



# THE SCOTTISH UNICORN

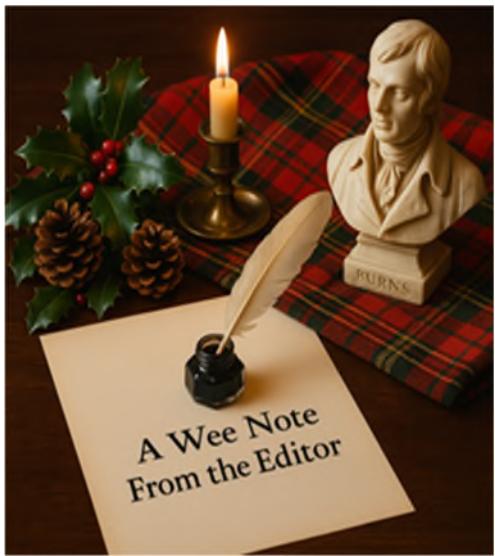
*Ignite Your Scottish Spirit*

## A Tribute to Robert Burns



From Edinburgh to Edmonton:  
2026 Burns Suppers around the World

# *A Wee Note from the Editor*



Robert Burns, Scotland's National Poet, was featured in our December issue – and many readers asked if they could have “just the Burns content by itself” to share with friends, family, fellow Burns fans and members of Burns Societies. In response, we created this special issue of *The Scottish Unicorn, A Tribute Robert Burns*.

Many Buns Suppers today have first-time attendees. They're excited to be part of this beautiful Scottish tradition but don't actually know much about Robert Burns or the rituals they'll partake in. We hope that this little Tribute may give them a little more knowledge about the history of the event - and of Burns, himself – so that they enjoy their evening even more.

Nearly everyone knows that Robert Burns composed the iconic New Year's theme, Auld Lang Syne, but fewer know how it became the anthem that the whole world sings with the clock strikes twelve. Some are unsure what it even means. That's the focus of our first feature article.

After that, *The People's Poet*, gives a short biography of the man, himself –a short but intense life that carried him from countryside of Ayrshire to the salons of Edinburgh and back again. His passions were deep and led to both scandal and heartbreak. Yet no one could bring out the touch of human dignity – even to a mouse whose nest he ruined when ploughing a field – quite like Robert Burns. It's evident why he was so beloved and why his words echo around the world even today.

We'll then describe the rituals of a Burns Supper – from the Piping of the Haggis to the Selkirk Grace and more, with a focus on the meaning beneath the merriment: A celebration of values that run deep in Scottish culture - friendship, equality and compassion. And we offer a listing of some of the hundreds of Burns Suppers scheduled around the world for 2026.

We hope you'll enjoy this special issue – and that you'll join us in raising a toast on or about January 25<sup>th</sup> to honor this extraordinary man whose work ignites the Scottish spirit.

Warmly,

*Blyth Douglas*

## *When the Clock Strikes Midnight:*



## *The World Sings Burns*

The final seconds of the year slip away. Crowds press close together under the winter sky. In Edinburgh, fireworks blaze above the Castle. In Glasgow, laughter and song spill into the streets. From Toronto to Tokyo, from Melbourne to Miami, people join hands and lift their voices in a melody older than memory — “*Should auld acquaintance be forgot...*”

It’s the moment the whole world becomes a little bit Scottish.

## *The Song That Belongs to Everyone*

When Robert Burns first put pen to paper in 1788, he wasn’t trying to write a New Year’s anthem for the world. He was preserving something older — a fragment of an ancient Scots folk tune that had been passed down by word of mouth. Burns refined and reshaped it, giving it a rhythm and language that could be sung. The phrase “auld lang syne” literally means “old long since” — or, as we might say today, “days gone by.”

It’s a simple idea, yet profoundly human: when we sing it, we honor the friendships, memories, and moments that shaped us. That’s why the song feels as natural at a farewell as it does at New Year’s — it isn’t really about time passing, but about what endures.

## *Auld Lang Syne and the Scottish New Year*

In Scotland, the New Year — or Hogmanay — long eclipsed Christmas as the country's chief winter celebration, a legacy of centuries when the Kirk forbade the observance of Christmas. (You'll find that remarkable story later in this issue.) Families swept their hearths clean, paid their debts, and prepared to start fresh. And when midnight struck, neighbors crossed thresholds with gifts of coal, shortbread, and whisky — the ancient custom known as first-footing. And inevitably, voices rose together in song.

