

Honorary members of 1996 – 1999

1996: Tony Harrison, Prof. Tom Sutherland, Sir A W ('Sandy') Macara

1997: John Inglis, The 11th Earl of Elgin & Kincardine

1998: Jackie Stewart, Dr Anne Lorne Gillies, Rt Hon Tony Blair

1999: Sir Jimmy Shand, John Mason

1996 Tony Harrison (1937-)

Tony Harrison is a superb poetic craftsman, who sets the hard issues of today in verse which catches the reader or listener up in its vibrant and, unusually for today, rhyming metres. His work spans the theatre, television and film; its 'strutting energy', wrote critic Michael Kustow (1992), 'is like Kipling on speed . . . where Yorkshire grit meets Attic wit'; it is strongly imbued with his Yorkshire upbringing, his classical education, and his sense of purpose, whether to verbalise the concerns of his fellow-northerners or to rage against rigid international ideologies. A 2008 interview contained these three comments: "My belief in Greek tragedy has always been a fundamental inspiration . . . All Greek drama was outwardly directed"; "I turned to poetry because I grew up with inarticulate people" (his father was a tongue-tied baker in working-class Beeston, one uncle stammered, and another was dumb); and "I have spent all my life trying to find a way of filling classical forms with absolutely everyday speech".

He was a contender for Poet Laureate in 1984, when Ted Hughes was given the post. When Hughes died in 1998, Tony Harrison famously ruled himself out by publishing, in the 'Guardian', 'Laureate's Block', writing that he would rather be:

"free not to have to puff some prince's wedding, / free to say up yours to Tony Blair, / to write an ode on Charles I's beheading / and regret the restoration of his heir . . .

free to write what I think should be written, / free to scatter scorn on Number 10, / free to blast and bollock Blairite Britain / (and alliterate outrageously like then!)"

His theatre work includes a version of Euripides' 'The Trojan Women', set on the perimeter of Greenham Common, and his film work includes 'Black Daisies for the Bride', which won the Prix Italia in 1994, and 'Prometheus' (1999), set in a disused coalfield. His TV work includes 'The Gaze of the Gorgon' (1992) for which he was awarded the Whitbread Prize for Poetry; in this extract, he wonders whether the reflecting glass towers of Frankfurt's financial world can avert the evil which 'brings ghettos, gulags, genocide':

"That's maybe the reason why / so many mirrors reach so high, / into the modern Frankfurt sky. / Ecu land seems to prepare / to neutralise the Gorgon's stare, / but what polished shields can neutralise / those ancient petrifying eyes?"

Harrison is a classicist with a working-class background, a writer whose scholarship and craftsmanship are channelled into his abiding concerns of language, class, education and social mores. Melvyn Bragg, in the 'Sunday Telegraph', commented, in about 1999: "I am convinced that Tony Harrison is one of the few truly great poets writing in English today".

Letter of acceptance, written from Gosforth, Newcastle, on 17th November 1995, to Ian Dickson, President 1996:

Dear Mr Dickson

Many thanks for your letter. I am very proud and honoured that you consider me worthy of honorary membership of the Irvine Burns Club.

As a poet, and a fervent and life-long admirer of Robert Burns, I am more than happy to accept your kind invitation. May the merry Muse bless all your occasions.

Yours sincerely

Tony Harrison

Notes:

Tony Harrison, being a Classics graduate as well as one of Britain's foremost poets, was a natural choice of honorary member for President Ian Dickson, a Principal Teacher of Classics

1996 Prof. Tom Sutherland (1931-2016)

Tom Sutherland, Professor of Animal Science at Colorado State University, accepted the post of Dean of Faculty of Agriculture and Food Science at the American University of Beirut in Lebanon in 1983. In June 1985, Lebanese terrorists seized him. His prison for most of the following years was a dark basement. His captivity lasted 2,354 days, over six years, until November 1991. Tom was born in Scotland, graduated BSc Agriculture at Glasgow University, and crossed the Atlantic, taking master's and doctor's degrees at Iowa State University.

