

Honorary member of 1837 – 13th Earl of Eglinton

also Mr John Shaw, Rev. Mr Campbell

13th Earl of Eglinton (1812-1861)

Archibald William, 13th Earl of Eglinton, Knight of the Thistle, was grandson of Hugh, the 12th Earl; he succeeded to the title in 1819, at the age of 7, and was educated at Eton. At a dinner for his 20th birthday, in September 1832, he was presented with the freedom of the burgh. As he was only 24 in January 1837, his nomination as an honorary member reflects the standing of the family in North Ayrshire rather than his own, later, achievements, outlined below.

The Montgomeries of Eglinton (lords in the Scottish peerage from 1427) had, like the Cunninghams of Kilmaurs, extended their possessions and influence during the 16th century, and the 3rd lord Hugh (Montgomerie) was created Earl of Eglinton in 1508 [or '06 or '07 or '03]. The 13th Earl's grandfather, the 12th Earl, Hugh, had commissioned Eglinton Castle (completed 1802), had employed the services of the celebrated engineer Thomas Telford to survey the Bay of Ardrossan, leading to the 1805 Act of Parliament empowering a company to be formed to construct a harbour and canal to Glasgow, had joined the British peerage as Baron Ardrossan in 1806, had built Bath Villa, a hydropathic bathing facility in Ardrossan, in 1807, and had obtained a Royal Charter for Irvine Academy in 1818. An accumulation of debt led to the estate's 20th century decline: the 12th Earl left family debt of £269,000; the 13th Earl's expensive tastes were not covered by the considerable new income from coal and iron, and the 14th Earl suffered in the 1878 Glasgow Bank crash. The present (at time of writing) 18th Earl, Archibald George Montgomerie, also 7th Baron Ardrossan, 6th Earl of Winton, and 19th Lord Montgomerie, born in 1939, succeeded to these titles in 1966 and lives elsewhere.

The 13th Earl, Archibald William, was (quoting his obituary in 'The Gentleman's Magazine') "a leading patron of the turf and had at one period one of the largest and best racing studs in the country; his success on the turf was considerable". The local Bogside races, initiated by his father in 1808 and held until 1824, were revived in 1838, when the course was extended and steeplechasing was introduced into Scotland, though in the 13th Earl's later absence, from 1852, they again lapsed (until 1867). The Earl ran winning horses in the St Leger (1842, '47 & '49) and the Derby (1849). His obituary recalls: "His pleasures, like his business occupations, were such as benefited others, for they were eminently sociable."

He is best known locally for the Eglinton Tournament of 1839. Described by a county historian as "one of the most gorgeous spectacles ever witnessed", it is said to have cost £40,000. It was the last tournament in Britain, hosted in temporary pavilions, grandstands and canopies in the grounds of the Castle. It attracted to Irvine the cream of society, including Prince Louis Napoleon (later Emperor Napoleon III of France), and vast crowds which arrived by coach, carriage, steamboat and railway, but suffered greatly from unfavourable weather over the first two days. To commemorate the event, the Earl was

presented with the magnificent silver Eglinton Trophy, now displayed in Cunninghame House, Irvine.

In 1843, Sir Robert Peel appointed him Lord-Lieutenant of Ayrshire (succeeding George Boyle, the 4th Earl of Glasgow). In 1852, Lord Derby appointed him Lord Lieutenant of Ireland and the Earl's obituarist wrote: "the rare social qualities of his lordship, combined with his princely hospitality, rendered him a most popular viceroy". He retired from that dignity at the end of 1852, but held it again from 1858-59. In 1859, the Earldom of Winton (held by his kinsfolk the Setons until the 5th Earl's treason in 1740) was conferred on him by Lord Derby.

Other, less momentous, events include: from 1836 to 1852, he was colonel of the Ayrshire militia; in 1844, the Countess of Eglinton endowed a school to provide instruction for 80 girls in reading, sewing and knitting (the Council made available a room in the old school building at Kirkgatehead); in 1851, the Earl gave the Town Council the Bogside Flats, in exchange for land he wanted at Knadgerhill to create a new entrance to his policies; and, in 1852, he was elected Lord Rector of Glasgow University.

He died in 1861, at only 49, after a golf match at St Andrews, from "a fit of apoplexy which at once rendered him unconscious", and was succeeded by his son, aged 20, also named Archibald William; he had a daughter Egidia and two other sons. His first wife had died suddenly in Dec.1853, and his second (Lady Adela, only daughter of the Earl and Countess of Essex) had died suddenly in Dec.1860. The 13th Earl's portrait hangs in Irvine Burns Club premises. Our website contains a commentary on his uniform in the painting.

Letter of acceptance, received from Eglinton Castle on 27th January, 1837

Sir,

I beg to return you & the other gentlemen of the Burns Club my thanks for the honor [sic] you paid me in drinking my health on the anniversary of the poet's birthday.

I also have to thank you for having proposed me as an honorary member of the Society, & assure you that I feel great pleasure in becoming one.

I have the honor to be

Your Obedt Servt

Eglinton

Notes:

This card was addressed to Mr John Dean, Chairman [President] of The Irvine Burns Club (in 1837) and received by him on 27th January, 1837

Other nominees of 1837

The minuted nominees also include a **Mr John Shaw** and a **Rev. Mr Campbell** - we know nothing of either of these. They may or may not have accepted.