

Honorary members of 2009

2009 Andrew O'Hagan, Janet Elsie-May Coom

**2009 (Nov.: Homecoming Finale*) Giovanni Benedetti, Nicola Benedetti,
Nicola Sturgeon, Baroness Ford of Cuninghame,
Eddi Reader, Janice Galloway, Sir Tom McKillop,
Viscount Weir, Graeme Obree**

* a series of events designed to attract people of Scottish ancestry to visit Scotland, in the 250th anniversary of the birth of Robert Burns. The campaign was organised by EventScotland and VisitScotland on behalf of the Scottish Government, and part-financed by the European Regional Development Fund.

2009 Andrew O'Hagan (1968-...)

Andrew O'Hagan, born in Glasgow, attended St Michael's Academy in Kilwinning, and the appearance of one of his former teachers, in the pulpit of Irvine Old Parish Church in 1996 reading the lesson as Irvine Burns Club President, took his thoughts back to the classroom – fortunately Andrew's memories were good ('a decent sort of bloke'), so the moment was recorded in that year's 'Guardian' article on Burns (24/2/96) and repeated in his introduction to '*A Night out with Robert Burns*' (2008).

Andrew made his way south, enjoying the world of literature to a greater depth than many might have foreseen, being nominated for the Booker Prize, voted one of *Granta's* Best of Young British Novelists in 2003, winning the E M Forster Prize from the American Academy of Arts and Letters, becoming Editor-at-Large of the *London Review of Books* and a Fellow of the Royal Society of Literature. His many books include *The Missing* (1995), *Our Fathers* (1999), *Be Near Me* (2006, adapted for the stage in 2009), *the Illuminations* (2015) and *Mayflies* (2020, adapted for television in December 2022). His book *The Atlantic Ocean: Essays* discussed many topics from American and British viewpoints. In 2001, O'Hagan was named as a Goodwill Ambassador by the UK branch of UNICEF, and he has been involved in fundraising efforts for the organisation. Since September 2021, O'Hagan has been a visiting professor of creative writing at King's College London.

In Ayrshire, Andrew, being very willing to share his time among those who enjoy the written word, supports local ventures, including Irvine Burns Club and events relating to John Galt, the Irvine-born novelist.

Andrew O'Hagan has been described as "one of his generation's most exciting and most serious chroniclers of contemporary Britain and the part it plays in the world".

Letter of acceptance, written from his home in London on 12 Jan. 2009

Dear President, Mr Doole:

The great Samuel Johnson missed the Kilmarnock Edition by two years, but I strongly believe his native prejudice would have been stood on its head by the appearance of Burns' volume. It was Johnson, after all, who said 'there is nothing too small for such a small thing

as man', and that notion, so instinctive to our own bard, has been a motto to me over my writing life so far. As a person brought up in Kilwinning, who ran about the braes of Irvine and always admired Burns' feeling for fellowship, I am delighted and humbled that you should elect me an honorary life member of the Club. I am well aware of the traditions you embody and uphold - they are deeply graven in the poet's image - and I have no hesitation in accepting your kind invitation. I do so with thanks, believing it is always a happy day when one can join the company of one's true fellows.

Yours sincerely
Andrew O'Hagan

Notes:

Johnson died in 1784.

Andrew O'Hagan did indeed join us at the Annual Celebration in 2009, and has attended and spoken at several events over the years.

2009 Janet Elsie-May Coom (c.1925-2012)

Mrs Coom's background is indicated in her letter. Her descent from Robert Burns is this: Helen Anne ('Anna') Park was the niece of Mrs Hyslop, who kept the Globe Tavern in Dumfries. Anna was Burns' "Anna of the gowden locks" and the inspiration of "Yestreen, I had a pint of wine", considered by Burns to be his best lovesong. Anna and Robert were Janet Coom's great-great-great grandparents.

