

Honorary members of 2013 – 2016

2013 Alastair McHarg, Sir Drummond Bone

2014 Prof. David Purdie, Anne Gaw, Prof. Nigel Leask, Rt Rev. Lorna Hood

2015 Michael Murray, Prof. John R Hume

2016 Alex F Gilroy, Brian Cox, Brian Taylor

2013 Alastair McHarg (1944-)

Alastair McHarg, born in Irvine and educated at Irvine Royal Academy, played for Irvine since his club's formation in 1962, before going on to play for West of Scotland and London Scottish. He won 44 caps for Scotland. Allan Massie has said, "*He was probably the best line-out player Scotland have had.*"

He has been Director of Rugby at Reading (since 2005) and still helps run his family business, Ango Agriparts, selling farm vehicles.

Letter of acceptance, written from his home in Alton, Hampshire on 1/11/2012

Dear President,

I have a confession to make.

As a young man I had no liking for the works of Robert Burns.

I did not understand his verse and had no empathy for his views or how he expressed his emotions.

I was educated at Irvine Royal Academy and his imposing statue behind the school was a constant reminder of my dislike.

However as time passed and maturity blossomed with experience my views softened and I began to appreciate his works.

I am no great scholar of Burns but many of his verses touch dormant sensitive nerves of human emotion and that is a rare talent.

Many acceptance letters before this one quote from his works but I refrain from doing so . . . there is no need.

So as a Burns convert it is with humility I accept your kind invitation to be an Honorary Member of my home town Burns Club.

Kind personal regards,

Alastair McHarg

2013 Sir Drummond Bone (1947-)

Ayrshire-born (in Irvine!), (James) Drummond Bone was knighted in 2008 for services to Higher Education and the regeneration of the North-West, following his chairmanship of the Liverpool Culture Company, directing the city's preparations to be European Capital of Culture in 2008. In 2011, he was elected Master of Balliol College, from which his acceptance letter comes.

Sir Drummond attended Ayr Academy and the University of Glasgow, before continuing studies at Balliol College. On leaving Oxford in 1972, he went to the University of Warwick as a lecturer in English and Comparative Literature. He returned to Glasgow in 1980 as a lecturer in English Literature, becoming Senior Lecturer in 1989 and titular Professor in 1995. From 1991 to 1995, he was Dean of the Faculty of Arts, and in 1995 became Vice-Principal. In 2000, he left Glasgow to become Principal of Royal Holloway, University of London and Pro-Vice-Chancellor of the University of London. In 2002, he became Vice Chancellor of the University of Liverpool, retiring in 2008.

A specialist on the works of Lord Byron, He is also a Maserati enthusiast, and was made a Freeman of the Worshipful Company of Coachmakers and Coach Harness Makers, a Livery Company promoting the automobile industry. Irvine Burns Club notes that 2013 will see the 750th anniversary celebrations of his College, founded in 1263.

Letter of acceptance, written from Balliol College, Oxford, to Tim Swan, Club President, on official notepaper, headed 'From the Master'.

Dear Mr Swan,

I am honoured to be asked, and happy to accept, your invitation to become an honorary member of the Irvine Burns Club (like many Ayrshiremen I was actually born in Irvine!). I look forward to hearing more about the Club - Yours with thanks,

Drummond Bone

2014 Prof. David Purdie (...-)

After a distinguished medical career, with a special interest in osteoporosis, Professor Purdie, MD, FRCP Ed., FRSSA, FSA (Scot) devotes his time to "writing, broadcasting and his public speaking" also being "Chairman of the Sir Walter Scott Club and the Edinburgh Burns Club - and a Patron of the JP Morgan Library, New York, and of the National Galleries and National Library of Scotland". He concluded his medical academic life, which included serving as Clinical Dean of the Leeds University medical school, in 2007 and is now a Hon. Fellow of the Institute for Advanced Studies in the Humanities, University of Edinburgh.

The life and works of Burns have been a lifelong interest. Prof. Purdie is Editor-in-Chief of 'The Burns Encyclopaedia' - Fourth Edition - published in 2013. First published in bi-centenary year 1959 by Maurice Lindsay, it progressed to a second edition, then to a third in 1980. Prof. Purdie's co-editors in this venture are Gerard Carruthers, who holds the Chair of Scottish Literature since 1700 at the University of Glasgow, and Kirsteen McCue, Head of Scottish Literature in the School of Critical Studies, Glasgow University. The new edition has been thoroughly revised and updated in the light of contemporary scholarship.