32 months into captivity, on 25 January 1988, three captives - Tom, Jean-Paul (Kauffman, a French journalist) and Marcel (Carton, the French Embassy protocol officer) - chained by the wrist to the wall, celebrated the anniversary of the Bard's birthday with bad tea and pitta bread. In Jan. '86, Tom had introduced other fellow-captives, including Terry Anderson, to Burns. In Jan. '87, in a concrete underground cell, Tom had summoned from his memory the many poems he had learned over almost 40 years. Now, in 1988, Tom saw that "Jean-Paul's eyes lit up . . . [and soon] the chains no longer counted . . . [and we] were roaming free in the fields of Ayrshire". In 1989, Tom celebrated Burns' Day by himself, in an underground cell bear Baalbek, as he could not arouse the interest of fellow-captives John McCarthy and Brian Keenan, and 1990 and 1991 were celebrated again with Terry Anderson, who was "absolutely enchanted" by Kate nursing her wrath in Tam O'Shanter, "an image so beautifully word-painted".

Each year, Tom's wife Jean kept Burns celebrations going in their home on the campus in Beirut. Also, each Valentine's Day, birthday, wedding anniversary, Feast of Thanksgiving, and Christmas, she placed a message for Tom (many of which he saw) in the newspaper read by his captors.

Tom & Jean Sutherland have since published "At Your Own Risk: An American Chronicle of Crisis and Captivity in the Middle East", an account of his 2354 days as a hostage, and of Jean's valiant presence in Beirut throughout that time, and which places a turbulent decade in the Middle East in perspective.

Tom's first Burns Supper was in 1948, when, as a fifth year pupil at Grangemouth High School, he borrowed a kilt and "cycled the five miles back to the school with bare knees on a cold January night" and heard his friend recite Tam O'Shanter from memory. From that start, his appreciation of the works and life of Robert Burns infused his life and teaching in Iowa and Colorado, and kept up his spirits during captivity. In his own words: "Again and again, in the blackness and isolation of that cell, Burns brought me joy and comfort in my own time of trial and despair."

Letter of acceptance, written from his home in Fort Collins, Colorado, on 24th January 1996:

Dear Ian

Thank you for your letter of Jan. 15, received at brother Willie's home during my recent visit to Scotland. It was also nice to talk to you again on the phone after our all too brief meeting at the Burns Conference at Strathclyde - I was chagrined not to have re-contacted you prior to leaving the conference, but as you said, things got rather hectic towards the end!! 'Twas truly a great conference though, and I am glad I was allowed to register!

I am most honored to be invited into Honorary Membership of the Irvine Burns Club, and am delighted to accept your gracious invitation.

I am enclosing as promised a copy of the article I wrote for Sunday Times. It tells essentially "the whole story"! Hope you enjoy it. Meantime, my best wishes to you and the Club.

Sincerely

Tom Sutherland

Notes:

The letter is written to Ian Dickson, President 1995-1996, who personally offered Tom Sutherland Honorary Membership at the 1996 Strathclyde University Burns Conference.

1996 Sir A W ('Sandy') Macara (1932-2012)

Sandy Macara, born in Irvine and educated at Irvine Royal Academy and Glasgow University, became Chairman of the Council of the British Medical Association in 1993. The BMA is the voice of the medical profession in the UK and the position of chairman is its most senior political post.

A bout of serious illness at the age of six led to his choice of career. Otherwise, he might have followed his father's steps - Rev. Alex Macara was the well-liked minister of Irvine Old Parish Church for half a century from 1928 to 1978 (and President of Irvine Burns Club in 1939). Sandy, however, in his hospital bed, made up his mind to work for those in hospital, and made his career in medical health administration, promoting preventative medicine and influencing policies.

His political grounding was as a student at debates in Glasgow University. His career focused on World Health and National Medical Politics, the latter leading to his becoming the voice of the BMA in the media on all major issues during his chairmanship of its council.

Perhaps the most appropriate comments to illustrate his thoughts would be his own words in an 'Irvine Times' interview of January 1996, when asked what his wish for the coming year 1996 would be. He told the interviewer the BMA would be pushing for a more united NHS, and said: "Our main agenda is to return the word national to the National Health Service. What distresses us all is the way everything is being broken up and the way the amount of cash available in one area determines what people will get. It is my wish to get the Government to match their agreement on this issue with some action!"

