

Honorary members of 2000 – 2002

2000 Donald Dewar, Andrew Motion, Seamus Heaney, Arnold Palmer

2001 Jim Telfer, Michael Martin, J J Caldwell

2002 Tony Benn, Henry McLeish, Craig Brown, Eric Caldow

2000 Donald Dewar (1937-2000)

I* had the pleasure, as a first year university student, of witnessing Donald Dewar (then in the final year of his law degree course) in full flow at Glasgow University Union's Friday evening debating competitions. It is easy to remember his tall, lanky frame, untidy hair and his wonderful "debater's stammer". There were many other great debaters among his contemporaries, such as John Smith, Jimmy Gordon and Menzies ("Ming") Campbell.

Donald was born in August 1937, the only child of elderly, well to do parents, who did not enjoy the best of health. At the age of two and a half he was sent to a small boarding school in Perthshire and at the age of nearly five he moved to another boarding school near Hawick. He then moved back to Glasgow, at the age of nine, to attend Moorpark School. This was not a happy experience for Donald but around this time the Dewar family started a long series of happy holidays at a farm in Aberdeenshire, where he started a lifelong friendship with Charlie Adam, whose parents owned the farm. Charlie who was the same age as Donald is reported as saying that he cried only twice in his life-once when the local minister refused to allow his father a church funeral and on hearing the report of Donald's death.

Donald moved from his unhappy experience at Moorpark to Glasgow Academy where the imperatives of sporting excellence passed him by! However, despite finding it difficult to make friends in the school, he saw himself as a "happy misfit". This description was typical of Donald's self-deprecating humour.

When Donald went to Glasgow University he came into contact with a group of young men who influenced the direction that his life would take, none less than John Smith, who was to become the leader of the UK Labour Party. As well as those mentioned at the beginning of this piece this group included Ross Harper (who was to set up one of Scotland's largest law firms), Donald McCormack (who became a prominent political broadcaster) and Derry Irvine (who became Lord Chancellor). In those days Law students were obliged to first complete another degree before studying for the law degree and Donald's first degree was an MA in history. His love and great command of Scottish history and culture stood him in good stead as he later campaigned for the formation of a Scottish Parliament. He was passionate in his desire to eradicate inequality and poverty.

Donald had an encyclopaedic knowledge of Scots literature, history and art and possessed a wonderful collection of books and paintings related to these interests. It is said that his reading of Burns, Hume and Cockburn provided "fodder for his mind" and his training in Law and history "helped form the radical mind inside the crumpled suit". Donald was not known for his elegant dress sense!

In 1999, at a conference in Dublin he was asked, "What are you?" to which he replied, "I am a Scot, a citizen of the United Kingdom with a very real interest in the future of the European Union".

Donald was relentless in his (and John Smith's) dream of the formation of a Scottish Parliament. That dream became a reality in 1999 when, after nearly three hundred years this Parliament met in Edinburgh. He was recognised as "The father of the nation" and his legacy to Scotland cannot be easily ignored. This legacy is often summed up in words Donald wrote: "There shall be a Scottish Parliament". Donald died on 11 October 2000. He was of course the first First Minister and since there can be only one first First Minister his place in History can be assured.

(contributed by Michael Murray, President 1999-2000)*

Letter of acceptance, written from the Scottish Executive, St Andrew's House, Regent Road, Edinburgh, undated

Dear Mr Murray,

I appreciate your kind invitation to become an honorary member of Irvine Burns Club. I am delighted to accept and to join the impressive list of those who have become members of a club with such a distinguished and lengthy history,

Yours sincerely,
Donald C. Dewar

2000 Andrew Motion (1952-)

When considering the possibilities for honorary membership for 2000, it was pointed out to me that it was traditional to offer membership to the Poet Laureate. Since Andrew Motion had been appointed as only the 19th Poet Laureate late in 1998 I duly invited him to be an honorary member, without knowing very much about the man. However when I started to research his life and works, I was very pleasantly surprised. Here is a man chosen by the establishment but by no means a puppet of that establishment.

As well as being an acclaimed poet he is also a very well respected biographer (eg Philip Larkin and John Keats). His Larkin biography won a Whitbread Award in 1993. His poetry publications include "The Pleasure Steamers" (1977), "Secret Narratives" (1983), "Dangerous Play: Poems 1974-1984" (1984), "Selected Poems" (1998).