On 23rd March 1791 (nine days before the birth of his son, William Nicol, by Jean Armour), Anna gave birth to their daughter, Elizabeth ('Betty'), Mrs Coom's great-great grandmother, who was legally adopted and brought up by Jean Armour. It is not known what happened to Anna, some saying she died in childbirth with Elizabeth, some saying she married a soldier in Edinburgh.

Betty married John Thomson, and their eldest son was Robert Burns Thomson, Mrs Coom's great-grandfather. His daughter Mary McNaught Thomson, Mrs Coom's grandmother, married Provost Fisher of Rothesay. Their daughter Eliza McNaught Fisher, Mrs Coom's mother, married Macdonald Halliday. Janet Elsie-May was happily married to W A ('Bill') Coom and they have children and grandchildren. He passed away in December 2011 and Elsie-May herself about a month later.

Letter of acceptance, written from her home in Glasgow on 15th January 2009

To: Iain Doole, President Irvine Burns Club

Thank you for your kind invitation inviting me to become an Honorary Life Member of Irvine Burns Club.

I am honoured, not only because in itself, this is a great privilege to be awarded, but because it happens to be the 250th Anniversary of our National Poet, Robert Burns, my great-great-great-grandfather's birth. There could not be a more auspicious moment, & I accept not only with delight but with a sense of awe, love & the deepest respect for such an honour.

I was born in Scotland, Rothesay, Isle of Bute, but spent my first seven years on the Atacama Desert, in Chile, South America. I felt I'd lost my Scot's Heritage when we returned to the island, but thanks to Burns, he made me proud to be a Scot. He embodies for me Scot's Patriotism - not parochial but far-reaching - "that man to man the world o'er shall brithers be" - that's the bit - which is so very satisfying and inspiring.

I am so glad to become an honorary Life Member of Irvine Burns Club. I feel more than ever I've come home.

Janet Elsie-May Coom

2009 Giovanni Benedetti (1943-)

Born in Barca, Giovanni Benedetti came to Scotland from Italy at the age of 9, arrived here speaking very little English, and worked in his Uncle's café in Bridgegate while attending school in Irvine. But while Gio came to these parts with very limited English, he arrived with a fierce determination to succeed in whatever he did. Aged 19, Gio purchased a small Dry Cleaning Shop which he grew in 8 years to 16 shops servicing Ayrshire and Glasgow.

In 1981 he formed a new company "ICS" to exploit his new and innovative process development for reclaiming industrial gloves. With a £12m turnover servicing customers that included Ford, Vauxhall, Rover, Nissan, Lucas, GKN and Tesco, Gio sold ICS in 1989 for a substantial sum. He then bought out Silcock Express from Sears Group, grew it from £36m to £120m and in 1993, sold it for another substantial amount.

In between, he had also bought Wrapfilm, a Cling Film and Foil converting company with a small £2m turnover which he grew to a sizeable £36m and then sold it to Management at the end of 2007 for £21m with Giovanni remaining a Director and retaining a major shareholding.

Today, Gio is Chairman of Benedetti International, consisting of Wallace Cameron, UK's leading First Aid Company and Benedetti design division. He is an example of how a young person with talent, drive, dedication, and ambition can make it right to the top. North Ayrshire is very proud that he chose to settle here in this lovely part of the world and Irvine is proud to have been an influence in his success.

For his outstanding contribution to Scottish industry, Irvine Burns Club was happy to nominate Gio Benedetti as an Honorary Member.

(from the nominating speech, by Bill Nolan, at the Honorary Members lunch, in 2009)

Letter of acceptance, written from his home in West Kilbride on 16th November 2009, to President Billy Dickson

Dear Mr Dickson,

Thank you for your kind invitation to become an Honorary member of the Irvine Burns Club, which I am delighted to accept.

Unfortunately, due to prior commitment, I may not be able to be with you until approximately 11.30 am on the 27th.

I look forward to seeing you and thank you again for the invitation.

Yours sincerely,

Gio Benedetti

Notes:

The letter refers to the reception for past and new Honorary Members, on 27 Nov., 2009, at the Homecoming Finale exhibition "Dear Mister Burns".