What began as a local custom soon became a global ritual. Scots carried it with them wherever they went — across oceans, across generations. And in doing so, they gave the world its New Year's song.

## *How the World Learned to Sing Burns*

The spread of Auld Lang Syne beyond Scotland is a story of diaspora and music. In the 19th century, emigrant Scots brought the tune to every corner of the British Empire — from Canada to Australia, from India to the Caribbean. It appeared in military regiments, church services, and later, in gatherings of Scots abroad who longed for home.

But the real turning point came in the early 20th century when Guy Lombardo, the Canadian bandleader from London, Ontario, began performing Auld Lang Syne with his orchestra at midnight broadcasts from New York's Roosevelt Hotel. By the 1940s, his radio show had become the soundtrack of New Year's Eve for millions of Americans — and, eventually, for the entire English-speaking world.



From that moment on, Burns's humble poem was no longer just Scottish — it was universal.

## *A Song of Parting and Promise*

There's a curious power in the melody. You don't have to know the words; you just have to know the feeling. People who've never set foot in Scotland find themselves swaying arm-in-arm at midnight, singing a song they've half-forgotten but somehow know by heart.

It's the perfect mix of nostalgia and hope — that sweet ache of remembering what we've lost while believing in what lies ahead. For one brief moment, the divisions of language, class, and country dissolve. The song binds us in the oldest human ritual there is: saying goodbye, together.



*"And there's a hand, my trusty fiere,  
And gie's a hand o' thine;  
And we'll tak a right guid-willie waught,  
For auld lang syne."*  
— **Auld Lang Syne, 1788**

Roughly translated: "So here's my hand, my trusted friend, and give me yours; let's share a goodwill drink for old times' sake."

Few lines in world literature capture camaraderie more simply or sincerely.

## *When the Clock Strikes Twelve*

When midnight comes to Scotland, it joins a chorus that began hours earlier in Sydney and Tokyo and rolls westward through London, New York, and Vancouver. In Edinburgh, torches blaze through the streets in the great Hogmanay procession, the bells of St. Giles ring out, and fireworks crown the Castle as a river of people sing, laugh, and hold each other close. Across time zones and continents, the same words echo — a single song chasing the sunrise around the world.

In Tokyo, revelers sing it as Hotaru no Hikari, with different lyrics but the same haunting tune. In Nova Scotia, it's played at curling clubs and small-town gatherings. In New York, it rings out over Times Square. In Scotland, it fills the air like a benediction.

It is the world's shared heartbeat of Hogmanay — a moment of connection that owes its pulse to a Scottish ploughman-poet who understood, better than anyone, that friendship and memory are the true measure of time.



## *The Gift That Burns Gave the World*

What makes Auld Lang Syne extraordinary isn't that it belongs to Scotland. It's that Scotland gave it away. The song has no borders, no barriers. Whether sung in Scots, English, Japanese, or French, it carries the same human truth — that we are shaped by the people we've known, and the kindness we've shared.

Burns may never have imagined his verse circling the globe, yet perhaps he would have smiled to know that at the turning of every year, millions pause to sing his words — raising their voices for "auld lang syne," for friendship, for memory, and for hope renewed.

So when the clock strikes midnight this Hogmanay, join hands — wherever you are — and sing with the world. Because for a few shining minutes, through the poetry of one Scottish voice, we are all united in the same song.

# *Robert Burns: Scotland's Poet of the People*



Before he became an icon, Robert Burns was a farmer's son from Ayrshire — a man who ploughed by day and wrote poetry by candlelight. His was a life of contradictions: rustic and refined, disciplined and reckless, tender and tempestuous. Yet it is precisely these contradictions that made him unforgettable. Burns embodied the very soul of Scotland — proud, passionate, and profoundly human.

Born in 1759 in the small village of Alloway, Burns grew up in a modest home his father built with his own hands. William Burns, a tenant farmer, was a man of principle and learning who believed that his children's minds should be richer than his fields. From him, Robert inherited both a fierce work ethic and a restless imagination. Books were scarce, but words became his wealth.

