

HSHC SPORRAN

www.HighlandSocietyofHarfordCounty.com

February 2025 — Alba Gu Brath — Scotland Forever

The Highland Society of Harford County was incorporated for the preservation of the spirit, lore, poetry, art, dress, welfare, and history of the Scottish people dedicated to the promotion of these traditions among those of Scottish ancestry within Harford County and its environs.



Our February 18 Gathering

Whisky Tasting at the Vandiver Inn

301 South Union Avenue,
Havre de Grace, MD, 21078

6:30 - cash bar

7:00 - dinner

whisky tasting follows

[Click Here](#) to

Choose your entree &
prepay your meal

The password is Highland (case sensitive) (If you have any trouble or questions, you may call the Vandiver front desk at 410-939-5200 after 1030 a.m. for help.)

2025 Officers

The highlight of the Burns Night Gathering was the installation of the 2025 Officers of the Highland Society of Harford County. The Installation was officiated by Jim Wasson, most senior past laird, who led the officers in the pledge of the Highland Society of Harford County. The newly installed Officers for HSHC for 2025 are:

Laird Dr. John Polk, Clan Pollock

1st Aide-de-Laird David Ray, Clan McRay

2nd Aide-de-Laird Susan Wheler, Clan Shaw

Secretary Dr. Andrea Bowden, Clan McMillan

Treasurer Dr. John Polk, Clan Pollock

Immediate Past Laird Keith Reagan, Clan Keith



Anyone wishing to contribute an article, news, a joke or humorous anecdote or other contributions, news, suggestions for articles send them to:

sallyjoanderson@hotmail.com or abowden@bcps.k12.md.us

Burns Night 2025



Laird's Letter



Our Robert Burns Night was an excellent event with all of the expected ceremonial observances - toasting, tasting, piping and feasting. We had an excellent haggis, locally produced in the proper Scottish manner, served with tatties and neeps, and formally addressed with Robbie Burns' Ode, delivered by former Laird Jim Wasson. Unfortunately, a number of our members were afflicted with illnesses, and others were deterred by the severe weather, and were not able to attend. A pity as it was a fun evening indeed, ending with singing of Auld Lang Syne.

Jack Owen Award. The John R. Owen Award was presented to Andrea Bowden at the Burns Night gathering. This award is given at the discretion of the Board of Directors, or a committee appointed by the Laird, and may be awarded in any given year to a member who has performed outstanding service to the Society and has exhibited the character of the true Scot. It remains in that member's possession for the ensuing year.

February Meeting – Scotch Tasting. Our next gathering, 18 February, will be special both because it features a tasting of selected single malt Scotch whiskies and because we will be meeting at the Vandiver Inn for the first time. We will have a private room and they are preparing a special meal just for us. Don't miss it.

Installation of Officers for 2025. Our Society's officers for 2025 were duly sworn in at the Burns Night meeting and held a Board of Directors meeting the following week as required by our bylaws. We discussed finances, meetings and other activities.

2024 Financial Report. The Financial Summary Report for 2025 is on page 4 in this issue of the Sporrán. We are in good shape but spent more than we collected in 2024 for various reasons, but mainly due to increased venue fees paid at our meetings. This was discussed at our BoD meeting and will be carefully monitored in the year ahead.

Scottish Scholarship. There is currently \$1441 in our treasury, accumulated years ago for the purpose of supporting scholarships or Scottish cultural activities, but has not been used. This was discussed at the BoD meeting and Andrea Bowden was appointed as chairperson to form a committee and explore possible uses of the funds. If you have suitable suggestions, please let Andrea know.

Dues are still due. If you have not yet paid your 2025 dues, please mail a check to me at 908 Lapidum Road, Havre de Grace MD 21078. Dues are \$30 per person or \$45 per couple.

Alba gu bràth –
John Polk, Laird

OWEN AWARD PRESENTED TO DR. ANDREA BOWDEN

by Susan Wheeler

Dr. Andrea Bowden, Clan McMillan was awarded the coveted John (Jack) R. Owen Memorial Award for 2024 on January 21, 2025, at the gathering of the Highland Society of Harford County by Laird John Polk, Clan Pollack. Chair of the Awards Committee, Keith Reagan, Clan Keith cited her for contributions to every HSHC program-virtual and in person – since 2020, arranging events such as the Outlander Picnics, providing decorations, serving as substitute secretary for years and now as elected secretary and since 2021, as co-editor of the SPORRAN. Andrea expressed her surprise at receiving the award and her heartfelt appreciation to HSHC for it. She said that she enjoys celebrating her Celtic heritage, paternal Scottish, and maternal Irish.

