

Honorary members of 1910-14

1910 Sir George B S Douglas
1911 Sir Herbert Maxwell of Monreith
1912 Lord Haldane
1913 D T Holmes
1914 Robert Bridges

1910: Sir George B S Douglas (1856-1935)

George Brisbane Scott Douglas, a Scottish poet and writer, also a Baronet, he was born in Gibraltar, the home country of his mother, Dona Sanchez de Pina. He authored some of his books under the name of Sir George Douglas.

Springwood Park had been bought in 1750 by the Douglas family, and Sir George was the fifth Douglas owner, and the 5th Baronet. He never married and managed to combine the running of a large country estate with writing prose and poetry. His successor, who never lived at Springwood, died without issue and in debt, and the estate was sold.

Sir George had a great interest in local history and recorded many tales told by his gamekeepers and other worthies. He was widely published in his lifetime and his work includes *New Border Tales* (1892); *Poems of a Country Gentleman* (1897); *Diversions of a Country Gentleman* (1902) and *The Border Breed* (1909). His authoritative history of Roxburgh, Selkirk and Peebles was published in 1899 by William Blackwood & Sons.

Letter of acceptance, written from Springwood Park, Kelso, on 30.1.10

Dear Sir,

I beg to acknowledge receipt of your notification of my admission to the Irvine Burns Club as an Honorary Member, & at the same time to express my sense of the honour of being connected with a Burns Club of such old standing, which is also associated with the scene of an interesting tho' obscure episode of the Poet's youth. I am, dear Sir,

Yours faithfully
George Douglas

1911: Sir Herbert E Maxwell (1845-1937)

Sir Herbert Eustace Maxwell was President of the Dumfries and Galloway Natural History and Antiquarian Society between 1900-1902. One of the key figures in the development of Scottish archaeology, he inherited the estate of Monreith, Mochrum, in 1877. In the same year the Ayrshire and Wigtonshire Archaeological Association was formed with Maxwell as one of its vice-presidents. He began to build up a large collection of archaeological objects, many of which had been found on the estate by his tenants. The vast majority of these were donated to the Museum of Antiquities in Edinburgh, now part of National Museums Scotland.

Maxwell also carried out a number of excavations in Wigtownshire, most notably at St Ninian's Cave and at St Medan's Chapel, Kirkmaiden.

He was involved in archaeology at a national level. As MP for Wigtownshire (1880-1906) he was a keen supporter of the 1882 Ancient Monuments Act. To encourage other landowners Maxwell offered a number of archaeological sites on his estate for guardianship by the state under the new act. These sites included the standing stones at Drumtroddan, the Wren's Nest stones and the Iron Age fort at Barsalloch.

Maxwell was President of the Society of Antiquaries from 1900 to 1913. He was also the first Chairman of the Royal Commission on the Ancient and Historic Monuments of Scotland, a post he held for 26 years. He was Lord Lieutenant of Wigtown 1903-1935.

(source: Dumfries Museum & Camera Obscura)

Letter of acceptance, written from Monreith, Whauphill, Wigtownshire, on 27th January 1911, addressed to Robt Boyd, Esq., Hon Secretary, Irvine Burns Club

Dear Sir

I have to thank you for your letter of 23rd inst. and to request that you will convey to the members of the Irvine Burns Club an expression of my sense of the honour they have done me in admitting me as an honorary member.

It is a high privilege to be associated in this manner, however distantly, with the name and memory of one who attained an unrivalled place in the literature of our land.

I am

Faithfully yours

Herbert Maxwell

1912: Viscount Haldane (1856-1928)

Haldane was an influential British Liberal Imperialist and later Labour politician, lawyer and philosopher. In 1885 Haldane was elected Liberal Member of Parliament for Haddingtonshire, a seat he held for 25 years until 1911. He was Secretary of State for War between 1905 and 1912 (initially under Sir Henry Campbell-Bannerman), during which time the "Haldane Reforms" were implemented, including the creation of the Territorial Army. His decisions included the establishment of a military depot in Dunbar, the immense barracks of which were in course of completion in 1912.

Raised to the peerage as Viscount Haldane in 1911, he was Lord Chancellor (succeeding the Earl Loreburn) between 1912 and 1915. He later joined the Labour Party and once again served as Lord Chancellor in 1924 the first ever Labour administration.

Letter of acceptance, typewritten from the War Office, Whitehall, S.W., on 19th January 1912, addressed to Robert Boyd, Esq., Irvine Burns Club

Dear Sir,

I have your letter of the 18th January and beg that you will convey my thanks to the Irvine Burns Club for electing me an Honorary Member.

Yours very truly,

Haldane of Cloan

Notes: The address is embossed, so does not appear on photocopies.

