

# HSHC SPORRAN

[www.HighlandSocietyofHarfordCounty.com](http://www.HighlandSocietyofHarfordCounty.com)

February 2026 — 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 17 Gathering

**Kindness Week, Mardi Gras,  
and the Lunar New Year  
Bash**

### Vandiver Inn

302 S. Union Avenue, Havre de Grace

### To Register for Dinner

[Click Here](#)

Scroll down to HIGHLAND SOCIETY DINNER

Password: "Highland"

6:30-7:00	Social Gathering & Cash Bar
7:00-8:00	Call to Order, Toasts & Dinner
8:00-8:30	Society Business & Program
8:30-ish	Adjourn

Random Acts of Kindness Week (February 15-21, 2026) promotes making kindness a lasting habit. Small, daily acts like saying hello & thank you, smiling at people, picking up a piece of trash, or not getting annoyed when someone takes a parking place - even in the snow. These things encourage simple, impactful actions to build a positive culture in our communities.



Among the events on January 20, 2026, at the Annual Robert Burns Night Gathering, was the installation of officers for 2026. Jim Wasson, former Laird, administered the Oath of Office.

### 2026 Leadership Team

*from Right to Left*

Susan Wheeler, Laird  
Brian Nesbit, 1st Aide to Laird  
Kallie Lyons, 2nd Aide to Laird  
Andrea Bowden, Secretary  
Keith Reagan, Treasurer  
John Polk, Laird Emeritus

### Welcome New Members!



Joanne Mallick,  
Clan Campbell

Chris Wilson,  
Clan Gunn



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](mailto:sallyjoanderson@hotmail.com) or [abowden@bcps.k12.md.us](mailto:abowden@bcps.k12.md.us)

# Robert Burns Night 2026



Our piper for the

New Members Joanne Mallick, Clan Campbell and Chris Wilson, Clan Gunn being sworn in



Susan Wheeler receiving the Laird's Mace



Jim & Betsy Wasson receiving a Lifetime Membership Award



Auld Lang Syne



# Laird's Letter



Greetings Fellow Highlanders –

As I step into the role of Laird of the Highland Society of Harford County, I want to begin by saying how honored I am to serve and how grateful I am for the trust you have placed in me. I look forward to getting to know many of you better and to continuing the strong traditions of our Society.

**Our Roots and Our Path Forward.** As we begin a new year, it feels important to pause and remind ourselves of the roots of the Highland Society of Harford County. Founded in 1967 by a small group of Harford County members of the Saint Andrew's Society of Baltimore, the Society was built on a shared commitment to preserving Scottish traditions and creating a place for fellowship and community. Those early gatherings laid the foundation for who we are today.

More than five decades later, we continue to come together for that same purpose—connecting through shared heritage, learning from one another, and strengthening the bonds that unite us. As we move forward, I hope we will continue to expand upon this mission, welcoming new members, new ideas, and new ways to celebrate and sustain our Scottish heritage. I am deeply grateful to be part of a Society that honors its past while continuing to grow and evolve.

**Looking Ahead.** As we begin a new year, I encourage each of us to reflect on our own family histories and the paths that brought us here. Whether your connection to Scotland is long documented or newly discovered, it is those individual stories that give our Society its richness and meaning. We are, first and foremost, a society of members, and I hope each of you will continue to share your stories, talents, and ideas as we move forward together.

**Meetings and Events.** I hope you will join us at our upcoming gatherings in 2026, including our February Mardi Gras celebration and March St. Patrick's Day and Irish whiskey tasting at the Vandiver Inn. We will also be representing the Society at several Scottish and Celtic festivals throughout the year. These events are at the heart of our fellowship, and I look forward to many good conversations and shared laughter along the way.

Thank you for the warm welcome I have already received. I am truly honored to serve as your Laird and look forward to a year of camaraderie, connection, and celebration of our shared heritage.

Warm regards, Susan Wheeler

# MINUTES OF OUR LAST GATHERING

Dr. Andrea Bowden

The Highland Society of Harford County met on a frigid evening, Tuesday, January 20, 2026, at MacGregor's Restaurant in Harve de Grace. There were 23 members and guests present to celebrate Robert Burns Night. Laird John Polk, Clan Pollock, called the meeting to order at 7:10 PM.