At twenty-seven, Burns's first collection, *Poems, Chiefly in the Scottish Dialect*, made him famous overnight. Edinburgh's literary world hailed him as a "Heaven-taught ploughman," though the label carried more condescension than praise. He was courted by noblemen, toasted by society ladies, and painted by Alexander Nasmyth in a portrait that still defines him. Yet fame sat uneasily upon his shoulders; he remained, at heart, a countryman — more at ease in a tavern than a drawing room.

## ***Love, Passion, and Scandal***

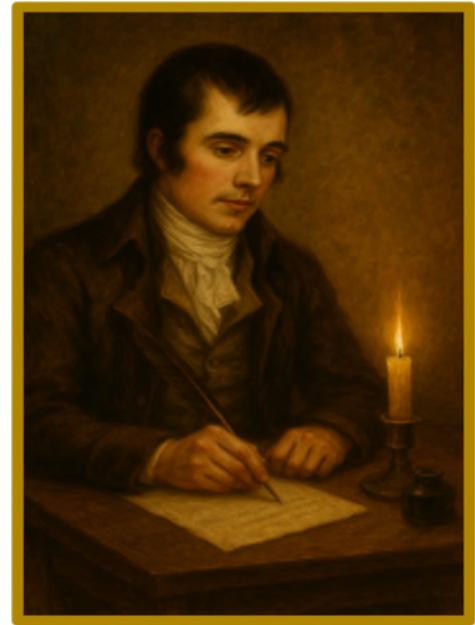
If his verses throbbed with feeling, so did his life. Burns's romantic adventures were legendary and often disastrous. Jean Armour, the daughter of a respected stonemason, was his great love — and his great scandal. When she became pregnant with twins before they were married, her father destroyed their marriage contract in outrage. Burns fled briefly, nursing heartbreak and humiliation. Yet he could never stay away for long; he returned, reconciled with Jean, and they eventually wed, their union producing nine children, though only three survived infancy.

Then there was Highland Mary — Mary Campbell — whom Burns met around 1786. She was young, devout, and perhaps the one woman who stirred something purer than desire in him. They exchanged Bibles at the banks of the River Ayr. Weeks later, she died suddenly, likely of typhus. Burns was shattered. Years later, he poured his grief into verse:

*Thou lingering star, with lessening ray,  
That lov'st to greet the early morn,  
Again thou usher'st in the day  
My Mary from my soul was torn.*  
— **To Mary in Heaven, 1792**

His passion never cooled. He flirted shamelessly and wrote love poems to women from every walk of life — barmaids, society ladies, even Edinburgh hostesses. Yet his songs of affection, tenderness, and loss continue to resonate because they spring from something universal: the way love ennobles and wounds us all.

*Ae fond kiss, and then we sever;  
Ae farewell, alas, for ever!*  
— **Ae Fond Kiss, 1791**



## **Fame and Frustration**

Burns's moment in the Edinburgh spotlight was brief. The salons and societies that had fawned over him soon tired of the novelty of a farmer-poet. Disillusioned, he returned to rural life — to the backbreaking labor of farming, where one failed harvest followed another. Debt haunted him. In the end, he accepted a position as an excise officer — collecting taxes for the Crown, a stable but ironic occupation for a man who had written so passionately about liberty and equality.

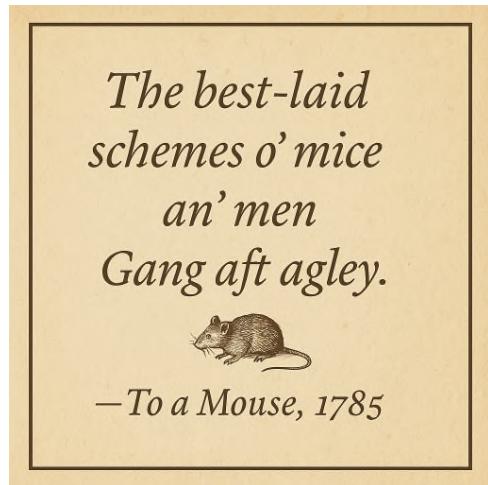
Yet even as he trudged from tavern to tavern inspecting whisky barrels, the poet's pen never rested. His song ***A Man's a Man for A' That*** championed the dignity of ordinary people and the equality of all humankind.