Andrew is married to Jan Dalley, a journalist and they have three children. He has written a book - "Love in a Life", which is about his marriage to Jan.

When he was sixteen years old, Andrew's mother was involved in a riding accident, which left her in a comatose state until she died ten years later in hospital. Her death (obviously) had a profound effect on Andrew and helped to shape his ambition to be a writer. He often brought her into his writing "as another way of keeping her alive". Indeed his poem, "The Letter", which is about her won him the Avron International Poetry Competition in 1981.

People who know him well describe him as "a sensitive man who writes sensitive poetry about love and loss and a sad childhood who speaks in a soft and beguiling voice". Indeed the more the author of this modest piece reads of him the more determined I am to study his works and perhaps revisit this task and do a much more comprehensive appreciation of the man.

(contributed by Michael Murray, President 1999-2000)

Letter of acceptance, written from his home in London on 20th July 1999

Dear Michael Murray,

Thank you for your letter.

I'll be honoured to accept honorary membership of your club: Burns is a poet I revere.

Alas, though. I won't be able to be with you on 28 January 2000.

With good wishes and thanks

Andrew Motion

Notes:

Andrew Motion is the first Poet Laureate to have a set term of ten years - previously the office was held for life. His successor Carol Ann Duffy was appointed in 2009.

The acceptance is typewritten.

2000 Seamus Heaney (1939-2013)

Seamus Heaney was born in County Derry in 1939, the eldest of nine children. His father had a small farm but was more committed to cattle dealing. His mother's maiden name was McCann and her family was more connected with the industrial than with the rural economy of the Heaneys. One side of Seamus' family was connected with the cattle-herding Gaelic past and the other side with the Ulster of the Industrial Revolution. Seamus considers his formation as a poet to have been greatly affected by the tension between speech and silence in his family life. Whereas his dad was "sparing of talk" his mother was notably ready to speak out and Seamus believes that this contrast between his parents has been fundamental to the "quarrel with himself" out of which his poetry rises. Although Seamus has travelled widely, and now has his home in Dublin, rural Derry is the "country of mind" where much of his poetry is still grounded.

His poetry first came to my notice when I visited a third year English class in St Andrew's Academy. The class was studying the Poem "Digging" and I was immediately impressed by the total concentration of the youngsters in this class, which was not the top section in the year group. This experience made me buy a box set of his poetry a few weeks later. The box set comprise of four volumes "Death of a Naturalist", "Door in the Dark", "Wintering Out", and "North". Although "Digging" is still one of my favourites among his prodigious output, there are many others of his poems which stand out like the great works of Robert Burns. His poem "Mid-Term Break" is a simple but very moving account of his being brought home from boarding school for the funeral of his four year old brother who had been killed by a car.

This very human human-being has been a professor of English at Oxford and Harvard as well as lecturing at Queens University, Dublin, Carysfort Teacher Training College, and Berkley University, California.

He has won many awards throughout the World including The Whitbread Prize (in 1996 for 'The Sprit Level' and in 1999 for his translation of 'Beowulf'), The Southbank Prize and Commandeur De L'Ordre des Arts et Lettres by the French Ministry of Culture. However his most outstanding award was that of Nobel Prize for Literature in 1995 - the citation read:

"for works of lyrical beauty and ethical depth, which exalt everyday miracles and the living past".

(contributed by Michael Murray, President 1999-2000)

Letter of acceptance, written from 9 Maitland Road, Reading, on 23 Jan., 1937

Dear Mr Murray,

It was a great pleasure to receive your letter offering me Honorary Membership of the Irvine Burns Club. I accept with gratitude and am proud to join the line of distinguished predecessors.

I am sorry that I cannot attend your annual celebration on January 28. A few weeks previous to your letter, I agreed to go to the University of York for a fund-raising event on that Friday. I cannot renege on it at this stage.

Some day I hope to go to Irvine, to see the treasure-trove of manuscripts and letters. In the meantime I rejoice in my affiliation.

Sincerely,

Seamus Heaney

Notes:

Although Seamus Heaney could not attend the function in 2000, he visited the Club in March 2004, and was the President's guest at the 2004 Directors' Dinner.