Professor Purdie is a Parliamentary speechwriter and Editor for certain members of the House of Commons – and speech adviser to a number of major figures in the Sports and Entertainment fields. He also contributes to the broadsheet press and BBC radio on medical and scientific matters.

Letter of acceptance, written from his home in Edinburgh on 9/11/2013, to President Roger Griffith

Dear Roger,

Thank you for your letter and the invitation to become a Hon. Member of Irvine Burns Club - which I am delighted and honoured to accept.

I look forward to meeting you & your colleagues at the Directors Dinner next year and to speaking on our, now completed, Encyclopaedia of the Bard,

Yours sincerely,

David W R Purdie

Notes:

Prof. Purdie was the guest of the Directors on 7 March 2014.

2014 Anne Gaw (c.1932-2018)

Anne Gaw's long term devotion to the Burns movement began in 1975, when she was cajoled by Rosalind Keyte, who had arrived in Irvine from London to find that there was no Burns Club she could join, to start the Irvine Lasses Burns Club. Anne was its first President 1975-79, and served in the same office again in 1991-93 and 2007-09.

Anne was also very involved in the Ayrshire Association of Burns Clubs, serving as its Secretary and eventually becoming responsible for setting up a Schools Festival featuring recitation, singing and instrumental music, in 1985. She served as its President in 1986-91.

In the Robert Burns World Federation, Anne Gaw was organising committee secretary when its conference met in Irvine in 1981, contributed to the success of the Kilmarnock Burns conference in 1986, and took on various other responsibilities, serving as the Federation President in 1988-89. Returning to what was dear to her heart, she became Schools Convener, spending ten years in that role.

Letter of acceptance, written from her home in Irvine on 12/11/2013

Dear President Roger,

Thank you for your lovely letter offering me Honorary Membership of Irvine Burns Club - an offer which I humbly accept.

I am very aware of Irvine Burns Club's unique list of Honorary Members and I could never have thought that, one day, I might be one of them. This makes your offer an even greater honour.

I have never thought of anything I've ever done in the Robert Burns movement as "work" because, at every level, I had great pleasure and satisfaction from the outcome. The involvement with schools was the most rewarding of all when you saw the talent which emerged from our young "star" Burnsians of the future.

It was also an opportunity to make many long lasting friendships.

With grateful thanks

Yours sincerely,

Anne Gaw

2014 Prof. Nigel Leask (1958-)

Nigel Leask, previously Reader in Romantic Literature in the English Faculty at Cambridge University, was appointed to Glasgow's Regius Chair of English Language and Literature in 2004, and as Head of the School of Critical Studies.

Prof. Leask won the Saltire Society Scottish Research Book of the Year award in 2010 for his book "Robert Burns and Pastoral: Poetry and Improvement in Late-18th Century Scotland". He interprets Burns's poetry as an innovative and critical engagement with the experience of rural modernity. Detailed study of the literary, social, and historical contexts of Burns's poetry explodes the myth of the 'Heaven-taught ploughman', revealing his poetic artfulness and critical acumen as a social observer, as well as his significance as a Romantic precursor. Leask discusses Burns's radical decision to write 'Scots pastoral' (rather than English georgic) poetry in the tradition of Allan Ramsay and Robert Fergusson, focusing on themes of Scottish and British identity, agricultural improvement, poetic self-fashioning, language, politics, religion, patronage, poverty, antiquarianism, and the animal world. The book offers fresh interpretations of all Burns's major poems and some of the songs, the first to do so since Thomas Crawford's landmark study of 1960.

He edits the "Collected Prose Writings of Robert Burns" for the AHRC-funded Oxford edition of the Collected Works of Robert Burns (general editor, Prof Gerard Carruthers).

Letter of acceptance, written from his home in Glasgow on 15/11/2013, on the notepaper of University of Glasgow School of Critical Studies, to President Roger Griffith.

Dear Roger,

I was delighted to receive your letter earlier this week inviting me to accept Honorary Membership of the Irvine Burns Club. This is a great honour indeed, and I feel very privileged to have my name added to the illustrious list that appears on your website, going back to Irvine's own John Galt!

I have great pleasure in accepting, and will look forward to visiting Wellwood in order to receive the Certificate, at your convenience. I am resident in Glasgow, so it should be easy to arrange a convenient date. I also look forward, as a Burns scholar, to viewing your outstanding collection of books, manuscripts, artifacts, and other items.

Yours sincerely,

Nigel Leask

2014 Rt Rev. E Lorna Hood (1867-1951)

Moderator of the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland 2013-14, Lorna Hood was born in Irvine, and educated at Kilmarnock Academy and the University of Glasgow. In 1979, she was inducted to the charge of the North Parish Church in Renfrew and in 2008 was appointed as one of the ten Chaplains to the Queen in Scotland.