Letter of acceptance, written from British Medical Association House, Tavistock Square, London, on 3rd January 1996

Dear Mr Dickson

Thank you very much for your letter of 22 December last, and for the kind invitation to accept nomination for honorary membership of the Irvine Burns Club.

I am honoured and delighted to accept, especially as I was privileged to be brought up in the Old Parish Manse and inculcated in a love of Burns (and poetry generally) by my father, who greatly valued his long and happy association with the Club.

My best wishes to you all for 1996

Yours sincerely

A W Macara

also in 1996 . .

Nelson Mandela's office declined the offer of honorary membership in 1996: The following letter was sent from the Dept. of Foreign Affairs in Pretoria:

Dear Mr Dickson,

On behalf of President Mandela, I would like to thank you for your kind words and for the invitation which you have extended to him to accept honorary membership of the Irvine Burns Club

Although the Office of the President has great admiration for the active role which the Irvine Burns Club is taking in promoting human understanding and co-operation, as illustrated through the remarkable poetry of Robert Burns, it is regrettably not able to comply with your request. Unfortunately there are so many requests of this kind, both within and outside South Africa, that it is just impossible to accede to every request.

1997 John Inglis (1932-2022)

Born in New Cumnock, John Inglis was brought up in the very heart of the Burns Country and oft times 'paidled in the burn frae morning sun till dine'. Roving many a day among its lofty neighbouring hills, up Glen Afton and around the many places associated with the Bard, John became a Burns addict at an early age.

Two years as a coalminer were followed by National Service in the Scots Guards, mainly in the Canal Zone before Colonel Nasser nationalised Suez. On demobilization, he joined the old Ayrshire Constabulary, retiring in 1986 with the rank of Detective Chief Inspector in the Strathclyde Police, after 31 years service. He then worked for William Hill Ltd as Security Manager, keeping an eye on all the firm's betting shops north of the Border.

John served Irvine Burns Club as President in 1977-78, chaired the organising committee for the 1981 Conference held at the Magnum Centre in Irvine, thereafter hailed as 'one of the most successful events in recent years', and served as Burns World Federation President in 1984. He attended many Burns events as a reader and as a speaker, particularly in proposing the 'Immortal Memory'. His deep knowledge of the Bard and his works, coupled with his love of books, inspired the Federation to decide to publish a new edition, for the bicentenary of the Kilmarnock Edition in 1986, of the 'Complete Works', and his driving force and enthusiasm, as President of the Burns Federation in that year, helped ensure its success.

Letter of acceptance, written from 'Dalhanna', 16 Berry Drive, Irvine on 1:1:1997, on the headed paper of "The Burns Federation", Dick Institute, Kilmarnock, to Club President Duncan Rennie

Dear Mr President,

It was with great pleasure and much humility that I received your kind invitation of appointment as an Honorary Member of Irvine Burns Club.

I have been an avid Burnsian since I was sixteen but I was never involved in the Burns 'world' till I was thirty-eight. Since then I have had the honour of being Pres. of Irvine Burns Club, Pres. of the Ayr. Assoc. of Burns Clubs and Pres. of the Burns Federation. Notwithstanding, the prestige of these high offices, it is flattering to be identified and associated with the illustrious men and women of letters and eminence who, over the past one hundred and seventy years, have accepted this great honour.

'My dearest meed, a friend's esteem and praise' and it is doubly flattering to one born and brought up in a miners' row in New Cumnock and my early years spent working at the coal-face at the ill-fated Knockshinnoch Castle Colliery should be accorded this singular honour.

It is with pride I accept,
Yours sincerely,
John Inglis

Notes:

The quotation is the fourth line of "The Cotter's Saturday Night", one of John Inglis' many favourite poems, where 'meed' means 'reward'.

