

Honorary members of 1890-93

1890 A J Balfour (Viscount Traprain), James A Froude

1892 J M Barrie, Thomas Hardy, Alfred Austin

1893 Leslie Stephen, Augustine Birrell, Henry Craik, John Speirs

Also in 1892: George Meredith (1828-1909), the Victorian novelist and poet, was also nominated, but no acceptance is recorded. His novel 'The Egoist' (1879) was regarded as his masterpiece, but 'Diana of the Crossways' (1885) was the first to be generally read by the public. By the time of his death, he was regarded as standing "in the front rank [of novelists], with one or two others". He served as the 2nd President of the Society of Authors, succeeding Tennyson. He was also a social patron of J M Barrie, then a young man (aged 31) in London, whose acceptance of honorary membership in the same year is noted above.

1890: A J Balfour (Viscount Traprain) (1848-1930)

"Balfour, a Leader for Half a Century" - thus the New York Times headed his obituary, which celebrated "a career which for distinction and length of service has few equals in modern English history". By the year he accepted honorary membership, he had made his mark in Scotland and Ireland, and would go on to make his mark nationally and internationally.

Born on the family estate at Whittingehame near Haddington, Arthur James Balfour was educated at Eton and Cambridge. His father and grandfather had both been members of parliament, and his uncle, the 3rd Marquis of Salisbury, a senior Conservative party figure, persuaded him to stand for Hertford. In 1874, aged 26, he became Parliamentary Private Secretary to his uncle (the Foreign Secretary), gaining valuable experience, particularly during the Balkan crises. After Gladstone's Liberal win in 1880, during five years in opposition, he made his mark as a serious politician. On return to power, Salisbury created the office of Secretary for Scotland (1885) and in 1886 appointed Balfour (now representing Manchester). In 1887, Balfour was appointed Chief Secretary for Ireland - though nicknamed 'Bloody Balfour' when he ordered that rioters be shot down without hesitation, his tenure was more successful than that of many others.

In 1891, he became First Lord of the Treasury, then Leader of the Commons, and succeeded his uncle as Prime Minister (1902-1905). After the Liberal landslide of 1905, he returned representing the City of London, and remained party leader until 1911. In Lloyd George's wartime coalition government, Balfour was Foreign Secretary (1916-19). In 1917, he wrote the letter to Lord Rothschild, a leader of British Jews, explaining the new Government position supporting the establishment of a national home for the Jewish people, and asking him to bring it to the knowledge of the Zionist Federation; this 'Balfour Declaration' was ratified by the other Allied governments and led to Britain being given the League of Nations Mandate in Palestine in 1920. He represented Britain at the Versailles peace conference in 1919, and at the first assembly of the League of Nations, and led the British delegation to the 1921 Washington Arms Conference. He was created 1st Earl of Balfour and Viscount Traprain of Whittingehame in 1922.

By inclination a philosopher ("The Foundations of Belief", 1895), he was also a gifted musician, and founder and President of the Handel Society; he enjoyed golf, and was proud of his title as Captain of the Royal and Ancient Golf Club of St Andrews; he was the first public man in Britain to ride in an airplane; he was also President of the British Academy. On his 80th birthday, members of parliament gave him an expensive car along with the balance of what had been raised, "as a reservoir whence you can draw the fines you'll undoubtedly have to pay". Over half a century, though more an aesthete than a natural politician, A J Balfour had applied his debating abilities and independent thought to the service of his country.

Letter of acceptance, written from the Irish Office, Gt. Queen Street, S.W., with a supplementary handwritten address of 4 Carlton Gardens, London S.W., on 4th February 1890

Dear Sir

I beg to acknowledge your letter of the 31st ult., informing me that the Members of the Irvine Burns Club have been good enough to elect me as an honorary [sic] member. Pray thank them for the honour they have done me which I highly appreciate.

Yours faithfully

Arthur James Balfour

Notes:

The Irish Office address is embossed on the paper, so does not show up in photocopies. 4 Carlton Gardens (a residence possibly second in political fame only to 10 Downing St.), built in 1825, was leased by Lord Palmerston until he died.

1890: James A Froude (1818-1894)

Recorded in our minutes as "James Anthony Froude, Esquire, the Eminent Historian", he specialised in the reigns of Henry VIII and Elizabeth. Following the death of Thomas Macaulay in 1859, Froude became the most famous living historian in England.