*The rank is but the guinea's stamp,  
The man's the gowd for a' that.*  
— ***A Man's a Man for A' That, 1795***

Fame brought neither fortune nor peace. At one point, facing ruin, Burns even contemplated seeking work abroad — in Jamaica, where the plantations ran on slave labor. Whether he truly meant to go or merely dreamed of escape remains uncertain, but the idea shows how deeply despair had set in.

## *The Shadow and the Light*

Burns was no saint. He could be impulsive, vain, and self-destructive. Yet his humanity was his genius. He understood the frailty and nobility in every soul — farmer or lord, lass or laird.



His empathy extended to all living things. When he disturbed a mouse's nest with his plough, he wrote not in jest but in genuine remorse:

*"The best-laid schemes o' mice an' men  
Gang aft agley."*  
— To a Mouse, 1785

That single line has echoed across centuries, even lending its rhythm to the title of American writer John Steinbeck's classic novel, *Of Mice and Men*. It is the voice of compassion, distilled.

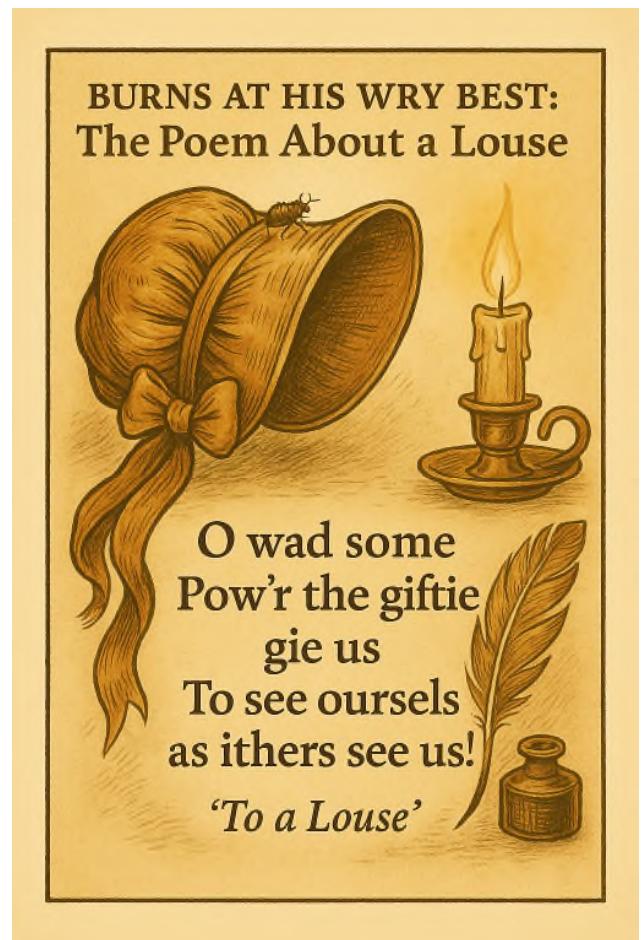
## *Burns at His Wry Best*

In one of his most playful works, “*To a Louse*” (1786), Robert Burns spies a tiny intruder crawling across the bonnet of a finely dressed lady in church. With typical Burnsian mischief, he addresses the creature directly — skewering vanity and pretension while reminding us of our shared humanity.

*O wad some Pow'r the giftie gie us  
To see ousrels as ither see us!*

Roughly translated: “*Oh, would some Power give us the gift to see ourselves as others see us!*”

A simple moment of embarrassment, turned into eternal wisdom — only Burns could make that leap.



## A Legacy Without Borders



Burns died young — only 37 — his body worn out by illness and strain. Yet his words lived on, carried first by Scots abroad and later by a world hungry for sincerity. His influence stretched far beyond the moors of Ayrshire. Across the Atlantic, Abraham Lincoln was said to carry Burns's poems in his coat pocket and could recite ***Tam o' Shanter*** from memory. The ploughman's voice, born in a humble cottage, reached the White House itself.

Every January 25th, Scots and friends of Scotland gather to honor him at Burns Suppers — evenings of poetry, laughter, and fellowship that have become a cultural treasure. ***The Selkirk Grace***, the ***Address to a Haggis***, and the immortal toasts to "the Lassies" and "the Laddies" are part of a living ritual that celebrates not perfection but passion — the kind that lights the human heart.

