

HSHC SPORRAN

www.HighlandSocietyofHarfordCounty.com

January 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 Next Gathering

ROBERT BURNS NIGHT

January 21, 2025

State Theater, Havre De Grace

6:30 - cash bar / fellowship

7:00 - dinner / haggis procession



Welcome to our newest members!!

Shawn & Melissa Halligan
George Kingery & Melissa Moreno

See pages 2 & 3 for more about them.

2025 Dues Are Due

Annual dues to our esteemed Society are now due. \$30 per individual; \$45 per couple. Please send a check - made out the the Highland Society of Harford County - to Laird John Polk at 908 Lapidum Road, Havre de Grace 21078, or bring to our January gathering.

Potluck Recipes

Please send your recipes from the December potluck dinner to Andrea Bowden, who will compile them for us. A picture of a recipe card is fine. Abowden@bcps.k12.md.us Due January 15th.

Coming Up

Our February 18th gathering will be a whisky tasting at Vandiver Inn. Details will be upcoming.



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

Welcome Shawn & Melissa Halligan!!

Mel and Shawn Halligan joined HSHC at our gathering at our September gathering at the Susky Brewery - what a great place to start!

MEL

Mel's Scottish heritage is through the McWilliams', her mother's side of the family.

Dr. Thomas McWilliams (before 1697-10/20/1736) immigrated from Scotland to St. Mary's County Maryland arriving on St. Clements Island in late 1600s.

Dr. Thomas McWilliams' son was Captain Thomas McWilliams Jr. (bef. 1728-1/22/1791) Thomas was Captain of Marines aboard the Sloop "Molly" in the Revolutionary War and his records show that he served with Distinction.

Cpt. McWilliams son was Clement McWilliams (3/14/1777-2/27/1841).

Clement's son was Dr. Joseph McWilliams (1805-1885) owner of the St. Clements Lighthouse.

Dr. Joseph's son was Jerome McWilliams (09/20/1836-02/25/1904) who ran the lighthouse with his family.

Jerome's son was Frederick Jerome McWilliams (5/28/1869-11/9/1955).

Frederick had a son (Thomas) Grason McWilliams Sr. (07/12/1905-03/06/2005), who served in the U.S. Navy and received acclamations from the secretary of the navy Forrestal.

Grason had a son Dr. Thomas Grason McWilliams Jr. (01/10/1934-04/23/2009), Mel's Grandfather.

Tom Jr.'s Daughter Eliza Ridgely McWilliams (11/2/1962-present) is Mel's mother who was kind enough to pass the McWilliams name on to her daughter.

Although a current resident of Harford County, Mel graduated from Bohemia Manor High School in Cecil County. Mel's professional career was 10 years with the Cecil County Detention Center where she served as Senior Deputy First Class, a 287 (g) designated immigration officer for the department of Homeland Security, a member of Honor Guard and where she found her doting husband Cpl. Shawn E. Halligan. Currently Mel considers herself retired thanks to that doting husband and is one of the managers at a local pet store. Mel enjoys traveling, working with a wide variety of animals and finding new ways to expanding her knowledge of the world around us. Mel is the last member of her family to have carried the McWilliams name.

Shawn (or if you're being formal: Shawn Edward Halligan)

Not much is known about Shawn's Scottish heritage but his Irish heritage is somewhat documented. His clan hails from County Cork Ireland. There are also ties to the Halligan clan in County Meath Ireland with land maps dated back in the 1700s. In the 1800s his family fled from British rule to the United States.

As a long time resident of Harford County, Shawn graduated from Edgewood High School in 1995. He has been a Correctional Officer for Cecil County and Campus Police Officer for the Community College of Baltimore County. His current position is as a Nuclear Security Officer at Peach Bottom Nuclear Plant in Pennsylvania.



Welcome George Kingery & Melissa Moreno !!

GEORGE KINGERY

Born in Baltimore Maryland, I grew up in the horse community in Eldersburg in Carroll County. I enlisted into the Marine Corps in 1990 and served in Desert Shield / Desert Storm in 1991. Afterwards I settled in Baltimore County and have worked in the IT industry for 28 years.



