

Honorary members of 1974 – 1976

1974 Winifred Ewing, Wendy Wood

1975 David Murison, Alex. MacMillan

**1976 Nigel Tranter, Prof. Ian A Gordon,
Prof. G Ross Roy, Dr Robert B Taylor**

1974 Winifred Ewing (1929-2023)

A lawyer, Winnie Ewing served as Secretary of the Glasgow Bar Association from 1962 to 1967. She came to national prominence when she won the Hamilton by-election for the Scottish National Party in 1967 – her husband and children accompanied her on the journey to Westminster, where she arrived at Parliament in a Scottish-built Hillman Imp and was greeted by a crowd and a pipe band. After losing the seat in the 1970 General Election, she won Moray & Nairn in 1974 (two months after the acceptance letter below), losing it in 1979, and was then elected to the European Parliament, representing the Highlands and Islands until 1999. She served as President of the SNP from 1987 to 2005.

Letter of acceptance, written from 52 Queen's Drive, Glasgow, on 8/1/74 to Hon. Secretary Andrew Hood

Dear Mr Hood,

It is with great pride I accept the honour of Irvine Burns Club honorary membership. My Father was a life long student of Robert Burns and brought me up on the simple philosophy based on Burns writings:

"Never think any one is better than you, and never think that you are better than any man who lives."

Burns season is upon us again. I shall be speaking at two suppers in Elgin and Llanbryde.

Burns of course also has a lot to do with my life long fight for Freedom. Thank you for the honour.

Yours for Scotland

Winifred Ewing.

Notes:

Her letter is on the headed paper of the Scottish National Party Prospective Parliamentary Candidate for Moray and Nairn.

1974 Wendy Wood (1892-1981)

Wendy Wood (born Gwendoline Emily Meachum) was a prominent Scottish patriot with a flair for campaigning and drawing attention to many causes. Her fame, as the journalist, Hugh Cochrane, would observe, had spread as far as America. If there was a fiery cross, he

said, she wasn't usually far away: "She was mixed up with nearly every Scottish protest that came along, even getting guilt or praise by association when she was not involved". She once said: "Nothing in the world has ever been gained without fanaticism."

Born to Scottish parents in Kent, she lived as a child in South Africa during the Boer War, went to school in England, discovered a passion for art and was a supporter of the suffragettes. Married at 19 and living in Ayr, a trip round Scotland prompted her interest in nationalism. After divorce in 1927, she adopted her mother's maiden name, Wood. In 1931 she founded Scottish Watch to encourage young people to learn about Scottish culture. She formed the Scottish Patriots in 1949, an organisation dedicated to cultural nationalism. She pressured the Post Office to issue Robert Burns stamps in 1966 and got the Elizabeth II motif removed from post boxes. Other causes she supported included an anti-conscription league in 1933, the conditions suffered by women prisoners, Indian independence and Iceland's interests in the Cod Wars in the 1970s.

Letter of acceptance, written from 31 Howard Place, Edinburgh, on 9/1/74 to Hon. Secretary Andrew Hood

Dear Andrew Hood,

(Please excuse me thus addressing you, but the 'Mr' means nothing, lacking individuality)

I am indeed honoured to be proposed as an Honorary Member of the Irvine Burns Club, with its fine and ancient tradition. It seems also to be un-usually original in its processes, something much more than just holding a Supper once a year!

The Club's stated reason for offering me this great honour is very precious to me, and it is difficult to find words to express my humble appreciation.

I hope, later in the year, to make a special journey to Irvine in order to visit the Club and so be able to verbally express my gratitude.

Yours sincerely,
Wendy Wood

They say 'it's love that makes the World go round', but it is Rabbie's lovability that has made him go round the World.

Notes:

We do not have the 'stated reason' for the nomination, nor do we yet know whether she managed to visit the Club.

1975 David Murison (1913-1997)

David Donald Murison, editor of the Scottish National Directory, made possibly the greatest contribution this century to the study of modern Scots. Building on decades of collection by the first editor William Grant, Murison deepened the research and produced a work which not only reaches the highest standards of scholarship but provides a brilliant picture of a language and its culture, for scholar and layman alike.

He increased the number of volunteer readers scanning books and other writings for the Dictionary and set up a system of word questionnaires which were sent round all the dialect

areas to collect data orally. He took over from Grant at the end of letter C and from that point all entries were either compiled or edited by him. He was also personally responsible for the lists of personal names, place names, fairs and markets etc, in the last of the 10 volumes, a fascinating addendum to the Dictionary.