The John (Jack) R. Owen Memorial Award was instituted in 1998 upon his death. Mr. Owen (1925-

1998) was a twenty-five+ year member and leader in the Highland Society of Harford County. He served a Laird in 1976 and on numerous committees over the years.

The Award is a circular silver tray, two feet in diameter with the words in Gaelic THA ANIM URRAMACH “May his Name be Distinguished” inscribed along the lower rim and a Piper etched at the top. The names of the recipients appear in order of year awarded. The most recent recipient of the award was Lady Crystal Hudson-Boyd in 2023. Current HSHC members who have won the award are 2000 Col, James V. Wasson, 2011 Angela Macomber Schiaffino, and 2013, James E. Schiaffino.

(SJ note: well earned, Andrea!! You are a true and faithful friend of the Society.



Honored with the John R. Owen Memorial Award:

- 1999 James "Scotty" Adams
- 2000 Col. James V. Wasson
- 2001 Albert Wade Laisy
- 2002 James C. Robertson
- 2003 David F. Wallace
- 2004 J. Michael Pratt
- 2005 James T. Wollon
- 2006 Henry C. Peden, Jr.
- 2011 Angela Macomber Schiaffino
- 2012 David C. Robinson
- 2013 James Edwin "Ski" Schaifffino
- 2023 Lady Crystal Hudson-Boyd
- 2024 Dr. Andrea Bowden



HIGHLAND SOCIETY OF HARFORD COUNTY
2024 Financial Summary
J. F. Polk, Treasurer

Balance 1 Jan 2024 \$4260.94

Income

Dues \$945.00
Raffles 309.00
Donations 110.25
Meeting proceeds (meals) 5,085.00

Income Total **\$6449.25**

Expenses

Bank Fees \$36.00
Insurance 250.00
Whisky, toasting/tasting 398.68
Donations 150.00
Registration/ticket fees 135.01
Miscellaneous, supplies 215.28
Catering 3705.67
Venue Fees 2150.00

Expenses Total **\$7040.64**

Balance 31 Dec 2024 **\$3669.55**
2024 Y/Y Net **- \$591.39**

HS HC End of the Year Account Balances

2013	\$3754.37
2014	\$3810.14
2015	\$3994.06
2016	\$3813.75
2017	\$3605.90
2018	\$3207.89
2019	\$3098.93
2020	\$3162.84
2021	\$3374.19
2022	\$3694.11
2023	\$4260.94
2024	\$3669.55

Note: balance includes \$1441.00 set aside for support of cultural scholarships.

MINUTES OF OUR LAST GATHERING



HSHC gathered at the State Theater in Havre de Grace MD on Tuesday, January 21, 2025, for the annual ROBERT BURNS DINNER. There were 13 members present. Fellowship began at 6:30 PM. Sarah Autry circulated selling 50/50 raffle tickets and John Polk collected dues.

Laird John Polk, Clan Pollock, called the meeting to order at 7:00 PM. The toast to King Charles III was given by Keith Reagan, Clan Keith. The toast to President Trump was given by David Ray, Clan McRay. The toast to Scotland was given by Jim Wasson, Clan Buchanan. The Pledge of Allegiance to the Flag was led by John Polk who also offered grace. Birthdays were recognized, including that of Robert Burns on January 25th, Andrea Bowden reminded members to send her recipes from the potluck dinner on December 17th. She distributed tickets to those attending the RIVERDANCE performance on February 26th at the American Music Theater in Lancaster, PA.

The HAGGIS PROCESSION was led by piper, Tom Ritter, Clan Campbell, followed by Laird John Polk, Clan Pollock holding the huge Claymore Sword. Betsy Wasson, Clan Buchanan, carried the haggis, which they had cooked. Jim Wasson recited the Ode to the Haggis by Robert Burns and gave the toasts of whisky with the quaich, the cup of friendship. He then cut the haggis, poured whisky in it and invited members to come forward for haggis and 'neeps and tatties' – mashed turnips and potatoes. Thereafter, dinner from Chesapeake Grille was served: roast beef, gravy, mashed potatoes, green beans, carrots and onions and an assortment of cakes.

