

Honorary members of 1936–1939

1936 Prof. Adolphus A Jack, Sir Harry McGowan

1937 Prof. Robert Dewar

1938 Neville Chamberlain, Harry Lauder

1939 John White, Frederick Niven

1936 Prof. Adolphus A Jack (1868-1946)

Brought up at Irvine Academy, Adolphus Alfred Jack began his career as a government Inspector of Schools in the Irvine area and went on to become Professor of English Literature at Aberdeen University. His books included "Shelley, An Essay" (1904), "Essays on the Novel, as Illustrated by Scott and Miss Austen" (1897), "Thackeray" (1895), "The Angry Heart: A Domestic Drama" (1928), "A Commentary on the Poetry of Chaucer and Spenser" and "The Prince: A Play".

Letter of acceptance, written from Bohally, by Pitlochry, Perthshire, on April 8, 1936

Dear Sir,

Your letter followed me here where I have been in bed with a troublesome cough. Otherwise I should have acknowledged sooner the very welcome honour you have done me. It is a great pleasure to me to be associated in any way with Irvine, my father's and my grandfather's town, though I doubt if either was actually from there. I myself spent many happy holidays in Irvine when I was a small boy.

Faithfully and gratefully yours

A. A. Jack.

The engraving at the head of your Club paper of the statue is astonishingly neat. I did not know that steel engraving could be done so well in modern days.

1936: Sir Harry McGowan (1874-1961)

Harry McGowan, 1st Baron McGowan, was a prominent British industrialist who served as Chairman of Imperial Chemical Industries (ICI) for 20 years, from 1930 to 1950.

Letter of acceptance, written from 40, Park Street, London, W.1, on 5th April 1936

Dear Mr Hall,

I am deeply grateful for the great honour conferred on me by the Irvine Burns Club in electing me as one of their Honorary Members. I am particularly pleased when I note the qualifications of such membership. I am not infrequently in the vicinity of Irvine, and will be delighted to call on you and inspect the possessions of the Club. It is somewhat extraordinary the hold that our National Poet still has on the world, but a moment's reflection shews the reason of this, namely that he in his works stands for Humanity, and that is common to every race.

With renewed appreciation,
Yours sincerely, H McGowan

Notes:

('shews' is an older spelling of 'shows')

1937 Professor Robert Dewar (...)

We know little about Professor Dewar, but a University of Reading archive records that he was appointed Professor of English Literature in 1912 (a parallel position to Edith Morley's Professor of English Language). He certainly fought in the 1914-18 War and the Annual Report of 1918-19 noted his return to the College in February 1919. He was Editor of "Robert Burns, Poetry and Prose" (Oxford, 1929). When nominated as an Honorary Member, possibly prompted by his visit to Irvine to see the MSS (see his letter), Professor Dewar was Dean of the Faculty of Letters (1934-1948).

Letter of acceptance, written from 9 Maitland Road, Reading, on 23 Jan., 1937

Dear Mr Stewart,

I have been prevented till now from answering your letter of the 12th; but it would be cruel if I didn't try to get something sent in time for the 25th and the Club meeting that day. I hope this does reach you by Monday morning at latest.

It is difficult to say what I felt on reading that the Club wished to do me the honour of electing me as Honorary Member. I am still not able to see why they should do this thing; for I am sure I have not deserved the honour. It can only be another piece of that kindness, which I sampled just over a year ago, when Mr Hogg allowed me to see the Burns MSS. belonging to the Club. I have been to more places than one of late years on a similar errand; but nowhere, I can say honestly, have I felt myself so welcome and so immediately (as it were) among friends, as I found myself in Irvine. I promised myself, on leaving, that I'd see more of Mr Hogg someday; and it was a shock I still remember, when I heard he had died not many weeks after I spoke with him & found him a man well worth knowing. If only for the sake of the kindness Mr Hogg showed me in the Club's name, I should wish - whatever my unfitness - to accept the honour offered me. And I do so with very great pleasure indeed; and ask you to thank the Club, on my behalf, for thinking me worthy of joining their ranks. I can only hope that I shall prove worthy with time.

Yours sincerely,
Robert Dewar

Notes:

This letter contains a warm recollection of the hospitality shown by the Club, in the person of Hon Secy James Hogg, who had died in 1936 aged 59.

1938 Neville Chamberlain (1869-1950)

Arthur Neville Chamberlain served as Britain's Prime Minister from 1937 to 1940, so his nomination as an Honorary Member reflects that role. The following year proved that most remembered in history, when he sought to achieve peace with Adolf Hitler, resulting in the Munich Agreement of September 1938. Although the peace policy, popular with the British public at the time, ultimately failed, Chamberlain succeeded in giving time for Britain to prepare for war the following year.