From the earliest I can remember, the tale within my mother's family was that her mother's Great, Great, Great Grandfather was an Indian Chief. Given my Grandmother's high, sharp lined cheek bones it was an easy story to believe. This tale was told for many of my younger years until around 1995 my mother and her cousin decided to do some digging. Unfortunately, after many exhausting years of genealogy research no Indian Chief was ever discovered. In fact, it was found that the Shover's were about the furthest thing from Native American as could be having immigrated from France and settling in Pennsylvania.

That, however, was only half of the story. While tracing lineage, they decided to do a little digging into my mother's father, Raymond Johnson of whom she had very little knowledge due to divorce when my mother was a young child. What they discovered dated back to the immigration of a few of the Johnstone family members from Dumfries in the Southern Upland region to North Carolina in the mid to late 1700s. At some point along the journey the surname spelling was changed to Johnson. The family slowly migrated north and came to settle around Page Virginia and eventually relocated to Maryland in the early 1900s.

MELISSA MORENO (maiden name: Willis)

My two girls and I moved to Maryland from Alabama in 2010 for my job. I've lived in Baltimore County since that time and met George Kingery in 2016.

Both of my parents are from Alabama and my mother still lives on family land going back at least four generations (they settled that area). Her maiden name is Robbins (a variation of Robison or Robinson), which is a sept of the Gunn clan. Through DNA maps and reports we know that we are genetically connected to the Jefferson and Walker County areas back to the earliest settlers of that region. And, thanks to research of my mom's side, we know that at least one branch of her heritage dates back to the first American colonists. We've been in America a very long time. My American ancestors were mostly coal miners, loggers, pastors/church leaders, and farmers. But remembering my great grandmother's tales of struggle during the great depression makes me truly appreciate their strength and sense of family and community unity. It's not hard to see and remember as I can walk through the cemetery of the Dora church that we helped establish so long ago, and see most all of them buried together.

My father's surname is Willis (a variation of Wills or Williamson), which is also a sept of the Gunn clan. My father's side of the family has many interesting stories, too numerous to tell, which have spanned various American wars, the building and selling of radio and tv stations around the country, and factory management (which sustained them through the great depression).

Like many others, the early origins of my family names (predating America) can be found in Scotland, England, Ireland, and Wales.

Laird's Letter

Fellow Highlanders –

Bliadhna mhath ùr! 2025 has arrived. May it be a good year filled with blessings on us one and all, and on our esteemed Society. I look forward to our many activities celebrating Scottish culture and traditions, and our continued happy fellowship.



New Members. We were happy to welcome and induct Melissa Moreno and George Kingery as new members in December. We have had five new members join since we resumed our regular meetings in September. Fantastic!

Hogmanay. Many thanks to Betsy and Jim Wasson for the marvelous Hogmanay on New Year's Eve hosted at their lovely home in Bulle Rock. We were treated to an evening of music, haggis presented with the proper Scottish formalities, and a wee dram or two. We welcomed in the new year piping and singing Auld Lang Syne from Jim and Betsy's back deck, overlooking the Bay. A truly special event. It has been quite a few years since our Society's last Hogmanay. May there be many more.

January Meeting – Burns Night. Do not miss it. We will be meeting at the State Theater in Havre de Grace on Tuesday, 21 January. We will have a haggis and honor Scotland's Bard with toasts, talks and poetry. Our Social gathering will start at 6:30 as usual; formal meeting at 7:00.

Dues are due: Annual dues to our esteemed Society are now due. \$30 per individual; \$45 per couple. Please send a check to me at 908 Lapidum Road, Havre de Grace 21078, or bring to our January meeting.

Alba gu bràth and a most blessed New Year!
John Polk, Laird

FYI: HSHC goes Irish RIVERDANCE

Ten HSHC members and guests will be attending a performance of the legendary Irish RIVERDANCE on Wednesday, February 26th at the American Musical Theater in Lancaster, Pennsylvania. They will enjoy dinner before the performance at Miller's Restaurant.



Treasurer's Report Dr. John Polk

Period: 1–31 December 2024

OLD BALANCE	\$3622.55
Expenses:	
Bank Fee	\$3.00
Venue fee, State Theater	\$250.00
Income:	
Proceeds, collected at meeting	\$220.00
Raffle proceeds	\$80.00
NEW BALANCE	\$3669.55

MINUTES OF OUR LAST GATHERING

HSHC gathered at the State Theater in Harve de Grace MD on Tuesday, December 17, 2024, for the HOLIDAY CELEBRATION and potluck dinner. There were 24 members and guests present. Fellowship began at 6:30 PM. Andrea Bowden received the Scottish Swap items and distributed tickets for them and Sarah Autry circulated selling 50/50 raffle tickets.