After dinner, Laird John Polk reconvened the meeting. Jim Wasson, past Laird, installed the HSHC officers for 2025: Laird- John Polk, Clan Pollack; First Aide to the Laird-David Ray, Clan McRay. Second Aide to the Laird- Susan Wheeler, Clan Shaw, and Secretary- Andrea Bowden, Clan McMillan. Laird, John Polk then introduced the Jack Owen Award and committee: Keith Reagan, Kallie Lyons, and David Ray. The background was read by Keith Reagan, noting that the award was established to honor Jack Owen, 1921-1998, for his many contributions to the Highland Society of Harford County. Keith announced that the recipient for 2024 was Dr. Andrea Bowden for her leadership and service to HSHC. He presented her with a sterling silver tray engraved with the names of the recipients, Andrea expressed her heartfelt thanks to the group. The 50/50 drawing and bottle of PINCH Scotch were won by John Polk.

John Polk then introduced a video about Robert Burns, which gave an overview of the life of the great poet. The video traced his humble farm upbringing, education, jobs, many romantic liaisons, his poems, and popularity in Scotland and around the world. David Ray then gave the Toast to the Lassies, as is traditional at Burns Night events. This was followed by Regina Ray who replied with a lively Response from the Lassies. John then distributed copies of poems by Robert Burns and various members read them aloud. liaisons, his poems, and popularity in Scotland and around the world. The meeting concluded with the singing of Auld Lang Syne, by Robert Burns, accompanied by piper Tom Ritter. The gathering ended at 9:05 PM.

Respectfully submitted, Andrea Bowden, Secretary

THE BEST SCOTCH FROM EVERY REGION OF SCOTLAND

By Christopher Osbourn January 20, 2025 Reprinted from COOL MATERIAL

Scotland is home to the greatest concentration of whisky distilleries in the world. Currently, there are more than 150 malt and grain distilleries in production. But, unlike in the U.S., where bourbon can be made anywhere with no geographical specifications (yes, it can be made other places than Kentucky), Scotland has five distinct regions.

Those regions are Speyside, Highlands, Lowlands, Islay, and Campbeltown. Speyside is located in the Highlands and has the highest concentration of distilleries in the country, with more than fifty in operation. The Highlands is the largest region based on geography and also produces the most diverse whisky types. It's home to around forty distilleries. The Lowlands is in the southernmost area of Scotland and is home to around twenty distilleries.

The last two regions are the most interesting. Islay is an island in the Inner Hebrides off the coast of Scotland. It's home to 30,000 sheep and only around 3,000 people, but boasts iconic distilleries including Lagavulin, Ardbeg, and Bruichladdich. The island is known for its robust, memorable peat-smoked whiskies. Campbeltown is by far the smallest whisky region, a harbor town located alongside the Campbeltown Loch on the Kintyre Peninsula. Once packed with distilleries, the town is now only home to a handful, including well-known brands like Springbank and Glen Scotia.

Below, you'll find the absolute best Scotch whisky expression from each region. And ridiculously old and over-the-top expensive releases aren't included for obvious reasons. These are exceptional bottles that you can actually purchase from your local liquor store or whisky retailer.

Speyside – Aberlour A'Bunadh



Speyside has a lot to offer single-malt Scotch whisky drinkers. But, if you're only going to pick one expression to add to your home bar, make it Aberlour A'Bunadh. This non-age-statement single malt is matured completely in ex-oloroso sherry casks. The result is an award-winning, cask strength whisky that begins with a nose of candied nuts, orange peels, sweet sherry, and gentle spices. The palate is a mix of dried cherries, dark chocolate, sherry, oak, and wintry spices.



Highlands - The Glendronach 15 Year Old Revival



Located in the Highlands region, The Glendronach is another distillery with a strong affinity for sherried expressions. One of its best is The Glendronach 15 Year Old Revival. Matured for fifteen years in oloroso casks, it's one of the most beloved sherried single malt Scotch whiskies in the world. This 46 percent ABV sipper begins with a nose of raisins, candied orange peels, vanilla, and oak. Sipping it reveals a symphony of sweet sherry, dark chocolate, candied nuts, dried fruit, light spices, and oaky wood. Sip it neat, or with a splash or two of water.

