

Honorary member of 1836 – Sir James Shaw

Sir James Shaw (1764-1844)

James Shaw started life as the son of a farmer at Mosshead near Riccarton in East Ayrshire, and became Lord Mayor of London in 1805, where he was responsible for leading the funeral of Admiral Lord Nelson after Trafalgar.

He was a real-life Dick Whittington. When he was barely five years old his father died and his mother was forced to move the family into Kilmarnock, where Shaw was educated at the Grammar School. At the age of fifteen, he followed his older brother to seek his fortune in USA, where he was able to secure employment in commerce. In 1784 he returned to Britain and quickly rose to become a junior partner in the London office of the company he had worked for in New York. He began to move in influential circles and won respect from his peers such that he was appointed Lord Mayor of London in 1805.

His respect for Robert Burns was such that, after the death of the poet in 1796, Shaw helped support his widow and gained employment for his sons.

In 1806 Shaw was elected a Member of Parliament in London, a position in which he served until 1818. In 1809 he was created a Baronet. In 1816, Shaw defended the Royal Exchange when it was attacked by radicals, intervening to capture one of the leaders of the protest. He served as an Alderman of London until 1831 when he was raised to the office of Chamberlain of the City, resigning from this office shortly before he died.

Shaw is remembered by a marble statue in Kilmarnock, erected by public subscription. The statue, by sculptor James Fillans (1808-52), was unveiled in 1848.

[Information courtesy of The Gazetteer for Scotland at www.geo.ed.ac.uk/scotgaz]

Letter of acceptance, written from London on 1st February 1836

Dear Sirs,

Accept my acknowledgements for the honour done to me by the Burns Club of Irvine, on the 25th ult., in electing me an Honorary Member of their society, and believe me to be with great respect

Dear Sir

Your [Ob.] Sert

Jam^s Shaw

Notes:

This letter is addressed to W. Thomson Esq., Chairman, and the members of Burns Club, Irvine.

(It is clearly dated 1836, but bears, in another hand, an incorrect date of 1834.)