2009 Nicola Benedetti (1987-)

Nicola Benedetti, the younger daughter of Gio (also an honorary member) and Francesca Benedetti, started to learn the violin at the age of four. By the age of nine, she had already passed the eight grades of musical examinations, and in September 1997 began to study at the Yehudi Menuhin School for young musicians under Lord Menuhin (also an honorary member) in rural Surrey. Like her dad had been, she was a young person, on her own and in a strange land.

At the end of her first year (1998), she played solo in the school's annual concert at Wigmore Hall, and performed in London and Paris as a soloist in Bach's Concerto in D minor for two violins and orchestra. In 1999, Nicola performed in the celebrations to mark the opening of The Scottish Parliament at Holyrood Palace with the National Youth Orchestra of Scotland and within two years had performed with the City of London Sinfonia, as well as the Royal Philharmonic Orchestra, Scottish Opera, Scottish Chamber, and the Royal Scottish National Orchestra. So many musical achievements and still barely 15.

In 2002, she left the Menuhin School to begin studying privately with Maciej Rakowski, and in May, 2004, aged 16, Nicola Benedetti won the BBC Young Musician of the Year competition performing Karol Szymanowski's First Violin Concerto, which was not an obvious choice, in the final at the Usher Hall in Edinburgh, Scotland.

Because of this brilliant wonderful and highly-acclaimed performance, she won the music section of the Top Scot award in December 2005 – no mean feat for a classical performer. Since then, her career has been nothing short of phenomenal with regular tours across the United States, the Far East and throughout Europe and her concert success has been matched by her recording success in a notoriously difficult market.

Nicola Benedetti has a very special and unique musical talent that has been harnessed to a resolute dedication that has brought her success through sheer hard work, patience and practice.

She has performed at Irvine Burns Club and the club is delighted to recognise this young virtuoso by awarding her Honorary Membership – so Nicola Benedetti became our 300th Honorary Member of Irvine Burns Club.

(from the nominating speech, by Bill Nolan, at the Honorary Members lunch in 2009)

Nicola was awarded a Doctorate of Letters at Heriot-Watt University in November 2010 in recognition of her contribution to music. In the New Year Honours list of 2014, she was awarded an MBE for her services to music and to charity. In 2014, she is artist in residence at the Cheltenham Music Festival. Her network of agents is ('The Times' interview, 31/5/14) "poised to drop her in front of a symphony orchestra [in Europe, Asia or North America] at a moment's notice".

Her maternal grandfather was a Scot, passing through northern Italy with the advancing Allied armies when he fell in love with a local girl. The family moved back to Scotland when her mother was a child. Her father's story is told above, in the preceding entry.

Letter of acceptance, written in Nov. 2009, to President Billy Dickson

Dear Billy Dickson,

I am writing to thank you very much for your kind invitation to become an honorary member of the Irvine Burns Club. I would be absolutely delighted to accept this invitation, and am most honoured to be asked.

Being an Ayrshire lass myself, I have grown up with a huge admiration for Burns and his work, so to become an honorary member of a club so dedicated to such an incredible man is just wonderful.

The overwhelming list of honorary members only adds to my delight in being placed alongside them all.

Thank you so very much once again.

Yours sincerely,

Nicola Benedetti

2009 Nicola Sturgeon (1970-)

Born in Irvine, Nicola Sturgeon was educated at Greenwood Academy and read law at the University of Glasgow where she graduated with an LLB (Hons) and Diploma in Legal Practice. She worked as a solicitor in the Drumchapel Law Centre in Glasgow before becoming an MSP on the restoration of the Scottish Parliament in 1999.

Deputy Leader of the Scottish National Party since 2004, Nicola led the SNP at Holyrood for three years until Alex Salmond's return in 2007, and is now the MSP for Glasgow Govan, Deputy First Minister for Scotland, and Cabinet Secretary for Health and Wellbeing.