Letter of acceptance, written from 10 Downing Street, Whitehall, on Feb. 8, 1938

Dear Sir,

I have your letter of the 31st ult. informing me that I have been elected an Honorary Member of the Irvine Burns Club; and I should be glad if you will convey to the members my appreciation of this compliment.

If I should at any time be visiting Irvine I shall look forward with pleasure to seeing your interesting relics of the poet.

I am

Yours sincerely

Neville Chamberlain

Notes:

The letter is handwritten, on official notepaper, to the Hon. Secy Robert Stewart.

1938 Sir Harry Lauder (1871-1950)

Knighted in 1919, Sir Harry Lauder was described by Sir Winston Churchill as "Scotland's greatest ever ambassador". He made his first public appearance, singing, at a variety concert at Oddfellows' Hall in Arbroath when he was 13 years old, winning first prize for the night (a watch!). In 1884, the family moved to Hamilton and Harry gained employment at Eddlewood Colliery at ten shillings per week, staying there for ten years. He often sang to the miners, receiving his first ever fee for singing (5/-) at Larkhall.

He turned professional in 1894, reaching the Charing Cross Music Hall in London in 1900, and being top of the bill in 1912 at Britain's first ever Royal Command Performance, in front of King George V. At one point, he was the highest paid performer in the world. During WW1, he promoted recruitment into the services and, after the death of his son in 1916, led successful charity fund-raising efforts; his knighthood was in recognition of his war efforts.

Si Harry had strong family connections with Australia. In South Africa, over 20,000 people lined the streets for his arrival in Cape Town, and his reception in Johannesburg was equally amazing.

The Wellwood collection includes a pen given to Ian Whyte by Sir Harry, inscribed "Ian Whyte, from Sir Harry Lauder, for Service Rendered".

Letter of acceptance, written from Lauder Ha', Strathaven, on Feb 7, 1938, to Hon. Secy Robert Stewart

Dear Mr Stewart,

Please let me thank you for your letter of Jan 31st and how much I appreciate your Club electing me an Honorary Member, and when the bonny days come roon again you may expect me to gie ye a ca'.

Please convey my thanks to the "Irvine Burns Club".

Yours sincerely

Harry Lauder

1939 John White (1867-1951)

Born in Kilwinning, John White was one of the most influential figures in the Church of Scotland during the early decades of the 20th Century. Initially at Shettleston, then at South Leith, he became minister at Barony Church, Glasgow, in 1911 until his retirement in 1934. The high point of his ministry was serving as Moderator of the General Assembly in 1924-25, as the reunion of the Church of Scotland with the United Free Church of Scotland, an outcome which he had helped to achieve, was nearing its conclusion. His controversial report of 1923, entitled *The Menace of the Irish Race to our Scottish Nationality*, accused all members of the Catholic Church in Scotland of subverting Presbyterian values and of drunkenness, crime and financial imprudence. He promoted the Church Extension Scheme – which from 1932 onwards aimed to build new church buildings in new housing estates in Scotland's cities. He was appointed a Member of the Order of the Companions of Honour in the 1935 Birthday Honours.

Letter of acceptance, written from The Barony, 61 Partickhill Road, Glasgow W1, on 23rd January 1939, to Hon. Secy Robert Stewart:

Dear Mr Stewart,

To be elected an Honorary Member of the Irvine Burns Club is something which I deeply appreciate. I am proud of my Ayrshire connection, and have many happy memories of my years spent in Kilwinning and Irvine. I am therefore grateful to you for admitting me to a club which has such a long and interesting history, and has done much to conserve the precious writings of Scotia's famous son. I look forward to examine these when I visit Irvine. On Wednesday I shall join with you in 'The Immortal Memory' - "Long life to thy fame and peace to thy soul, Rob Burns", said Sir Walter Scott: so say all.

Yours very sincerely;

John White

1939 Frederick Niven (1878-1944)

Born to Scottish parents in Valparaiso, Chile, Frederick John Niven was taken to Glasgow at age five and educated in Hutcheson's Grammar School and the Glasgow School of Art. In his late teens he was sent to visit friends in the Okanagan Valley, British Columbia, as a treatment for a lung ailment. He spent what he described as 'a year or two' travelling in

Canada and taking odd jobs, an experience that drew him into journalism on his return to Scotland. In 1908 he began his career as a novelist with the publication of "The lost cabin mine", one of many adventure stories he set in the Canadian West. Married in 1911, he spent several months in 1912 and 1913 travelling as a freelance writer in Canada. In 1920 he and his wife immigrated to Canada, living near Nelson, B.C., and in Vancouver until Niven's death.

