

Honorary members of 1886-89

1886 Earl of Rosebery, Dr Rob. Morris

1887 Sir J Henry B Irving, Sir William Muir, Robert William Cochran-Patrick

1888 William Black, David Christie Murray

1889 Andrew Lang, Walter Besant

1886 The 5th Earl of Rosebery (1847-1929)

Archibald Philip Primrose succeeded to the Earldom on the death of his grandfather in 1868 while at Oxford. A year later, against University rules, he bought a racehorse. Having to give up either his studies or his racehorse, he gave up his studies. At the time of his nomination, he was Foreign Secretary in the brief Third Gladstone Ministry (Feb-August 1886).

In 1878, he had married Hannah de Rothschild, through whom came the mansion Mentmore, now usually known as Mentmore Towers, built in 1852-54 for the Rothschild family. (After the 6th Earl died in 1973, its superb art collection was sold at public auction.)

In the 5th Earl's later career, he was Secretary for Foreign Affairs 1892-94 and Prime Minister in 1894 until the Liberal defeat of 1895. Having an imperialist outlook, he sometimes in later days voted with the Conservatives. In 1911, he was further enobled as Baron Epsom of Epsom, Viscount Mentmore of Mentmore and (1st) Earl of Midlothian.

However, the reason for Rosebery's nomination was his admiration for Robert Burns. In 1882, he had unveiled the statue of the Bard in Dumfries. In Glasgow, in 1885, a group of Hutchesonians named their Rosebery Burns Club after him. In March 1885, Rosebery, while Lord Privy Seal and First Commissioner of Works, had unveiled the national monumental bust of Burns (sculpted by Sir John Steell, RSA) in the Poets' Corner of Westminster Abbey. The World Burns Federation was launched later that year.

On 21st July 1896, the anniversary of the poet's death, while leader of the Liberal party, he gave, at Glasgow, an eloquent "Tribute to Robert Burns" (on the web at www.famous-speeches-and-speech-topics.info/famous-speeches/earl-of-rosebery-speech-a-tribute-to-robert-burns.htm), and another address at Dumfries. In 1906, the Kilbirnie Rosebery Burns Club was formed. In the same year, Rosebery was active in a campaign to save the "Auld Brig o' Ayr". Burns clubs throughout the world contributed to a fund, and Rosebery reopened the bridge in 1910.

In 1913, the Burns Glenriddell MSS were bought by John Gribbel of Philadelphia, who asked Rosebery to decide to which Scottish institution they should be donated. Gribbel gifted them to the Scottish National Library under terms which ensure that they will remain in possession of 'the people of Scotland for ever'. In 1921, when Rosebery published his "Miscellanies, Literary and Historical", Burns was the subject of chapter 1.

He is reputed to have said that he had three aims in life: to win the Derby, to marry an heiress, and to become Prime Minister. He succeeded in all three.

Letter of acceptance, written from Mentmore, Leighton Buzzard (Beds.), on 30th Jany, 1886, addressed to James Dickie, Esq., Hony Secy

Sir,

I am very sensible of the honour conferred upon me by the members of the Irvine Burns Club in electing me as an Honorary Member. Will you take the earliest opportunity of conveying my thanks to the members not only for electing me to be one of their number, but also for the kind expressions with which they accompanied the honour.

I trust that some day I may have an opportunity of inspecting the MSS which the Club is so fortunate as to possess.

Believe me,

Yours faithfully

Rosebery

1886: Dr Robert Morris (1818-1888)

Dr Rob Morris, of Kentucky, over the years, wrote over 400 poems, many of which were devoted to Eastern Star and Masonry. After serving as Grand Master of the Lodge of Kentucky, he went in 1860 to La Grange initially to serve on the faculty of the Masonic University; his home remains a shrine to him, maintained by the Kentucky Grand Chapter of the Order of the Eastern Star. He travelled to the Orient in 1868.

In 1875, William T. Anderson's Masonic Publishing Company in New York published his 'Three Hundred Masonic Odes and Poems'. While the title 'The Poet Laureate of Freemasonry' seems to have been self-selected, official recognition as such came at a ceremony in New York City in 1884. Only one other poet had been given that title before. Robert Burns had been made the Poet Laureate of Lodge Canongate Kilwinning No. 2, Edinburgh, Scotland in February 1787. Like Burns, Morris was crowned with a laurel wreath. This official recognition would have prompted his nomination by Irvine Burnsians.

