

Honorary members of 1958 – 1959

**1958 Sir Compton Mackenzie, Lord Strathclyde, Harold Macmillan
1959 Lord Cameron, William Phillips, Lord Douglas of Kirtleside,
Sir Vivian E Fuchs, Norval Murray**

1958 Sir Compton Mackenzie (1883-1972)

Sir Edward Montague Compton Mackenzie was a Scottish writer of fiction, biography, histories and a memoir, as well as a cultural commentator, raconteur and lifelong Scottish nationalist (a co-founder in 1928 of the National Party of Scotland along with Hugh MacDiarmid, R. B. Cunningham Graham and John MacCormick). He was knighted in 1952.

He served with British intelligence in the Eastern Mediterranean during the First World War, later publishing four books on his experiences; he was head of the British secret service counter-espionage section in Athens in 1915-16. The third book, in 1932, identified 'C', gave organisational details and named other officers, leading to its author narrowly escaping jail and being fined £100 and the book being withdrawn from sale.

He published almost a hundred books on different subjects, including ten volumes of autobiography. Mackenzie is perhaps best known for two comic novels set in Scotland: *Whisky Galore* (1947) set in the Hebrides, and *The Monarch of the Glen* (1941) set in the Scottish Highlands - the sources of a successful film and a television series respectively.

Letter of acceptance, written from 31 Drummond Place, Edinburgh ,3, on January 16, '58

Dear Mr Phillips,

Your letter to tell me of the honour I have received from the Irvine Burns Club reaches me on the eve of my 75th birthday; I do not remember a birthday present which has given me greater pleasure.

Pray convey to the Club my deep appreciation of their gesture which has greatly moved me and made me very proud.

As it happened your letter arrived when a B.B.C. representative was recording an interview about Burns which will be broadcast in a programme the B.B.C. are doing on the 25th.

I could not resist mentioning my gratification and I was asked to express it to the tape-machine. So I hope I shall be allowed this public acknowledgement in the programme.

I shall certainly let you know when I have a chance to visit Irvine and I hope it will be during next spring or summer.

I also hope that you will be able to read my handwriting. I have tried hard to write legibly.

Once more assuring you of my warm awareness of the great compliment the Club have paid me and with renewed thanks,

I am

yours most truly

Compton Mackenzie

1958 Lord Strathclyde (1891-1985)

Thomas Dunlop Galbraith was a Scottish Unionist politician, the MP for Glasgow Pollock from 1940 to 1955. He served as Minister of State for Scotland from 1955 to 1958, which would be the prompt for his nomination as an Honorary Member. He served as Chairman of the North of Scotland Hydro-Electric Board from the late 1950s until 1967.

His son was Tam Galbraith, the Scottish Unionist politician who served as the Member of Parliament for Glasgow Hillhead from 1948 until his death in 1982, the 33-year tenure making him Scotland's longest-serving MP.

Letter of acceptance, written from St. Andrew's House, Edinburgh, 1, on 24th January 1958

Dear Sir,

It was with great pleasure that I learnt from your letter of 15th January that at the Annual Meeting of the Irvine Burns Club, I had been elected an Honorary Member. This is indeed a great honour and one which I most deeply appreciate.

Will you please convey to your members my sincere thanks for the honour they have conferred upon me.

With best wishes to the Club and to all its members.

Yours sincerely, Strathclyde

Notes:

His letter, on official Secretary of State for Scotland paper, is otherwise handwritten.

1958 Harold Macmillan (1894-1986)

From his birth, in Chelsea, at the height of the Victorian Empire, Harold Macmillan was involved in the great events of the 20th century. But, as these notes relate to Irvine, we begin in Irvine.