Everyone said the pledge to the flag. John gave the toast to the Office of the President. Pam Pippin, Clan St. Andrews, gave the toast to King Charles III, Jim Wasson, Clan Buchanan, gave the traditional toast to Scotland. January birthdays were recognized: Joanna Reagan, Clan MacPherson. Condolences were extended to SJ Anderson, Clan Anderson, on the death of her stepson, and to Mark Lyson, Clan Stewart on the recent death of his father who would have been 94 next week. Angie Schiaffino was welcomed back, and her late husband Jim (Ski) was remembered. The grace before meals was offered by John Polk.



Jim Wasson, Clan Buchan and former Laird, called the new HSHC Officers for 2026 forward and administered the Oath of Office: Laird- Susan Wheeler, Clan Shaw, First Aide to the Laird Brian Nesbit, Clan Nesbit, Second Aid to the Laird- Kallie Lyons, Clan Stewart, Secretary- Andrea Bowden, Clan MacMillian, Treasurer- Keith Reagan, and Immediate Past Laird – John Polk, Clan Pollock. Susan Wheeler expressed her excitement about becoming laird and expressed hope that everyone would participate in the activities of HSHC throughout the year. The new officers received a round of applause from those in attendance.

As her first duty, Susan Wheeler, Clan Shaw, Laird, inducted new members into the Highland Society of Harford County: Joanne Mallick, Clan Campbell and Chris Wilson, Clan Gunn. The new members were warmly received. They were given a HSHC tumbler as new members.

Susan called Jim Wasson, Clan Buchanan and Betsy Polk Wasson, Clan Pollack and Buchanan forward. She cited their long membership in the Highland Society of Harford County and their many leadership activities – Jim was Laird and held other offices, Betsy was host to several Hogmanay celebrations and both have supported our organization. She noted that they recently celebrated their 60th wedding anniversary. Susan presented them with LIFE MEMBERSHIPS in HSHC and gave them an official letter and framed certificate. All present stood and gave Jim and Betsy a round of applause.

Susan asked Dr. Andrea Bowden to make a special presentation. Andrea asked Dr. John Polk to join. Andrea announced that John Polk, was the recipient of the OWEN AWARD. Instituted in 1998, the award recognizes overall contributions to the HSHC. John was cited for his leadership in the Highland Society of Harford County. A member since 2010, John has served on many committees, as Treasurer, Aide to the Laird, Laird 2013-2014 and again in 2024-2025. John is credited with bringing 12 new members into the HSHC, promoting HSHC at events, being de facto Historian and upholding Scottish traditions. Past Owen Award recipients were also acknowledged: 2000 Jim Wasson, 2011 Angie Schiaffino, 2013 Jim Schiaffino, 2024 Lady Crystal Boyd, and 2025 Andrea Bowden.

Brian Nesbit, Clan Nesbit and newly inducted 1st Aid to the Laird, began the traditional celebration of Robert Burns Night. John Polk, Laird Emeritus, gave the traditional Selkirk Grace by Robert Burns. The Haggis Procession followed with John Polk carrying the Claymore Sword, Betsy Polk Wasson carrying the Haggis (which she prepared), and Susan Wheeler carrying the bottle of Scotch whisky. The Haggis was laid on the table and Jim Wasson, Clan Buchanan, said to Ode to the Haggis by Robert Burns. He then slit the Haggis open with the sgian dubh and poured Scotch whiskey into it. Jim, Betsy, John, and Susan toasted the Haggis with Scotch whisky from the traditional Quaich, friendship cup. All assembled lined up for Haggis, neeps (mashed turnips) and tatties (mashed potatoes).

Brian Nesbit then began dinner service and people enjoyed salad, beef burgundy over rice, chicken parmesan, roasted potatoes and vegetables, and finally dessert. Everyone had more than one helping of the delicious food.

After dinner, Brian began the tributes to Robert Burns by reading interesting background information about Scotland's national poet. Steve Belkoff, Clan McLane, read the toast to the Lassies and his wife Lisa Stewart, Clan Stewart, responded with the toast to the Laddies. Melissa May, Clan Anderson read a Burns poem as did Chris Wilson, Clan Gunn, and finally Kallie Lyons, Clan Stewart read To a Red, Red Rose. Winners of the drawing for the Robert Burns commemorative plate and Lion Rampart coin purse were Pam Pippin and Sandy Hackman. The evening concluded with thanks from Brian Nesbit and a Blessing from John Polk. Attendees crossed arms and joined hands to sing AULD LANG SYNE (Long Time Past).