Lowlands – Auchentoshan Three Wood



This award-winning single malt whisky from Auchentoshan gets its name because it was matured in three different barrel types. Those types are bourbon, Spanish oloroso sherry, and Spanish Pedro Ximenez sherry. The result is a multi-layered, complex whisky that begins with a nose of candied orange peels, plums, dried fruits, butterscotch, and oak. The palate is loaded with flavors like cinnamon candy, candied nuts, orange peels, dried fruits, and sticky toffee pudding. A whisky this complex deserves to be enjoyed neat on a cool night.

Campbeltown – Springbank 15 Year



Campbeltown is by far the smallest Scottish whisky region, both in terms of geography as well as number of distilleries. But that doesn't mean the region is lacking for standouts, and there aren't many Campbeltown distilleries more beloved than Springbank. This renowned distillery is home to numerous complex, memorable expressions. The best reasonably priced bottle is Springbank 15 Year. Matured for at least fifteen years in ex-sherry casks, it's known for its nose of salted caramel, iodine, sweet sherry, and light smoke. Drinking it brings notes of candied nuts, dried fruits, sherry, vanilla beans, cocoa, toffee, and gentle barbecue smoke.

Islay – Bruichladdich Port Charlotte Heavily Peated

The island is well-known for its peat-smoked whiskies, but some rise above the rest. If you're looking for a robust, smoky, memorable whisky, look no further than Bruichladdich. While you could spend more for some of its limited releases, it's tough to beat the appeal of Bruichladdich Port Charlotte Heavily Peated. Matured for seven years in a combination of first-fill bourbon barrels, virgin oak barrels, and second-fill wine casks, this peat-smoked whisky isn't for Islay novices. The nose is a mix of orchard fruits, candied orange peels, toffee, cinnamon, and robust peat smoke. The palate follows suit with notes of citrus peels, dried fruits, oak, heather, coconut, vanilla, pipe tobacco, and rich, luxurious peat smoke. This 100-proof whisky is best enjoyed neat, with a splash or two of water.



BREAKING NEWS

FROM BBC February 2, 2025

Punxsutawney Phil has seen his shadow meaning six more weeks of winter in North America. On the cold morning of February 2, 2025, Phil emerged from his burrow, with a little help for his handlers, to be set on his stump and sniff the air. The sun was weak but enough for Phil to cast a shadow. The crowd chanted “Phil, Phil, Phil” as he was held skyward by Tom Dunkel, President of the Punxsutawney Ground Hog Club.

Over 30,000 people descended on the small town of Punxsutawney, Pennsylvania, for an uniquely American celebration. Punxsutawney is a small town about 85 miles



northeast of Pittsburgh in the mountainous western part of the state. The Punxsutawney Ground Hog Club has been having celebrations since 1886 on Gobbler’s Knob. In the last 25 years, Ground Hog Day has become increasingly popular and has drawn fans from far and wide.

In the wild, groundhogs also known as woodchucks, whistle pigs and marmots live about six years. (Supposedly a special “elixir” of life has been given to Phil, however.) It is known that the present Phil has a family - “wife” Phyllis and new “twin pups” Sunny and Shadow. The groundhog is a rodent of the family Sciuridae, belonging to the group of large ground squirrels known as marmots. A lowland creature of North America, it is found through much of the Eastern United States, across Canada and into Alaska. It typically weighs 8-9 pounds and has a n omnivorous diet of a variety of plants, grubs, earthworms and other small animals. Groundhogs live in burrows or dens and are less active in winter.

Treasurer’s Report Dr. John Polk

Period: 1-31 January 2025

OLD BALANCE	\$3669.55
Expenses:	
Bank fee	\$3.00
Supplies	\$53.00
Venue fee	\$250.00
Catering	\$360.19
Income:	
Collected, at gathering	\$455.00
Raffle proceeds	\$80.00
Dues collected	\$465.00
Donation (anonymous)	\$500.00
NEW BALANCE	\$4503.36



THIS PENULTIMATE WEATHERMAN HAS SCOTTISH ROOTS

by James (Ski) Schiaffino

Reprinted from the February 2021 SPORRAN (Note: This was the last issue for which Ski served as editor.)