Laird John Polk, Clan Pollack, called the meeting to order at 7:15 PM. The toast to King Charles III was given by David Ray, Clan McRay. The toast to President Biden was given by Keith Reagan, Clan Keith. The toast to Scotland was given by Jim Wasson, Clan Buchanan. The Pledge of Allegiance to the Flag was led by John Polk. SJ Anderson, Clan Anderson, offered grace. Birthdays and anniversaries were recognized.

Everyone enjoyed a delicious potluck meal that included soup, salad, appetizers, entrees, side dishes and an array of desserts. Thanks to Kallie Lyons for coordinating the dinner. Recipes will be published in the new year. During dinner, we were serenaded with holiday favorites by Tom Ritter, on the mandolin and Geoff Douglass on bagpipes.

Laird, John Polk thanked people for their presence. The first order of business was the Induction of new members Melissa Moreno and George Kingery who became interested in HSHC at the November Irish Festival. Everyone welcomed them into HSHC.

John announced that the January 21, 2025, Burns Night Gathering will be at the State Theater and February 18th Gathering and Whisky Tasting would be at Vandiver Inn. Details will be published. Jim Wasson reminded us that the return of the traditional Hogmany at the home of Betsy and Jim Wasson, 113 Tim Tam Court, Havre de Grace, MD 21078 on the December 31st, New Year's Eve, 9:00 PM-12:30 AM. People should bring their preferred beverage and a snack to share. The group will be able to view fireworks from the porch. Andrea Bowden asked if people were familiar with the Irish performing group RIVERDANCE. Many indicated that they were. She asked if there was interest in seeing the group at the American Music theater in Lancaster PA in late February. People responded in the affirmative and a survey will be emailed.

Andrea Bowden then explained the Scottish Swap in which people brought items that are Scottish or gift-like. Donors were given a ticket and numbers were drawn for people to choose an item. Over 30 items were donated including handmade Holiday decorations, a kilt pin, a plaid jumper and a cute highland coo! Numbers were called and people chose their treasures.

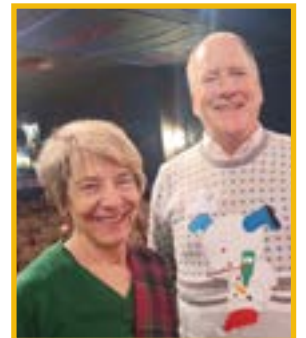
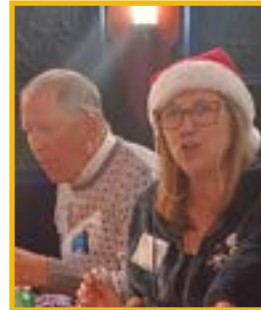
The 50/50 purse was \$155 and Susan Wheeler won half. A bottle of Jameson Irish whiskey, graciously donated by George Kingery & Melissa Morano, was won by Joanna Reagan.

Past Laird Keith Reagan brought hand bells and holiday music from his church and brave souls volunteered for the eight-person bell choir. After brief instruction, the group performed some remarkably melodic pieces. Everyone then joined hands and sang Auld Lang Syne.

A wonderful time was had by all! The gathering concluded at 9:30 PM

Respectfully submitted,
Andrea Bowden, Secretary

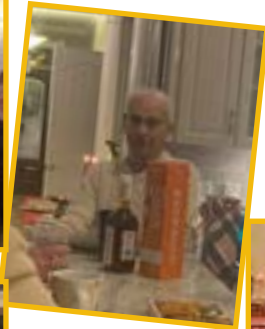
OUR HOLIDAY POTLUCK SHENAIGANS



The Haggis
Procession

Hogmanay

Impromptu
Music & Sing-Along



The charming Scottish fishing town that celebrates Hogmanay two weeks late

two excerpts from the Daily Record (www.dailyrecord.co.uk)

Burghead, Scotland, won't be celebrating Hogmanay for almost two weeks (after New Year's Eve). Burghead is a small and scenic fishing town in Moray, situated around eight miles out of Elgin. It is a popular summer destination, but is also well worth visiting in January for the yearly Burning of the Clavie festival.

