

Honorary members of 1950 – 1953

1950 A B McDonald, Lord John Boyd Orr

1951 Sir Hector Hetherington

1952 Prof. David Daiches, The Duke of Edinburgh

1953 Sir Alexander Fleming, Sir James Fergusson, Col Bernard Fergusson

1950 A B McDonald (...)

A B McDonald, a native of Irvine, emigrated and had a successful career in South Africa. In 1929, he funded the memorial at Knadgerhill to the stand-off, in 1297 in the First War of Independence, between the Scottish and English armies, when the Scots signed what was titled the "Capitulations of Irvine", sometimes referred to as the Treaty of Irvine. On his behalf, Irvine Burns Club presented the memorial to the burgh.

In 1938, A B McDonald laid the foundation stone for the Pinelands Presbyterian Church (enlarged in 1959), Cape Town. Pinelands is a 'garden city' suburb; he lived in the district of Kenilworth, a short distance to the south.

In 1949, in acknowledgement of his benefactions to the town and to the academy, he received the freedom of the Royal Burgh of Irvine, prompting this nomination.

Letter of acceptance, written from the Cape Times Building, St George's Street, Cape Town, on 6 March, 1950, addressed to President Robert Whyte

Dear Mr Whyte,

In your kind letter of 12 January, you advised me of the decision of the Irvine Burns Club, to elect me an honorary member. This is most interesting and unexpected, and in accepting I should like to express my sincere appreciation of this great honour. It is assuredly a high privilege to be a member of this famous Club, whose foundation goes back to such early times. It would be a matter of great pride to the present members to know that the founders of the Club so early and so wholeheartedly recognised the merits of the Poet whose understanding and interpretation of the life of the common man have been an inspiration and stimulus to the folk of his own time, and to generations then unborn.

I note with great interest the priceless treasures possessed by the Club, and I shall hope one day to have an opportunity of seeing them.

The list of distinguished men who have in the past been Honorary members of the Club, has impressed me greatly and I feel highly honoured in being admitted to this company.

In conclusion, I should like to wish the Club every success and prosperity in the future and I thank the members for admitting me into this distinguished brotherhood.

With best regards,

Yours sincerely,

A B McDonald

Notes:

The headed notepaper bears A B McDonald's name printed, but with no other detail.

1950 Lord John Boyd Orr (1880-1971)

John Boyd Orr, 1st Baron Boyd-Orr, CH, DSO, MC, FRS, FRSE (born in Kilmaurs), styled Sir John Boyd Orr from 1935 to 1949, was a Scottish teacher, medical doctor, biologist, nutritional physiologist, politician, businessman and farmer who was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize for his scientific research into nutrition and his work as the first Director-General of the United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO). In 1927, Boyd Orr proved the value of milk being supplied to school children, which led to free school milk provision in the UK. In October 1945, Orr was elected Rector of the University of Glasgow after standing as an Independent Progressive candidate. He was elected as an independent Member of Parliament (MP) for the Combined Scottish Universities in a by-election in April 1945, and kept his seat at the general election shortly after. He resigned in 1946.

He was nominated following being awarded the Nobel Peace Prize (he donated the entire financial award to organizations devoted to world peace and a united world government) and being elevated to the peerage (both in 1949).

Letter of acceptance, written from Brechin, Angus, on 23rd Jan'y 1950, addressed to Robert Whyte, President

Dear Mr Whyte,

Will you please thank the members of the Club for the great honour they have done to me in adding my name to the list of celebrities who have been elected Honorary Members of the Irvine Burns Club.

I have much pleasure in accepting your invitation to call and see the valuable original manuscripts the next time I am in the neighbourhood of Irvine.

Yours sincerely

Boyd Orr of Brechin

1951 Sir Hector Hetherington (1888-1965)

Sir Hector James Wright Hetherington, a Scottish philosopher, became Professor of Logic and Philosophy at University College Cardiff in 1915, moved to the post of Professor of Philosophy and Principal of University College Exeter in 1920, returned to Glasgow as Professor of Moral Philosophy in 1924, became Vice-Chancellor of the University of Liverpool in 1927, and returned to Glasgow again in 1936 as Principal and Vice-Chancellor of the University of Glasgow until 1961.

He travelled widely, particularly in the United States and Canada, to promote links between British Universities and those in other countries, and received honorary degrees from 13 universities in the UK and North America.

Letter of acceptance, written from The University, Glasgow, W2, on Jan. 11, 1951, to Club President A M Skinner

Dear Sir,

I am much obliged by your letter of Jan. 9th conveying the friendly decision of the Club to elect me to Honorary Membership. It is pleasant to belong to a Society which for 125

years has fulfilled the purpose and pious duty of celebrating the special association of Ayrshire with the greatest of our Scottish poets.

With warm thanks and all good wishes for the prosperity of the Club.

Yours sincerely

Hector Hetherington

Notes:

The letter is on headed notepaper also bearing the text "From The Principal, Sir Hector Hetherington".