His great work was 'The History of England from the Fall of Wolsey to the Defeat of the Spanish Armada', which appeared from 1856 to 1869. Though very popular, it received but doubtful approval from historians.

Froude was made literary executor to Thomas Carlyle (honorary member 1863), who died in 1881, and his 'Life of Carlyle', 'Carlyle's Reminiscences' and 'Letters and Memorials of Jane Welsh Carlyle', as edited by him, provoked an extraordinary amount of interest and controversy. It is probable that both his historical works and his Carlyle publications contributed to his nomination as an honorary member by Irvine Burns Club.

Letter of acceptance, written from 5 Onslow Gardens, S.W., on 3rd February 1890:

Dear Sir

I have to acknowledge the receipt of your letter informing me that I have been chosen an honorary member of the Irvine Burns Club.

Pray accept for yourself and present to the members of the Club my most hearty thanks for the honour which they have done me,

and believe me,

Your faithful servant,

J A Froude

1892: J M Barrie (1860-1937)

" Our minutes of 1892 indicate the works then best known to the members of Irvine Burns Club - "Mr J M Barrie, the Editor of 'Auld Licht Idylls', [author of] 'A Window in Thrums', 'The Wee Minister' and other Novels". The Auld Lichts, or Old Lights, refers to the religious sect to which his mother had belonged before her marriage and the book consisted of sketches of Scottish life, praised by critics for their originality. The town name Thrums is his pen-name for his native town of Kirriemuir, Angus. 'The Little Minister' (the minute-taker got the title wrong), a melodramatic novel, became a huge success and was filmed later three times.

The three books mentioned above were published in 1888, 1889 and 1891 respectively. James Matthew Barrie's age at the time of nomination was only 31. He had started as a journalist for the 'Nottingham Journal' and moved in 1885 with empty pockets to London as a freelance writer. At this point, he was at the start of his career.

Barrie's first theatre successes were 'Quality Street' in 1901, 'The Admirable Crichton' in 1902, and 'Peter Pan' in 1904. Later plays included other fantasy plays, such as 'Dear Brutus' (1917) and 'Mary Rose' (1920), with themes of children and loss, and plays dealing with social issues, eg 'What Every Woman Knows' (lovelessness & ambition), 'The Twelve Pound Look' (divorce; Barrie himself was divorced in 1909 after his wife's infidelity) and 'Echoes of the War' (1918). He was knighted in 1913 and received the Order of Merit in 1922.

Drama was his principal delight. As a schoolboy at Dumfries Academy, his drama club production led to a furious rebuke from the minister on the school board. In 1891, his parody of Ibsen's dramas was a sensation after a single private performance and denied a licence until 1914. Between 1909 and 1911, along with other playwrights, he unsuccessfully challenged the Lord Chamberlain's censorship of the theatre.

Barrie was not a one-hit wonder, despite the National Theatre of Scotland selecting 'Peter Pan' for the 150th anniversary of his birth - he was an author with a remarkable career, producing "a remarkable range of work from largely successful fictions to captivating drama" (Robert Crawford, 'Scotland's Books').

Letter of acceptance, written from the Garrick Club, W.C., on Feb 1, '92

Dear Sir

Your letter has given me much pleasure & I thank the Irvine Burns Club heartily for electing me an honorary member. I hope to meet you all sometime & to have an opportunity of seeing the Burns manuscripts.

Yours truly
J. M. Barrie

Notes:

The letter is addressed to Jas. Dickie, Esq., Hon. Secy.

1892: Thomas Hardy (1840-1928)

Originally trained as an architect, Thomas Hardy was best known to Irvine readers as "the Author of 'Far from the Madding Crowd', 'A Pair of Blue Eyes', 'The Trumpet Major' and other Works".

Hardy himself classified his novels in three categories. Novels of Character and Environment included 'Far from the Madding Crowd' and 'Tess of the D'Urbervilles', this latter published in 1891, the year before his nomination. Romances and Fantasies included 'The Trumpet Major' and the 1891 novel 'A Group of Noble Dames'. Novels of Ingenuity included 'Desperate Remedies', his first novel, published in 1871 or 1872. Although best known as a novelist, Hardy considered himself a poet, publishing a number of volumes of lyrics.

Like J M Barrie (hon. member in the same year), Hardy had been helped in his early career by novelist and poet George Meredith (also nominated in 1892).