Taking place on January 11, the unique fire festival is Burghead's way of celebrating the New Year. It sees a barrel filled with wooden shavings and tar — the 'clavie' — lit up and carried around the streets before being placed at an ancient fort and allowed to burn out.

People from across Scotland and beyond travel to Burghead for the fire festival. It is customary for onlookers to take home pieces of the clavie as they fall off, and they are even said to bring good luck for the year ahead.

The reason the Burning of the Clavie takes place nearly two weeks after the rest of Scotland celebrates Hogmanay goes back to the 1750s. At this time, the country officially dropped the Julian calendar in favour of the Gregorian one — but



Why steak pie is New Year tradition in Scotland - and why it won't die out anytime soon

Scots have enjoyed marking the turn of the year with steak pie for generations.

Scotland is known the world over for being one of the best countries to usher in the new year. There are plenty of customs and traditions surrounding Hogmanay making Scotland an attractive place for tourists to flock.

From the cannon being fired atop Edinburgh Castle at midnight, to the capital's infamous street party - which has sadly been cancelled this year due to wild weather thrashing the region - Scotland has made its mark on the holiday.

Bruce McColl of the Scottish Craft Butchers Association gave his thoughts. He revealed: "One theory holds that steak pie became the national dish at New Years because January 1 wasn't generally taken as a holiday so families were too busy to cook. They would buy steak pies to feed their families instead, this continues to this day as people want a delicious meal after the previous night's celebrations. **So it was essentially one of the first ready meals.**"

Shedding more light on the quirk, Mr McColl went on: "The other train of thought is that people would have it as their main meal on Hogmanay before they started to drink. It's a good meal to be made in advance so a lot of people have it as their main meal before the bells."



Suggesting a third possibility, Mr McColl added: "Another theory is that because it is a big meal you can keep warm and serve to visitors throughout the day, as people come to the house."

Regardless, steak pie fits Scotland's New Year's celebrations perfectly. Whether it's soaking up the booze, lining your stomach, or having a meal quick, easy, and big enough to appease first footers, we don't see the practice dying out any time soon.

WEE NEWS BITS FROM SCOT- LAND

SCOTLAND'S SHETLAND PONIES IN SWEATERS

Almost every year around Holiday time a series of adorable photos go viral. You may have seen Scotland's favorite ponies, Fivla and Vitamin , make rounds online. The pair can be seen wearing festive knitted sweaters posing with the sunset as the perfect background. This year was not the exception, as the photos went viral again on Instagram. The photoshoot with the pair of Shetland ponies was taken to promote tourism in Scotland, making them the faces of an important



© Thordale/MyShetland

WREN'S DAY - AN OLD CELTIC TRADITION

From Newsbreak

From the Dingle in southwest Ireland to the Isle of Man in the Irish Sea midway between Ireland and Scotland an old Celtic tradition persists. This ancient mid-winter custom is usually celebrated on December 26th, St. Stephen's Day. Folklore says that the wren squealed, and Roman soldiers thereby found Stephen and killed him, making him the first Christian martyr. However, there are other similar Pagan customs . Masked groups go house to house with a captured wren and ask for money to bury it. They are invited into the house for refreshments and usually perform songs or music. Traditional costumes resemble



HOGMANY CELEBRATIONS IN EDINBURGH CANCELLED from Newsweek

Edinburgh's outdoor Hogmanay celebrations have been canceled due to extreme weather conditions, with high winds and inclement weather making outdoor events unsafe for attendees. A spokesperson for the festival announced the cancellation of all outdoor activities scheduled for December 30th and 31st, including the popular Night Afore Disco Party, the Hogmanay Street Party, the Concert in the Gardens, and the Midnight Fireworks display from Edinburgh Castle. The cancellation of Edinburgh's Hogmanay outdoor events is a major blow to the city's residents and visitors, disrupting one of the world's most iconic New Year celebrations which attracts visitors from around the globe. Indoor events and pub celebrations continued.