The meeting adjourned at 9:15 PM.

## About Our New Laird Susan Wheeler



I am honored to serve as the Laird of the Highland Society of Harford County and grateful for the trust you have placed in me as I begin this role.

Professionally, I have spent 34 years in Baltimore City Public Schools. I began my career as a high school

science teacher and also served as a cheerleading and softball coach. I had the privilege of leading two different school softball teams to state championship appearances, close calls both times. Today, I serve as a principal supervisor, supporting 15 schools across Southeast Baltimore. Throughout my career, my work has been grounded in people, perseverance, and community.

My connection to Scotland is both longstanding and, in some ways, newly rediscovered. My ancestry traces back to Clan MacBean and Clan Shaw of the Highlands, both part of the Chattan Confederation, as well as to the Niven family of the Borderlands. I also carry English and Welsh ancestry. For much of my life, however, I had not explored my Scottish roots in any meaningful way.

That began to change when conversations with fellow Society members sparked my curiosity and encouraged me to learn more about my heritage. When I shared this growing interest with my father, he let me know that I, too, had many Scottish ancestors.

Some of my earliest memories of that heritage come from summers spent with my Granny Shaw. She lived to the remarkable age of 104, took no guff from anyone, and made a Niven family shortbread that I still remember fondly. Those memories, once tucked quietly away, now feel like an important part of how I understand myself and my place within this Society.

I look forward to listening, learning, and strengthening the bonds that bring us together as members of the Highland Society of Harford County.

## About Our Outgoing Laird John Polk



John has been a member of the Highland Society of Harford County since 2010. He has served on many committees, was Treasurer, Aide to the Laird, Laird 2013-2014 and again in 2024, and 2025. He has brought 12 new members into the Highland Society in the last three years due to his outreach and follow up at festivals. John was the 2025 recipient of the coveted Jack Owen Award for his leadership and contributions to HSHC.

An "Army Brat", John was born in Laurel, MS, and he and his six siblings lived all over the world. John and his sister Betsy Polk Wasson attended school in Ireland and Austria, among other places. John received his BS from Holy Cross College in Worcester, MA, and his MS and PhD in mathematics from the University of Delaware in Newark DE. He is also a graduate of the U S Army Officers Candidate School and is Commissioned by the Army Corps of Engineers. He served as a platoon leader and quality control officer with the 864th Engineer Battalion in Vietnam in 1970-71. During his professional career John worked as a research mathematician at the U. S. Army Ballistics Research Laboratory and as Senior Advisor for International Research Cooperation at the U S Army Research Laboratory at Aberdeen Proving Ground. He retired in 2014.

John lives in Havre de Grace and has been married for 57 years to Anita. They have three children: Theresa, Jack, and Tom and six grandchildren. His sisters Betsy and Bracken are members of the Highland Society. John has long been interested in colonial Scotch-Irish history and genealogy. He has written several books about the Scotch-Irish heritage in colonial Maryland. He also pursues family history and served as the Clan Historian for Clan Pollock International for 25 years and Project Administrator for the Polk-Pollock-Pogue DNA project since 2010. He has contributed numerous articles to the SPORRAN about Scottish history. He is also the de facto historian of HSHC because his home is the repository of all the memorabilia.

John Polk has made significant contributions to the Highland Society of Harford County and we thank him for his service!

## JIM AND BETSY WASSON BECOME LIFETIME HSHC MEMBERS



On January 20, 2026, Jim Wasson, Clan Buchanan and Betsy Polk Wasson, Clans Pollock and Buchanan, were awarded LIFETIME MEMBERSHIP in the Highland Society of Harford County.

Susan Wheeler, Clan Shaw, Laird, cited their long membership in the Highland Society of Harford County and their many leadership activities – Jim was Laird and held other offices, Betsy was host to several Hogmanay celebrations and both have long supported our organization. She noted that they recently celebrated their 60th wedding anniversary. Susan presented them with LIFE MEMBERSHIPS in HSHC and gave them an official letter and framed certificate. Jim and Betsy received a standing ovation.