He had studied Classics at the Universities of Aberdeen and then Cambridge, emerging from both with first-class honours degrees. Thereafter he became an Assistant Lecturer in Greek at Aberdeen University (alongside the poet Douglas Young, who was a close friend).

In 1954 the Scottish National Dictionary Association moved to its present home in Edinburgh's George Square. He did a great deal to encourage the teaching of Scots in the Scottish universities. He himself gave courses on Scots, travelling weekly to Aberdeen in the 1960s and teaching also in Edinburgh in the 1970s, and for three years in Glasgow after his retiral.

He was in great demand as a Burns orator. His little book *The Guid Scots Tongue* (1977) is probably still the best introduction to the Scots language.

(Information from 'The Herald', 22/2/1997)

Letter of acceptance, written from 27 George Square, Edinburgh, on 6 January 1975 to Hon. Secretary Andrew Hood:

Dear Mr Hood,

I feel extremely honoured to have been nominated as an Honorary Member of so distinguished a Burns Club as that of Irvine, and I accept the compliment with the greatest pleasure and thanks, even if, at the same time, with no little astonished trepidation at finding myself in the company of American presidents, English poet-laureates, British generals and politicians and literary men of all kinds. While respecting them all for their outstanding qualities, I think the one I like best is your own townsman, John Galt, who has always had my admiration, and whose work, I am glad to think, is at last getting the credit it deserves.

Incidentally I notice that my nominator is Mr Charles Masson. If he is indeed an old Aberdeen friend of mine, the pleasure of the compliment he pays me is so much the more enhanced. Please convey my warmest thanks and my kindest regards to him. I very much regret I cannot accept his most friendly invitation to be present at your Burns Supper. I have a prior engagement to attend that of Peterhead Burns Club but I shall be thinking of you all and I send you my best wishes for a happy function.

Lastly I am especially glad to be made a member of an Ayrshire Burns Club. I lived for several years in Ayrshire, enjoyed every minute of it and learned to have a deep and lasting affection for Ayrshire folk.

Yours very sincerely,
David Murison

Notes:

Charles Masson was Club President 1974-75.

This letter is on the headed paper of The Scottish National Dictionary, of which he was Editor.

1975 Alex. MacMillan (c.1906-1978)

Alex Macmillan, previously a teacher of English at Ayr Academy, came to Irvine in 1953, when he succeeded James Porter as Rector of Irvine Royal Academy. In 1956-57, he served as President of the Robert Burns World Federation. Interestingly, Irvine Burns Club did not invite him to serve as President for another decade (he filled that role in 1969-70). His nomination as an Honorary Member was not only for his contribution to Burns activities but also for his sterling efforts to preserve the Doric language of Scotland and to encourage its use in Scottish classrooms.

His obituary in the 'Burns Chronicle' of 1979 speaks primarily of the man rather than his achievements: "We recall that wonderful smile which in itself could express fun, satire, friendship and, at times, all the world of experience . . . with practical sense and pawky humour, he could bring folks back to reality. Listen again to his report as Convener of the Literature Sub-committee - every word in the Doric, every word understood and the whole ranging from appeal through condemnation to realism." It continues: "The real and true Alex Macmillan chose his companions for their own worth - not the learned academicians and stars from the world of learning and the arts. Rather with his cronie, Tommy Boslem, a Lanarkshire artisan who never enjoyed the benefits of university education: but a man so devoted to Burns that he was a walking dictionary of the poet's life and work. It was the Tommy Boslems in life that the 'Auld Schilmaister' most admired; between them they made up the best of the Burns movement." It ends: "We shall treasure the privilege of having walked and talked with this gifted 'lad o' pairts'.

Alex Macmillan continued as Rector when Irvine Royal Academy moved, under its new name of Ravenspark Academy, to new premises in 1969, and retired in 1970. In retirement, he undertook the task of writing a new history of Irvine (McJannet's being of 1938), but, though he did prepare, in two typewritten volumes, a revised version of McJannet, death prevented completion. (Andrew Hood subsequently picked up the challenge, but death again intervened, in 1982; John Strawhorn completed the task in 1985.)

As a writer and poet, Alex Macmillan served as a member of the executive of the Scottish National Dictionary and, under a pseudonym, co-published a book of children's poems * - 'Bairnsangs - Nursery Rhymes in Scots by Sandy Thomas Ross' (first published 1955, re-published since) of which he was the 'Sandy' in the triumvirate. He died in May 1978, aged 72, hailed as "a leading authority on Scots literature and language".