As a child, the portraits of his grandfather Daniel and great-uncle Alexander, the founders (in 1843) of the Macmillan publishing firm, hung on his nursery wall. Daniel, born in Arran (his crofter father became a carter in Irvine), was apprenticed to bookseller and printer Maxwell Dick by the age of 11, beginning at 1/6 (8p) a week, and served in the bookshop for seven years (1824-31). (We think it likely that the link between Dick, a founder member of Irvine Burns Club, and Daniel Macmillan, both of enterprising character, was the catalyst for some of the honorary membership nominations of London literary figures.) On Daniel's early death aged 44, his two sons Maurice (Harold's father) and Frederick were brought up by their uncle Alexander. Sir Frederick accepted honorary membership of Irvine Burns Club in 1924.

The words of a 20-year-old Daniel, in 1833, had a profound effect on his grandson Harold (who read Daniel's biography while still a child): "I do not feel bound to follow in the footsteps of any of my relations. I am here to act for myself . . . the most important things must be done by myself alone". Harold warmed to his grandfather's charm and strength of character. Such was the influence of one who had spent early years on Arran and teenage years with an Irvine bookseller. Throughout his life, Harold Macmillan cherished the photographs of his grandfather and of the Arran croft where he was born.

Harold Macmillan's career is well documented elsewhere. In summary, he was educated at Eton, gained a First at Oxford, and served with distinction in the First World War (until wounded at the Somme, where, lying wounded in a trench until found, he continued the book he carried with him - Aeschylus' 'Prometheus' in Greek). In WWII he served in Government, for a time as Parliamentary Secretary to Minister of Supply Sir Andrew Duncan, Irvine Burns Club President in 1927. He served as MP for Stockton-on-Tees from 1924 until the Labour landslide of 1945, then, after a by-election, as MP for Bromley 1945-64. He served as Prime Minister from 1957, prompting this nomination, until 1963.

As a politician and statesman, Macmillan had great sympathy for the unfortunate. His book "The Middle Way" (1938) called for urgent action to provide, for all, a decent standard of living through a mixed system combining state ownership and private enterprise. After election as Conservative leader, he quoted Disraeli ("we must be conservative to conserve all that is good and radical to uproot all that is bad") and continued: "I trust that while I am your leader we will never be a party of any class or sectional interest". As Housing Minister in 1954, when an annual target of 300,000 new houses had been achieved, he said: "Housing is not a question of Conservatism or Socialism. It is a question of humanity." Contrary to popular belief, he did not boast "You've never had it so good" - his phrase "most of our people have never had it so good" was a premise to the prescient question "Is it too good to last? Can we control inflation? This is the problem of our time." His 1959 General Election success earned him the epithet 'Supermac'; in his diary three days later he wrote "the great thing is to keep the Tory party on modern and progressive lines" - he was no Edwardian throw-back. He tried to take the UK into the EEC, but had to suffer the 1963 veto of De Gaulle. To dealings with colleagues, he brought an informality, a disarming friendliness and an unassuming manner. His 6-volume autobiography was "imbued with insight and humour". He was created the 1st Earl of Stockton in 1984.

Letter of acceptance, written from 10 Downing Street, Whitehall, on Feb 27, 1958

My dear Sir,

I was very pleased to receive your letter of January 15th, on my return from my Commonwealth tour, informing me of my election as an Honorary Member of the Irvine Burns Club.

My grandfather, Daniel Macmillan, was bound apprentice to a bookseller in Irvine at the age of ten. I have therefore a family association with your ancient burgh.

I am indeed happy to join that distinguished company whose letters are preserved by the Club, and I hope at some future date to avail myself of your kind invitation to see that collection & the Burns relics.

My greetings to all my fellow members. "Plenty be your fa"

Yours very truly

Harold Macmillan

Notes:

His letter is on official Prime Minister paper, but is otherwise handwritten.

The bookseller was Maxwell Dick, the year 1823 or 1824, and his apprentice wage was 1s 6d (7½p) per week, with a 1s (0.05) rise each year for the seven years he worked there.

The quote is from the last lines of "To The Guidwife of Wauchope House", where the word "fa" means "lot" as in "fate", so means: "May you always have plenty".