2000 Arnold Palmer (1869-1950)

Arnold was born in the small town of Latrobe in Pennsylvania USA. His home as a child was near to the Latrobe Country Club Golf Course, where he spent a great deal of his formative years playing with clubs, which were cut down to size by his dad, who was the professional and course superintendent at the golf club. From the age of eleven much of his time was spent caddying and performing lots of tasks about the club and very early on his ability as a player showed through. He was able to beat many of the older caddies and by the age of seventeen became the Western Pennsylvania Amateur Champion (he repeated this feat four more times). He began to perform well in national events and went to Wake Forest College where he soon became top player in the golf team but he was so affected by the death (in a car accident) of a golf team mate and closest friend that he left college and joined the US coastguard service for three years. After completing his three years with the coastguard service he returned to complete his education at Wake Forest and in 1954 became the US Amateur Champion.

Shortly after winning this prestigious event Arnold became a golf professional and then married Winifred Walzer. The young couple travelled together to tour events until their first child reached school age. He soon achieved success in the highly competitive US Tour and between 1960 and 1963 he won twenty three titles. In three of these four years he was the leading money winner and twice represented his country in the Ryder Cup. He made the supporters feel important and he was followed by huge groups, who soon became known as "Arnie's Army". In the UK he helped to breathe new life into the Open Championship, when

many of his American colleagues did not see it as important enough to leave US to participate. He is acknowledged by many as a major reason for the fact that the best players from all over the world try to win this tournament. Arnold won this twice and also won The Masters four times, US Open once. In his career he won a total of ninety two national and international competitions.

His company has designed or remodelled over two hundred golf courses and he has become as successful as an entrepreneur as he was a golfer. His business interests have involved auto and aviation interests as well as every conceivable aspect of golf equipment. He has received many honours during his life and has contributed a great deal to a large number of charities related to children's and women's health. Indeed he has set up a foundation "The Arnold Palmer Hospital for Women and Children".

Arnold was married to Winifred for forty five years until she died of cancer in November 1999. Arnold had successful surgery for prostate cancer in 1997 and he did much to publicise and support early detection and cancer research.

Arnold graciously accepted the invitation to become an honorary member of Irvine Burns Club in 1999/2000. When the club was organising the "Dear Mr Burns" exhibition, Arnold was asked for a photograph for publicity material. This request was met with an immediate response, despite the fact that (as was discovered later) Arnold was heavily involved in the organisation of the Annual World Golf Hall of Fame awards ceremony. He was inducted into the Hall of Fame in 2009 and was awarded an Honorary Degree by St Andrews University in 2010.

(contributed by Michael Murray, President 1999-2000)

Letter of acceptance, written on a personal postcard, unaddressed & undated, to Michael Murray, Club President that year, himself a keen golfer

Dear Michael,

I am pleased to accept honorary membership in the Irvine Burns Club, but will not be able to attend the annual celebration next January!

Sincerely,

Arnold Palmer

2001 Jim Telfer (1940-)

Jim Telfer was a Scottish rugby union coach and player. As a player, he won 21 international caps in the amateur era, also having a career as a headmaster at Hawick High School and Galashiels Academy and Forrester High School as a chemistry teacher. With Sir Ian McGeechan he had success with both the Scotland national team and the British Lions.

Allan Massie wrote of him: "Telfer is a man of innate authority. There's a wealth of quiet reserve and self-knowledge, touched by that form of self-mockery which appears as understatement, in the way he will describe himself as being a 'dominant personality'."

Letter of acceptance, written from his home in Galashiels, Selkirkshire, on 27/12/00 to Hugh Hutchison, Club President that year, himself a keen rugby player.:

Dear Hugh,

Thank you very much for your kind invitation to become an Honorary Member of the Irvine Burns Club. I feel very privileged to be asked & I readily accept. I have always been an admirer of the Burns culture, although I must admit to not being an expert on the Bard myself. I never fail to be impressed, & rather humbled, when his virtues (and foibles) are extolled by speakers at Burns Suppers and on other occasions.

I would like to come to your Annual Supper on Friday 26th January 2001 but, at this point in time, I am not too sure what my rugby movements will be on that evening. That weekend is scheduled for the European Cup 1/4 Finals and as yet we don't know the participants. However, if the Reds or the Reivers don't have a game on that night, I will be delighted to come.

