

Honorary members of 1946–1949

1946 Field Marshal Montgomery, Thomas Johnston, Winston Churchill

1947 Dwight D Eisenhower

1948 James Bridie, James Barr

1949 Ian Whyte

1946 Field Marshal Montgomery (1887-1976)

Bernard Law Montgomery ('Monty') served in the First World War, the Irish War of Independence and the Second World War, and the very detailed Wikipedia entry will supply as much information as most people wish. At the time of his acceptance below, and probably at the time of his nomination, he had recently, in the 1946 New Year Honours, been created 1st Viscount Montgomery of Alamein.

Montgomery is one of several war leaders offered Honorary Membership by Irvine Burns Club, honouring those leading the armed forces in pursuit of the freedom enjoyed by later generations. Appointed in 1942 as commander of the Eighth Army, his victory at El Alamein eliminated the Axis threat to Egypt, the Suez Canal and the Middle Eastern and Persian oil fields. and revived the morale of the Allies, being the first big success against the Axis since late 1941.

Montgomery made a great effort to appear before troops as often as possible, frequently visiting various units and making himself known to the men, often arranging for cigarettes to be distributed; in relations with politicians and other generals, his lack of tact and diplomacy was sometimes counter-productive.

Letter of acceptance, written from Tac Headquarters, British Army of the Rhine, on 27 January, 1946

Dear Sir

Thank you for your letter informing me that I have been elected an Honorary Member of the Irvine Burns Club. I am much honoured by this distinction which you have conferred on me. I would be glad if you would convey my grateful thanks to all your members.

Yrs. sincerely
B. L. Montgomery
Field-Marshal

Notes:

"Tac HQ" is short for Tactical HQ.

The main paragraph is typed. The letter is addressed to William Phillips, Esq., President, Irvine Burns Club, Park Terrace, Irvine

1946: Thomas ('Tom') Johnston (1881-1965)

Tom Johnston, the son of a Kirkintilloch grocer, was a prominent Scottish socialist journalist who became a politician, an MP, and a government minister, being Secretary of State for Scotland in 1941-45. As founding editor of 'Forward' (1906-59), he ensured, when Mrs Pankhurst spoke in Glasgow in 1914, that she had a bodyguard of brawny dockers and navvies who promptly ejected a group of university students when they tried to disrupt her meeting.

In 'The Scottish Nation' (1999), Professor T M Devine describes Tom Johnston as "Scotland's wartime supremo", "a giant figure in Scottish politics" and "the greatest Scottish Secretary of the century", writing that "he was no political theorist but a man of action who was committed to achieving practical results for Scotland". Devine posits several factors which helped Johnston: the war gave him an opportunity for planning and state reform, he is believed to have presented Churchill with a slate of demands before he accepted the Scottish Office, there was a climate of opinion sympathetic to state intervention, and he was able to use the 'nationalist threat' to extract more concessions in Scotland.

In 1909, he published 'Our Scots Noble Families', one of the fiercest polemics ever written about Scotland's land-owners, banned at the time by some booksellers, and republished, with the permission of his 82-y-o daughter Mary, in 1999. Mary remembered Churchill's remark to her father as he stepped forward to receive them – "Ah, he said, "Here comes the king of Scotland."

A leader in 'The Times' in 2020 (Oct 2nd) gives him due credit – the leader ended: "Climate change demands the kind of vision not seen in Scotland since the mid-20th century, when the hydroelectric revolution sparked by Tom Johnston, Scottish Secretary in Winston Churchill's wartime cabinet, transformed the Highlands and gave the nation an invaluable head start in renewables. Something of that boldness is required today."

Letter of acceptance, written from "Monteviot", Kirkintilloch on 14/1/46, addressed to William Phillips, Esq., President, Irvine Burns Club

Dear Sir,

I am greatly obliged for and honoured by your letter of 10th January, informing me that I have been unanimously elected an Honorary Member of the ancient Irvine Burns Club, and for the knowledge that I share that dignity with a long list of distinguished men.

Please inform your colleagues that I most willingly accept.

Yours Sincerely,

Thomas Johnston

Notes:

Tom Johnston and his wife later retired to Fintry, then moved to Milngavie.