1952 Prof. David Daiches (1912-2005)

David Daiches was a Scottish literary historian and literary critic, scholar and writer. He wrote extensively on English literature, Scottish literature and Scottish culture. His first published work was *The Place of Meaning in Poetry*, published in 1935. He was a prolific writer, producing works on English literature, Scottish literature, literary history and criticism as well as the broader role of literature in society and culture.

His book on 'Robert Burns' appeared in 1951, so would be the prompt for his nomination as an honorary member. Gerry Carruthers, Director, Centre for Robert Burns Studies, University of Glasgow has written: 'In the later twentieth century Robert Burns was sorely in need of commentators to provide fuller analysis of a figure whose cultural reputation too often overshadowed his literary achievement. The brilliance of David Daiches as a literary critic filled much of the gap. His readings are a cornerstone of modern Burns studies.'

In 1951, after spells at Chicago and Cornell Universities, he had returned to Cambridge as a Lecturer in English, hence the address from which he replied.

In 1971, he published 'Robert Burns and his World'. His other published works included books and articles on James Boswell, Shakespeare, Robert Louis Stevenson, Andrew Fletcher of Saltoun, Sir Walter Scott and Virginia Woolf.

Letter of acceptance, written from 53E Bateman Street, Cambridge, on 26 January, 1952, to President Archibald Green

Dear Mr Green,

Your letter of 17th January has been forwarded to me here from Cornell. (I left Cornell last year to return permanently to Britain, and I am now lecturing at Cambridge.) I am honoured indeed to have been elected an Honorary Member of the Irvine Burns Club, of whose history and reputation I am aware, and I should like you to convey to your members my gratitude for the distinction they have bestowed on me and my sense of pride at being associated with Irvine and with the Burns tradition in this way.

I hope to be in Scotland fairly frequently now that I am back on this side of the Atlantic, and though my family ties are with the East & the North East rather than the South West it is not unlikely that I shall find myself in the neighbourhood of Irvine: if I do, I shall certainly take advantage of your kind invitation to inspect the Irvine Burns Club's possessions.

Yours sincerely,

David Daiches

1952 The Duke of Edinburgh (1921-2021)

At the death, in April 2021, of the Duke of Edinburgh, very many articles and tributes reflected the extraordinary and unique contribution of the Queen's consort to the well-being of the country, so here we comment on only a few details of his life and activities, with the added intention of putting into context his nomination as a Honorary Member of Irvine Burns Club. Although a prince of Greece and Denmark, he abandoned those titles before his marriage, and did not become the British Prince Philip until 1957.

Born in Corfu, of a family descended from Danish aristocracy and elected to the Greek throne in 1863, his family were forced into exile in 1922 and settled in Paris. In 1934, he started at Gordonstoun, where he became the captain of both the hockey and cricket teams, and became Head Boy, then entered the Royal Naval College at Dartmouth, where he graduated top of his class. Looking back, he said, "My mother was ill, my sisters were married, my father was in the south of France. I just had to get on with it." As a teenager, he was mentioned in dispatches for his heroism during the battle of Crete in 1941. In 1943, when only 22 years old, his quick thinking and inventiveness saved the lives of his crewmates on HMS Wallace. In 1951 he was the Commander of the frigate HMS Magpie.

Prince Philip met Princess Elizabeth in 1939, when she was 13 and he was 18. They married in 1947 (he was created Duke of Edinburgh shortly beforehand), and by 1952 had their first two children, Prince Charles and Princess Anne. When the Duke was approached by Irvine Burns Club in January 1952, King George VI was known to be seriously ill - Princess Elizabeth became Queen only ten days after the Duke's Private Secretary sent the letter below.

Prince Philip, on looking back, at age 90, on life as consort to the Queen, said: "It was trial and error. There was no precedent. If I asked somebody 'What do you expect me to do?' they all looked blank. They had no idea. Nobody had much idea." He therefore filled his role in his own way, as a supportive husband, as a loving father, as a royal representative with a keen interest in engineering, as the founder (in 1946) of the Duke of Edinburgh Award Scheme, as an active sportsman, and as a no-nonsense and upright figure, who enjoyed provoking a laugh and chatting with people, right up to his final months. His lifelong relationship with the Commonwealth, begun in 1949 when he lived in Malta as a naval officer, led to visiting 50 Commonwealth countries over 72 years, sometimes with the Queen, but almost 300 times without her - an aspect of his role which he much enjoyed.

The Queen, at their Golden Wedding (1997) said: "I, and his whole family, and this and many other countries, owe him a debt greater than he would ever claim or we shall ever know".

Letter of acceptance, written from Clarence House, St James's, on 28th January, 1952, to President Archibald Green

Dear Mr Green

The Duke of Edinburgh has asked me to say that he has great pleasure in accepting the invitation of the Irvine Burns Club to become an Honorary Member,

Yours sincerely

Michael Parker

Private Secretary to The Duke of Edinburgh

Notes: The letter is typed, except for the opening and closing lines written by the Duke's Private Secretary.