1959 Lord Cameron (1900-1996)

John Cameron, educated in Edinburgh, rose to King's Counsel rank in 1936. After war service (Dunkirk and D-Day landings) he was made Sheriff of Inverness and returned to Edinburgh in 1948 to serve as Dean of the Faculty of Advocates, becoming a Law Lord in 1955.

Letter of acceptance, written from Parliament House, Edinburgh, 1, on 14 Jan'y '59

Dear Mr Phillips

I was most surprised – and pleasantly so – to receive your very kind letter. I cannot with any modesty claim to be qualified in any sense for honorary membership of the Irvine Burns Club, but it is a very great honour to have been selected, and in such distinguished company. I fully realize the extent of the honour which you so gracefully offer and which I am most delighted to accept. It is all the more an honour, I feel, that this should come in a year of such particular note and from a club of such antiquity and distinction. I would be very grateful if you would convey to all your colleagues my humble acceptance of this honourable distinction and my deep appreciation of what they have done. I hope that it will not be long before I have not only an opportunity of seeing your treasures but also of thanking you personally.

Yours sincerely

John Cameron

Notes:

His letter is on official Court of Session paper, but is otherwise handwritten.

The year is "of particular note" as being the bicentenary year of the birth of Robert Burns.

1959 William Phillips (?1908-1968)

Bill Phillips was Honorary Secretary of Irvine Burns Club for twenty-two years (1946 to 1968), having served as President in 1946. A teacher of English and History at Irvine Royal Academy, he moved to Marr College as Depute Rector. He contributed to the Third Statistical Account of Scotland of 1947.

In 1959, he had served twelve years as Secretary, but continued for almost another ten years until his death, which, in 1968, came as a shock to his friends in Irvine.

Letter of acceptance, written from Marr College, Troon, on 23rd January, 1959

Dear Dr Taylor,

It is with great pleasure that I acknowledge my election as an Honorary Member of the Club.

Such an honour is neither given nor accepted lightly and I know that this decision is in recognition of services rendered to the Club in my capacity of Honorary Secretary for the past twelve years.

These services I give willingly and hope to continue to do so for some time yet.

Please convey to the Members my deepest thanks for this compliment which I appreciate very much indeed.

Yours very sincerely
William Phillips

Notes:

His letter, on official Marr College paper, is otherwise handwritten.

1959 Lord Douglas of Kirtleside (1893-1969)

William Sholto Douglas joined the Royal Field Artillery at the outbreak of the First World War, then transferred to the Royal Flying Corps for observer training and later qualified as a fighter pilot. He eventually became a squadron commander and on one occasion duelled with Hermann Goering. During the First World War Douglas won both the Military Cross (1916) and the Distinguished Flying Cross (1917).

After the war Douglas became chief test pilot for the Handley Page Company before joining the Royal Air Force in 1920. He later became an RAF instructor at the Imperial Defence College. In 1936 Douglas was appointed as director of staff studies in the Air Ministry. Two years later he was promoted to Vice Marshal and became assistant chief of air staff with responsibility for training and purchasing new equipment.

During the Battle of Britain Douglas was highly critical of the strategy promoted by the head of Fighter Command, Hugh Dowding and Vice Marshal Keith Park, the commander of No. 11 Fighter Group. Douglas, supported by Trafford Leigh-Mallory and Douglas Bader, argued that RAF fighters should be sent out to meet the German planes before they reached Britain. Air Chief Marshal Charles Portal, the new chief of the air staff, agreed with Douglas and in November 1941, he removed Keith Park and Hugh Dowding from their posts. Douglas had the added satisfaction of taking over from Dowding as head of Fighter Command.

Douglas now developed what became known as the Big Wing strategy. This involved large formations of fighter aircraft deployed in mass sweeps against the Luftwaffe over the English Channel and northern Europe, and RAF pilots were able to bring down a large number of German planes. In 1942 Douglas was sent to Egypt, and in the following year was appointed Commander in Chief of the RAF in the Middle East. In 1944 Douglas was Commander in Chief of Coastal Command during the invasion of Normandy, where his main objective was to clear the English Channel of German naval opposition.