Letter of acceptance, written from Max Gate, Dorchester, on February 1, 1892:

Dear Sir,

I beg to acknowledge the receipt of your letter of the 26th ult. and to thank you for the honour you have conferred upon me by electing me to the Burns Club.

I also congratulate you upon the preserving of so many valuable MSS of that sweet singer & poet, & truly great-hearted man.

Yours very faithfully
Thomas Hardy

Notes:

His address is embossed on the writing paper (so does not show up in the photocopy). Max Gate is the house he designed and lived in from 1885. The house is now cared for by the National Trust and open to the public on the days advertised by the tenants.

1892: Alfred Austin (1835-1913)

Alfred Austin, the English poet (1835-1913), accepted honorary membership. The 1893 minutes record that his letter was read to the members, but the letter is no longer extant. In

the 1892 minutes, he is "the poet who is now prominently before the public as the Author of a Poem on His Royal Highness The Duke of Clarence & Avondale". A few years later, in 1896, he was appointed Poet Laureate, succeeding Tennyson. Though Tennyson had died in 1892, the position had remained vacant until after the distinguished poetess Christina Rossetti died in 1894, so as not to interrupt the male succession ('The Guardian', 11/02/1999).

He attended the 1896 unveiling of the Robert Burns statue in Irvine, but his Irvine oration was scathingly attacked by the "Glasgow Herald" on the following Monday.

Letter of acceptance:

Received, but whereabouts no longer known.

1893: Leslie Stephen (1832-1904)

Leslie Stephen was nominated (as recorded in our 1893 minutes) as "Author of 'Hours in a Library', 'A History of English Thought in the 18th Century' and other Works, in recognition of his literary gifts and accomplishments".

'Hours in a Library', published in three volumes in 1874, 1876 and 1879, consisted mainly of sharp and penetrating critical studies reprinted from the 'Cornhill Magazine' which he edited from 1871 to 1882. He then edited, and contributed many 'Lives' to, the Dictionary of National Biography from 1882 to 1891. He received a doctor's degree from Harvard University in 1890, in 1895 he was elected President of the London Library in success to Tennyson (an hon. member in 1863), and he was honoured with a knighthood in 1902. The nndb (Notable Names Database) website contains a comprehensive account of his literary endeavours.

As a mountaineer, Stephen made the first ascent of several Alpine peaks between 1858 and 1871 and served as President of the Alpine Club in 1865-68. His first wife was the daughter of William Makepeace Thackeray (an hon. member in 1854). Two of his daughters by his second wife became famous, as Vanessa Bell and Virginia Woolf.

Letter of acceptance, written from 22 Hyde Park Gate, London, S.W., on 13.2.93

Sir,

Upon returning from a visit to the Continent, I find your obliging letter & beg to return my sincere thanks to the members of the Irvine Burns Club for the honour they have done me. I have enough Scottish blood in me to be a cordial lover of Burns & if ever I have the good fortune to be in your neighbourhood, I should be very glad to look at the interesting MSS of which you speak.

I am, with sincere thanks,

Yours very truly

Leslie Stephen

1893: Augustine Birrell (1850-1933)

Augustine Birrell combined writing and politics. Our minuted summary records him as "the Essayist, Author of 'Obiter Dicta', 'Res Judicatae' and other Works, M.P. for the Western Division of Fifeshire, in recognition of his literary skill and intellectual ability".

He had published 'Obiter Dicta' (a volume of essays) in 1884, with a second series in 1887, and 'Res Judicatae' in 1892. He had entered Parliament in 1889.

In later years, he published 'Collected Essays' in 1900 and was President of the Board of Trade from 1905-1907, when he was appointed Chief Secretary for Ireland, holding that position until 1916. His first period in Ireland, to 1912, was successful, his second period less so, and he resigned the day after the Easter Rising ended. His opposition to votes for women led to some injuries in 1910, when set upon by a group of suffragettes while walking from the House of Commons to the Athenaeum Club. In retirement, he published 'More Obiter Dicta' (1920).

By coincidence, his second wife (in 1888) was Eleanor Tennyson, the widowed daughter-in-law of the poet (hon. member 1863).