1997 The 11th Earl of Elgin & Kincardine (1924-)

Andrew Douglas Alexander Thomas Bruce, Lord Elgin of Broomhall, the 11th Earl of Elgin and 15th Earl of Kincardine, may be the nearest living direct descendant of Scotland's hero king, Robert the Bruce, or may be a descendant of a related Robert de Brus, 5th Lord of Annadale.

In 1980, he was appointed as Lord High Commissioner (the monarch's representative) to the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland and was installed as a Knight of the Thistle in 1982. Lord Elgin is Chief of the Clan Bruce. In 1982 he skippered the Scottish curling teams which defeated the Governor-General of Canada's teams in a series of matches in Ottawa.

In 1929, aged 5, he attended his first event to commemorate Robert the Bruce and since then his life has been punctuated by memorials, celebrations and commemorations. In 1974,

he took Bruce family members from across the world to retrace Robert's footsteps, marking 700 years since the King's birth. He is a great raconteur; enjoy reading his two letters.

His two letters, written from Broomhall, Dunfermline, Fife, on 15th and 16th January, 1997, to 1997 Club President Duncan Rennie:

On 15/1/97, in his own hand:

Dear Mr Rennie

It was delightful as Chief of the Bruce Family to have received your Invitation coming from the Carrick Shore as it did.

From this ancient Family point of view it is a delight to accept your invitation. Then as I am President of the Dunfermline United Burns Club (1812) it is a further joy that now links our two Clubs.

So as you have commanded a letter I felt I should reply with appropriate antiquity. This writing paper was made for my great grandfather before leaving for Canada in 1847 - only 20 years younger than yourselves.

May you have great felicity of your Celebration of 24th January 1997.

Yours sincerely,

Elgin

And on 16th January, 1997, typed apart from the beginning and the end:

Dear Mr Rennie,

Your kind letter was such a bolt from the blue that I am hurrying to send you a reply.

With luck, I hope to preside over the annual meeting of the Dunfermline United Burns Club later in the month for the fortieth time and so, as we are just a little bit older than you, it would be a very great delight that two early 19th century clubs might be connected and this makes me all the more happy to agree to accept your invitation.

You asked that this acceptance be in my own hand and I shall attend to this. Nevertheless, I discovered that, after long correspondence with a prestigious club in Canada, when I carried out the letter writing in my own hand, they were unable to decipher it and kept asking me to fax my replies. When eventually we did meet up, I explained to them that I had only last year mended the roof of the pigeon loft where I kept the carriers and I was afraid we had not quite caught up with their modern technology, so I hope you get appropriate letters in good time.

Yours sincerely,

Elgin

1998 Jackie Stewart (1939-)

Accepting the award of an honorary professorship from Stirling University in 1998, this three-times world racing champion (in 1969, 1971 and 1973) told how he always felt inadequate because dyslexia had ruined his education. He spent most of his time doing metalwork, failed his 11-plus exams twice and left school when he was 15. He now, in 1998, had one professorship and three doctorates in universities around the world.

He could remember every gear shift and every braking distance for the 187 corners of the Nurburgring, but could not read or remember the National Anthem or the Lord's Prayer. His dyslexia was not diagnosed till he was 42, when his sons were experiencing difficulties at school and that they would both have to leave if they failed to keep up. He hired a specialist dyslexia teacher to give them extra tuition for a year and it paid off.

He persuaded the Scottish Parliament to fund a chair of inclusive studies at Aberdeen University and is head of the Scottish Dyslexia Association.

Letter of acceptance, written from Stewart Grand Prix, Milton Keynes, on 19 November 1997:

Dear Malcolm Rae

Thank you very much for your letter of 10 November in which you invite me to become an Honorary Member of the Irvine Burns Club.

I would be delighted to accept your offer but I hope you understand that given the hectic pace of my life at present I do not envisage being able to attend your annual celebration on 23 January, nor I fear will I be able to find time to get up and visit your premises in the foreseeable future.

That said however, I am flattered to be invited to be a member of the club and I look forward to my association with it.

Yours sincerely

Jackie Stewart

Notes:

Only the signature is hand-written; Jackie Stewart, as a dyslexia sufferer, has done much for dyslexia charities.