As the hoopla and bally-hoo of Hogmanay fades away and the hangover is but a distant memory, this February we can turn our attention to another Hog. That means only one thing- Groundhog Day! While February to some may be candy hearts or birthdays, any true American Scot will tell you that the only real holiday in February is Groundhog Day-February 2nd. Although some of the lesser informed might think of it in terms of a German origin.

Like us, the day is an amalgam of many different cultures. But it is truly Celtic in origin. Throughout history at this time of year there were all sorts of 'celebrations'. In the Celtic calendar it was called Imbolic, and centered around Brigid - the Celtic fertility goddess. It was a feast associated with fertility and weather prediction - for the planting of crops.

The Romans were also involved. (Scratch Western culture anywhere and you'll find a Roman.) They had a day in early February devoted to the divination of weather, except that they used a hedgehog. The Romans called this time of year Februa which meant offerings. In this case purification. The goddess Lupercalia (Roman version of Brigid) was asked to purify the land for spring planting. Then the church got involved and combined all of it into Candlemas Day. This was a day devoted to the purification of Mary. After all it was a day originally devoted to women. Which leads us back to the Celts and Scotland. Our Groundhog Day is based on a Scottish poem that goes:

If Candlemas Day be bright and fair
half the winter is to come and mair (more)
If Candlemas Day be dark and foul
half the winter was over at Yowl (Yule-Christmas)

Now you know why he goes back into his den if he sees his shadow.

So how did the groundhog become involved? Punxsutawney Phil - like us- is a synthesis. In Western Pennsylvania you can't throw a haggis egg without hitting someone of either German or Scottish descent with a little Native American thrown in for good measure. So come February second, they just had to continue the Celtic tradition. They didn't have a hedgehog so they used a groundhog. But, he isn't really a hog, pig or ground anything, although he does burrow underground. You might have a semi-accurate argument about Punxsutawney Phil being a pig. Another name for a groundhog is "Whistle Pig". When startled a Groundhog will make a sound similar to a whistle before it scurries underground. But even Phil's Taxonomic Rank isn't quite correct. Phil is actually a woodchuck. The word Woodchuck comes from an American Indian (Delaware Tribe) word Oijik -pronounced Wuchak. That is their name for the groundhog.



Add that to the fact that Groundhog Day is celebrated in a place called Punxsutawney, also an American Indian word- actually Lenni-Lenape or original people referring to a "clan" of the Delaware Tribe. Punxsy was a campsite halfway between the Allegheny and Susquehanna rivers notorious for its sandflies or as the Delaware referred to them "ponksads". (Sandflies are the American version of ubiquitous Scottish midges.) So, the campsite and eventually the town became ponksaduteney - the little town of the sandflies. It is a short jump (linguistically) from Ponksaduteney to Punxsutawney.

So, what we have in Groundhog Day is a Scottish poem celebrated by an American animal with an Indian name held in an American town also with an Indian name for a Scottish bug. What more could you ask of an American holiday? Groundhog Day has everything, lots of different animals, people, cultures, and celebrations! It has a little of everything and it's Scottish to boot! Here's to the whistle pig!

If you ever get the chance, you simply must go to Groundhog Day in Punxsutawney. It is truly a wonderful experience - once.

WEE NEWS BITS FROM SCOT- LAND

THE KING'S NEW TARTAN WAS SHOWCASED IN A PHOTO TO MARK BURNS NIGHT - from Sky News

"Wishing those celebrating a very happy Burns Night" said a message from the Royal Family's social media accounts alongside the picture. He was wearing his green, red and blue kilt made from King Charles III tartan, a new variety of the cloth designed by the Scottish Tartans Authority in 2023. It was created in recognition of the King's passion for preserving the culture and traditions of Highland dress and Scottish tartans and marked his coronation.



HUNGRY FOR HIPPOS - EDINBURGH ZOO VISITS SOAR from The Scottish SUN



ZOO bosses have seen a bounce in visitors desperate to view a rare pygmy hippo. Haggis was born in Edinburgh Zoo in October and has proved a hit to rival another calf, internet star Moo Deng. The Corstorphine attraction saw visitor numbers soar to 26,000 last month. The Royal Zoological Society of Scotland's David Field, said: "The interest in Haggis has been crazy. "Not only has she gone viral on social media but she's been lampooned in a US sketch show, had a currency named after her, and was adopted as the official Radio 1 mascot!" The zoo's Donald Gow added: "Haggis has got fans all around the world!"



