



GORDONSTOUN
Plus Est En Vous

Allan Shiach

Round Square, 1956

Recognised for services to the Scottish film and whisky industries as a dynamic business leader and award-winning screenwriter and producer.

Allan Shiach is a multi-award winning screenwriter and producer writing under the pseudonym Allan Scott, and a former Scotch whisky executive.

He was born and raised in Elgin, to a family steeped in whisky history and craftsmanship. The Shiach family distillery, Macallan, was a playground to Allan and his younger brother Peter, who grew up among the casks. As his family were close friends with Kurt Hahn, Allan then spent most of his school life close by - firstly at Aberlour House and then on to Round Square at Gordonstoun. At school, he was able to indulge in his love of writing and theatre, starting a school newspaper, making films and working backstage on school productions. However, his childhood was cut short when he was 8, by the traumatic death of his father, creating in him the resilience which enabled him to deal with the early death of his brother some years later.

Allan chose to go to Montreal to study English at McGill University and it was here his television career began, with his own chat show on CBC, featuring self-penned comedy sketches. His 'Grandes Passions' of whisky and film then formed the path of the rest of his life. After returning to the UK and writing numerous shows for the BBC, he continued to work on his own scripts. Around this time, he became a board member at Macallan and when asked to step into the role of Chairman in 1979, he rose to the challenge, driving huge growth and winning a reputation for innovative ad campaigns - resulting in a Fellowship in The Marketing Society. By the time the company was sold in 1997, Allan had helped establish a hugely successful international brand and increased its stock market value more than six hundredfold.

Yet in parallel with his whisky success his writing resulted in an even longer and more greatly celebrated career. Accolades include the Edgar Award (1976) and Writers' Guild Award (1978) and two Genie Awards for his 1997 film Regeneration. He was Executive producer and co-creator of the multi-award-winning Netflix series The Queen's Gambit and executive producer of Shallow Grave. He has written more than a dozen films and his stage musical adaptation of The Adventures of Priscilla, Queen of the Desert, which opened in Sydney in 2006, has become the most successful Australian stage musical of all time.

Service has been a theme throughout his life, both at the helm of the family firm, and later on in the Broadcasting Council of BBC Scotland, as chairman of the Scottish Film Production Fund, Scottish Film Council and Scottish Screen. He was director of both Caledonian Newspapers and Scottish Television plc, a governor of the British Film Institute and former chairman of the Writer's Guild of Great Britain.

Drama is what fascinates me but marketing is much the same. I guess that's what I was doing all along with the whisky.

I took two years out from writing to work full time as chairman at Macallan and I had to immerse myself in the world of marketing. Our whisky had only just launched on the market, so it was hard work making a name for ourselves. Yet I found myself writing yarns, stories - just as I always have. We used this to develop a very original ad campaign where we based our marketing simply on the stories of real people. That's what connects with an audience.

One of my biggest fans changed my perception of my own work forever.

I had a fan who would often write to me from Brazil. After years of this, he asked if we could have a Zoom call - and as I couldn't see why not, I agreed. He asked me what my theme was, as a writer, and I said I didn't have one. He said, "Of course you do - it's grief". The moment he said it, it all made sense. I can't believe I didn't realise before, that it all goes back to the death of my father. I think about my work entirely differently now.

I think Gordonstoun's greatest gift to us all was freedom - and freedom breeds happiness.

Gordonstoun allowed us to be free to explore our own interests and that made me able to enjoy the things I loved. We had so much more freedom than most other pupils at that time and it liberates you, helps you find what you enjoy in life. I spent so many hours of my childhood captivated in the many cinemas in Elgin, Forres and Lossie. As a result, I'm busier than ever in my 80s - but I don't work to be busy, I work because I love it. That's the most fulfilling way to live.

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