An American "Dictionary of American Authors" referred to him as "the Masonic Dickens of America". Rob Morris was an industrious individual, a prolific writer, and a keen traveller, both to Masonic lodges and in general. A teacher by profession, most of his career was in Masonic establishments, an Academy, a College, and latterly the Masonic University in Kentucky. His home is maintained as a shrine by the Kentucky Grand Chapter of the Order of the Eastern Star.

Letter of acceptance, written on 10 Feb 1886 from: Residence of Dr Rob Morris, La Grange, Oldham Co., Kentucky, at 'The Old Kentucky Home', addressed to James Dickie, Esq., Honorary Secretary, Irvine Burns Club

My Very Dear Sir

I have received the intelligence of my election as an Honorary Member of your Club, an honor doubled by the complimentary terms in which you announce it, in your favor of Jan. 26th.

You make me very happy and I wish I had something that I could contribute to your collections, worthy of your acceptance.

With hand weakened by age and disease I have copied the lines to which Mr Wylie in his remarks at my nomination, made allusion, and beg to send them. In other wrappers I mail a portrait, made 14 years since, and some pamphlets and shall feel honored if the Club will accept them.

With heartfelt wishes for the personal happiness of my fellow members and the success of the cause which binds you together

I am

With much esteem

Your ob. servant

Rob Morris

Poet Laureate

Notes:

The Mr Wylie, we presume, was Robert Wylie, Club President in 1972 and 1975.

1887: Henry Irving (1838-1905)

Henry Irving (John Henry Brodribb Irving), the English actor, played in Sunderland, Edinburgh, Glasgow, and Manchester before making his name in London. His first marked success was in 1870, and in 1874 his performance as Hamlet ensured his reputation. In 1878 he leased the Lyceum Theatre for himself, playing most main Shakespearian roles, with Miss (later Dame) Ellen Terry as his leading lady.

He also wrote for magazines and contributed addresses at Harvard and Oxford Universities. We do not know what particular circumstance prompted the members of Irvine Burns Club to honour him. It may have been his successful 1886 production of Goethe's 'Faust', in which he played Mephistopheles, and which toured to other cities including Glasgow.

Irving was back in Scotland in 1887, as he planned his next production, 'Macbeth', to get the authentic feel for the setting - Ellen Terry noted in her memoirs: "Visited the 'Blasted Heath'. Behold, a flourishing potato field." For this production, which opened in Dec., 1888, he commissioned, at extraordinary expense, 21 changes of scene, featuring "elaborate, massive and realistically detailed sets" (Foulkes, 'Henry Irving', 2008). Sir Arthur Sullivan's incidental music for the production required a larger-than-normal orchestra of 46 players and a female chorus of 60. The performance was as successful as it was spectacular.

We wonder whether Henry Irving met any of the Irvine Burns Club directors or friends either on the 'Faust' tour, or subsequently during his research for 'the Scottish play'.

Henry Irving was knighted in 1895. His eldest son followed in his father's footsteps as an actor-manager and author, his roles also including Hamlet.

[Hall Caine (honorary member 1898), as critic of the Liverpool 'Town Crier', attended the first night of 'Hamlet' in the Lyceum Theatre in 1874. His criticism, from one still aged only 21, was so fine that it was reprinted as a broadsheet pamphlet. Irving and Caine went on to enjoy a friendship and a great respect for each other's talents, lasting until Irving's death. (Source: Bram Stoker. 'Personal Reminiscences of Henry Irving')]

Letter of acceptance, written from the Lyceum Theatre (London), on 3 Feb. 1887

Dear Sir,

Pray convey my hearty thanks to the Burns Club for my Election as an Honorary member.

The compliment I appreciate most highly, & shall ever be interested in the proceedings of your club.

It will be very good fortune, I hope, at some time, to have the pleasure and privilege of meeting you all & with every good wish

Believe me, most cordially yours

Henry Irving

1887: Sir William Muir (1819-1905)

Sir William Muir, an Arabic scholar, Principal of Edinburgh University from 1885 until 1903, had been educated in Ayrshire at Kilmarnock Academy. His elder brother, John, was a Sanskrit scholar of note.