Letter of acceptance, written from 30 Lower Sloane Street, S.W., on 12th February 1893

Sir

I am sorry to find that so long a time has elapsed since I received the letter in which you told me of the honour done me by the Irvine Burns Club in electing me an Honorary Member. A great pressure of work must be my excuse, & I beg you will offer my apologies to the Club, at the same time assuring the Members that I most sincerely appreciate the honour they have done me.

I am much interested to hear of the valuable Manuscripts in the Club Collection.

I remain

Sir

Yours faithfully

A Birrell

Notes:

His address is embossed on the writing paper, so does not show up in photocopies.

The letter is addressed to Jas. Dickie, Esq., the Club's Hon. Secy.

1893: Henry Craik (1846-1927)

This prominent educationalist is described in our records as "Henry Craik, Esquire, C.B., M.A., LL.D., Secretary to the Educational Department of Scotland, Author of a 'Life of Swift' and

other Works, in recognition of his intellectual accomplishments and his eminent services to the cause of education".

After education at Glasgow and Oxford (honours in Classics and History), he was appointed an Examiner in the Education Department, being transferred afterwards to the Scottish Education Department (established 1872). In 1878 he became senior examiner, and in 1885 was appointed Secretary. In this position he controlled and moulded the educational methods and machinery of Scotland for 19 years. Meanwhile he was created C.B. (Companion of Order of the Bath) in 1887 and K.C.B. (Knight Commander) in 1897. He was also made LL.D. by the Universities of Glasgow and St Andrews.

As well as his life of Dean Swift, he also penned several volumes on Education. After retirement in 1904, Sir Henry was chosen as M.P. for Glasgow and Aberdeen Universities, serving from 1906 to 1918, and, on the reorganisation of seats, for the Combined Scottish Universities from then until his death in 1927. For his last five years in Parliament, he was the oldest MP, being aged 76 to 81 (though not the longest-serving). In 1926, he was made a baronet, of Kennoway, in the county of Fife.

Letter of acceptance, written on the headed paper of the Scotch Education Department, Dover House, Whitehall, on 28 January 1893

Dear Sir

I have the honour to acknowledge the receipt of your letter of 26th Jany. informing me that the Irvine Burns Club has been good enough to elect me as an Honorary Member of the Club. I esteem it a high honour to belong to a Club which by its old standing, its territorial connexion, and its possession of most valuable memorials of Burns, must stand in the front rank of those associations the aim of which is to testify to our pride in, & honour of, our national poet.

Will you be so kind as to convey to the Club my thanks for the honour they have done me?

I have the honour to be,

Dear Sir

Yours faithfully

H Craik

Notes

The letter is addressed to Jas. Dickie, Esq., the Club's Hon. Secy.

1893: John Spiers (1817-1899)

It is thanks to John Spiers that Irvine can be proud of an imposing statue to the Bard. Our minutes record that he "had intimated his intention of presenting to the Burgh of Irvine, his native place, a Statue of the Poet, Burns" and that his nomination was "in recognition of his munificent gift". Our website has a special section on the statue, the unveiling ceremony in 1896, and the newspaper reports of the time.

John Spiers left Irvine as a young man and enjoyed a long, successful and, equally importantly, honourable career as an underwriter and insurance broker at Blythswood Sq., Glasgow. His family had long been merchants in Irvine; and his mother and his wife both belonged to the family connected to Edgar Allan Poe. Retired by now in Seamill, his age and infirmity prevented his attending the unveiling, so he was represented by his two daughters.

His gift of a statue was motivated by what he had been told, in his young days in Irvine, by people who had known the poet, so in a sense the statue is a personal testament from one who had heard at first hand of Burns' generous character, great genius and noble humanity.

John Spiers also showed his awareness of people's more immediate needs. On unveiling day, he sponsored a breakfast for 320 needy people, and some thirty years earlier, he had been a founder of, and thereafter a benefactor to, the Glasgow-Irvine Society, for those of his native town who found themselves in "decaying circumstances".

The whole life of John Spiers was marked by commercial probity and thought for others.

Letter of acceptance, written from 2 Blythswood Square, Glasgow, on 28 January 1893:

My Dear Sir

Yesterday I received your letter of the 26th inst intimating that the Club had unanimously elected me as an honorary member.

I thank them sincerely for the honor conferred.

I am

My Dear Sir

respectfully

yours

John Spiers

Notes:

His writing paper has an attractive light blue "S" at the top left corner.

His writing is extremely shaky.

The letter is addressed to James Dickie, Esq., the Club's Hon. Secy.