### *Fun Legend!*

from [Confucius Institute for Scotland W](https://www.confuciusinstitute.org/scotland)

The Lunar New Year is aka Chinese New Year & Spring Festival. According to legend, a monster named Nian came out of the sea every New Year's Eve to attack villagers, livestock, and crops. Most people secured their livestock and ran to the mountains. Then one year, an old man with silver hair came to one of the villagers and promised to drive away the cruel beast. However, all of the villagers were too scared to believe him and still fled before nightfall.

Nian broke into the village as usual and just as it was ready to butcher its prey and devour it, a sudden sound of firecrackers arose together with bright flares. Nian trembled and dared not step forward. Then the old man stepped forward dressed in red, and this sent the beast into a frenzy. It was terrified and rushed away.

From then on, on the last day of the year, people put up red couplets, hung up red lanterns, set off firecrackers, kept the lights on and stayed up late to keep safe from Nian.

## OWEN AWARD PRESENTED TO DR. JOHN F. POLK



The JOHN (JACK) R. OWEN MEMORIAL AWARD was instituted in 1998 upon his death. Mr. Owen was a 25+ year member and leader in the Highland Society of Harford County. He served as 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.

On January 20, 2026, the name of Dr. John F. Polk, Clan Pollock, was added to the list of recipients. Dr. Andrea Bowden, Clan MacMillan, presented the award to John for his leadership in the Highland Society of Harford County. A member since 2010, John has served on many committees, as Treasurer, Aide to the Laird, Laird 2013-2014 and again in 2024, and 2025.

He has brought 12 new members into the Highland Society in the last three years due to his outreach and follow up at festivals. With a PhD in Mathematics, John was well suited to be Treasurer, an office he held for many years. John has great interest in Scottish and Scots-Irish history and has done research and written papers on the Scots in Maryland. He is a Scotch whisky aficionado and has presented many whisky tasting program for HSHC. John is de-facto Historian of HSHC and his office is the repository of HSHC memorabilia. He embodies the very best qualities of Scottish leadership, knowledge, and friendship.

### **Past Owen Award recipients were also acknowledged:**

2000 - Jim Wasson

2011 - Angie Macomber Schiaffino

2013 - Jim Schiaffino

2024 - Lady Crystal Boyd

2025 - Dr. Andrea Bowden



# While We're Still Talking About February; St. Valentine's Day Scottish Style

by Ski Schiffino, from our historical archives

Yes, Virginia there is a Valentine's Day in Scotland. The next time you're visiting Scotland take a side trip to The "City of Love", Glasgow, (Their phrase not mine.) and stop by the church of Blessed St. John Duns Scotus. Some of the remains of one of the St. Valentini can be found there.

St. Valentine's Day really is celebrated in Scotland. Do keep in mind that this is Scotland and it is February. Unless your favourite form of entertainment is running around in freezing rain or snow, then you really don't need much of a reason to celebrate anything. The Scottish enthusiasm and passion for Valentine's Day comes to life in the shops and stores soon after Christmas, or just after New Year, and definitely after Hogmanay. Although Burns' Night is the next celebration, shopkeepers, hoteliers and restaurant owners all try to cash in on the romantic occasion of Valentine's Day. Just like their brethren across the pond, evidence of their marketing is everywhere, with cards, gifts, special offers at hotels and special meal-deals.

Scotland's reputation for romantic venues is already well known throughout Europe. Indeed the small village of Gretna Green (Scotland's version of old Elton.) like Elton, was THE place to go for a quickie wedding. It is the first village over the Scottish border on the road from England to Glasgow. It is particularly renowned for being the place where young English couples, in particular, eloped; as English Law said they could not marry until they were 18 years old, whereas in Scotland marriage is allowed at 16.

Another charming Scottish custom is that in Auld Alba, Valentine's Day is celebrated by having a festival. At the festival there is an equal amount of young unmarried (single) men and young unmarried (single) ladies who get together. Each of them writes their name or a made up name, on a piece of paper. These then are rolled up. The names are placed in two hats; one for the men and one for the ladies. Then, they have to draw a piece of paper out of the hat. When all the valentines have been selected and matched the company is then split up into couples, gifts are given to the young ladies and the young ladies would wear the name of their valentine over their heart or on their sleeve. There might also be a dance. Then at the end of the festival there might even be a lot of marriages or at least romances.

