

# Nobel Prize-winning Scots economist dies at the age of 82

By [Martin Hannan](#) Journalist, The National, 31 August 2018



Sir James Mirrlees previously worked for the Scottish Government's council of economic advisors. Photograph: Getty

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**ONE of [Scotland](#)'s greatest minds, Nobel Prize-winning economist Sir James Mirrlees, has died at his Cambridge home aged 82.**

Joint winner of the Nobel Prize for Economics in 1996, Mirrlees was a long-standing member of the Scottish [Government](#)'s council of economic advisers, and did a great deal of work for the council ahead of the 2014 independence referendum.

His widow Lady Patricia Mirrlees told The National: "It is hard to put into words the immense sense of loss. Jim was brilliant and yet he was modest and lived simply. He gave generously of his time and knowledge as a teacher and supervisor in Oxford and Cambridge and as the Master of Morningside [College](#). He was deeply loved and respected and will be sorely missed.

"His great life is over, but Jim will live on through his work and those he inspired."

Former first minister [Alex Salmond](#) was among the first to pay tribute to Mirrlees, who was born in Minnigaff in Dumfries and Galloway in 1936 and was educated at [Edinburgh](#) University.

Salmond said: "Jim Mirrlees was both a Nobel laureate and a thoroughly nice man. For no fee, this internationally-renowned economist served on the council of economic advisers and made a massive contribution to its work.

"My thoughts go out to Patricia who I first met when she was handing out some badly needed sustenance to a group of anti-war protestors outside the [House of Commons](#) at the time of the Iraq war – her courage will stand her in good stead at this time."

Mirrlees had a long relationship with Nuffield College in Oxford which he joined as a professorial fellow in 1968. He was the Edgeworth professor of economics until 1995 when he left Oxford to take up the professorship of political economy at Trinity College, Cambridge.

In 2002, he became distinguished professor-at-large of the Chinese [University](#) of Hong Kong, and in 2009 the master of Morningside College in that university.

The late Sir Tony Atkinson of Nuffield once described Mirrlees as one of the best economists in the world, remarking that he was best known for his work on the theory of the optimal design of income taxation.

He wrote: "In 1969 [Jim] reformulated the question in a way which had never been done before and developed a deep set of mathematical tools to solve the problem.

“He took this an important stage further when he recognised in the mid-1970s that the mathematical structure of the problem applied much more generally to questions of mechanism design in the face of incomplete information. In this way he has influenced whole branches of economics.”

Mirrlees shared with William Vickrey the 1996 Nobel Prize for Economics in recognition of their research into the economic theory of incentives under asymmetric information. He served as president of the Econometric Society and of the Royal Economic Society, and was elected a fellow of the British Academy and an honorary fellow of the Royal Society of Edinburgh.

Mirrlees is also survived by his daughters Catriona and Fiona, from his marriage to Gill, who passed away in 1993. His funeral is on Friday, September 14, at 10.30 am.

## Nicola Sturgeon pays tribute to James Mirrlees

By [National Newsdesk](#), 31 August 2018



Nicola Sturgeon said the 82-year-old will be remembered for his "great intellect"

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**[NICOLA Sturgeon](#) has paid tribute to the Nobel prize-winning Scottish economist Sir James Mirrlees after his death.**

Mirrlees, who was born in the small town of Minnigaff in Dumfries and Galloway, went on to teach economics at both Oxford and Cambridge universities.

The 82-year-old, who jointly won the Nobel prize in economic sciences in 1996, will be remembered for his "great intellect" and "wonderfully dry sense of humour", the Scottish First Minister said.

[Sturgeon](#) also told how Mirrlees, who studied at [Edinburgh](#) University, was proud of his Scottish heritage.

Scottish Deputy First Minister and former finance secretary John Swinney described him as a "wise, gentle and deeply thoughtful man".

Mirrlees won his Nobel prize for work on how to devise an optimal income tax regime, balancing both efficiency and equity, sharing the honour with William Vickrey of Columbia [University](#).

During his career he served as the Edgeworth Professor of Economics and Fellow of Nuffield [College](#) in Oxford from 1968 to 1995, before becoming Professor of Political Economy at Cambridge in 1995.

In 2002 he was also appointed Distinguished Professor-at-Large at The Chinese University of Hong Kong.

He joined the Scottish [Government](#)'s council of economic advisers when it was established after the [SNP](#) came to power at [Holyrood](#) in 2007.

Sturgeon said: "Sir James Mirrlees, who passed away earlier this week, will be sadly missed. His contribution to economics, in which he was awarded the Nobel prize in 1986, will leave a lasting legacy.

"I had the pleasure to get to know Jim personally through his valuable contributions to the Scottish Government's Council of Economic Advisers, which he was a member of since 2007.

"Like many people of great intellect, Jim had a way of conveying the essence of any economic issue in a manner which was clear, thoughtful and accessible. He had a wonderfully dry sense of humour and served on the council with distinction throughout this period.

"Jim was also proud of his Scottish heritage – born in the south of [Scotland](#) and having begun his studies at Edinburgh University, he always enjoyed returning to Scotland and sharing his wisdom, insights and knowledge.

"I am sure there will be further opportunities to celebrate the contribution of Jim's legacy, which is recognised internationally. But at this time, my thoughts and wishes are with Jim's immediate family amid their sad loss."

Mirrlees is survived by his widow Patricia, his two daughters Catriona and Fiona from his first marriage to Gill who died in 1993, and by his stepson Rory and four grandchildren.