1946 Winston Churchill (1874-1965)

There is no need here to attempt a synopsis celebrating the leadership of Winston Churchill during the Second World War, after which Irvine Burns Club offered him Honorary Membership and he, through his Private Secretary, accepted. He was knighted in 1953, having declined the title of Duke of London.

However, it is relevant to mention some of his many links with Scotland. Incidentally born on St Andrews Day, Churchill served as Liberal MP for Dundee for 14 years (1908-22), called for Scottish home rule in 1912, served with the Royal Scots Fusiliers on the Western Front in 1915, warned at Ibrox Stadium in 1949 that Labour's nationalisation policy threatened Scots' autonomy, and said to his troops that "Although an Englishman, it was in Scotland that I found the three best things in my life: my wife, my constituency and my regiment". His wife Clementine was of Scottish descent. Churchill served as Rector of the University of Aberdeen in 1914, and of the University of Edinburgh in 1929. In 1940, he formed the Commandos in Scotland and ordered the creation of the Scapa Flow barriers on Orkney. His good relationship with Secretaries of State for Scotland, particularly Tom Johnston (see previous Honorary Member item above), transformed the country. Churchill accepted the freedom of the City of Edinburgh in 1942.

(source: an account of Churchill's Scottish links by columnist Alastair Stewart)

Letter written on his behalf from the House of Commons on 30th March, 1946, addressed to The President, Irvine Burns Club

Dear Sir,

Mr. Churchill has now seen your letter of the 10th January, in which you inform him that he has been elected an Honorary Member of the Irvine Burns Club, and has asked me to say how pleased he is by this compliment. At the same time I am to express regret that it is not possible for him to reply in his own handwriting, as he is very heavily pressed by both public and private business. He is sure you will understand and excuse him.

Yours truly,
Elizabeth Gilliatt
Private Secretary

Notes:

The notepaper is embossed with the House of Commons crest, which does not appear in photocopies.

Elizabeth Gilliatt was Churchill's P.S. from 1945 to 1955.

1947 Dwight D Eisenhower (1890-1969)

In 1947, Dwight D Eisenhower ('Ike') was a successful general but had not yet been persuaded to run for President, an office he held from 1953-1961. After the United States entered World War II, Eisenhower oversaw the invasions of North Africa and Sicily before supervising the invasions of France and Germany. In December 1943, President Roosevelt decided that Eisenhower would be Supreme Allied Commander in Europe. After the war

ended in Europe, he served as Military Governor of the American-occupied zone of Germany (1945) and as Army Chief of Staff (1945–1948).

Letter of acceptance, written from Washington, on 28 November, 1947, addressed to Mr Peter McGinn and Mr William Phillips

Dear Mr McGinn

I am delighted to have the distinction of honorary membership in The Irvine Burns Club. May I ask you to convey my sentiments of gratitude to all your members for the graciousness of their action?

Should the fortune bring me opportunity to visit your library you may be sure I shall take instant advantage of it. My pleasure in seeing your interesting souvenirs of the great Scottish poet will be all the deeper if I should be able, also, to call upon you to express my thanks in person.

Very sincerely
Dwight D Eisenhower

Notes:

The letter, on paper headed with a circle of five stars and the initials D D E, is in Eisenhower's own hand.

1948 James Bridie (1888-1951)

James Bridie was a pseudonym – that of Scottish playwright, screenwriter and physician Osborne Henry Mavor. He graduated in medicine from the University of Glasgow in 1913 and served in the Royal Army Medical Corps during the First World War, subsequently practising as a doctor in Glasgow before his increasing success as a dramatist led to his embracing that career full-time.

He founded the Citizens Theatre in Glasgow in 1943 and many of his 40 or more plays were performed there between 1943 and 1960. He was the first chairman of the Arts Council in Scotland and was also instrumental in the establishment of the Edinburgh Festival.^[5] In 1950 he founded the Glasgow College of Dramatic Art, part of the Royal Conservatoire today.

Letter written from Finnich Malise, Drymen Station, Stirlingshire, on February 14th, 1948

My dear President,

I think I need hardly tell you how great an honour I feel it to be to be elected to the Honorary Membership of the illustrious Irvine Burns Club. It brings to a sharp focus the pride one feels in belonging to a nation which chooses a great lyric poet for its national hero.