WORLD'S SMALLEST REINDEER From Newsbreak

Svalbard reindeer are wild, non-domesticated reindeer endemic to the Norwegian Svalbard archipelago in the Arctic Ocean. In winter, they look adorable with thick fluffy light grey or yellow-white fur. In the summer, they look darker, and their fur is less thick. The reindeer feed on moss and lichen and do not migrate like their larger cousins. These reindeer have short legs, and relatively small, rounded heads. Both males and females have antlers. The males have larger antlers that grow between April and July, but they tend to drop them in early winter. The females grow their antlers in June and keep them for a year. These reindeer do not live in large herds, but instead in small or single groups, typically of three to five individuals. An exception occurs in late autumn during the rut season, when males gather harems, and sometimes in winter when animals form larger groups in scarce good feeding grounds. Males weigh 198 pounds and females weigh 117 pounds and they are about 3 feet tall. The managed herd of reindeer in the Criaghorn Mountains of Scotland was established in 1952. It is a tourist attraction, especially around the holidays. These animals are twice as large as the Svalbard but have similar behaviors.



Winter Funnies

contributed by Dr. Andrea Bowden

How do SNOW PEOPLE get around?
They ride ICICLES.

What is the favorite department of SNOWPEOPLE in the grocery store?
Vegetables – they love looking for carrots for noses.

What kind of beverages do SNOWPEOPLE drink?
Iced ones, of course.

What do you get when you cross a baker and a snowman?
Frosty the DOUGHman.

What do SNOW KIDS say to each other?
Hey, you are COOL!

What do you say to a stressed SNOW MOM?
Chill out, please!

What do you sing at SNOW BOY'S birthday party?
FREEZE a jolly good fellow!

Where do SNOW TEENS go to dance?
Snow balls.

Where do you find SNOW PEOPLE'S webpages?
On the WINTERNET.

How do SNOWPEOPLE greet each other?
So, ICE to meet you.

What are pets of SNOWPEOPLE called?
Slush puppies and cool cats



NEW YEAR'S CUSTOMS AROUND THE WORLD

compiled by Dr. Andrea Bowden



UNITED STATES – Over 60,000 spectators gather in Times Square in New York City to see a 12,000 pound geodesic sphere descend. Millions of others watch on television.

UNITED STATES – Watching college football parades and games; Rose Bowl, Peach Bowl, Fiesta Bowl and smaller spectacles.

MANY SPANISH SPEAKING COUNTRIES – It is considered good luck to eat 12 raisins or grapes at midnight, one with each chime.

MEXICO AND COLUMBIA – people drag empty suitcases around the square to symbolize a year filled with travel and adventure.

ESTONIA – People gorge on 12 meals on the last day of the year.

GERMANY – People eat marzipan pigs 'schwein gehabt' literally eating a pig for good luck.

FRANCE – People eat crepes representing the sun in hope of longer days and prosperity.

HAITI – January 1 is also Independence Day. In 1804 Haiti was the first country in the Western Hemisphere to declare slavery illegal.

GREECE – People smash pomegranates which symbolize renewal. They wake children by tapping them on the head with an onion representing growth and good luck.

PHILLIPINES – People jump over 7 waves in the ocean, making a wish for each.

WORLDWIDE – There are 24 time zones so the new year strikes first being at Kiritimati (Christmas) Island in the Pacific, which is on the International dateline. Nearby American Samoa celebrates almost a day later.

THE LIFE OF ROBERT BURNS: SCOTLAND'S BARD

Source: Scotland.org

The word bard is of Celtic origin and means poet. As William Shakespeare is England's national bard, Robert Burns is Scotland's. And over 250 years after he was born into a poor Ayrshire farming family, the universal appeal of many of his poems and songs endures.

Burns had a gift for putting himself into the shoes of others and sympathising with their plight. His greatest works were a vivid insight into the aspirations and anguishes of the less-privileged, his hopes for equality and a better world. Words that maintain their powerful meaning today.

ROBERT BURNS DEATH AND LEGACY

Robert Burns died in Dumfries on 26 July 1796, on the same day that his wife gave birth to their ninth child, a son, Maxwell. He succumbed to a form of rheumatic fever, which would have been easily treatable today. In those days, however, the cause and remedy of his ailment were unknown, and his demise was likely hastened by a course of sea-bathing in icy salt waters.

To make matters worse, Burns died in debt, borrowing from a cousin and an old patron, George Thomson, to bail himself and his pregnant wife out of trouble. The fact is that Burns had lived in near poverty most of his life. He had been engaged in heavy physical farm work since he was a young boy, in a harsh climate and on a very limited diet had taken its toll. He was only thirty-seven years old when he died.

