The Foundation's impact has come from equipping the farmers with the finance, skills, operational and marketing support to build sustainable industries, significantly improving their incomes and quality of life. Sir Ian considered his projects in Africa to be among the most rewarding of his 60-year career.

In 2015, Sir Ian joined the Giving Pledge, making a public commitment to donate more than half his wealth to philanthropic causes. Accepting the Carnegie Medal of Philanthropy in New York in 2019, he stressed that "charity must not end at home", a sentiment reflecting his humanitarian and international outlook.

His influence on national policy was also significant. Commissioned by the UK Government in 2013 to conduct an independent review of offshore oil and gas recovery, the resulting Wood Review (2014) reshaped regulation of the UK continental shelf and led directly to the establishment of today's North Sea Transition Authority.

In the same year, he chaired the Scottish Government's Commission for Developing Scotland's Young Workforce, the recommendations of which fundamentally strengthened the relationship between education and employers and continues to shape opportunities for young people across the country.

Up until his death, Sir Ian remained committed to Aberdeen and its future success, recognising that the region's prosperity once again depended upon adapting to profound economic changes. Having served as Chairman of Scottish Enterprise from 1997 to 2000, he was a strong proponent of place-based regional economic development and he became a driving force in shaping North-east Scotland's next chapter, chairing two not-for-profit private-sector-led economic development companies enabled by over £100 million in support from the Wood Foundation.

In 2015, Wood established Opportunity North East (ONE) to support diversification of the regional economy and entrepreneurship, which has evolved to focus on digital technology, life sciences, tourism, food, drink and agriculture. In 2021 he was instrumental in the establishment of the Energy Transition Zone Ltd (ETZ), which is working to maximise the economic and social benefits to North-east Scotland arising from the move to low carbon energy. Wood also played a pivotal role in setting up the Net Zero Technology Centre in 2016 (originally the Oil and Gas Technology Centre), serving as its founder Chairman.

Above all else, Wood was a builder: he built a global company and helped build an industry. He helped build institutions that will continue to shape Scotland's future. Through philanthropy, he sought to build confidence, capability and opportunity in others, believing that lasting change comes not from charity alone but from enabling people to shape their own futures. And he built a loving family, who were with him in his final hours.

Sir Ian Wood died peacefully at his home in Aberdeen on Sunday 26th July 2026.

He is survived by his wife, Lady Helen, their sons Nicholas and his wife Sarah, Graham and his wife Gillian, Garreth and his wife Nicola, and by seven grandchildren, all of whom he adored above all else.