

Honorary members of 1894-1896

1894 Sir Donald Matheson, Lord Roberts, John Veitch,
also: William Morris, John Nichol (letters received, but no longer extant; letters from
all five 1894 nominees were read to members at the 1895 Dinner)

1895 Samuel Rutherford Crockett
1896 Alexander Longmuir

1894 Sir Donald Matheson (1832-1901)

An Irvine man, his achievements and character come alive in our minutes of the time: "Sir Donald Matheson, K.C.B., Bourtriehill [*sic*], Irvine, Honorary Colonel, Clyde Division Volunteer Submarine Miners, Royal Engineers, and Honorary Colonel, 1st Lanarkshire Engineer Volunteer Corps, in recognition of the honours conferred on him for distinguished services as an officer of the Volunteer Forces and also of the active and philanthropic interest he takes in all movements for the welfare and culture of the people." We have no other information about him at present.

Letter of acceptance, written from P & O Str "Oriental", Bay of Biscay, on 23 March 1894:

Dear Mr Dickie

When I received intimation from you a considerable time ago that the Irvine Burns Club had done me the honour to elect me an honorary member I intended to, & have since been under the impression that I had, at once accepted the honorary membership with grateful thanks, but having some faint misgivings on the subject I requested Mr Rankin, the last time I saw him to ascertain for me whether I had really done so or only intended & so afterwards thought I had done so, and I received a letter from Mr Rankin the day before I left home informing me that I had omitted to do so.

I am quite ashamed of this misapprehension and oversight on my part, and I will be much obliged if you will be so good as to convey to the members my humble apology for the unwitting delay and my grateful acceptance of the honour they have done me.

I will be happy if I may be afforded some opportunity of meeting with the members of the Club.

With kind regards believe me

Yours faithfully

Donald Matheson

Notes:

'Str' = 'Steamer'.

The letter is addressed to J. Dickie, Esq., Hon. Secy., Irvine Burns Club.

1894: Lord Roberts (1832-1914)

"The Right Honourable Lord Roberts, one of the Generals in the British Army, G.C.B., G.C.S.I., G.C.I.E., V.C., D.C.L., LL.D., of Kandahar of Afghanistan and City of Waterford, in recognition of his distinguished military services in India and in other parts of the Empire." Thus is he recorded in our minutes of the time.

Frederick Sleigh Roberts was an outstanding soldier, born in Cawnpore, India, the son of General Sir A Roberts, and no short biography can do justice to his career. Starting in the Bengal Artillery of the East India Company in 1852, he won the Victoria Cross in India in 1858, and was appointed Q.M.G. there in 1873. On the outbreak of war in Afghanistan in 1878, he restored order in Kurram, and led a mobile column in a brilliant march to the relief of Kandahar. On the withdrawal of British forces, he was appointed commander-in-chief of the Madras army, becoming commander-in-chief in India from 1885 to 1893. Then, for two years, during which time he was nominated for honorary membership, he was at home in Britain.

His career afterwards was equally impressive. After appointment to the chief command in Ireland, he went out in 1899 to the Boer War, in which his only son had recently been killed, as commander-in-chief. Returning home, he assumed the highest position a soldier could then aspire to, commander-in-chief of the army, the last of a long line of distinguished soldiers to hold that office, as it was abolished in 1904. In 1901, he was created Viscount St Pierre and Earl Roberts. In retirement, foreseeing the approaching hostilities, he campaigned actively for universal military training. Known to the army as 'Bobs', he died with his comrades in France in Nov. 1914, at the age of 82.

For an excellent and full account of his career, see the www.pinetreeweb.com site.

Letter of acceptance, written from Evercreech, Somerset, on 1st Feb. 1894

Dear Sir,

I have the pleasure to receive your letter of the 29th January, in which you inform me that the members of the Irvine Burns Club have unanimously elected me an Honorary Member of the Club. I beg you will convey my best thanks to the members & say how much I appreciate the honor they have done me. I look forward to having the pleasure of visiting Irvine some day & seeing the valuable collection of holograph manuscripts left by Scotland's great poet, Burns.

yours very truly

Roberts

Notes: The letter is addressed to James Dickie, Esq., Hon. Secy.

Editor's footnote (2010): History shows the Pashtuns that foreign invaders are vulnerable. In the first Afghan War, in 1842, a 6,000 strong British army retreating from Kabul en route to Kandahar was totally annihilated. In the second Afghan War, in 1880, at the battle of Maiwand, an Afghan force led by Ayub Khan suffered high casualties, but was a rout for the British, as the 2,500 British force under General Burrows lost more than 950 men on their retreat to Kandahar. The third Afghan War in 1919 is now "totally forgotten by us" (Geoff Cowling, Vice-consul in Kabul, 1970-73). The Russian experience was no better. The recent war seems to have achieved nothing. We wonder what advice Lord Roberts might have given.

1894: John Veitch (1829-1894)

Professor of Logic and Rhetoric in the University of Glasgow, John Veitch's published works included the "History and Poetry of the Scottish Border" and various poems.

A poet, philosopher and historian, a native of Peebles, he was appointed in 1860 to the Chair of Logic, Metaphysics and Rhetoric at St Andrews, and to the corresponding Chair at Glasgow in 1864. The volume mentioned in our minutes had appeared in 1877; the appearance of its 2nd edition in 1893 may have prompted his nomination in 1894. He died later that year, on September 3rd.

The website of the University of Glasgow ends its biography of Veitch with this comment: "Historians agree that Veitch was a conservative thinker who showed little sympathy for the latest developments in philosophical thought. He published a number of volumes of philosophical criticism and biographies and bibliographies of famous philosophers (as well as several collections of his own poems), but he is better remembered for his work on the history and poetry of the Scottish Borders."