1998 Dr Anne Lorne Gillies (1944-)

A Mod Gold Medallist at the age of 17 in 1962, Anne Lorne Gillies signed off her poetic acceptance of our nomination with the Gaelic phrase meaning "With every good wish". As a singer, a teacher and an academic, Dr Gillies has devoted her career to promoting Gaelic culture and Scottish literature and song.

Her awards include being designated Speaker of the Year 2005 by the Association of Speakers Clubs of Great Britain, gaining the Ratcliff Prize 2006 for 'Songs of Gaelic Scotland' (hardback), her contribution to the study of folklore in Great Britain and Ireland, and the September 2008 award of a Fellowship by the UHI Millenium Institute. Her 1989 Doctorate was in Gaelic Education, and she was honoured with an Honorary Degree by the University of Edinburgh in 1993. In October 2009, she was appointed as the Scottish Government's Gaelic Language Ambassador.

The letters after her name form a biography in themselves: M.A., Ph.D., L.R.A.M., P.G.C.E., Dr.h.c., F.R.S.A.

Anne was delighted to be nominated - on her website she mentions being an Honorary Member of "the venerable Irvine Burns Club (one of the very few women to be so honoured)".

Letter of acceptance, written from her home in Glasgow on 13 January 1998:

Dear Mr. Rae, I'm fair excited!
Let ither chieles be Damed or Knighted -
Mair honour, fegs, to be invited
To join your ranks!
Sae tell your friends the quine's delighted
An' sends her thanks.

There's ne'er a Ne'er Day M.B.E.,
Professorship nor Ph.D.,
Could bring mair unexpectit glee
To hansel me.
Sae moran taing dhuibh - A.L.G.,
M.I.B.C.!

Leis gach deagh dhurachd.
Anne Lorne Gillies

Notes:

"moran taing dhuibh" = "many thanks to you"

"Leis gach deagh dhurachd" = "With every good wish".

1998 Rt Hon Tony Blair (1953-)

Member of Parliament for Sedgefield from 1983 to 2007, Tony Blair served as Prime Minister from 1997 to 2007, being the youngest prime minister of the 20th century.

As so much information is easily available elsewhere, a summary from Wikipedia will suffice: "At various points in his premiership, Blair was among both the most popular and most unpopular politicians in British history. As prime minister, he achieved the highest recorded approval ratings during his first few years in office but also one of the lowest ratings during and after the Iraq War."

Letter of acceptance, written from 10 Downing Street, London SW1A 2AA, on 20 June 1997

Dear Mr Rae,

Thank you for your letter of 1 June inviting me to join the roll of Honorary Members of the Irvine Burns Club.

This is a very kind thought and I have much pleasure in accepting.

yours sincerely

Tony Blair

Notes:

Only the "Dear Mr Rae" and the "yours sincerely Tony Blair" are hand-written.

The headed paper bears the crest, the address, and "THE PRIME MINISTER".

1999 Sir Jimmy Shand (1908-2000)

Jimmy Shand lived in Auchtermuchty from a young age. His father was a skilled melodeon player. Jimmy himself started with the mouth organ, was soon playing the fiddle and playing at social events and in competitions, switching to the British chromatic button accordion for the rest of his life.

Soon after the war, he gave up being a miner and became a full-time musician, travelling throughout Britain, and tours to Australia, New Zealand and North America, always with full kilted regalia. In 1972, he went into semi-retirement, playing only small venues for a reduced fee. Made a freeman of Auchtermuchty in 1974, the town has memorialised him by a statue. His signature tune was 'The Bluebell Polka'.

Letter of acceptance, written from Windyedge, Mournipea, Auchtermuchty, Fife, on 11th January, 1999, to Bobby Haswell, President 1999

Dear Mr Haswell

With reference to your generous offer of honorary membership of the Irvine Burns Club, I regard it as an honour that you have considered me for this and will accept accordingly.

Please thank your members on my behalf and I look forward to an enjoyable relationship with you all.

Yours sincerely

Sir Jimmy Shand MBE MA

Notes:

Sir Jimmy signed the typed letter, his hand being a touch shaky.