Knighted in 1867 after a 30 year career in India, when foreign secretary to the Indian government, he was later appointed lieutenant governor of the North West Provinces. It was chiefly through his exertions that the central college at Allahabad, known as Muir's College, was built and endowed.

Muir published several books, his best known being 'A Life of Mahomet and History of Islam to the End of the Hegira', in four volumes, with three editions, in 1862, 1878 and 1894.

Letter of acceptance, written on his behalf by Mrs Disraeli from Hughenden Manor (Bucks) on April 24th, 1854

Dear Sir,

I have to acknowledge the receipt of yr letter of the 28th inst, intimating to me that the Irvine Burns Club have done me the honour of electing me to be an Hony Member of their Club, and I beg that you will submit to them my humble acknowledgement of the same, & of the kind & flattering terms in which the communication has been made by you.

I am

Yours very truly

W. Muir

1887: R W Cochran-Patrick (1842-1897)

Robert William Cochran-Patrick may have been proposed for nomination as an honorary member due to having represented North Ayrshire in Parliament (as a Conservative) for the five years 1880-85, though bear in mind that those living in the burgh voted in the Ayr Burghs constituency at that time.

The Irvine Burns Club Directors would also have in mind that R W Cochran-Patrick, as depute Provincial Grand Master for Ayrshire, had, in 1878, laid the foundation stone for the Burns Memorial in Kilmarnock, first mooted on Burns Night 1877 and completed in August 1879, the focal point in the burgh's Kay Park.

His other talents would have added justification to the honour. He had served as Dean of Faculties at Glasgow University 1882-85, and was a Fellow of the Society of Antiquaries of Scotland and the Society of Antiquaries of London. He was a founder, in 1874, of the Ayrshire and Wigtonshire Archaeological Association, and was a numismatist of repute, both in the scope of his collection and in his authorship of volumes on Scottish coins, and possessed one of the country's greatest collections of early Scottish coins and medals.

Born at Ladyland near Kilbirnie, Cochran-Patrick was also the Chairman of Speir's School at Beith and became Provincial Grand Master of the Masons of Ayrshire.

Ladyland probably derives its name from a pre-reformation chapel. Its policies are known for attractive countryside, some rare species of flowers, and a small bronze axe donated in 1886 by R W Cochran-Patrick to the National Museum of Antiquities of Scotland.

Letter of acceptance, written from Woodside, Beith, N.B., on 29:1:87

Dear Sir

I had the high pleasure & gratification of receiving your letter intimating my appointment as an Honorary Member of the Irvine Burns Club, this morning.

I esteem it a very great honour & hope if able to attend next years meeting.

Very truly yours,

R W Cochran-Patrick

Notes:

The N.B. in the address is for North Britain, a term often used for Scotland in those days.

1888: William Black (1841-1898)

Although now hardly mentioned in reference books, William Black was a popular novelist in Victorian Britain.

Born in Glasgow, he went to London, joined the staff at the 'Morning Star', and was its special correspondent during the Austro-Prussian War of 1866. Later he edited the 'London Review', then moved to the 'Daily News' as assistant editor. He contributed a weekly serial to 'The Graphic'.

Black's first novel, 'James Merle', in 1864, was only moderately successful, but the success of 'A Daughter of Heth' in 1871 gained him an increasing circle of readers. Collections of short stories and another 22 novels followed, the last being published shortly before his death. 'Yolande' (1883) dealt in part with drug addiction; 'Judith Shakespeare' (1884) was a historical novel featuring the playwright's daughter; and 'The New Prince Fortunatus' (1890) centred on London theatrical life.

During his own lifetime Black's novels were immensely popular, and were compared favourably with those of Anthony Trollope, though some critics complained that his writings revealed too much his interest in hunting and fishing.

He teamed up with such well-known authors as Rudyard Kipling, Thomas Hardy, and Walter Besant (all three accepted honorary membership of Irvine Burns Club in various years) to abolish the bootlegging of popular works by American publishers, before copyright laws in that country. This resulted in the passing of new laws during 1891.

Black is remembered by a lighthouse, built in the form of a Gothic tower in 1901 at one of his favourite places, about a mile south of Duart Castle on Mull.