Rev Hood's nomination as an Honorary Member marks her links to Ayrshire, her achievements in the ministry, and her interest in the life and works of the Bard. In February

2013 she was assessed as one of the 100 most powerful women in the United Kingdom by Woman's Hour on BBC Radio 4.

Letter of acceptance, written from 121 George Street, Edinburgh on 4/12/2013, typed on the notepaper of the Church of Scotland, to President Roger Griffith:

Dear Mr Griffith,

Thank you for your recent letter on behalf of the Irvine Burns Club inviting me to accept Honorary Membership.

I would be delighted to accept this invitation but regret that due to previous commitments I will not be able to attend the Annual Celebration on 24 January,

The visit to Kilmaurs was most enjoyable and I look forward to being able to return to the area and to have the opportunity of learning more about Robert Burns.

Yours sincerely,

Lorna Hood

Notes:

Rev. Hood met Club President Roger Griffith at St Maur's Glencairn Church, Kilmaurs, in 2013, the 600th anniversary of its establishment.

2015 Michael Murray (....-)

Michael Murray, Club President 1999-2000, was invited to accept Honorary Membership "in recognition and appreciation of the work that you have undertaken to establish strong links with local schools - your work in organising the Club's annual schools competitions, your work in organising the School Visits Programme to Irvine Burns Club, your enthusiasms for our collections, your work in creating the CD of Children's Verse Speaking for the Robert Burns World Federation Conference, and your work in creating Burns for a new generation.'

Michael's teaching career took him to the headmastership of St Conval's Secondary School, Cumnock, where he practised a very engaged style of leadership. This career both prompted and enhanced his educational work for the Club in the ten years he spent on these activities following his presidential years.

Letter of acceptance, hand-written written from his home in Saltcoats on 10/1/2015

Dear Mr Griffith,

Thank you for your letter of 08/12/14 offering me Honorary Membership of Irvine Burns Club. I am thrilled to be considered to join such a group of eminent people from all around the world. Many of them are friends of mine and a few have been friends and mentors since I joined Irvine Burns Club. If only I could write poetry like Seamus Heaney, play golf like Arnold Palmer or play the pipes like Jim Butler!

The most important contributors to the success of our programme of visits to Wellwood are our curators. David Smith showed himself to be a wonderful teacher and his 'script' for the directors room presentation is still used, with few changes. Ian Wight and Graham Hyslop have added to David's legacy in many ways. Many directors of the Club have

contributed over the years, to the development of the programme; they, with the curators, have helped to deepen my knowledge of Robert Burns and many aspects of local and national history. I am confident that the children and teachers, who have taken part in our programme, have enjoyed the experience and will benefit in future years from what they have seen and heard at Wellwood.

Therefore, it is with great pleasure that I accept your invitation to become an Honorary Member of Irvine Burns Club.

With very best wishes,
Michael Murray

Notes:

The addressee, Roger Griffith, was the President preceding President Robert Travers.

2015: Prof. John R Hume (1939-)

John R Hume is Honorary Professor at the Universities of Glasgow and St. Andrews. He was for 20 years a lecturer in Economic and Industrial History at the University of Strathclyde, and was for 15 years first a Principal Inspector of Ancient Monuments, then of Historic Buildings with Historic Scotland, retiring as Chief Inspector of Historic Buildings in 1999.

He has published a wide range of books and articles on the industrial archaeology and historic buildings of Scotland, and is currently Convener of the Committee on Church Art and Architecture of the Church of Scotland and an advisory member of the General Trustees of the Church of Scotland.

In inviting Prof. Hume to accept the nomination, Club President Rev Robert Travers was particularly mindful of his work with Historic Scotland, with the General Trustees of the Church of Scotland, with CARTA, and through his book on Scotland's Churches, and his many articles in 'Life and Work', as well as his wider work with the Royal Commission on the Ancient and Historical Monuments of Scotland, and, more locally, through his 'generous appreciation of Irvine's Ecclesiastical Riverbank views and our Parish Church'.

Letter of acceptance, handwritten on the notepaper of the RCAHMS from his home in Glasgow on 17/12/2014, to President Rev Robert Travers:

Dear Robert,

I was greatly touched to receive your letter of 8th December offering me Honorary Membership of the Irvine Burns Club. This is a great honour and I am very happy to accept, as a private individual, and not as an office holder. I hope this will be acceptable to the Club. If it is, I will be very happy to receive my certificate of Honorary Membership.