More than two centuries later, Robert Burns remains a poet for the people because he was one of them. His life was as rough and radiant as the land he loved. And while the salons of Edinburgh have faded into dust, the warmth of his words endures — sung in kitchens, taverns, and ballrooms around the world each Hogmanay, when friends join hands and raise their voices for ***Auld Lang Syne***.

# *Hang Onto Your Haggis: The Rituals of a Burns Supper*

## *A Feast of Poetry, Tradition and Good Company*

Every January 25th, candlelight flickers across dining halls, tartans gleam, and the sound of the pipes rises like a heartbeat.

Glasses are raised, laughter ripples through the air, and one name is spoken with warmth and pride: Robert Burns.

For more than two centuries, Scots and friends of Scotland around the world have gathered to honor their national poet in the most fitting way possible — with food, fellowship, and verse.

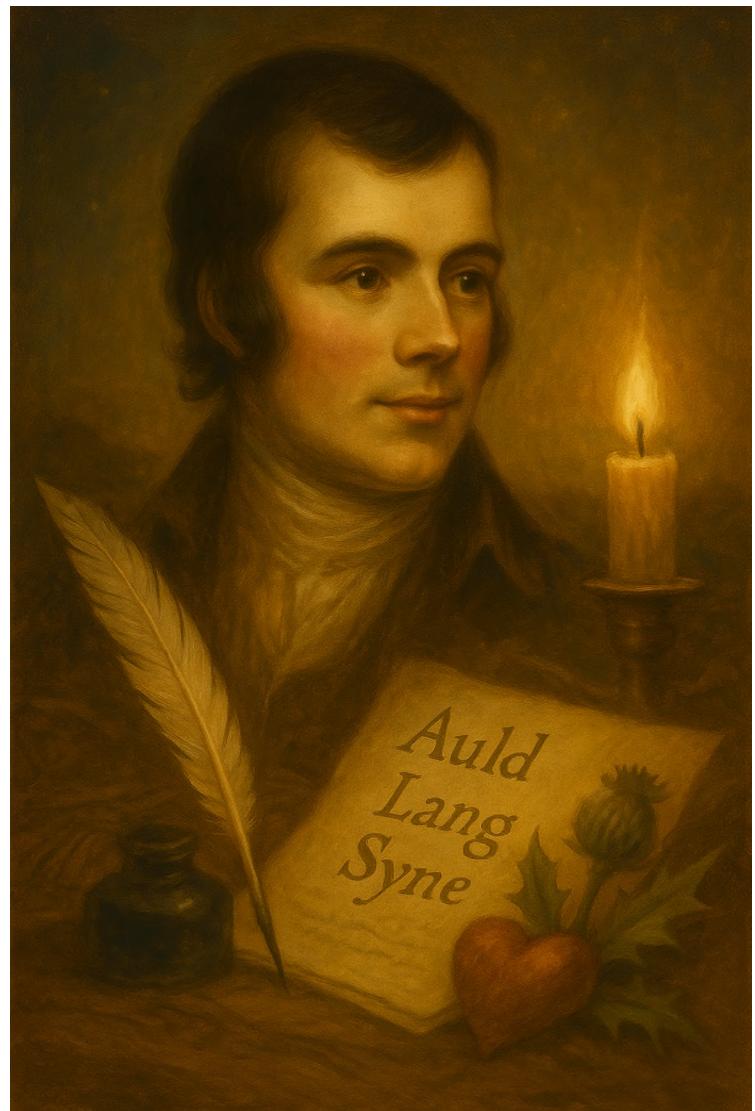
A Burns Supper isn't a solemn occasion; It's a joyous celebration of poetry, wit, and shared humanity.

## *How It All Began*

The Burns Supper tradition began modestly enough. In July 1801, five years after Burns's death, nine of his friends met at his birthplace in Alloway to mark his birthday and pay tribute to the man they loved and admired.

They dined on haggis and sheep's head, read from his works, and toasted his memory late into the night.

What they began that evening became one of Scotland's most enduring cultural rituals. Within decades, Burns Clubs sprang up across the country — and around the world — each one keeping the flame of his words alive through annual suppers filled with laughter, stories, and song.