Letter of acceptance, written from The College, Glasgow, on 10th March 1894

Dear Sir,

I am quite pained to find that your announcement of my election as an Honorary Member of the Irvine Burns Club has remained without acknowledgement until now. The constant pressure of class-work here, requiring daily & unceasing attention, must be my apology.

I have to thank the Club very much indeed for the great honour they have done me in electing me an Honorary Member. I prize the distinction highly, as coming from a Club so long established and so well known, and also as coming from the land of Burns.

The first time I am in Irvine or near it, I shall take the opportunity of seeing and examining the interesting & valuable MSS in possession of the Club.

These have a very special interest – as associated with one of the greatest of our countrymen.

Believe me

Yours truly

J Veitch

Notes:

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

The following two nominees also accepted, as letters from all five 1894 nominees were read to members at the 1895 Dinner. Unfortunately, their letters seem to be no longer extant.

1894: William Morris (1834-1896)

William Morris, poet, artist, designer and Socialist, is recorded in our minutes as the "author of 'Earthly Paradise' (1868-70) and other poems". He is much better remembered today as

the senior partner of Morris, Marshall, Faulkner & Co, a firm of decorators and manufacturers, founded in 1861 after the successful completion of his Red House at Upton in Kent. "Morris did more than anyone else", records the Gresham Encyclopaedia of the 1920s, "to exorcise the spirit of drab ugliness from Victorian houses".

1894: John Nichol (1833-1894)

John Nichol, LL.D., was Emeritus Professor of English Literature, the University of Glasgow, and is recorded in our minutes as "a distinguished Literateur and Author of Poems, and Lives of Burns, Byron, and Carlyle". He had served as Professor from 1861 to 1889. He died in the year of nomination, before the reading of his acceptance letter. His many works covered Ancient, European, and American Literature, and his biographies also included those of Hannibal and Kant.

1895: Samuel Rutherford Crockett (1859-1914)

There was a second reason for this nomination of Scottish novelist S R Crockett - his interest in the Irvine-born John Galt. Our minutes record: "Samuel Rutherford Crockett, Esquire, Scottish Literateur, Penicuik, Mid Lothian, the Author of 'The Stickit Minister'. 'The Raiders', etc, and in recognition of his eminence as a Scottish Literateur and as the Prefatory Contributor to the forthcoming Edition of the Works of John Galt, the Novelist, a native of Irvine".

Crockett became Free Church minister at Penicuik, but gave up the Church for literature. J M Barrie's success with his novels set in Kirriemuir had created a demand for sentimental, home-y stories in Lowland Scots (the 'Kailyard school'), and 'The Stickit Minister' of 1893 first made Rutherford's name known. Following this and 'The Raiders', he published another eleven volumes of tales and sketches.

Letter of acceptance, typed at Bank House, Penicuik, on 29 Jany 1895

Dear Sir,

I desire to thank you and the members of the Irvine Burns Club for the honour of electing me as an Honorary member of their club.

I feel that they have done me a very great honour indeed. I have never been in the town of Irvine but I propose to visit it during this year, if all goes well. I hope that I shall be able to see the excellent collection of MSS which I believe you possess. I had heard of it from Mr. Craibe Angus.

With kind regards,

Faithfully yours

S. R. Crockett

Notes:

This is the earliest typed letter in the collection. Handwritten acceptances have usually been encouraged.

The letter is addressed to James Dickie, Esq., Burns Club, Irvine.

Alexander Longmuir (c.1823-1913)

Irvine-born Alexander Longmuir was a grain merchant, then a bank agent, for The Clydesdale Bank from 1868, for 33 years until retiral in 1901. [In the 1860s, he lived on Bank St.; in 1881, his address was 81 High St; in 1913, he is 'of Roseholm'.] Alexander and two of his sons served Irvine Burns Club as office-bearers.

Alexander became Club Treasurer in 1862, holding that office for 32 years until 1894, when he was succeeded as Treasurer by his son Robert. He served as Club President in 1865. His Club membership dated from 1851. At his death, he was a Director and an Honorary Member, and our minutes declare that "his record in the history of the Club is unique".

Robert F Longmuir (1864-1942, in Irvine; his middle name is the maiden surname of his mother Eliza Findlay, of Beith) took on the role of Treasurer in 1894. His term of office as President in 1901 was extended by a year into 1902, as the 22nd January death of Queen Victoria had prompted the cancellation of the 1901 Annual Celebration. He was a ship broker. His long service as Treasurer was marked by honorary membership in 1926.

James F Longmuir (1856-1937, in Troon), a grain merchant living on Kilwinning Road in Irvine, was Club President in 1892. He was a lieutenant in the 'Irvine Company' Ayrshire Rifle Volunteers, later (1880) the 1st Ayrshire Rifle Volunteers. His first son was, as was customary, named after his grandfather.

Letter of acceptance, written from the Clydesdale Bank, Irvine, on 27th Jany, 1896

Dear Sir

I have much pleasure in acknowlwedging the receipt of your letter of the 25th Inst. intimating my election as an Honorary Member of "The Irvine Burns Club.

The past kindness and consideration of the Club in continuing the appointment of Hony. Treasurer in my family; as also, the Extract from the Records of the Club I received on my resignation of the Treasurership, are very gratifying to my feelings; and conjoined with this later honourable mark of distinction just conferred upon me, evoke my sincere and heartfelt thanks. With kindest regards for the welfare, and continued prosperity of the Club,

I remain

Yours very faithfully

A. Longmuir

Notes:

The letter is addressed to James Dickie, Esq., Hon. Secy., The Irvine Burns Club. His son succeeded him as Hon. Treasurer.