Letter of acceptance, written from Paston House, 1 Paston Place, Brighton, on Dec 15, 1888

My Dear Sir,

Will you be so good as to present my compliments to the Members of the Irvine Burns Club, and say how sensible I am of their kindness and courtesy in electing me an Honorary Member.

Yours very faithfully

William Black

1888: David Christie Murray (1847-1907)

David Christie Murray wrote around thirty novels in a journalistic style, many set in Staffordshire. So far, we have no evidence of the love of Burns which he mentions in his letter of acceptance. As special correspondent for 'The Times' and 'The Scotsman' he reported on the Russo-Turkish war of 1877-8. In the 1880s he lived in Belgium and France, as the letter heading shows, and toured other countries as a lecturer. The works for which he is mentioned in our minutes are "Old Blazer's Hero" and "A Life's Atonement".

His novel 'Aunt Rachel' had appeared in 1886 and rightly became one of his most popular works. About this story of two love affairs, the West Midlands Literary Heritage website has written: "Like Hardy, David Christie Murray is able to switch effortlessly from comedy to romance, and from sturdy humour to pathos". In 1887, he had published the non-fiction 'A Novelist's Notebook'. Another of his popular novels was 'Joseph's Coat' of 1881.

An interview in the New Zealand 'Star' (27 Feb. 1890), when he arrived at Christchurch, adds extra interest. Firstly, it underlines his success: He "is a maker of good books, as those of us who have read 'Joseph's Coat' and 'First Person Singular' will testify". Secondly, it gives an impression of his personality: "Mr Murray is one of those men whom one 'takes to' at first sight . . a very engaging face . . the face of a man whom one would trust, who had read, and can read, men; and who has read and loved, aye and still loves, books". Thirdly, his views on separate government for Australia are the opposite of those of novelist Edward Jenkins (hon. memb. 1872) - Murray says: "There is a considerable feeling of irritation against England in the Australias, and the patronising tone of the people at Home is very much responsible for it. Sir Julius Vogel has written that England must make it known definitely that the Colonies have no right to a separate national existence. More foolish a proclamation I cannot imagine. America proved . . the right of any community of British descent to govern itself."

In 1897, Murray recorded his criticisms of the contemporary Kailyard school of Scottish literature in his book 'My Contemporaries in Fiction'. There he complained of "the 'boom' which has lately filled heaven and earth with respect to the achievements of the new Scotch school". Singling out the novelist Crockett (honorary member 1895), as had Buchan before him, Murray wrote: "the unblushing effrontery of those gentlemen of the press who have set him on a level with Sir Walter is the most mournful and most contemptible thing in association with the poorer sort of criticism which has been encountered of later years" - an interesting, if unexpectedly critical, insight to his opinions.

Letter of acceptance, written from Villa Colbert, Montboron, Nice, on March 27th 1889

Sir

On the day on which I received your intimation of the honour which had been done me by the Irvine Burns Club I wrote a letter begging you to convey to the committee my thanks for their very kindly and agreeable action. I now observe to my great distress that my letter has by some accident been left unposted. I hasten to apologise for my seeming churlishness.

I shall try, and I trust at no very distant date, to avail myself practically of the Club's hospitality and to secure a look at the valuable manuscripts in its possession. I dare to say that the Club has not conferred the honour of unsought election upon any man more worthy of it than myself if a genuine love of Burns's work is counted as a merit.

I am sir

yours very truly

D Christie Murray

Notes:

His nomination is recorded in the 1888 minutes.

1889: Andrew Lang (1844-1912)

Our minutes record his nomination thus: "Dr Andrew Lang, Author of 'Books and Bookmen' and other Literary Works".

This short phrase, necessary in minutes, totally fails to do him justice. He was a poet, a novelist, a critic, an important collector of folk and fairy tales, an author on anthropology and psychic research, a Homeric scholar and co-translator of 'The Odyssey' and 'The Iliad', a writer on Mary Queen of Scots, John Knox and the Young Pretender, and a journalist writing sparkling leaders for the 'Daily News'.