## *The Order of the Evening*

Though every Burns Supper is somewhat unique, most follow a well-loved pattern that blends reverence with humor and a fair bit of whisky. The evening usually begins with the **Piping in of the Guests**, as a piper greets arrivals with rousing marches that set the tone. Then comes the **Selkirk Grace**, a short, humble prayer attributed to Burns:

***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.***

Then comes the moment everyone's been waiting for: the **Piping in of the Haggis**.

A procession forms as the haggis is carried proudly into the room, accompanied by a piper and thunderous applause. The master of ceremonies recites Burns's famous "**Address to a Haggis**," beginning with the immortal line:

***Fair fa' your honest, sonsie face,  
Great chieftain o' the pudding-race!***



At the climactic moment, the haggis is dramatically cut open with a knife — a theatrical gesture that never fails to draw cheers. What follows is a hearty meal of haggis, neeps, and tatties, washed down with whisky and good humor. Then, amid laughter and clinking glasses, come the toasts and tributes that make each supper its own.

The **Immortal Memory** is the centerpiece: A speech honoring Burns's life, work, and enduring influence. Some are scholarly; others are light-hearted. But all reflect the same affection for a man whose words still move hearts more than two centuries later.

Next comes the **Toast to the Lassies**, a playful salute to the women present — humorous, affectionate, and often filled with mock gallantry. The **Reply from the Lassies** answers in kind, with wit and good-natured teasing that keeps the room roaring with laughter.

Between courses and speeches, guests take turns reciting or singing Burns's works — ***A Man's a Man for A' That, Tam o' Shanter, Ae Fond Kiss***, and of course, ***Auld Lang Syne***.



## A Global Tradition

What began in a small cottage in Ayrshire now spans continents.

Today, Burns Suppers are held everywhere from Edinburgh to Edmonton, Dunedin to Dubai. Some are grand formal banquets; others are intimate gatherings of friends around a kitchen table. But wherever they take place, the heart of the evening remains the same: Shared pride, shared laughter, and a shared love of Scotland's bard.

In New York, Sydney and Singapore, Scottish societies host glittering dinners complete with pipers, dancers, and tartan aplenty. In tiny rural halls across the Highlands, neighbors still gather with mugs and fiddles, reciting the same lines their ancestors once did.

And in countless homes around the world, descendants of Scots raise a glass to the poet whose words still make them feel connected to the land of their forebears.

## The Meaning Beneath the Merriment

For all the pomp and playfulness, a Burns Supper is more than a feast — it's a celebration of values that run deep in Scottish culture: friendship, equality, and compassion.

Burns's poetry gave voice to the ordinary person. He wrote of farmers and ploughmen, of love and loss, of human dignity and the fleeting beauty of life.

His was a democratic spirit — and his words remind us that wit, warmth, and humanity are worth toasting, year after year.

So, when the whisky flows and the laughter rises this January, remember what it's really about. It's not the haggis or the speeches — it's the connection between people, the power of words to bind hearts, and the joy of lifting a glass together in a celebration of life, itself.

Or, as Burns himself might say:

***“Here’s a bottle and an honest friend!  
What wad ye wish for mair, man?  
Wha kens, before his life may end,  
What his share may be o’ care, man?”***



**Edinburgh – Jan 23 & 24**

The Royal Yacht Britannia

<https://tinyurl.com/4z5er9x4>

**Falkland (Fife) – Jan 24**

Falkland Palace & Gardens

<https://tinyurl.com/t8tv2x7x>

**Dunblane (Stirling) – Jan 30**

Burns Club Centenary Burns Supper

[2026 Burns Supper - Dunblane Burns Club](2026%20Burns%20Supper%20-%20Dunblane%20Burns%20Club)

**Ayr – Jan 23**

Ayrshire Hospice Burns Supper

Brig O' Doon Hotel

[Burns Supper - Ayrshire Hospice](#)

**Glasgow – Jan 25**

The Citizen: Burns Supper

[Burns Supper — The Citizen](#)

**Aberdeen- Jan 23 & 24**

Burns Ceilidh Supper

[Burns Ceilidh Supper | Aberdeen City Council](#)