SCOTLAND'S DYING ART OF TRADITIONAL NICKNAMES from the BBC

A Scottish tradition of giving people a family name or a nickname based on their appearance, or where they are from or who their parents are is at risk of dying out, an academic has said.

The practice has been handed down through generations in west coast Gaelic-speaking communities, and examples include Ceitidh Ruadh (Red-haired Katie) and Pàdraig Murchadh Moilean (Peter, son of Murdo of the eyebrows). Parts of the Hebrides - Lewis, Harris and Barra - have phonebooks listing people's official names alongside their nicknames. Iain Taylor, who lectured at Scotland's Gaelic national centre - Sabhal Mòr Ostaig - in Skye for 20 years, said English language nicknames were replacing more traditional ones. Mr. Taylor, who has written about Scottish personal names and place-names, said there was a good practical reason behind the tradition. In the past, many families in traditional Gaelic areas adopted the name of the local clan chief.

He said this had resulted in a relatively small number of surnames. Mr. Taylor said: "In places like Scalpay and Harris there were very few first names and surnames generally used. "So you could have 30 John Macleods. "How do you distinguish between them all?" The answer was to give a person a family name, which could be derived from names based on a father or mother's name. Nicknames are also used, often inspired by where a person is from or what they look like. Mr. Taylor said: "I stayed in a township in South Uist and one of my neighbours was Ceitidh Ruadh - Red-haired Katie - and down the road there was Iain Mòr - Big or Tall John."

Other names include:

- Alasdair Dhòmhnaill Mhòir (Alexander of Big Donald) · Calum Seònaid (Janet's Calum)
- Alasdair Nill Bhig (Little Neil's Alasdair) · Am Muileach (The Mull Man)

Why do we wear RED in February?

Valentine's Day is celebrated in February with hearts. Red is associated with passion and love.

In modern times, people wear red in February to raise awareness of heart disease and promote heart health. This is done on National Wear Red Day, which is the first Friday of February.

Why is Valentine's Day celebrated in February?

Valentine's Day is celebrated in the middle of February because the Christian Church likely chose this date to "Christianize" the Roman festival of Lupercalia, which was held on February 15th and focused on fertility, coinciding with the belief that birds began mating around this time of year; by placing St. Valentine's Day on February 14th, the Church aimed to redirect the focus towards romantic love instead of Roman fertility rituals.

Who was St. Valentine?

The Catholic Church recognizes at least three different saints named Valentine or Valentinus, all of whom were martyred. One legend contends that Valentine was a priest who served during the third century in Rome. When Emperor Claudius II decided that single men made better soldiers than those with wives and families, he outlawed marriage for young men. Valentine, realizing the injustice of the decree, defied Claudius and continued to perform marriages for young lovers in secret. When Valentine's actions were discovered, Claudius ordered that he be put to death. Still others insist that it was Saint Valentine of Terni, a bishop, who was the true namesake of the holiday. He, too, was beheaded by Claudius II outside Rome. Other stories suggest that Valentine may have been killed for attempting to help Christians escape harsh Roman prisons, where they were often beaten and tortured. According to one legend, an imprisoned Valentine actually sent the first "valentine" greeting himself after he fell in love with a young girl—possibly his jailor's daughter—who visited him during his confinement.

Before his death, it is alleged that he wrote her a letter signed "From your Valentine," an expression that is still in use today. Although the truth behind the Valentine legends is murky, the stories all emphasize his appeal as a sympathetic, heroic and—most importantly—romantic figure. By the Middle Ages perhaps thanks to this reputation, Valentine would become one of the most popular saints in England and France.



What are some unusual Valentine Day customs?

Flowers for My Love

Roses weren't always the go-to Valentine's flower. In the 19th century, bouquets could contain a variety of flowers, each chosen to convey a specific meaning. A bouquet with yellow acacia (which means "concealed love"), jonquils ("I desire a return of affection") and snowdrops ("hope") sends the message that you secretly adore the recipient and hope those feelings might be reciprocated. At the end of the [19th] century, there were more commercial florists and therefore more availability of flowers at more affordable price points. Then there was a shift toward roses- often red ones.