1999 John Mason (1940-2011)

John Mason, MBE (in 1987), Musical Director and Principal Conductor of the Scottish Fiddle Orchestra, which he helped found in 1980, and Senior Partner of the offices of Waddell and Mackintosh, Solicitors, Troon, summarised his life and work in his letter of acceptance.

Letter of acceptance, written from his home in Troon, on 1st February, 1999

Dear Sir,

Honorary Membership of Irvine Burns Club

I thank you for your Club's generous invitation to me and with humility I accept.

Because I come from the Northern Isles it was only when my family moved to Wigtownsheil and I was still in my early teens that I first experienced the works of our National Bard. Later, having qualified in law in Edinburgh and by then also a bit of a musician, I returned to the area and enthusiastically became involved in the Annual Pilgrimage of Burns Suppers and St Andrew's Nights. These, all too often, consisted of the same speakers

and entertainers doing the equivalent of the classical musicians' "Messiah" tour of Yorkshire each spring! They were however delightful events and left many happy memories.

In 1967 I moved to a legal practice in Troon. My first contact in Ayrshire, in relation to fiddle music and Burns, was with a wonderful elderly gentleman Willie McCulloch from Kilmarnock who had been a friend of your Joe Caldwell's late father. I was now in the mainstream of Burns and the related music. I met with Joe, Alex Rubie, Willie Lockhart, Sam Gaw, Robin Whyte, David Smith etc. all of your Club and everyone made me so very welcome in their midst.

Having listened to Malcolm Arnold's "Tam o' Shanter" on many occasions and having been told that the story of the poem could be easily followed in the music I still failed to get to grips with it so decided to attempt my own Overture using Burns' related traditional tunes and music roughly prevalent of that era. The result was the twenty minute overture "Tam o' Shanter and Cutty Sark" which was "previewed" at the Gaiety Theatre Ayr before a capacity audience including many from your Club. At the performance I dedicated the work to Irvine Burns Club and that dedication remains. The piece has become firmly established in the repertoires of the national Scottish Fiddle Orchestra and also the Strings of Scotland Orchestra. It has also been videoed and the video should be released soon.

Probably my most ambitious work has been "Til a' the Seas Gang Dry" which is a Cantata for orchestra, mezzo-soprano, tenor and a reader. It is an attempt, in musical terms, to tell the Burns' story but essentially dealing in detail with as many of his romances as time and audience patience will permit! Even with pruning out many references to Burns' ladies the piece still runs for 45 minutes without a break! It was first performed by the Scottish Fiddle Orchestra and very successfully included in its concert series of 1997. In this work, which is really a joint venture, I am deeply indebted to your Sam Gaw, himself an ex Burns Federation President who wrote the script and checked with me into the old original tunes and kindly acted as reader in the S.F.O. series. This Cantata has also been video-ed, mainly for educational purposes, and is due to be issued along with "Tam o' Shanter and Cutty Sark".

I was privileged by your Club asking me to give a lecture, in your unique Burns Club on the connection of old tunes with the Burns' works. This included the prevalent music and musicians of the Burns' era. I was much assisted here by the Ayr & Prestwick Strathspey and Reel Society in their demonstration of the various items. The videoed product leaves the history with your Club for all time.

I have many reasons for which to thank your Club:- firstly for its supreme enthusiasm and support, secondly for the way I have been encouraged to research material and thirdly for the genuine humour and fun I have enjoyed. I feel sure that without these I would never have succeeded in any musical benefit I may have provided for the Burns' movement in general and Irvine Burns Club in particular. I have no doubt that my invitation to join and ultimate recent fellowship of The Society of Antiquaries of Scotland stems not indirectly from my connection with your Club.

Yours most sincerely,
John M Mason

Notes: John was born in Kirkwall, Orkney.

At High School in Newton Stewart he and friends formed a skiffle group. Later he joined Wigtown Silver Band. He also created Wigtown Boys Brigade bugle and drum band. John Mason's letter, addressed to the Secretary, is on the official paper of the SFO The Scottish Fiddle Orchestra (Patron: Her Royal Highness The Princess Royal), with the footnoted names being led by John M Mason, MBE, BL, FEP, NP, Musical Director.