[Notes compiled by IJD, who started his teaching career under Rector Macmillan]

* Example: The Wee Rid Motor:

In my wee rid motor, / I can gang for miles, / Up an doon the gairden, / Through the lobby
whiles. / Mony a bigger motor / Gangs tae toons afaur. / Nane can gang whaur I gang,
/ In my wee rid caur.

Letter of acceptance, written from 13 Kilwinning Road, Irvine, in January 1975 to Hon.
Secretary Andrew Hood:

Dear Andrew,

Your letter conveying the President's wish to make me an Honorary Member of Irvine Burns Club was a great surprise and a great compliment. I am well aware of the illustrious figures in the past to whom this honour has been accorded, and I am happy to take a humble place among them.

Whatever I have done for Irvine Burns Club to help keep the memory of the poet green, and for certain aspects of Scottish literature, I have done with all the enthusiasm of which I am capable. I am therefore the more pleased that your President has recognised what little I have been able to accomplish.

I hope I may be spared to see the Club succeed in its new endeavours, and to have a hand in some of these.

Yours sincerely, Alex MacMillan

Notes: This letter is on the headed paper of The Burns Federation Scottish Literature Committee, of which he was Convener.

1976 Nigel Tranter (1909-2000)

On his 90th birthday in 1999, Nigel Tranter, in his home in Gullane, East Lothian, said: "I don't know what all the fuss is about". Yet one columnist (Allan Massie) wrote: "Nigel Tranter has undoubtedly taught many Scots the only history they know." After 130 books, which included the multi-million selling Bruce trilogy, a novel about the removal of the Stone of Destiny from Westminster Abbey, westerns published under the pseudonym Nye Tredgold, and a five-volume set "The Fortified House in Scotland", he was still writing! From 1940 till 1998, he lived in Aberlady.

His biographer Ray Bradfield has said: "He had this fantastic gift of a vivid visual imagination, which lasted him right to the end." He would jot down his ideas, in miniscule handwriting, on waterproof paper, as he walked and type up the notes immediately on returning home in case he forgot what he wanted to write.

Letter of acceptance, written from Quarry House, Aberlady, East Lothian, on 3rd January, 1976 to Hon. Secretary Andrew Hood

Dear Mr Hood,

I greatly appreciate your letter of 30th December, informing me of the very real honour done to me, in being nominated an Honorary Member of the famed Irvine Burns Club. I am most happy to accept, naturally; and I hope you will convey to Ex-Provost Rubie my thanks for his nomination. Thank you also for the very kind things you say in your last paragraph - far too generous.

I found the brochure highly interesting and most tastefully compiled and produced - and the page of signatures quite fascinating. To be associated, however remotely, with the names thereon, is flattering in the extreme.

May I wish the Club, its officers, committee and members, all continuing success?

Yours sincerely,

Nigel Tranter

Notes: Alex Rubie was Club President 1975-76.

1976 Prof. Ian A Gordon (1908-2004)

Prof. Gordon graduated from the University of Edinburgh and taught there before his appointment to the Chair of English Language and Literature at Victoria University of Wellington, a position he held from 1936 to 1974. There he was instrumental in establishing the study of the structure, history, and use of English, and the teaching of English language.

Ian Gordon was Vice-Chancellor of the University of New Zealand from 1947 to 1952, Chair of the New Zealand Literary Fund from 1950 to 1974, and a member of the University Grants Committee from 1961 to 1971, in addition to holding many other academic and administrative posts. He was made a CBE and received several honorary doctorates.

The breadth of his scholarship was remarkable, including his book, *The Movement of English Prose* (1966), and definitive studies on Katherine Mansfield and 18th century Scottish writer John Galt. He undertook much teaching, writing, and broadcasting on the evolution of English, problems of usage, and the teaching of English and was widely regarded as an excellent teacher. He encouraged and fostered his own passion for language in others. Among his former students are Bob Burchfield, who became editor of the Oxford English Dictionary, Bill Ramson, who edited the Australian National Dictionary, and Harry Orsman, who compiled the celebrated Dictionary of New Zealand English.

Prof Gordon encouraged the development at Victoria University of Wellington of a strong tradition of lexicography which has continued through his students and through the establishment of the New Zealand Dictionary Centre. He was instrumental in the establishment of the English Language Institute in 1961 (now part of the School of Linguistics and Applied Language Studies). Along with Professor Frank Brosnahan, he supported the introduction of the teaching of Linguistics at the University from 1970, initially under the aegis of the Department of English, and later as a distinct discipline.