Puzzle Purses

In the 18th and 19th centuries, puzzle purses were popular Valentine's gifts in England and the United States. A puzzle purse consists of an intricately folded sheet of paper with parts of a message or verses written on different corners. As a puzzle purse is intended to be read in a specific order, folds were usually numbered so the recipient knew how to proceed. Unfolding one part—undoing the puzzle—revealed a section of writing. Sometimes there was also a small gift waiting in the center.

Pigs and Gingerbread

Valentine's Day, called Valentinstag, only took hold in Germany after the end of World War II. Since then, Germans have put their own spin on the day. One is by incorporating pigs, which are a symbol of luck in Germany, into Valentine's gifts.

Germans also give out large heart-shaped gingerbread cookies, known as lebkuchen, for Valentine's Day. These may include a personal message.

A Day for Friendship

February 14 is for friends, not just lovers, in parts of Latin America, including Ecuador, El Salvador and Mexico. Known as El Día del Amor y Amistad (Day of Love and Friendship), it's meant to recognize and honor friendship. In El Salvador, people draw names and exchange gifts in a tradition known as Amigo Secreto, Secret Friend, on that day. In the 1980s, Estonia and Finland started to recognize platonic love and friendship alongside romance on February 14. Instead of exchanging cards or going out to eat with a romantic partner, people in these two countries do this with friends. In Estonia, this is Friend's Day, Sõbrapäev. Finland's Friend's Day is Ystävän Päivä.

Mass Marriage in the Philippines

To help couples who can't afford their own weddings, local governments in the Philippines organize mass weddings on or around Valentine's Day. On February 14, 2010, 1,500 couples tied the knot at a mass ceremony in a Manila suburb. Couples even turned out, albeit in reduced numbers, to get married on Valentine's Day during the COVID-19 pandemic in 2021. Thanks to these efforts, February 14 is the most common wedding anniversary in the country.

Name a Roach after Your Ex

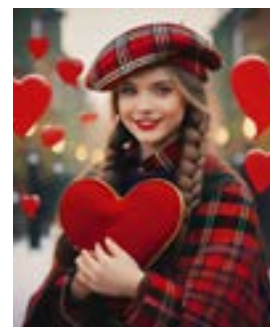
Flowers, chocolates, sentimental cards, even pig-themed gifts—these things may all be wonderful. But sometimes a relationship doesn't work out, which can make Valentine's Day difficult. However, if the ex responsible for your broken heart is still on your mind, there is a Valentine's solution: cockroaches. Several zoos now allow people to pay a small fee to give a roach the name of their choosing. The Bronx Zoo has Name a Roach for your Valentine, Chicago's Brookfield Zoo offers Name a Cockroach After Your Ex and the San Antonio Zoo organizes a Cry Me a Cockroach Fundraiser. All offer some type of certificate to commemorate the naming—and to send along to the roach's honoree.

Chocolates for Men in Japan



In Japan, women traditionally offer Valentine's chocolates to men. One origin story for this is a chocolate manufacturer's 1958 suggestion that women use Valentine's chocolates to confess romantic feelings. Another says Japanese department stores promoted the practice in the 1970s. Women give different types of chocolate. Honmei choco, which means true feelings chocolate, goes to male romantic interests. Giri choco, obligation chocolate, is offered to male colleagues or classmates. However, the desire to distribute obligation chocolate has been declining. In a 2017 poll, less than 40 percent of women intended to hand out giri choco. Tomo choco—friend chocolate—can go to friends of any gender.

Japanese women who follow the gender-specific tradition have their own day to receive presents from the men in their lives when White Day arrives on March 14.



BOB DYLAN'S LINKS TO SCOTLAND

from The Scottish Daily Express

Dylan has spoken fondly of Scotland, and even owned Aultmore House near Nethy Bridge in Cairngorms National Park, before he sold it for £4million to whisky producer Angus Dundee Distillers in 2023. However, Dylan has a more direct link to Scottish culture. Dylan said Robert Burns' 1794 poem "A Red, Red Rose" has had the biggest impact on his life out of anything he's read. The poem begins "O, my luve's like a red, red rose, That's newly sprung in June. / O, my luve's like the melody, / That's sweetly play'd in tune." Burns passed away two years after writing this poem in 1796 at 37 years old, and just five short years later, the first Burns supper took place.