Thank you again for your very kind invitation & I hope to see you on the 26th.

Yours sincerely,

Jim Telfer

Notes:

The teams mentioned are the Glasgow Caledonian Reds, later Glasgow Warriors, and the Edinburgh Reivers, later Edinburgh Rugby.

2001 Michael Martin (1945-2018)

The Rt Hon Michael J Martin, M.P., later ennobled as Lord Martin of Springburn, was Speaker of the House of Commons from 2000 to 2009. No holder of the post in modern times had come from such a deprived background - son of a merchant navy stoker who drank heavily, and after his father's death brought up with four siblings by his mother Mary, a cleaner, his childhood was harsh - he left school at 15, became a sheet metal worker, then shop steward at Rolls-Royce Aero-Engineers, passing his first 'O' Level when he was 42. He was elected MP for Glasgow Springburn in 1979.

Avuncular but ill-at-ease as Speaker, he demonstrated his modernity by dispensing with wig and breeches while in the chair, and, with his gravelly voice, ruddy complexion and white hair, was often seen and heard warning barracking MPs about their behaviour, but his gruffness contrasted with the vibrant personality of his predecessor Betty Boothroyd. Unfortunately, at the time of the MPs expenses scandal, he was slow to recognise the public perception that many MPs were greedy and self-interested. His handling of fast-moving developments and the possibility of a no-confidence motion led to trusted friends advising him to stand down - Michael Martin thus became the first Speaker for over 300 years to be forced from office. Also for the record(s), he was also the first Roman Catholic Speaker since Thomas More in 1523 - a fact which, though of no importance today, was nevertheless a mark of progress last century. He was very Scottish, very working-class and very Roman Catholic.

(these notes are indebted to his obituary in 'The Times' 30/4/18)

Letter of acceptance, written from Speaker's House, Westminster, London, SW1A 0AA, on 22nd Jan 2001, to Hugh Hutchison, Club President:

Dear Hugh,

Thank you for your kind letter, inviting to nominate me as an Honorary Member of Irvine Burns Club.

I consider it a great honour to be nominated and I will accept membership with great pleasure.

Please give my warmest regards to all at the Annual Celebration on the 26th January. I hope the evening is a great success.

Yours

Michael J Martin

Speaker

2001 J J Caldwell (1930-2012)

The following appreciation appeared in "The Herald" on 10 Jan., 2013, under the heading "Hotelier and host to the stars".

Joe Caldwell was a kenspeckle figure in his native Ayrshire where he was "mine host" at the Eglinton Arms Hotel in Irvine for almost 50 years. He was more than a publican or hotelier, for his interest in people and music meant his hotel became a magnet for musicians, singers and entertainers, as varied as Billy Connolly, Anne Lorne Gillies and Acker Bilk. He even managed to persuade the flamboyant American pianist Liberace to drop in for a late-night drink when in the area, a visit that caused problems for the local police who were unaccustomed to pink Cadillacs double-parking in Irvine's High Street.

In what was the golden age of the Scottish pub, the Eglinton Arms was at the heart of the Irvine community and, within an industry then full of characters, Mr Caldwell was much respected and liked by his licensed trade peers across Scotland.

Among his earliest initiatives on arriving in Irvine in 1960 was the Eglinton Burns Club which staged the town's first mixed Burns Supper. Such a break from tradition may have raised eyebrows but it is a tribute to Mr Caldwell's vision and high standards that the Eglinton Burns Club shortly celebrates its 53rd anniversary.

In the 1960s Irvine grew and Mr Caldwell was one of the innovators behind an ambitious expansion of the historical Marymass Fair by introducing a 10-day Folk Festival. Local sceptics feared the worst but the festival was an instant success with often three or four packed concerts running simultaneously in different venues each night. Folk legends including Matt McGinn, Alex Campbell and Josh McCrae were joined by then youngsters such as Gerry Rafferty, Barbara Dickson, Archie Fisher, The McCalmans and Aly Bain.

Mr Caldwell's musical tastes were catholic and he helped Bert Whyte, the then town clerk, found the Irvine Music Club which still meets regularly and attracts classical musicians and singers from the Scottish Conservatoire and beyond.

But Mr Caldwell's musical interest and network soon discovered more constructive opportunities when he supported his wife, Ann, in fundraising for Action Medical Research.