There is another pleasant valentine ritual were the first unaccompanied young person (of the opposite sex) who just happens to walk by you in the street, or elsewhere, will be your valentine for the day. It's kind of Scotland's version of Sadie Hawkins Day (See The Sporan November 2020). So for those of us who already have a valentine, perhaps we should consider avoiding Scotland on the 14th of February.

Before you bite into that chocolate covered cherry in the shape of a valentine you might consider not reading the next passage.

There were at least three historical Saint Valentini, (Latin for Valentine) all of them martyrs. One is described as a priest in Rome, another as a bishop of Interama (modern Terni in the Umbrian Region of Central Italy). These two seem to have been found guilty of marrying couples against the will of the emperor Claudius. Old Claudius had taken a dim view of marriage. He needed a lot of young, unmarried men for the Roman Legions. So, neither of these guys were around to see the second half of the third century and parts of them have been buried on the Flaminian Way, and some made it to Scotland.

Of the third Saint Valentine there is very little is known except that he lived in Roman North Africa, where he lived on a plantation. What is known is that prior to his martyrdom, he might or might not have cured a girl of blindness. Since this is a family oriented publication I used the term martyrdom instead of writing, what actually happened. Since all three were Roman citizens they could not have been crucified. Instead they were given an "honorable" death. They were pitilessly beaten with clubs and then beheaded. Oops, sorry about that.

Additionally, one of the three is reputed to have said, "Remember your Valentinus." Another is alleged to have written a note and signed it, "From your Valentinus." So if you find yourself in Scotland on Valentine's Day or any other day for that matter, go to Glasgow and the church of Blessed St. John Duns Scotus. And say an Ave there for old St. Valentine.

(Various Sources)



## Treasurer's Report

Keith Reagan

Period: 1 January - 31 January, 2026

<b>STARTING BALANCE</b>	\$3,917.70
<b>INCOME:</b>	
December gathering receipts	\$20.00
January gathering receipts from attendees	\$770.00
January gathering raffle receipts	\$140.00
Dues (2026)	\$660.00
<b>INCOME TOTAL:</b>	<b>\$5,507.7</b>
<b>EXPENSES:</b>	
Bank Fees	(\$3.00)
January gathering deposit to MacGregor's	(\$300.00)
January gathering balance to MacGregor's	(\$808.92)
<b>EXPENSES TOTAL:</b>	<b>\$1,111.92</b>
<b>ENDING BALANCE</b>	<b>\$4,395.78</b>

## Treasurer's Report

Dr. John Polk

Annual Treasurer's Financial Summary, for 2025

<b>BALANCE 1 JANUARY 2025</b>	\$3669.55
<b>INCOME:</b>	
Dues	\$780.00
Raffles	555.00
Donations	555.00
Gathering proceeds	3,440.00
<b>INCOME TOTAL:</b>	<b>\$5330.00</b>
<b>EXPENSES:</b>	
Bank Fees	\$36.00
Whisky, toasting/tasting	333.49
Donations	245.40
Registration/ticket fees	240.00
Miscellaneous, supplies	371.41
Catering	2224.31
Venue Fees	1631.24
<b>EXPENSES TOTAL:</b>	<b>\$5081.85</b>
<b>BALANCE 31 DEC 2025</b>	<b>\$3917.70</b>

## Fun Facts about Mardi Gras

-from various sources - contributed by SJ

There is a city ordinance in Orleans Parish that prohibits Mardi Gras from being commercialized. No corporate sponsorships are allowed on floats. All expenses are paid by krewes and riders.

Officials estimate upwards of 25 million pounds of Mardi Gras items get tossed from floats. In fact, locals like to visit ARC of New Orleans and recycle their beads for next year.

The first recorded Mardi Gras parade in New Orleans was in 1857. The first time floats appeared in New Orleans parades was 1896.

Mardi Gras in New Orleans is a culinary extravaganza featuring nearly 1 million king cakes sold, featuring purple, green, and gold icing, with a hidden baby bringing good luck and the obligation

## Rocky Horror Show film cast to appear in Edinburgh for "shadow" 50th anniversary screening

- from The Scotsman - contributed by SJ

On May 3, 2026, members of the original cast of the [Rocky Horror Picture Show](#) film are to appear in Edinburgh to appear at a "shadow" screening to mark the 50th anniversary of its release.