**Winnipeg, MB – Jan 25**

St. Andrew's Society of Winnipeg

[The St. Andrew's Society of Winnipeg](#)

**Toronto, ON – Jan 23**

St. Andrew's Society of Toronto

[2026 Burns Dinner • St. Andrew's Society of](#)

[Toronto](#)

**Montreal, QC – Jan 22**

St. Andrew's Society of Montreal

<https://www.standrews.qc.ca>

**Ottawa, ON – Jan 24**

Scottish Society of Ottawa

[The Scottish Society of Ottawa](#)

**Calgary, AB – Jan 23**

50<sup>th</sup> Annual Burns Supper

<https://www.calgaryburnsclub.com>

**Edmonton, AB – Jan 31**

Edmonton Scottish Society- Burns Pub Night

[www.edmontonscottishsociety.org](http://www.edmontonscottishsociety.org)

**Halifax, NS- Jan 24**

Halifax Burns Club Supper

[Halifax Burns Club | Robert Burns Club](#)



### **New York City, NY – Jan 16**

American Scottish Foundation  
Burns Supper at The University Club  
[www.americanscottishfoundation.com](http://www.americanscottishfoundation.com)

### **Washington, DC – Jan 23**

St. Andrew's Society of Washington DC  
[Burns Nicht – St. Andrew's Society of Washington, DC](http://Burns Nicht – St. Andrew's Society of Washington, DC)

### **Atlanta, GA – Jan 25**

Burns Club of Atlanta  
[The Burns Club of Atlanta - Celebrating Robert Burns | The Burns Club of Atlanta](http://The Burns Club of Atlanta - Celebrating Robert Burns | The Burns Club of Atlanta)

### **Cincinnati, OH – Jan 24**

Caledonian Society of Cincinnati  
[Events — The Caledonian Society of Cincinnati](http://Events — The Caledonian Society of Cincinnati)

### **Augusta, Maine – Jan 17**

St. Andrew's Society of Maine  
[Saint Andrew's Society of Maine](http://Saint Andrew's Society of Maine)

### **Rumford, Maine – Jan 24**

(Official) Scottish Society of Maine  
[https://tinyurl.com/dxhnpzyf](http://tinyurl.com/dxhnpzyf)

### **Fort Lauderdale, FL – Jan 24**

Scottish American Society of South Florida  
[Scottish American Society of South Florida - Burns Supper](http://Scottish American Society of South Florida - Burns Supper)

### **Dallas / Fort Worth, TX – Jan 24**

CowTown Scots  
[https://www.cowtownscots.org](http://https://www.cowtownscots.org)

### **New Orleans, LA – Jan 17**

Caledonian Society of New Orleans  
[https://www.caledoniansocietyofneworleans.com/activities.html](http://https://www.caledoniansocietyofneworleans.com/activities.html)

### **Shreveport/Minden, LA – Jan 24**

Scottish Society of the Louisiana Highlands  
[\(7\) Scottish Society of the Louisiana Highlands | Facebook](http://(7) Scottish Society of the Louisiana Highlands | Facebook)

### **Denver, CO – Jan 24**

Clan Donnachaidh Robert Burns Dinner  
[https://tinyurl.com/2743stp2](http://https://tinyurl.com/2743stp2)

### **Reno, NV – Jan 31**

Nevada Society of Scottish Clans  
[Robert Burns Celebration Details | NVSSC](http://Robert Burns Celebration Details | NVSSC)

### **Los Angeles, CA – Jan 24**

St. Andrew's Society of Los Angeles  
Robert Burns Supper  
[https://tinyurl.com/9rw8cr2u](http://https://tinyurl.com/9rw8cr2u)

### **San Francisco, CA – Feb 7**

St. Andrew's Society of San Francisco  
[Scottish Tradition & Heritage | St. Andrew's Society](http://Scottish Tradition & Heritage | St. Andrew's Society)

## **Spotlight: Burns Night at New York's University Club**

In the grand dining room of the very building where negotiations for U.S. Steel were struck in 1901 — securing Andrew Carnegie's place as one of America's greatest industrialists — the American-Scottish Foundation now hosts its annual Burns Supper. Guests dine beneath gilded ceilings where the echoes of history meet the songs of Scotland, toasting the Bard in true New York style.