As well as deputising for Alex Salmond, her wide-ranging parliamentary responsibilities include the NHS, health service reform and improvement, health promotion and sport, public health, dentistry, community care, mental health, learning disability, social inclusion, and anti-poverty measures.

A feisty performer at the ballot box and a vigorous campaigner for those ideals in which she believes, she not only won the Scottish Politician of the Year award last year but also the Donald Dewar Shield for outstanding debating performances at Holyrood.

Irvine Burns Club, recognising her outstanding political involvement over such a relatively short period, was happy to nominate Nicola Sturgeon, MSP, as an honorary member.

(from the nominating speech, by Bill Nolan, at the Honorary Members lunch in 2009)

Letter of acceptance, written from The Scottish Parliament on 30th October 2009, to President Billy Dickson

Dear Mr Dickson

Thank you very much for your letter of 9 October inviting me to become an Honorary Member of Irvine Burns Club. As a proud native of Irvine, I would be absolutely delighted and honoured to accept your kind invitation.

Unfortunately, due to constituency business, I will not be able to join you for the exhibition and lunch on 27 November, but I wish you well for a successful occasion.

Many thanks again for your invitation in this most special of years - the 250th anniversary of the birth of our Bard. With very best wishes,
Nicola Sturgeon

Notes:

The letter refers to the reception for past and new Honorary Members, on 27 Nov., 2009, at the Homecoming Finale exhibition "Dear Mister Burns".

2009 Baroness Ford of Cunninghame (1957-)

Born in Saltcoats, Margaret Ann Ford has had a prominent career in public life and was awarded her Life Peerage in May 2006, choosing in her title to recognise her links with her family home in North Ayrshire.

She spent her early career in a variety of roles either in the public sector, including a period at the previous Cunninghame District, or as an advisor to Government, and is a specialist in leadership development, culture change and public sector reform. From 1997 to 2000 she was Chairman of Lothian Health Board and from 2000 to 2003 was a Non-Executive Director of Ofgem.

In December 2007 Margaret retired from English Partnerships, the national regeneration agency, after six highly successful years. From 2000 to 2005 Margaret was a Director of Good Practice Limited, the publishing company that she founded. She was, until May 2009, Managing Director, Social Infrastructure and Development, Royal Bank of Canada Capital Markets.

Baroness Ford is also the Senior Non-Executive Director of Serco and, in what passes as her spare time, she is also president of the UK charity Epilepsy Action.

In April 2009, Communities Secretary Hazel Blears, Mayor of London Boris Johnson, and Olympics Minister Tessa Jowell announced her appointment as Chair of the newly created London 2012 Legacy Delivery Company, a somewhat onerous and demanding post but one that is set to bring lasting benefits not only to the East End of London but to other parts of the UK on the back of the London Olympics.

Much closer to home, Baroness Ford is Chair of the Irvine Bay Regeneration Company, an organisation that has already demonstrated both vision and commitment in improving the environment and well-being of several local communities including The Three Towns, Kilwinning Town Centre and Irvine Harbourside.

In recognition of her past achievements in public life, Irvine Burns Club was happy to nominate Baroness Ford of Cunningham as an Honorary Member.

(from the nominating speech, by Bill Nolan, at the Honorary Members lunch in 2009)

Letter of acceptance, written from the House of Lords on 18th November 2009, to President Billy Dickson

Dear Mr Dickson,

Thank you so much for your kind invitation to become an Honorary Member of Irvine Burns Club.

It is a real honour for me to be considered in this way and I am delighted to accept.

Yours sincerely

Margaret Ford

2009 Eddi Reader (1959-)

Glasgow-born Eddi Reader was the eldest of seven children when the family moved to Irvine in 1976 as part of the first intake by Irvine Town Council of what were then known locally as The Glasgow Overspill. She began playing guitar at the age of ten and started her musical career singing in the Eglinton Folk and refers in one of her CD's sleeve notes to her very early appearances at The Marymass Folk Festival and in the local Harbour Arts Centre.