Following its sold-out North American tour, the original Brad Majors, played by Barry Bostwick, the original Magenta, Patricia Quinn and the original Columbia, Nell Campbell, will all take part in the event, which will see a shadow cast act out the story in front of the screen.

Tickets are now available to the public from the [EIFF website](#), with a host of free screenings now available to book, though it seems they are going fast – so don't delay.



# IMPORTANT TRADITIONS ASSOCIATED WITH ROBERT BURNS NIGHT

by Dr. Andrea Bowden

**SELKIRK GRACE** – please see separate article.

## QUAICH

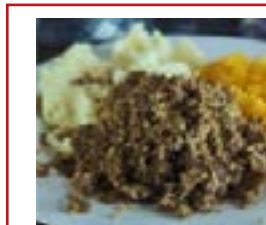
A quaich (pronounced kway-ch) is a shallow two handled 'loving cup' which comes from the Gaelic word 'cuach' meaning 'shallow cup'. However, it is more than a two handled cup, the quaich is a symbol for Scottish hospitality and people coming together.



On Burns Night, a toast of whisky is given to the haggis and people drink, say slainte, and tap the quaich over their head.

## HAGGIS

Scottish Gaelic: taigeis ['tʰakʲɪ]) is a savory pudding containing sheep's pluck (heart, liver, and lungs), minced with chopped onion, oatmeal, suet, seasonings, and salt, mixed with stock, and cooked while traditionally encased in the animal's stomach] though now an artificial casing is often used instead.



In the United States sheep lung is omitted to conform to FDA regulations so a mixture of lamb heart and liver, and sometimes beef fat is used.

The dish is considered traditionally of Scottish origin. It is even the national dish as a result of Scots poet Robert Burns' poem "Address to a Haggis" of 1786. Haggis is traditionally served with "neeps and tatties", boiled and mashed separately, and a dram (a small serving) of Scotch whisky especially as the main course of a Burns supper.

## SIGIAN DUBH

The Sgian Dubh (pronounced "skee-an doo") is one of the most iconic accessories in Highland dress, deeply rooted in Scottish history, tradition, and symbolism. This small, decorative knife, traditionally worn in the sock of a kilted Highlander, is both a symbol of heritage and a functional tool.

While today it serves mainly as a ceremonial accessory, the Sgian Dubh once had practical and defensive purposes, making it an essential element of Scottish attire. The Sgian Dubh is a small, single-edged knife, typically 3 to 6 inches long, and worn tucked into the kilt hose (sock) on the dominant-hand side. It is traditionally used to cut the Haggis.



- "Sgian" means "knife" in Gaelic.

- "Dubh" means "black" or "concealed," referring to its historical use as a hidden or secret knife.

- Handle made from wood, stag horn, bone, or synthetic materials.

- Blade made of stainless steel or Damascus steel.

- Often decorated with Celtic engravings, clan crests, or gemstones.

Fun Fact: The Sgian Dubh is one of the last remaining traditional weapons legally worn in Scotland.

# THE SELKIRK GRACE: A CENTRAL PART OF BURNS CELEBRATIONS

from the Scots Magazine

The Selkirk Grace is a short grace or blessing, traditionally recited before meals at gatherings to celebrate the life and work of Robert Burns, Scotland's national poet. The grace has become an essential part of Burns Suppers and other Burns Night events around the world.

## *History of the Selkirk Grace*

The origins of the Selkirk Grace are somewhat uncertain. It is believed to have been written or adapted by Robert Burns himself, based on an earlier grace from the 17th century. The first recorded use of the grace in connection with Burns was at a dinner held in his honor in 1801, five years after his death. The event took place in Selkirk, a town in the Scottish Borders associated with the poet, and the grace has been known as the "Selkirk Grace" ever since.

## *Importance of the Selkirk Grace in Burns Celebrations*

The recitation of the Selkirk Grace marks the beginning of formal proceedings at a Burns Supper or other Burns Night event. It serves as a reminder of the values that Robert Burns cherished, such as gratitude, humility, and fellowship. By saying grace together, participants also pay tribute to Burns' deep appreciation for traditional Scottish culture, including food, drink, and customs.