Less than two hundred years after this, the "Like a Rolling Stone" singer would collaborate with Burns' great-great great-great-grandson of the Romantic poet. Robert Hunter, born Robert Burns in Arroyo Grande, took his stepfather's surname, Hunter and was a guitarist who worked with Dylan from the late 1980s.

Dylan, who cited Scotland's national poet, as a major inspiration for his music, worked with his direct

descendant from the late 1980s onwards and co-wrote songs on the

albums *Down in the Groove* and *Together Through Life*. Dylan has previously used imagery from the Highlands in his work, including in the song named after the area on the 1997 Grammy Award-winning album *Time Out of Mind*. "My heart's in the Highlands wherever I roam / That's where I'll be when I get called home," he sang. Scotland also honoured Dylan as one of their own when the University of St Andrews awarded him with an honorary doctorate in 2004. Dylan said: "I think the thing with Burns is that he finds a place in different cultures, different hearts. He is in with the bricks in American culture; if you think about it, he's been there for 200 years. "Burns speaks to people directly, in a way that a lot of other poets don't, despite the linguistic differences. I think that's at the real heart of it. You sometimes feel that he is talking directly to you when you read his poems, because there's so much of the man in his poetry."



FURY AS ROBERT BURNS IS AXED FROM THE HIGHER ENGLISH CURRICULUM

from The Scottish Daily Express



Scottish exam chiefs have removed Robert Burns as a standalone author for pupils taking Higher English, sparking a furious backlash from fans of the national poet. The Scottish Qualifications Authority (SQA) defended the move, pointing out that of 35,000 students who sat Higher English last summer, only 83 chose to answer a question on Burns.

Robert Burns, along with other established greats such as Lewis Grassie Gibbon and George Mackay Brown, is being effectively downgraded in schools in favour of "more modern and diverse works". Although the SQA said it recognised the "cultural significance and value" of the Ploughman Poet, his

work can only now be studied as part of an anthology of writers. Professor Gerard Carruthers, the Francis Hutcheson chair of Scottish literature at the University of Glasgow, criticised the controversial move. He said: "It is vitally important that we provide our young people with endless opportunities to study Burns. He possesses a genius with words that's almost freakish; similar to Shakespeare, Joyce and Blake."

Scottish Recipe of the Month

CRANBERRY-ORANGE SHORTBREAD from Simply Recipes

Ingredients

- 2 sticks (1 cup) salted butter, room temperature
- 1/2 cup (100g) granulated sugar
- 3/4 cup (98g) powdered sugar
- 2 tablespoons milk
- Zest of 2 medium oranges
- 2 1/4 cups (270g) all-purpose flour
- 3/4 cup (100g) dried cranberries, chopped

Directions

1. Make the cookie dough:

In the bowl of a stand mixer fitted with a paddle attachment, cream the butter and both sugars on medium speed until light and fluffy, about 3 minutes. Mix in the milk and orange zest until combined.

On medium-low speed, mix in the flour until no streaks of flour remain, about 2 minutes. Mix in the dried cranberries just until well combined.

2. Shape the cookie dough logs:

Turn the dough out onto the counter. Use your hands to shape the dough into a log, about 12 inches long and 2 inches wide. Gently roll the log back and forth until it's smooth and cut it in half so you have 2 shorter logs. Wrap each log in plastic wrap. Chill the dough in the fridge for 2 hours.

3. Preheat the oven to 350°F.

Line a baking sheet with parchment paper.

4. Slice the cookies:

Remove one log from the fridge and remove the plastic wrap. Use a sharp knife to cut the log into 12 1/2-inch slices. If any dough crumbled off, smush it back together. Place the cookies at least 1 inch apart on the baking sheet.

5. Bake the cookies:

Bake the cookies until the bottom edges are lightly golden, 12 to 14 minutes. Allow the cookies to cool on the baking sheet for 10 minutes before transferring them to a wire rack to cool completely. Repeat with the remaining cookie dough log.

Store in an airtight container for up to 5 days.