She left Irvine Royal to busk her way round Europe but returned to work locally before the bright lights drew her to London and a singing career that saw her fronting the band Fairground Attraction. In the early 1990's, Eddi Reader came home again and turned to acting - including playing a major role in Michael Boyd's production of Janice Galloway's *The Trick is To Keep Breathing* - before returning to her first love of singing but this time as a soloist.

Her self-confessed admiration from her Irvine days for the poems and songs of Robert Burns led to an award-winning album, "Eddi Reader Sings the Songs of Robert Burns", with the Royal Scottish National Orchestra in 2003 and that was the start of an association with the Man and his Work that was at the heart of two sell-out concerts earlier this year in the Glasgow Royal Concert Hall and another highly acclaimed album.

Her contribution towards the Robert Burns project brought her an MBE in the New Year's honours list of 2006 for outstanding contributions to the arts; in May 2007, she was awarded an honorary doctorate from the University of Strathclyde and four months later she received an honorary doctor of Letters from Glasgow Caledonian University for her involvement in the education and encouragement of young musicians.

Irvine Burns Club, recognising Eddi Reader's contribution to the musical interpretation of the songs of Robert Burns, was happy to nominate her as a new Honorary Member.

Since this nomination, Eddi Reader was appointed (in January 2010) the first celebrity Burns Ambassador, assisting the National Trust for Scotland in promoting, world-wide, the new Robert Burns Birthplace Museum, due to open in Alloway in autumn 2010.

(from the nominating speech, by Bill Nolan, at the Honorary Members lunch in 2009)

Email, sent from eddireader.com on 01 January 2010 05:15:

Dear Irvine Burns Club,

I am absolutely delighted to have been invited by you to accept this honorary membership. I, like the rest of you, have fallen MADLY in love with what Robert Burns donated to our world.

There is nothing better than discovering something that allows you to see the beauty of the minds and hearts AND SOUL of the country that gave birth to you. Mr Burns with his eloquence, inventiveness, love and creativity brought me back home so warmly and completely I can't begin to thank him.

Therefore I accept your kind honour and I will ask you to thank the spirit of Mr Burns for me.

xxxxxxx

love eddi reader

Notes: The first acceptance by email.

2009 Janice Galloway (1955-)

Janice Galloway was born in Saltcoats and read Music and English at Glasgow University. Between 1980 and 1989 she worked as an English teacher, afterwards attending a writers' class at Glasgow University, before moving into the literary world.

Her acclaimed first novel, *The Trick is To Keep Breathing* (in 1989) won the MIND Book of the Year/Allen Lane Award and a Scottish Arts Council Book Award, and was shortlisted for the Whitbread First Novel Award and the Irish Times International Fiction Prize. Michael Boyd, the artistic director of the Royal Shakespeare Company, also turned Janice's novel into a successful production for both BBC and Glasgow's Tron Theatre.

Her second novel, *Foreign Parts* (in 1994) won the McVitie's Prize for Scottish Writer of the Year and, *Clara*, about the 19th-century musician Clara Schumann, published in 2002, won the Saltire Society Scottish Book of the Year Award.

Her latest book, published last year, is *"This is Not About Me"* – and really it's not. Instead, it's about all of us who were growing up in the 1950s and 60s. In my case, I happened to be growing up then in Saltcoats, also my home town, and thanks to Janice's evocative and stirring writing, I found myself reliving my own experience of that strange time of mixed emotions and totally new experiences, that progression from childhood to adolescence known as growing up. Once familiar sights, sounds and sensations long forgotten came flooding back and became alive again in reading *"This is Not About Me"*.

For her outstanding contribution to Scottish Literature, Irvine Burns Club was happy to nominate Janice Galloway as an Honorary Member.

(from the nominating speech, by Bill Nolan, at the Honorary Members lunch in 2009)

Janice Galloway contributed an essay entitled 'Singing for Suppers' to a new book celebrating the life of Robert Burns, published by Dundee University Press, 'For A' That, A Celebration Of Burns', in January 2010.