## *The Full Text of the Selkirk Grace*

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

"O, whan will a' their weary be? That's a sang! When will we and they gang free? That's another sang!

"But war' or peace, it's a' the same, To me, O Lord, Thy Grace, While here I am, in name an' place, In grace an' wisdom, Heaven's bliss!"

## *The Translation of The Selkirk Grace in Modern English*

"Some have meat but cannot eat, Some have none that want it; But we have meat and we can eat, So let the Lord be thanked."

Reciting the Selkirk Grace at Burns Celebrations

The Selkirk Grace is usually recited by a designated member of the gathering or by the host. It may be said in Scots, English, or both, depending on the preference of the group and the level of familiarity with the original language. In some cases, the grace may also be sung, particularly if it is being performed as part of a formal program of events.

## *Conclusion*

The Selkirk Grace remains an integral part of Burns celebrations around the world, reflecting the enduring appeal and significance of Robert Burns and his work. By reciting this simple yet powerful grace, participants honor the poet's memory, celebrate their shared Scottish heritage, and express gratitude for the blessings of food and fellowship.

# WEE NEWS BITS

## FROM SCOT- LAND

### SCOTTISH FOSSIL REVEALS 410-MILLION-YEAR-OLD LIFE FORM UNLIKE ANYTHING ON EARTH from GROUND NEWS

A new 410 million-year-old fossil has been added to the collections of the National Museum of Scotland. Scientists believe the fossil initially thought to be a fungus, represents a distinct, extinct evolutionary branch of life. The fossil, discovered near the village of Rhynie in Aberdeenshire, supports the theory that Prototaxites represents an independent link in building complex organisms. Researchers concluded that the morphology and molecular “fingerprint” of *P. Taiti* distinguishes it from fungi and other organisms preserved in a Devonian deposit. At an estimated 8 metres (26 feet) high, Prototaxites would have dwarfed almost every other organism alive at the time. Long before trees dominated the landscape, this colossal life form loomed over early plants and animals, reshaping scientists’ understanding of what life on Earth once looked like.



Scientists have discovered a new form of life, which once stood at a whopping 26ft (eight metres) tall -- (from National Museums Centre)

First described in the mid-19th century, they were initially believed to be ancient conifer trees. Later, as scientific techniques improved, they were widely reclassified as giant fungi, due to their internal structure and lack of obvious plant features such as leaves or roots. However, new research linked to the Rhynie WWWdiscovery suggests that even this explanation falls short. According to scientists, Prototaxites were neither plants nor fungi, but instead represented an entirely distinct branch of life — one that has no living descendants today. Chemical and anatomical analysis of the fossil indicates that these organisms do not neatly fit into any modern biological category.

### CANADIAN FAMILY BUYS SKYE'S 20,000-ACRE SLEAT PENINSULA from BBC

A Canadian family have bought Skye's 20,000-acre Sleat Peninsula and the historic estate's ruined Armadale Castle. The properties had been marketed separately, with the peninsula's South Sleat Estate on the market for offers over £6.7m and the castle and its grounds for offers over £2.7m. The sale involved historic lands of the Clan MacDonald. The Hutchison family said they were proud members of the clan and recognised the “unique cultural significance” of the estate. The South Sleat Estate is mostly used by tenant crofters and farmers, and has a history as a game shooting estate.



But the sale came as a surprise to people living in the south of Skye, and some criticised the lack of community involvement in the decision. A protest against the sale was held by islanders in Armadale in March. The properties reached a closing date in August, and selling agents Strutt & Parker said at the time there was “significant interest” in the properties. The Hutchison family said it had a portfolio of investments and holdings around the world, adding that heritage preservation and working with communities were at “the core” of its activities.



# YOUR PICTURES OF SCOTLAND ~ JANUARY

from BBC



## OLD SCHOOL SPREAD THAT BOOMERS LOVE, BUT YOUNGER GENERATION IGNORES

from TASTING TABLE

It doesn't take imaginative gymnastics to understand why some classic foods that Boomers grew up eating are way less popular now, like Jell-O salads, powdered milk, and liverwurst —however, it's low-key tragic that younger generations haven't caught on to Boomer bites. Most of the foodies with the words "orange marmalade" written on their weekly grocery lists belong to the Boomer generation. Not to be confused with jam, marmalade is a toothsome citrus preserve made from bitter Seville oranges. Sliced up pieces of orange rind, pulp, and juice all get boiled into the mix for a dense, chunky texture and ultra-tangy, sweet-sour zip on the palate.