## AUSTRALIA & NEW ZEALAND BURNS SUPPERS 2026

### **Sydney, Australia – Jan 24**

Institute of Chartered Accountants of Scotland  
Sydney Harbour

[ICAS Sydney Burns Night 2026: Honouring our  
Scottish roots - ICAS](#)

### **Perth, Australia – Jan 23**

(Dance practices - Jan 6, 13 and 20)  
St. Andrew Society of WA Burns Supper  
[Upcoming Events - Saint Andrew Society of  
Western Australia](#)

### **Brisbane, Australia – Jan 23**

Society of St. Andrew of Scotland Queensland  
[Society of St Andrew of Scotland Queensland](#)

### **Dunedin, New Zealand – Jan 25**

Dunedin Folk Club  
<https://tinyurl.com/mruesj93>

### **Arrowton, New Zealand – Jan 24**

Athanaeum Hall  
[2026 Arrowtown Burns Supper & Ceilidh](#)

## OTHER LOCATIONS THROUGHOUT THE WORLD



### **London, UK – Jan 23**

The Caledonian Club Burns Supper  
<https://www.caledonianclub.com>

### **Oman – Jan 24**

Caledonian Society of Oman  
<https://www.facebook.com/CaledonianSocietyOman>

### **Kenya – Jan 24**

Caledonian Society of Kenya  
<https://caledoniakenya.com/>

### **Bermuda – Jan 24**

Caledonian Society of Bermuda  
<https://caledoniansocietybermuda.com/>

### **Singapore – Jan 24**

Singapore St. Andrew's Society  
<https://www.standrews.org.sg>

### **Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia – Jan 31**

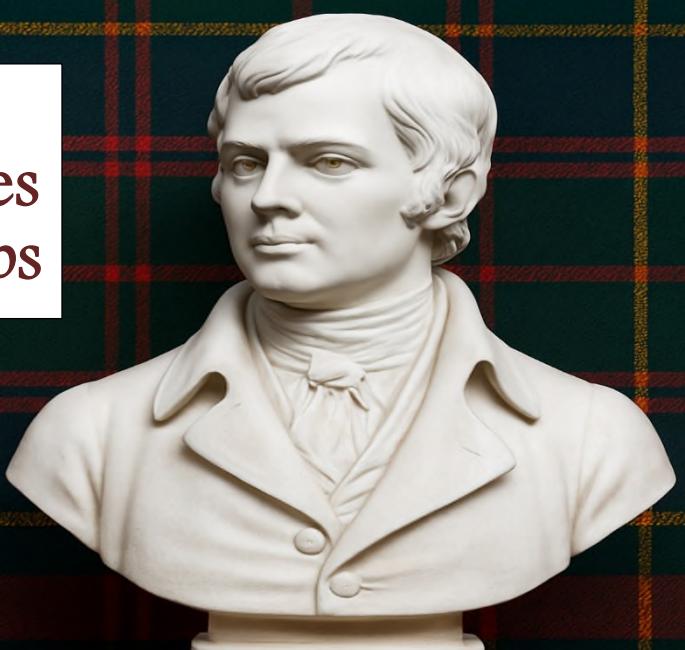
Selangor St. Andrew's Society  
[Selangor St. Andrew's Society | Scottish Society  
Malaysia](#)



# THE SCOTTISH UNICORN

*Ignite Your Scottish Spirit*

**A Wee Note for  
Scottish Societies  
And Burns Clubs**



We have compiled these Burns Night listings from publicly available information as well as contributions from participating societies. If any dates or details need correction, please feel free to let us know – we are always happy to ensure your event is represented accurately.

If your society is not listed or wishes to update its information, please reach out. While the layout for this Burns Tribute is now complete, we would be delighted to feature your Burns Night on our Facebook page – a wonderful way to highlight your celebration to Scots and friends of Scotland around the world.

You are very welcome to share this **Tribute to Robert Burns** with your members at no cost. If you prefer, we can send you the full December/January issue of *The Scottish Unicorn* which includes all of these articles, listings and more – also at no charge and available for distribution. To confirm any details, submit updates or request additional copies, please email: [blyth@scottishunicornnetwork.org](mailto:blyth@scottishunicornnetwork.org).

We look forward to celebrating Burns Night with you – wherever you gather around the world.