If there is anything I can do to repay, in some small measure, the kindness you have done me, I hope that you and your successors will not hesitate to ask.

Yours very sincerely
James Bridie

1948 Rev James Barr (1862-1949)

Rev James Barr was a Scottish minister and a British Liberal then Labour politician and a noted pacifist and socialist. He was also a strong supporter of home rule for Scotland, a minimum wage and the Temperance movement.

He is named in the following extract from Paul Malgrati's article on "MacDiarmid's Burns: The Political Context, 1917–1928" (in the Scottish Literary Review, Volume 11, Number 1, Spring/Summer 2019, pp. 47-66): "MPs like Thomas Johnston, David Kirkwood, George Buchanan and James Barr were deeply attached to the bard's patriotic and plebeian image, as expressed a few years earlier by John S. Clarke. They had placed Home Rule for Scotland at the heart of their programme. On 9 May 1924, five months after the government of Ramsay MacDonald was formed, the first Labour Home Rule bill was introduced by George Buchanan in the House of Commons. His plea was seconded by Tom Johnston who invoked, in a patriotic flight, the 1787 letter written by Burns to Dr Moore in which he expressed how 'the story of [William] Wallace [had] poured a tide of Scottish prejudice into [his] veins'."

(<https://eprints.gla.ac.uk/262412/1/262412.pdf>)

D Goldie has written (in "Robert Burns and twentieth-century war" in G. Carruthers (Ed.), The Oxford Companion to Robert Burns Oxford: Oxford University Press): "Burns had been much on the lips of Labour Party parliamentarians in the years leading up to the second war such as Davie Kirkwood and the Reverend James Barr. Both were prodigious Burnsians. It was said that Barr had given 1,200 addresses on Burns in the interwar years, and he was notorious for having spoken in a debate on the King's Speech in 1943 with quotes from Burns that filled a column of Hansard. But Kirkwood's reverence for Burns was sometimes written off as a kind of affectation or sentimental shtick, and Barr seemed too ready to use Burns intemperately as an advocate for his own brand of militant Temperance."

(https://strathprints.strath.ac.uk/73711/1/Goldie_OUP_2020_Robert_Burns_and_twentieth_century.pdf)

Letter written from the United Free Church of Scotland, 11 Newton Place, Glasgow, C3, addressed to Mr Phillips, Hon. Secy.:

Dear Mr Phillips,

I am deeply grateful for the honour you and your Club propose to do me in appointing me an Honorary Member of the Irvine Burns Club. I need not say that I highly appreciate the honour, & have much pleasure in accepting it.

In a fortnight or thereby shall call on you, to see the documents you have, & to talk over matters.

I will be glad to give you a lecture on Burns at such time as can be arranged.

With high regard, & many thanks,

I am,

yours very sincerely,

James Barr

1949 Ian Whyte (1901-1960)

Ian Whyte, whose relatives in Irvine contributed to the life of Irvine Burns Club and many other Irvine groups, was a conductor and composer. He studied the piano at the RCM in London and composition with Stanford and Vaughan Williams. He returned to Scotland in 1923, first as music director to Lord Glentanar, who mounted productions of Mozart and Sullivan at Aboyne in Aberdeenshire. In 1932 he became head of BBC music in Scotland, holding that position until 1945. In 1935, he founded, and in 1945, became conductor of, the BBC Scottish Orchestra, later the BBC Scottish Symphony Orchestra.

In our display case is a pen given to Ian Whyte by Sir Harry Lauder, inscribed "Ian Whyte, from Sir Harry Lauder, for Service Rendered". Ian Whyte's piano resides in the Music Room at 'Wellwood', where it continues its contribution to the enjoyment of attenders at concerts.

Letter of acceptance, written from 72 Clouston Street, Glasgow, NW, on 20th January 49, to President J M McDavid and Hon. Secy William Phillips:

Dear Sir,

Let me thank you and Mr William Phillips for your kind letter: and for the honour you have done me in making me an honorary member of your club. The Irvine Burns Club has a distinguished name, and I hope that my name - now and after - may add grace to it.

I have always been fully and quietly proud of belonging to that same Scotland to which Robert Burns belonged: after having received your letter I think I shall be more vociferous.

I repeat my thanks: and I wish you and your fellow members well.

Yours sincerely

Ian Whyte