

Burns Night

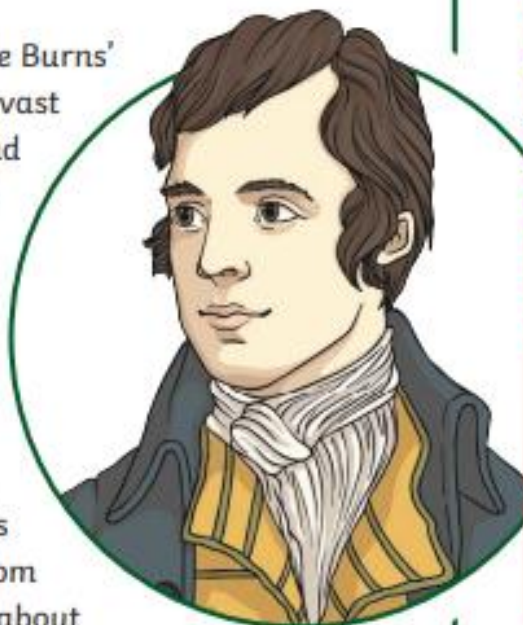
Countries around the world celebrate many different festivals for many different reasons. However, there is one festival that is particularly pertinent to Scotland and has become an important aspect of Scottish life. That is the celebration of Burns Night. This annual celebration takes place on or around the 25th January and entails music, lots of whisky and some rather unusual delicacies!

On Burns Night, people in Scotland (and Scottish people living elsewhere in the world) remember the life and works of a cultural icon; Robert Burns.



Who Was Robert Burns?

Robert Burns, who is often referred to as 'Rabbie Burns' or 'the Bard', was a famous poet who wrote vast numbers of lyrics 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 fuelled Burns' rebellion against authority which became a common theme in his later poetry. As well as writing about politics, Burns' literary work celebrated and praised his country and its people; especially the poor whom he admired greatly. He also wrote critically about religion; particularly Calvinism, which had a strict belief in God's absolute will over the decisions and actions of humans.



Burns suffered from ill health throughout his life and sadly, on the 21st July 1796, aged just 37, he died. The funeral took place four days later, on which his wife, Jean Armour, gave birth to their son, Maxwell. Together, Jean and Robert had nine children however sadly, only three of them survived into adulthood.



The Selkirk Grace

Some hae meat and canna eat,
 And some wad eat that want it.
 But we hae meat and we can eat,
 And sae the Lord be thankit.

**Burns Supper**

A Burns supper can be a small gathering of friends or a large organized event but whatever its size, a few key elements will occur. At more formal gatherings, guests may be welcomed in by a piper (someone playing the bagpipes) and will be welcomed by the Chair or host of the event. Once seated, the 'Selkirk Grace', a poem written by Burns to be recited before eating, is said.

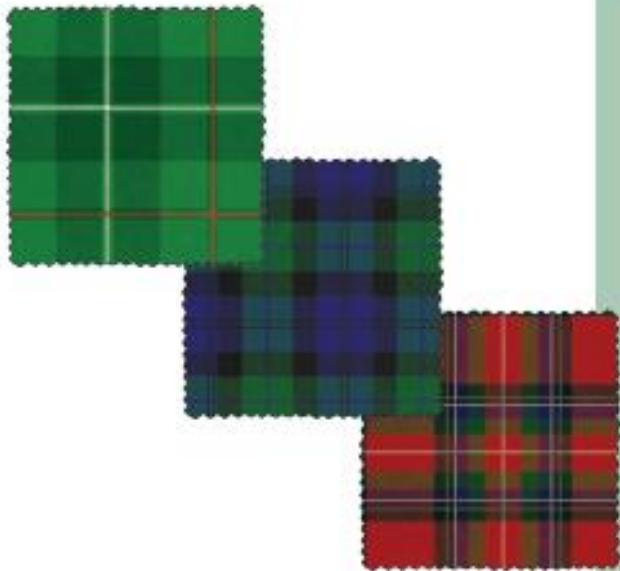
At this point, guests will stand as the haggis is presented on a silver platter and laid at the main table. Guests take to their seats and an honoured reader delivers another of Burns' poems called 'Address to a Haggis', which they say to the haggis itself.

During the rendition, 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.



Burns Night Entertainment

Once the meal has finished, the entertainment commences. Guests may be treated to Scottish dancing, poetry readings and performances 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 in order to bid farewell to the old year and welcome in the new one. The lyrics are:



Should auld acquaintance be forgot,
 And never brought to mind?
 Should auld acquaintance be forgot,
 And auld lang syne.
 For auld lang syne, my jo,
 For auld lang syne.
 We'll tak a cup o' kindness yet,
 For auld lang syne.

'Lang syne', in modern English, means 'in the distant past' or 'in times gone by'.

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.



The first Burns supper took place on 21st July, on the anniversary of Burns' death in the 1700s. However, the date was later changed to 25th January in remembrance of his birth.

1. What word is used to describe the unusual food that is served at Burns Night?

2. What religion did Burns criticise in his poetry? Tick one.

- Catholicism
- Hinduism
- Calvinism
- Islam

3. In what way is a formal Burns Night different from a less formal one? Give **two** examples.

4. What do you think the word, 'hae' in the 'Selkirk Grace' might mean? Use evidence from the text to support your answer.

5. Number the events to show the order in which they happen at a Burns supper.

- 'Address to a Haggis' is read
- Guests sing 'Auld Lang Syne'
- A piper plays whilst guests arrive
- The 'Selkirk Grace' is read
- Guests eat haggis, neeps and tatties.

6. Find and copy a word that shows that the knife is thrust into the haggis.

7. Fill in the missing words.

Should auld _____ be forgot,
And never brought to mind?
Should _____ acquaintance be forgot,
And auld lang _____.

8. Why do you think the Saltire may be displayed at Burns Night? Explain your answer.

9. Burns Night is a celebration of Robert Burns' life. In what ways was his life not so happy? Explain fully using evidence from the text to support your answer.

10. In Burns' lifetime, haggis was a cheap but nourishing meal. Why do you think it is eaten at Burns Night rather than something expensive and extravagant? Explain fully using evidence from the text to support your answer.