They were successful in raising tens of thousands of pounds across Scotland for their adopted charity. When Mr Caldwell asked anyone to speak or perform at Action events, there were few who refused, for people were happy to appear free for someone who asked little but constantly gave something back.

He became involved in the Irvine Burns Club, was its president in 1979 and continued afterwards as a director. In 2001 he was made an honorary member and in his acceptance letter, with typical modesty, admitted to being absolutely flabbergasted but completely delighted.

Almost single-handedly, he revived the Irvine Skinners, eventually becoming its deacon, and then Deacon Convener of the Irvine Incorporated Trades. Not content with local involvement, he joined the Trades House of Glasgow, became deacon of the Incorporation of Skinners and Glovers and served on its master court for more than 20 years.

His interest in football is well-documented, less so his interest in golf and rugby but, of all his leisure pursuits, his love of sailing was probably paramount.

To paraphrase Robert Burns, he was "the social, friendly honest man who filled great nature's plan" and he did it with a big grin, a twinkle in his eye, a laugh in his voice and a welcoming hand of friendship.

(contributed by W A Nolan)

Letter of acceptance, written from his home at 51 Kirkgate, Irvine, on Saturday, 06 January 2001, to Hugh Hutchison, Club President:

Dear Hugh,

I was absolutely flabbergasted and completely delighted to receive your wonderful invitation the other day. In a largely undistinguished life one of the highest honours I have had to date was to serve as Irvine Burns Club President way back in 1979.

To be invited to accept Honorary Membership of the Burns Club, particularly in the 175th Anniversary year of the Club, leaves me almost speechless, and of course I am delighted and highly honoured to accept.

Most certainly I will be at the Annual Celebration and know that you will have a great, if exceedingly taxing night on the 26th. You have so far had a great year as President of the Club.

I know that traditionally Honorary Members should reply in holograph, but my own personal fist is so untidy and virtually unreadable that I ask you that on this occasion you will please accept this personally typed acceptance.

Yours sincerely
Joe J Caldwell

2002 Tony Benn (1925-2014)

Anthony Neil Wedgwood Benn was elected for Bristol South East at the 1950 general election but, on inheriting his father's peerage, as 2nd Viscount Stansgate in 1960, could not remain in the House of Commons. Three years later, the Peerage Act enabled his renunciation of the title and his return as MP for Bristol South East, representing that constituency until 1983, and representing Chesterfield from 1984 to 2001. His government

posts included Postmaster General 1964-1966, Minister of Technology 1966-1970 and Secretary of State for Energy 1975-1979.

In 2001, he decided not to seek re-election ("leaving parliament in order to spend more time on politics"). He toured with a one-man stage show and spoke at many political meetings. In a programme on democracy, he argued that traditional social democratic values were under threat in an increasingly globalised world in which powerful institutions are unelected and unaccountable to those whose lives they affect daily.

Tony Benn was assiduous in keeping diaries and notes of events at which he spoke (even when speaking to directors at Irvine Burns Club!). Political opponents recognised his brilliance as a speaker and his great life of public and political service. His letter below mentions his grandfather, who was also a great communicator.

Letter of acceptance, written from his home in London, on November 28 2001, to Hugh Drennan, Club President:

Dear Mr Drennan

Your kind letter, inviting me to become an Honorary Member of the Irvine Burns Club was handed to me a few hours ago.

I am absolutely delighted to accept this honour for many reasons, not least the fact that my grandfather was born in Irvine & deeply admired the work of the poet.

Will you please pass on my thanks to your members and say how much I look forward to visiting the Museum.

With kind regards
Tony Benn

and the typed 'appendix' letter of the same date:

Dear Mr Drennan,

Following your kind letter, and our telephone call, I am writing this as an appendix to my manuscript letter of acceptance of the invitation you sent.

My grandfather Daniel Holmes was born in Irvine in 1863 and I am enclosing an article I wrote about him in the Glasgow Herald which will tell you something of his life and work.

I believe he was the President of a Burns Club probably in Glasgow or Paisley where he taught.

I also enclose a photocopy of a Burns Stamp which I had designed when I was Postmaster General back in the sixties and wanted to celebrate his life by using his signature and the word UK postage, to allow his autograph to be free standing.

