

Burns Night

Different festivals are celebrated in different countries around the world. However, there is one festival that is particularly important in Scotland and that is the celebration of Burns Night. This annual celebration takes place on or around the 25th January and involves music, lots of whisky and some rather unusual foods!

On Burns Night, people in Scotland remember the life and works of Robert Burns.

Who was Robert Burns?

Robert Burns, who is often referred to as Rabbie Burns, was a famous poet who wrote large numbers of songs and poems about cultural and political issues that were important to him. He was born in Alloway, Scotland on 25th January 1759 to hard-working farmer parents. The difficulties that his family faced as farmers encouraged Burns ill-feelings against authority which he wrote about in his poetry in later life. Much of Burns' work celebrated and praised his country and its people, especially the poor whom he admired.

Burns died on the 21st July 1796, aged just 37. The funeral took place four days later, on which his wife Jean gave birth to their son, Maxwell.

Jean and Robert had nine children in total however sadly, only three of them lived into adulthood. The first Burns supper was held on the anniversary of Burns death but was later changed to 25th January, his birthday.



Did You Know...?

Robert Burns is also known as 'Scotland's Favourite Son' and 'The Bard'. The word 'bard' means 'story-teller' or 'poet'.

**Burns Supper**

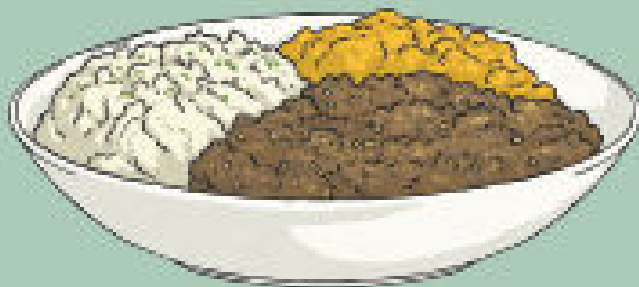
A Burns supper (the meal eaten on Burns Night) can be a small gathering of friends or a large organized event. No matter the size, a few key elements will occur. At more formal gatherings, guests may be 'piped' in by someone playing the bagpipes and will be welcomed by the Chair or host of the event. Once seated, the Selkirk Grace is said; a poem written by Burns to be recited before eating.

At this point, guests will stand as the haggis is presented on a silver platter and laid at the main table. Guests take to their seats and an honoured reader delivers another of Burns' poems called 'Address to a Haggis', which they say to the haggis itself. During the presentation, the reader plunges a knife into the outer-casing of the haggis (traditionally a sheep's stomach) and reveals the insides as they pour out.

The insides are a mixture of meats mixed with oatmeal and spices. Guests now stand and toast the haggis, usually with a glass of whisky, before enjoying a meal of haggis, neeps (turnips or swede) and tatties. Dessert may differ slightly from event to event but will most likely be a dish called Cranachan (whipped cream, raspberries and oat cakes) followed by even more whisky.

Once the meal has finished, the entertainment commences. Guests may be treated to Scottish dancing, poetry performances and recitals from musicians and bands. The evening will usually end with one of Burns' most famous songs,

'Auld Lang Syne'. This is traditionally sung around the world on New Year's Eve to say goodbye to the old year and to welcome in the new one. There are other traditions that may or may not be followed at a Burns supper.



Saltires (the Scottish flag) may be displayed, the diagonals of which represent the patron saint of Scotland, Saint Andrew.

Men may wear kilts and ladies often wear shawls or dresses, all of which will be made of their family tartan. Tartan is a heavy woollen cloth that is weaved to make a distinctive pattern of colours. The colours and patterns are associated with different areas, families or clans within Scotland. Whatever traditions are followed, the evening will always be one of merriment, music and celebration!