The prompt for the Irvine nomination would be the volume mentioned in the minutes (published in 1886), possibly coupled with; his 'Letters to Dead Authors', which also appeared in 1886 (see below). His two-volume 'Myth, Ritual and Religion' then appeared during 1887. For a comprehensive list of the many publications of this prolific journalist, poet, critic and historian, the Wikipedia website article is recommended.

Later works included, in 1896, an edition of "The Poems and Songs of Robert Burns" and, from 1903, a four volume "History of Scotland from the Roman Occupation".

Born in Selkirk, he was educated at Selkirk grammar school, and at the Edinburgh Academy, St Andrews University and at Balliol College, Oxford, where he took a first class in the final classical schools in 1868.

Tibbie Shiel's Inn by St Mary's Loch "was the resort of Prof. Wilson ("Christopher North") and other literary celebrities who made it their resting-place", so Lang's home of Rodono, "a fine house with superb views over the loch" must have hosted many of his literary friends.

Letter of acceptance, written from Rodono, St Mary's Loch

Dear Sir,

Pray convey to the Burns' Club my deep sense of the honour and kindness which they have done me, in electing me as an honorary member. There is no Hogg club here, but there should be one.

Believe me

Truthfully yours

A Lang

Notes:

The letter is undated.

The Hogg reference is to James Hogg, 'The Ettrick Shepherd', born and buried at Ettrick, less than five miles from St Mary's Loch.

From 'To Robert Burns' in 'Letters to Dead Poets' by Andrew Lang (1886)

It has been your peculiar fortune to capture the hearts of a whole people - a people not usually prone to praise, but devoted with a personal and patriotic loyalty to you and to your reputation. In you every Scot who is a Scot sees, admires, and compliments Himself, his ideal self - independent, fond of whisky, fonder of the lassies; you are the true representative of him and of his nation. Next year will be the hundredth since the press of Kilmarnock brought to light its solitary masterpiece, your Poems; and next year, therefore, methinks, the revenue will receive a welcome accession from the abundance of whisky drunk in your honour.

1889: Walter Besant (1836-1901)

A novelist and social reformer, Besant's best-known books are now those on the history and topography of London, and on Victorian poverty. His prodigious output included very many novels, several of the 1872-1882 novels being co-authored with James Rice, though he continued to write voluminously thereafter. Our minutes record him as "Mr Walter Besant, Author of 'By Celia's Arbour', 'Ready-Money Mortiboy' (publ.: Chatto & Windus), 'All sorts and conditions of men' and other Literary Works, in recognition of his Eminence and Celebrity as a Novelist".

After gaining 1st class Honours in Mathematics (as '18th Wrangler') at Cambridge, and two years teaching in England, he served as Professor of Mathematics in the Royal College,

Mauritius, in 1861 to 1867, and afterwards, back in London due to ill-health, was Secretary to the Palestine Exploration Fund from 1868 to 1885.

Walter Besant was mainly instrumental in the founding, in 1884, of the Society of Authors to protect the rights of professional authors. Its first President was Tennyson (honorary member 1863) and its members included J M Barrie and Thomas Hardy (honorary members in 1892). A 1911 encyclopedia stated: "the improved conditions of the literary career in England were largely due to [Besant's] energetic and capable exposition of the commercial value of authorship and to the unselfish efforts which Sir Walter constantly made on behalf of his fellow-workers in the field of letters".

As a freemason, Besant had, in 1886, conceived the idea of a Masonic research lodge, the Quatuor [*sic*] Coronati Lodge, of which he was first Treasurer.

Walter Besant's earliest books were on the subject of French literature, the first being "Studies in Early French Poetry" in 1868. Later, in 1899, he published, with Professor Palmer, a "History of Jerusalem". He published over forty works of fiction and over thirty non-fiction. He was knighted in 1895.

The 1911 encyclopedia also commented: "Though not without exaggeration and eccentricity, attributable to the influence of Dickens, [the novels of Walter Besant] are full of rich humour, shrewd observation and sound common-sense, and contain characters which have taken their place in the long gallery of British fiction."

Letter of acceptance, written from 12, Gayton Crescent, Hampstead, on July 20, 1889

Dear Sir

I have the honour to acknowledge your letter of the 13th and to convey to you my thanks for the honour you have done me in placing me on your list of Honorary Members. I have to remain dear Sir

Faithfully Yours,

Walter Besant