Alas that design was not chosen but we did get a stamp in his honour with his portrait on it.

I am sorry that I cannot be with you on January 25th but hope I may have the opportunity of visiting the Museum on another occasion.

With kind regards
Tony Benn

Notes:

Tony Benn's grandfather, Daniel Holmes, accepted Honorary Membership in 1913.

Tony Benn did visit on a later occasion, as guest speaker at the Directors' Dinner in 2003.

2002 Henry McLeish (1948-)

Henry McLeish is a Scottish politician, author, academic and former professional footballer who served as First Minister of Scotland from 2000 to 2001. With a term of just 1 year and 12 days, he is the shortest serving holder of that office. He was preceded by Donald Dewar and succeeded by Jack McConnell.

When he played for East Fife, he was one of the youngest ever players to play in Scottish professional football. As First Minister, he focussed on strengthening security, protection and defence systems to ensure Scotland was equipped to deal with a large scale terrorist attack. He resigned as First Minister in November 2001, amid allegations that he had sub-let part of his tax-subsidised Westminster constituency office without registering this in the register of interests at the Parliamentary office.

Letter of acceptance, written from The Scottish Parliament on 17.1.02:

Dear Sir,

Thank you for your kind invitation to become a member of the prestigious Irvine Burns Club.

I am delighted to accept.

I look forward to meeting you in future years.

yours,

Henry McLeish

2002 Craig Brown (1940-2023)

James Craig Brown CBE (1 July 1940 – 26 June 2023) was a Scottish professional football player and manager. After his playing career with Rangers, Dundee and Falkirk was curtailed by a series of knee injuries, Brown entered management with Clyde in 1977. He then coached various Scotland youth teams until he was appointed Scotland manager in 1993. He held this position until 2001, the longest tenure for a Scotland manager, and they qualified for the UEFA Euro 1996 and 1998 FIFA World Cup tournaments. He later managed Preston North End, Motherwell and Aberdeen. He retired from management in 2013 and was appointed a non-executive director of Aberdeen.

From "The Times" on 16 Jan 2009:

At 69, as Craig Brown admitted yesterday, he has "been there and seen it all". It takes a lot these days to get the new Motherwell manager flustered. "Nothing fazes me now", Brown said, "I don't get edgy, I don't get uptight. At my age, so long as you still have the appetite and the drive, you don't feel any anxiety."

Letter of acceptance, written from his home in Ayr on 26th December 2001, to Hugh Drennan, Club President, himself a footballer and football commentator.:

Dear Hugh,

Irvine Burns Club

I consider it a great privilege to be asked to accept Honorary Membership of the prestigious Irvine Burns Club. It delights me to respond in the affirmative and am proud to join the illustrious group upon whom you have bestowed this honour.

Thank you very much.

Yours sincerely,

Craig Brown

2002 Eric Caldow (1934-2019)

After schooling at Cumnock Academy, Eric Caldow became an apprentice painter with Cumnock Burgh Council. He started his football career with the local Glenpark Amateurs, then with Muirkirk of the Western Junior League. Signed by Rangers in 1952, he played with them for 13 years, during which he made a total of 407 appearances and won 40 caps for Scotland, 14 of which as captain. Caldow also appeared 14 times for the Scottish League XI.

After leaving Rangers, Caldow played for one season with Stirling Albion, before moving south in 1967 to become player/manager of Corby Town. He returned to his native Ayrshire in 1970 to become manager of Junior side Hurlford United. In 1973, he was appointed manager of Scottish League side Stranraer. Caldow left Stair Park in 1975 and his last involvement with football was as a scout for Queens Park Rangers.

Eric Caldow was inducted to the Scottish Football Hall of Fame in 2007. On his death in 2019, former team-mate John Greig, Rangers' honorary life president, led the tributes, saying "Eric was a great player and captain for the club, but above all else he was an absolute gentleman", and describing him as "a class act".

Letter of acceptance, written from his home in Mauchline, Ayrshire, undated, to Hugh Drennan, Club President, himself a footballer and football commentator:

Dear Hugh,

Thank you very much for your letter, inviting me to be an Honorary member of the Irvine Burns Club. I will be delighted and honoured to accept this position, also accept your invite on the 25th January.

Yours Sincerely

Eric Caldow