With very best wishes, and thanks,
Yours sincerely,
John R Hume

2016 Alex F Gilroy (....-2019)

This honorary membership, "in recognition and appreciation of your generosity and kindness to the museum and club in presenting to us artefacts of significant importance to the people of Irvine", in essence includes his father, Francis Clark Gilroy.

Artefacts belonging to William Templeton, in whose shop and home Robert Burns took much pleasure, both in extending his knowledge and appreciation of literature, including the poems of Robert Fergusson, and in conversing with the bookseller, were taken to Australia, as family mementoes, in 1909, by Margaret Gilroy, a grand-niece of Templeton. Her son, Francis, was keen, as we know from letters written in 1939 and 1946, that these artefacts should return to Irvine before some later generation disposed of them as so much sentimental rubbish.

Hence, through the generosity of Francis and his son Alex, Irvine Burns Club can display the silk stockings exchanged by Burns with Templeton, the seal stamp which belonged to Templeton's widow Helen Templeton and which may have been used in the first Irvine post office, and, most importantly of all, the chair in which Robert Burns was remembered by that family as having many a laugh and jest in while visiting the bookseller.

For the full story, go to the Templeton page on the website. Alex's mother visited Irvine in 1949, and his uncle Archie in 1946. He himself visited in August 2015.

Letter of acceptance, handwritten on his personal Thistle Glen notepaper, showing his position as a "Justice of the Peace (NSW)", from his home in New South Wales on 30 October 2015:

Dear Sir,

In reply to your invitation for membership to the Irvine Burns Club, it is with pleasure that I accept your very kind invitation and of course extremely proud and honored to be considered as a suitable person to be a member of such an old and prestigious club, particularly as I have been raised as a Burnsian and taught to appreciate the wonderful works of Scotland's ploughman philosopher, our Bard, Robert Burns.

Yours gratefully and faithfully

Alex F Gilroy

"Justice of the Peace", N.S.W. Australia

2016: Brian Cox (1946-)

Brian Cox, CBE, Rector, the University of Dundee, was nominated by President Derek Murdoch in recognition of his acting career on stage, screen and television and for his encouragement to young actors in his role as patron to the Scottish Youth Theatre and other groups. Theatre has for many years been an interest of President Derek, so it was most appropriate that he should nominate a leading figure in that sphere.

This Scottish actor is known for his work with the Royal Shakespeare Company, where he gained recognition for his portrayal of King Lear, and has also appeared in many American films, such as *Rushmore*, *Super Troopers*, *X2: X-Men United* as William Stryker, and *Troy* as Agamemnon. He was the first actor to portray Hannibal Lecter on film in the 1986 movie *Manhunter*.

Letter of acceptance, written at his agent's office in London on 11 November 2015 to President John D Murdoch ('Derek'):

Dear John,

Thank you for your kind offer of an honorary membership of the Irvine Burns Club. I am most delighted and pleased to accept membership to this illustrious organization.

Yours

Brian Cox

2016: Brian Taylor (1955-)

Brian Taylor, political editor of BBC Scotland and based at Dundee, was nominated in appreciation of down to earth presentation style and use of language over many years making reporting of political issues, large and small, more interesting and accessible, and in no small measure leading to our society being better informed on current affairs and political issues.

He has also written two books on Scotland's Parliament.

Letter of acceptance, typed on the notepaper of BBC Scotland, from BBC Scotland, Scottish Parliamentary Unit, Edinburgh, on 7 December 2015:

My Dear President,

Many thanks for doing me the signal honour of inviting me to be an Honorary Member of Irvine Burns Club. I am delighted to accept.

It is a particular pleasure that the invitation comes from an esteemed Ayrshire club. The Bard, of course, is rightly revered across Scotland and indeed the globe. However, perhaps the reverence is most fervent in his native Ayrshire.

Irvine may be said to straddle Scotland's ancient past and contemporary outlook, your proud burgh being known both as a "New Town" and as an historic settlement.

My own profession of journalism can prompt a range of responses. Some feel we are perhaps too quick to judge. Some feel we should consider:

O ye wha are sae guid yoursel',
Sae pious and sae holy,
Ye've nought to do but mark and tell
Your neibours' fauts and folly!

For myself, I attempt to be rationally critical in the public interest - but never cynical. I would say:

Then gently scan your brother man,
Still gentler sister woman;
Tho' they may gang a kennin wrang,
To step aside is human.

From a Scottish journalist and a passionate Burnsian,
All best wishes,
Brian Taylor