After the Second World War Douglas became Commander in Chief and Military Governor of the British Occupation Zone in Germany and in January 1946 was knighted and promoted to marshal of the RAF. He retired from active duty in 1948 and was awarded a peerage as 1st Baron Douglas of Kirtleside. Douglas served as chairman of British European Airways (1949-64) and later wrote two volumes of memoirs, *Years of Combat* (1963) and *Years of Command* (1966), before he died on 29th October, 1969.

(information from 'The Douglas Archive')

Letter of acceptance, written from British European Airways, Keyline House, Ruislip, Middx, on January 25th 1959

Dear Mr Phillips,

Thank you very much for your letter of 8th January. I am indeed honoured to have been elected an Honorary Member of the Irvine Burns Club and am of course delighted to accept that honour.

I shall look forward to visiting Irvine and inspecting your interesting manuscripts of our great national poet.

I am sorry not to have answered your letter before but I have been away travelling, mostly in Spain.

yours sincerely -

Douglas of Kirtleside

Marshal of the R.A.F.

Notes:

His letter is handwritten on BEA Chairman's Room notepaper, to Mr Phillips, Hon. Secy.

1959 Sir Vivian E Fuchs (1908-1999)

Sir Vivian Ernest Fuchs FRS was an English scientist-explorer and expedition organizer. He led the Commonwealth Trans-Antarctic Expedition which reached the South Pole overland in 1958, this being the prompt for his nomination. He was knighted in 1958.

His first expedition was to Greenland in 1929. In 1930 he travelled with a Cambridge University expedition to study the geology of East African lakes. He then joined Louis Leakey on an expedition to Tanzania.

Starting on 24 November 1957, the Trans-Antarctic Expedition took 100 days for the 2,158 miles, ending on 2 March 1958. Planning had begun in 1953.

Letter of acceptance, written from The Trans-Antarctic Expedition, 64, Victoria Street, London, on 2nd February 1959:

Dear Mr Phillips,

I write to say how honoured I am to hear that the Irvine Burns Club has elected me an honorary member. As I have been away in Amsterdam and elsewhere I am afraid that this acknowledgement is somewhat overdue for which I apologise. I would have wished to write on the occasion of the great man's recent anniversary, but I was delighted to see the universal and appreciative notices throughout the press.

Please convey my great appreciation of the honour to the Club.

Yours sincerely,

V E Fuchs

Notes:

His letter is handwritten on Trans-Antarctic Expedition notepaper, to Mr Phillips, Hon. Secy.. The year 1959 was of course the bicentenary of the Bard's birth.

1959 J Norval Murray (1894-1977)

John Norval Murray ('JNM3') was an Irvine solicitor in the practice of Murray, Gillies & Wilson and served as Irvine Burns Club President in 1934. His father, J Norval Murray ('JNM2'), the solicitor who had set up the firm of Murray, Gillies & Wilson in 1906, had served as President in 1900. The firm merged with another firm in 2022 so the name no longer exists.

The Newcastle solicitor John Norval Murray ('JNM5') is his grandson, making three generations (after a short interlude) in that profession – he has commented (2024) that his late father would be delighted that his father, an 'enthusiastic supporter of the Burns Club', is remembered in this way.

Norval Murray served as Clerk to the Incorporated Trades 1943-1954, and was an elder at Irvine Parish Church for 40 years. It is possible that his nomination resulted from his custody of some Irvine Burns Club records in his law premises.

Letter of acceptance, written from Woodlands, Irvine, on 15th January, 1959 to Hon. Secy William Phillips:

Dear Mr Phillips,

I have to thank you for your letter of 8th inst. informing me that I have been elected an Honorary Member of Irvine Burns Club. This is indeed a great honour and one which I deeply appreciate.

I have a keen sense of pride in my long association with the Club and count myself fortunate in having been privileged to give some small service to it.

Yours faithfully

N Murray