1953 Sir Alexander Fleming (1881-1955)

Born near Darvel, Alexander Fleming followed his elder brother Tom into the profession of physician, and qualified with an MBSS degree from St Mary's Hospital Medical School (now part of Imperial College, London) with distinction in 1906. In World War I he served in the Royal Army Medical School and was mentioned in dispatches. On return, he returned to St Mary's Hospital, and was elected Professor of Bacteriology of the University of London in 1928. That year is the year, following previous years of research, of his discovery of penicillin, on Sept. 28th, the first true antibiotic. In 1944, he was knighted for his scientific achievements.

He was awarded the Nobel Prize in Medicine in 1945 and received awards from many countries, including the United States of America, France, Greece and Spain.

Letter of acceptance, written from The Wright-Fleming Institute of Microbiology, St Mary's Hospital Medical School, Paddington, London, W.2, on Jan 14, 53, to 1953 Club President William G Guild

Dear Mr Guild,

I received your letter this morning telling me that I had been elected an honorary member of the Irvine Burns Club.

It is indeed a great honour to appear in the same list with Walter Scott, Garibaldi, Gladstone, Lord Kelvin, and the others you mention in your letter.

I have been made an honorary member of many Academies, societies, and clubs but none of them has given me the intense pleasure that has my election to your club in my native county dedicated to the master poet that we all revere.

I thank you most sincerely

Yours faithfully

Alexander Fleming

Notes:

Sir Walter Scott was nominated, but either did not confirm acceptance or, more likely, his letter is no longer extant, whereas Col. Walter Scott, the New York philanthropist and Burns enthusiast, accepted, and Gladstone seems not to have been nominated.

1953 Sir James Fergusson (1904-1973)

A grandson of David Boyle, the 7th Earl of Glasgow, Sir James Fergusson was a Scottish aristocrat, broadcaster, journalist and historian. He initially worked for 'Blackwood's Magazine' in Edinburgh, then in 1934 joined BBC Scotland and gave commentary on Nazi propaganda during World War II. From 1945, he was leader writer for the 'Glasgow Herald' and from 1947 appeared on 'Round Britain Quiz' with Jack House.

At the time of his nomination, he was official Keeper of the Records of Scotland (1949-1969). On the death of his father in 1951, he became 8th Baronet of Kilkerran. Kilkerran Estate lies

thirteen miles south-east of Ayr and has been home to the Fergusson family since Fergus Fergusson obtained a charter from Robert the Bruce in the early 1300s, confirming that the lands at Kilkerran were his.

Later, in 1968, he was elected a Fellow of the Royal Society of Edinburgh. His younger brother, Col. Bernard Fergusson, was nominated in the same year (see the following entry).

Letter of acceptance, written from the New Club, Edinburgh, on 15 January 1953:

Dear Sir,

I thank you for your letter of the 13th, and beg you to express to the members of the Irvine Burns Club my grateful appreciation of the honour they have done me in electing me an honorary member of their Club.

Yours faithfully
James Fergusson
of Kilkerran

1953 Col Bernard Fergusson (1911-1980)

Brigadier Bernard Edward Fergusson, Baron Ballantrae, KT, GCMG, GCVO, DSO, OBE, educated at Eton and Sandhurst, commanded the 16th Infantry Brigade throughout the Chindit operations of 1944 before becoming Director of Combined Operations from 1945 to 1946. He was a grandson of David Boyle, the 7th Earl of Glasgow, and the younger brother of Sir James Ferguson, also nominated in the year 1953 (see previous entry).

He gained world fame for his daring exploits with the Chindits. In the year prior to his nomination he had been promoted to the rank of colonel. In 1943, he published "Beyond the Chindwin – an account of Number Five column of the Wingate Expedition into Burma 1943" – this account of a remarkable expedition still stands as a military classic, written in just 12 days, only a year after the end of the story that it tells. In 1962, he published a "Special Edition for Young Readers".

In 1962, he was appointed Governor General of New Zealand (a position his father Sir Charles Fergusson had held many years previously) and in 1972 was created a life peer, as Lord Ballantrae.

Letter of acceptance, written from 137, Boulevard de le Reine, Versailles, Seine-et-Oise, France, on 19 January 1953:

Gentlemen:-

I was delighted to receive this morning your letter telling me of the honour which the Irvine Burns Club has done me in electing me an Honorary Member. I am well acquainted with the long and distinguished history of your Club, and I have also happy links with Irvine: for though I am Carrick my mother is Kyle, and was brought up at Shewalton, not far away. And ever since I was a schoolboy I have been a devotee of Galt: even here during my sojourn in France six of his books are on a shelf three yards from my shoulder as I write this letter. I was once also privileged to speak at your drumhead service on the Moor, when Mr Wishart was still your minister. And my father had done the same before me.

So this is for me a very real honour, and I propose to indulge in exploiting the privilege of my membership the next time that Her Majesty's Service brings me home to my native country.

Please tell the members of your Club how grateful I am for the honour which they have conferred on me; and I am

Yours sincerely

Bernard Fergusson

Colonel

I bought two years ago the house of Auchairne, near Ballantrae, in the Stinchar Valley: so when my time comes to retire, I shall not be too remote from Irvine.

Notes:

A 'drumhead service' is one conducted in the field.

Rev. James Wishart was minister of the Wilson-Fullarton Church from 1902 to 1947.