Letter of acceptance, written on 2nd November 2009, to President Billy Dickson

Dear Mr Dickson,

If your letter gave you great pleasure in the sending, I can assure you it was received in the same spirit; possibly more. As an Ayrshire resident for most of my formative years (though I would not like to hazard a guess at which, in particular, those were) - indeed as a former resident of Irvine - this invitation is particularly sweet. As an admirer of Burns, it touches me deeply. I was a Burns singer in my teens & have sung at & for various suppers, but never, to the best of my recall, in Irvine. This might be a first. The songs are still my chief Burns love and it remains a staggering truth that, strapped for cash as he almost continually seemed to be, the songs - over 360 of them - were collected, altered & preserved in amber by him for no fee & largely no accreditation. It will give me a great deal of pleasure to join the Irvine Burns Club for all sorts of reasons - stellar ranks among them - but to confess open appreciation of the man is perhaps most keen.

With all good wishes & gratitude for you thinking of me -

Janice Galloway

PS I most certainly will join you on Friday 27th.

2009 Sir Tom McKillop (1943-)

A real “lad o’ pairts”, Tom McKillop was born in Dreghorn, attended Irvine Royal Academy where he was school dux in 1960 and continued his education at Glasgow University where he gained a BSc Hons and PhD in Chemistry.

Having started at ICI Ardeer, he joined their corporate research laboratory at Runcorn after extensive research work in Paris, moved to ICI Pharmaceuticals Division and was later appointed its Technical Director with international responsibility for research, development and production.

When ICI Pharmaceuticals demerged to become Zeneca, he became Chief Executive Officer of the new company and when Zeneca merged with Astra to form Astra-Zeneca plc, Tom McKillop became Chief Executive of the merged company bringing to what was to become a global pharmaceutical giant, a strong sense of corporate social and community responsibility that was unusual in that industry but which drew worldwide recognition and approval.

He was knighted in 2002 for services to the pharmaceutical industry and on retiring early from Astra-Zeneca in January 2006, became the chairman of the Royal Bank of Scotland, from which he retired last year.

The son of an Ayrshire miner who, like many from that background, introduced his sons to the works of Robert Burns at an early age, that lifelong interest in Burns was particularly evident when in 2006, Sir Tom became Chairman of the Robert Burns Humanitarian Award panel, now a major international event.

For his outstanding contribution to the pharmaceutical industry globally and for his involvement in establishing the Robert Burns International Humanitarian Award, Irvine Burns Club was happy to nominate Sir Tom McKillop as an honorary member.

(from the nominating speech, by Bill Nolan, at the Honorary Members lunch in 2009)

Letter of acceptance, written from his home in Gawsworth, Cheshire, on 20th November, 2009

Dear President,

For a Dreghorn lad raised in the heart of Burns country with the Bard's poems and songs a staple part of my diet and educated at Irvine Royal Academy under the watchful eye of Rector Alex MacMillan, himself a Past President, your invitation to become an Honorary Member of Irvine Burns Club is a great honour and one which I accept with all humility.

The works of the Bard have accompanied me like a true friend along life's journey at home or abroad and through the inevitable highs and lows. Over and over again I have returned to his writings and found within them the solace, the encouragement, the guidance I was seeking.

"Is there a man, whose judgement clear
Can others teach the course to steer,
Yet runs, himself, life's mad career
Wild as a wave? -
Here pause - and, thro' the starting tear,
Survey his grave."

It will, therefore, be a great privilege to become an Honorary Member of Irvine Burns Club which has done so much to promote and celebrate the life and works of our National Poet. I also look forward with great anticipation to the "Dear Mister Burns . . ." exhibition and to the celebratory lunch on Friday, 27th November.

Yours sincerely,
Tom McKillop

2009 Viscount Weir (1933-)

Viscount Weir is the third individual to have held that title, and William Kenneth James Weir is the grandson of the First Viscount Weir, for whom the title was created in 1938 for his services to politics, industry and commerce and, particularly as Secretary of State for Air. Originally, the Weir Family had an estate and farmed near Torranyard but later moved to Renfrewshire.