According to a 2025 YouGov report, Gen Z's breakfast habits favor eggs (57%), toast (40%), fruit (39%), cold cereal (34%), and yogurt (31%) Although, another report by consumer data firm InsightTrends World adds that Gen Z breakfasts are characterized by an increased focus on health and wellness, "scrutinizing ingredient labels,

avoiding excess sugar, and prioritizing natural, whole foods with a strong preference for protein and fiber," which may leave sugary jarred fruit spreads by the wayside.

What might also have caused the lack of interest from younger people is that the Boomer generation traditionally has a greater familiarity with home-canning. However, even though you can make delicious batches at home, orange

marmalade is commonly stocked in many grocery stores in the US and UK in the jelly aisle. A 12-ounce jar of sweet rather than bitter Smucker's brand orange marmalade currently runs for \$2.50 on Amazon and a more traditionally made jar of Wilkin & Sons marmalade from England made only with Seville oranges and sugar will set you back over \$9. It is estimated

that over 70% of Boomers in the UK and 50% in the US enjoy toast and orange marmalade with tea or coffee at breakfast.



## 'I HADN'T HEARD OF CELTIC CURSE, THEN I WAS DIAGNOSED WITH IT'

from BBC

Thousands of people in parts of Northern Ireland are being offered free testing for a disorder commonly known as the Celtic Curse. Haemochromatosis is the most common genetic disorder in Northern Ireland and **is mostly found in people of Irish and Scots ancestry.**

The disorder means a person is more at risk of absorbing too much iron and it can start to damage other parts of their body. Symptoms can range from chronic fatigue, joint pain, memory issues, abdominal pain and skin conditions. If left untreated it can lead to serious long-term health complications.

Haemochromatosis UK will offer up to 23,500 households free genetic screening in Irvinestown, Portadown, Ballymena and Magherafelt. Neil Irwin works for Haemochromatosis UK and was diagnosed with the condition seven years ago. He says early diagnosis is key to allow people access to effective treatments. "In recent years we have had anecdotal evidence from areas like Mid Ulster where people have been contacting us saying their area seems to have high rates of haemochromatosis," he said. "But there is a lack of official data, so we're looking

to fill in some of those blank spots in Northern Ireland that have never screened before, to paint a more detailed picture of the prevalence of the condition." Collette McKnight is a mother of three who lives in rural County Down.



The gene mutation that causes most cases of hereditary haemochromatosis is believed to have originated in the Celtic population of Europe. DNA analysis of the genomes of a Bronze Age farmer on Rathlin Island off the coast of County Antrim showed that it was already established by that period. Earlier still, the remains of a Neolithic woman found at Ballynahatty near

Belfast show that she carried a different variant also associated with an increased risk of the disorder. As part of the latest screening campaign, Haemochromatosis UK is bringing a touring photographic exhibition to Northern Ireland. The exhibition, We are Overloaded, opens to the public at the Millennium Court in Portadown. It features a photographs of people living with haemochromatosis by Pulitzer Prize-winning photojournalist Cathal McNaughton.

# Scottish Recipe of the Month

from A Feast of Salmon, cookbook by Janet Warren

## Salmon Steak Toravaig

### Ingredients

4 salmon steaks

seasoned flour - (all-purpose flour combined with salt, pepper, and various spices - such as paprika, garlic powder, or cayenne)

oatmeal

1 egg, beaten

salt and pepper

1 oz. butter, melted (2 T)

parsley butter - (3 oz butter, chopped parsley, 1 tsp lemon juice, black pepper)

1 lemon, sliced

### Directions - Salmon

Wipe the salmon and remove the skin. Pass through seasoned flour, dip in beaten egg and coat with oatmeal.

Brush both sides with melted butter and season.

Grill or pan fry both sides slowly, basting well.

Garnish with parsley butter and lemon slices.

### Directions - Parsley Butter

Cream 3 oz butter (6 T) until soft, then mix in 2 T chopped parsley, 1 tsp lemon juice and a seasoning of black pepper. Shape in roll and chill.



Toravaig House Hotel, Isle of Skye