Before emigrating, Niven had established himself as a minor but promising novelist in Britain. His writing was stimulated by his Canadian travel, and more than half of his early publications include New World settings, some Canadian, some in an indeterminate 'West': two volumes of short stories, "Above your heads" (1911) and "Sage-brush stories" (1917); a book of poems, "Maple-leaf songs" (1917); a fictionalized personal experience, "The S.S. Glory" (1915); and four novels: "The lost cabin mine" (1908), "Hands up!" (1913), "Cinderella of Skookum Creek" (1916), and "Penny Scot's treasure" (1919). Some of these books were adventure romances written 'to keep the wolf from the wife', to use Niven's phrase. His more realistic novels had Old World settings and, like "A wilderness of monkeys" (1911), treated themes of isolation, especially that of the artist championing spiritual values in a materialistic society.

After settling in Canada, Niven used Old World settings for eleven of seventeen remaining novels. He used the New World for one volume of poetry, "A lover of the land and other poems" (1925); one fictionalized personal experience, "Wild honey" (1927); and six novels: "The wolfer" (1923), "Treasure trail" (1923), "The flying years" (1935), "Mine inheritance" (1940), "Brothers-in-arms" (1942), and "The transplanted" (1944). The later novels include Niven's chief contribution to Canadian literature: "Mine inheritance" centres on the struggle to establish the Selkirk Settlement amid the fur-trade wars on the Red River. "The flying years" is a panoramic narrative extending from the 1850s to the 1920s. Its protagonist makes the Prairies his home without altogether relinquishing Scotland as that 'country of the mind' from which the Highland Clearances had driven him. "The transplanted" is set in a settlement in the lumbering, mining, and ranching area of inland British Columbia.

Niven also published a good deal of non-fiction, including "Canada West" (1930), "Colour in the Canadian Rockies" (1937), with illustrations by Walter J. Phillips and "Coloured spectacles" (1938), autobiographical reflections. Niven remains important to Canadian literature because he brought to bear on Western experience a developed writing talent influenced by British literary and cultural traditions. He became an immigrant, as distinct from a colonial writer—recreating the West in a Canadian perspective.

Letter of acceptance, written from Willow Point, Nelson, British Columbia, on February 8th 1939, to Hon. Secy Robert Stewart

Dear Mr Stewart,

Your letter of January fourteenth has just arrived here. I am deeply touched by the honour done me by the Irvine Burns Club in electing me an honorary member. I am often, in spirit, in Irvine. Some of my earliest memories are of the Royal Burgh. I can still recall my first visit. When I was very small indeed I was taken there by my mother who was on a sentimental visit after some years in South America, where I was born. We went to see my great-aunts, Janet and Margaret Barclay. They are mentioned, by the way, in Thomas Hughes' "Menoir of Daniel Macmillan", published in 1883, page 23. My last visit to Irvine was in 1911, shortly after my marriage, in Glasgow. My wife and I tramped over from

Stewarton where we were staying a night with an old friend. I hope to come back with her again some day and on that occasion would like to see - if still it is there, of course! - my grandfather Barclay's name on the wall of the Academy.

I have had touch, during the years, with the loved old place, because of communications from the late Provost R M Hogg and Mr James Hogg, John N Hall, Mr and Mrs Lumsden, whose Christmas cards let me know I am remembered, and Mrs Dickie also, in a charming letter, told me that she possessed a pair of stockings of thread and lacework and coloured silks given to her by one of my great-aunts.

I know you have a copy of my "A Tale that is Told" in the Club library. Because of references to Irvine in it I sent a copy to Provost Hogg, unaware that he had gone, and his brother - Mr James Hogg - passed it on to the Irvine Burns Club. In case you have not a copy of my latest book - "Coloured Spectacles" - I am sending you one now because of a memory of Irvine in it. See pages 65 to 69.

Please convey my thanks to the members of the Irvine Burns Club. To be remembered in Irvine, the old home of my mother's people, and that I often remember, means much to me.

Yours very sincerely,
Frederick Niven

Notes:

Thomas Hughes (1822-1896) was the author of "Tom Brown's Schooldays". His "Memoir of Daniel Macmillan" (grandfather of PM Harold Macmillan), who lived in Irvine as a boy, may have appeared in 1882.

His fond yet vibrant description of Irvine ("a certain little seaport on the Clyde") in the 1890s (in "Coloured Spectacles", published 1938, pages 65-69), is available online (courtesy of Project Gutenberg, 2012) at

<http://www.gutenberg.ca/ebooks/nivenf-colouredspectacles/nivenf-colouredspectacles-00-h.html>