Educated at Eton and Oxford, Willie Weir has the background of those normally found on the grouse moors but, in his time as chairman of Weir Pumps, Viscount Weir was just as much at home on the shop floor of the busy Glasgow-based international engineering company.

His interest in Robert Burns and his work is well-documented and Viscount Weir is justly proud that he is a direct descendant of The Poet, through an illegitimate line through Elizabeth Paton who was the mother of Burns' first child – his much loved "dear bought Bess", whose birth he celebrated with warm tenderness, in "A Poet's Welcome to his Love-begotten Daughter" (or, as Burns himself more pithily put it in one of his several versions, to "his bastard wean").

Elizabeth, as the child was baptised, and in a remarkable act of domestic kindness, was brought up at Mossgeil by Agnes Brown, Burns' mother. In later life, she married John Bishop. Out of that line, Viscount Weir is directly descended.

For his support of Scottish industry and commerce and for his lifelong interest in Robert Burns, Irvine Burns Club was pleased to nominate Viscount Weir as an Honorary Member.

(from the nominating speech, by Bill Nolan, at the Honorary Members lunch in 2009)

Letter of acceptance, written from his home in Mauchline, Ayrshire, on 22nd Oct. 2009, to President Billy Dickson:

Dear Mr Dickson,

I cannot tell you what great pleasure it gave me to receive your invitation to become an Honorary Member of Irvine Burns Club. I am delighted to accept and do so with some humility when I see the list of those eminent people who have previously had this honour.

I am only sorry that I am away and unable to come to your lunch. I am descended from Burns' first child Bess by Elizabeth Paton and by coincidence live about a mile from Mossgiel Farm.

With kindest regards

William Weir

2009 Graeme Obree (1965-)

Though born in Warwickshire, Graeme Obree has lived most of life in Scotland and is so much an adopted Scot that his autobiography, published in 2003, is entitled "The Flying Scotsman", as is the 2006 film based on the book.

Graeme Obree has always been fascinated by bicycles and became involved in cycling locally in Ayrshire, notably with Fullarton Wheelers, in road time trials in the early 1990s. However, when the unknown Irvine-based rider suddenly emerged in July, 1993, from obscurity in deepest Ayrshire to smash Francesco Moser's World Hour Record of 51.151 km by almost half-a-kilometre, he turned the international cycling world on its head.

What made it even more intriguing and sensational was that, on the way to breaking the World Hour record, Obree created major controversy in the international cycling world with his unique riding style and his pioneering construction techniques in which he famously used washing machine ball bearings in building 'Old Faithful', his successful own-designed racing machine.

Having broken Moser's record, Obree then lost it to Chris Boardman but had the satisfaction knocking Boardman out of the 4000m Pursuit at the 1993 World Championships in Norway to claim the Gold Medal. In March 1994, Graeme Obree regained his world record when he cycled 52.713 km in one hour.

Shortly afterwards, almost in a fit of pique, the UCI, the world governing body, banned his unusual riding position but Graeme simply invented a totally new, and equally successful, style in which his arms were extended out in front. It became known as "The Superman position" and Obree himself was a real Superman when he won his second 4000m Pursuit Gold Medal in the World Championships in Bogota.

Twice Gold Medallist, twice world pursuit champion and twice World One Hour Record-holder, Graeme Obree is certainly "The Flying Scotsman" and, for his cycling achievements,

both on the road and on the velodrome track, Irvine Burns Club was happy to nominate this adopted Irvinite as an Honorary Member.

(from the nominating speech, by Bill Nolan, at the Honorary Members lunch in 2009)

Letter of acceptance, written from his home in Saltcoats on 13-11-09, to President Billy Dickson:

Dear Mr Dickson,

It is with great pleasure that I write to you. I realise what an honour it is to be offered honorary membership of Irvine Burns Club and as such it is, of course, an offer that I hereby accept.

I look forward to The Homecoming celebration on 27th November, and on becoming a member that day.

Yours faithfully,
Graeme Obree