1913: Daniel T Holmes (1863-1955)

This information is from an affectionate family memoir, written by his grandson Tony Benn (Hon. Member 2002) and published in the 'Glasgow Herald' in 1990.

Daniel Turner Holmes entered Parliament as a Liberal MP for the Govan division of Glasgow in a by-election in 1911, serving till defeated in 1918. He was not really a politician at all, but a scholar who had been persuaded to stand, being a lecturer who could hold audiences spellbound with accounts of historical events and the light that they threw on current affairs. In that capacity he represented perfectly the deep commitment of his fellow countrymen and women to education and the importance of learning – describing himself as “a worshipper at learning’s shrine”, more interested in his books than anything else, and as an author and poet of some considerable ability.

Born in Irvine in 1863, he was the second son of James Holmes, a steeplejack, a deeply religious man, and Elizabeth Turner, who bore eight children, five of who died in their youth – all from preventable diseases. At the age of three he insisted on going to school with his elder brother. Later, sitting for an external degree at London University, he came first among all the examinees from all over the country. He continued his studies at the Sorbonne and became head of the English department at Paisley Grammar School.

From 1904 to 1908 he travelled around Scotland lecturing at local literary societies, travelling by train, steam boat, mail coach, horse bus, pony trap, wagon cart, and foot, in all weathers. He estimated that he had spoken to over 40,000 people. Everywhere he found a tremendous passion for learning. Of the weavers, he commented that they “had far clearer views on politics than most of their legislators”. A discussion on the Mull ferry on ‘Has the Deity unlimited Free Will?’ saw some of the ship’s crew joining in. In Feb. 1911, he gave a lecture at the Irvine Literary and Debating Club on ‘The Teaching of John Ruskin’, the chairman being Wm Hall, and the vote of thanks being given by R M Hogg.

His maiden speech in the House of Commons on the Temperance (Scotland) Bill held his fellow MPs with his humour: “I do not expect that, in our generation at least, alcohol will ever be out of date and when I look at the history and even the climate of my native country I know quite well that my fellow countrymen will never be sickeningly abstemious or ostentatiously teetotal”. He was also known as the “Poet Laureate of the House of Commons”, leaving a notebook full of the most amusing verses about his colleagues and contemporary affairs.

In October 1942 he was made an honorary burgess of the Royal Burgh of Irvine. His daughter, Margaret (herself a scholar, an honorary member of the Hebrew University) married William Wedgewood Benn, then MP for Leith, in 1920.

Tony Benn, remembering his grandfather as a kindly and absent-minded old man, always ready to teach his grandchildren, comments: “There are not many scholars in parliament, which is a great pity, for politics seems to have degenerated into abuse as a substitute for exposition and our society is the poorer for it. Daniel Holmes represented, faithfully, in the House of Commons, that passion for learning that has ‘always characterised the Scots’.”

Letter of acceptance, written on 21.1.13, addressed to Robert Boyd, Esq., Irvine Burns Club

Dear Mr Boyd,

I am extremely gratified that the Irvine Burns Club has made me an honorary member. No honour could be more pleasing to me. In lieu of a greeting for the Anniversary, I enclose some verses on our old town.

I am

Very Faithfully Yours

D. T. Holmes

1914: Robert Bridges (1844-1930)

Robert Bridges wanted no biography written about him and made a conscious effort to thwart any such attempt. The eighth of nine children, his father died when he was eight, and his mother remarried; he seems to have had a rather idyllic mid-19th c. childhood. He practised as a physician until lung disease forced him to retire in 1882, but he had published his first collection of poems before that, in 1873. In 1884 he married Monica Waterhouse and spent the rest of his life in rural seclusion, first at Yattendon, Berkshire, then at "Chilswell", on the edge of Boars Hill, Oxford, where he died.

He was appointed Poet Laureate in 1913, the only medical graduate to have held the office.

Letter of acceptance, written from "Chilswell", Oxford, on Mar. 29, 1914, addressed to Rob. Boyd, Esq., Hon. Sec., Irvine Burns Club

Dear Sir

I find your letter of Jan'y 19th without any note of its having been answered. Pray accept my apology for the unintentional neglect: and let me now thank you for the honour that you have done me in electing me an Hon'y Member of the Irvine Burns Club. I am a thorough admirer of the Poet: and as on one side of my family I have Scotch antecedents, I consider myself entitled to share the national enthusiasm.

I wish that I could foresee any likelihood of my being able to take any advantage of the hospitality of your Club: but I hope that you will consider me a sympathetic member;

I am your sincerely

Robert Bridges

I have so many more letters sent to me than I can hope to reply to that the delay in my acknowledgement of your letter is easily accounted for.