(information from the website of the University of Wellington, NZ)

Letter of acceptance, written from 91 Messines Road, Wellington 5, New Zealand, on 6 January 1976 to Hon. Secretary Andrew Hood

Dear Mr Hood,

Your letter of 29 December inviting me to be an Honorary Member of Irvine Burns Club gave me great pleasure, & I accept this honour with thanks. My visits to Irvine, where I have been hunting for documentation on John Galt, have been both profitable & pleasurable, & I retain kind memories of your hospitality. I expect to be in the U.K. this summer & if there is a chance of my calling again - and giving a talk on John Galt - I shall not miss the opportunity. I have another Galt edition [The Last of the Laids] in the press & expect to see it published later this year.

Meantime, on the occasion of your 150th birthday, I send my best wishes for the next 150 years.

Sincerely Yours,

I. A. Gordon

Notes: Irvine Burns Club had been founded in 1826.

Prof. Gordon lectured in the Irvine Burns Club on 28 May 1979.

1976 Professor G Ross Roy (1924-2013)

Emeritus Professor G Ross Roy was a world authority on Robert Burns but did not care for that description! The G Ross Roy Collection of Burns books and manuscripts was begun by his grandfather, totalled 1,500 volumes when he inherited it and consists of nearly 15,000 volumes of which nearly 5,000 are on Burns. He himself founded, in Alabama in 1963, and for nearly 50 years was sole editor of, the journal "Studies in Scottish Literature", which gave a first publishing break to many young scholars. With his love of his subject, he took Scottish scholarship across the world, inspiring many.

He visited Scotland as a boy aged 8, brought by his grandfather, and throughout his life kept the pocket edition of Burns from that visit - starting his lifelong interest.

On his visit to Irvine Burns Club in August 2008, he presented the Club with a facsimile of the 1799 edition of "The Merry Muses of Caledonia", boxed with his book on "Robert Burns and the Merry Muses" (Wellwood library ref.s 1722/23). The Club honoured his visit with a Tribute delivered by Kenneth Simpson, an appreciation of Burns by Janet Elsie-May Coom, a great-great-granddaughter of Anna Park through Betty Burns, a recitation by John Inglis, and music by Court of Equity. Colin Hunter McQueen presented Ross Roy with a cast of Robert Burns' skull. William McIlvanney thanked the Club on behalf of the visitors.

Born in Montreal, he taught at the University of Alabama, then the University of Montreal and Texas Tech University, before moving in 1965 to the University of South Carolina as professor of English and comparative literature, retiring in 1990.

Letter of acceptance, written from Department of English, University of South Carolina, Columbia, on January 10, 1976 to Hon. Secretary Andrew Hood

Dear Mr Hood,

It was with the greatest pleasure that I received your letter notifying me that I had been elected an Honorary Member of the Irvine Burns Club, an honor which I gratefully accept.

The list of your previous Honorary Members is so distinguished that I feel humble to have my name inscribed with theirs. I am proud that my Burns scholarship has been recognized by the Members of the Irvine Burns Club. Your Club and others like it have done much to make the ever-growing fellowship of Burns-lovers indeed brothers "the world o'er" - as the Bard had hoped.

With every good wish for the continued success of your Club and with warmest regards to its members,

Yours sincerely,

G. Ross Roy

1976 Dr Robert B Taylor (c.1909-1977)

Dr Robert B Taylor was President of Irvine Burns Club in 1959. He lived and practised at "Willowbank", between the Trinity Church and the river.

When Fairbairn's opened the first Scottish BMW franchise in Irvine, near the bridge (now gone) and across the river from Dr Taylor's house (also now gone), they had in their showroom a white BMW – a week later it was Dr Taylor's car, envied by many!

His nomination reflects his standing in the community as one of the two best known Irvine doctors of his generation.

Letter of acceptance, written from 34 Kirkgate, Irvine, on 10th May, 1976 to Hon. Secretary Andrew Hood:

Dear Andrew,

It was a great emotional experience to receive your letter regarding my nomination as an Honorary Member of the Irvine Burns Club.

I am indeed more than grateful for this great honour which has been bestowed on me by the Club.

I have tried to carry out my duties to the Club and the town to the best of my ability. This honour has made me very humble.

I hope to be able to continue any help I can give to the Club in future, and I am deeply conscious of the honour being conferred on me, and which I am delighted to accept.

Yours sincerely,

R B Taylor

Robert Bicket Taylor, M.B., Ch.B.

Notes:

The letter is, excepting the signature, typed.