He was buried with full military honours as a member of the local volunteer militia, the Fencibles. Burns had joined up the year before as Britain was at war with France and there was a fear of invasion. Sadly, as is so often the case, Burns' genius was only widely recognised after his death.

Nowadays, Burns night is celebrated across the globe. People often come together to celebrate his life by singing songs, reading poems and addressing Scotland's national dish with Burns' poem 'Address to a Haggis'.

ROBERT BURNS FAMOUS POEMS In his short life,

Burns wrote hundreds of poems and songs that would become cherished throughout the world. His words would reach far beyond his native Scotland and continue to resonate over two centuries later words about the human spirit and condition, about nature, love, life and death that are as meaningful now as they were in Burns' time.

His most famous poems include:

- Auld Lang Syne, Tam o' Shanter, Ae Fond Kiss, Red, Red Rose, Scots Wha Hae, A Man's a Man for A' That, Address to the Haggis

But who was this man who died young and in poverty in a small provincial town, who was almost instantly mourned by an entire nation and who is still revered over 250 years after his birth?



WHERE WAS ROBERT BURNS BORN? Burns was born on a wild and windy night in Alloway on the Ayrshire coast of Scotland, in the family house his father, William, had built with his own hands. Robert was the eldest of seven children. Burns' Cottage, now a museum, still stands today, although no longer set in rolling fields, but in the new affluent suburbs of the town of Ayr.

WHO WERE ROBERT BURNS' PARENTS? Robert's parents were small tenant farmers. William and his wife, Agnes, struggled to make a living on poor soil. But despite their hardships they were keen to educate their offspring, so in 1765 Robert and his brother, Gilbert, were sent to a school two miles away at Alloway Mill.

William then clubbed together with three local families to share a private tutor, a young man called John Murdoch, who taught Robert English grammar. He also made the children sing Psalms but, ironically, for someone who went on to pen some of the most well-known songs ever written, Robert's voice was, according to Murdoch, "untuneable". When Murdoch took up a post at Ayr Academy in 1772, Burns' father tutored the boys at home, although they continued taking lessons at various other schools nearby.

The following year the family moved to another farm

at Mount Oliphant, high on a hillside two miles from Alloway. The rent was steep, and the sour upland ground was difficult to cultivate. Life was tough on the new farm. Since the family couldn't afford hired help, Robert did a full day's work in the field and farmyard on a diet of oatmeal and skimmed milk even though they lived on a farm, meat was much too expensive.

On the long, dark, bitterly cold Scottish winter nights Robert was often to be found huddled under a single candle, with his nose buried in a book. By the time he was 21 he had read Shakespeare, David Hume, his favourite philosopher Adam Smith and everything in between. These books helped to fuel his already burgeoning imagination.

ROBERT BURNS' PERSONAL LIFE He had already written his first love poems when he was fifteen, to a farmer's daughter from Dalrymple. It was the beginning of his lifelong love of women and his celebration of them in poems and songs. Burns had many affairs throughout his life and enjoyed drinking with friends, but he was far from the over-sexed, booze-sodden farmhand of yore, a slightly misleading myth that has tended to overshadow his literary legacy.

Robert Burns fathered over a dozen children to various women, and his sexual behaviour was radical, especially in 18th-century society. The handsome, charismatic poet undoubtedly enjoyed the company of women, from society ladies to servant girls.

Burns' first child was by a servant, Elizabeth Paton, who worked at Lochlea farm in Tarbolton (the family had moved to the village when Robert was nineteen), and one of his most famous love affairs, though never consummated, was with the upper-class Agnes McLehose, for whom he wrote the beautiful parting song *Ae Fond Kiss*.

Burns acknowledged women as individuals who had valuable insights and opinions and were stimulating. He started a life-long correspondence with sometime patron, Mrs Frances Anna Dunlop, a well-to-do Ayrshire widow who admired his poems. In his work, he managed to combine descriptions of his prurient exploits with the tenderest of emotions, memorably and simply expressed. Love (and lust!) and poetry were always to run together for Burns.

ROBERT BURNS POETRY By the time his first collection of poetry, *'Poems, Chiefly in the Scottish Dialect'* was published in July 1786 he had founded the debating society, the Tarbolton Bachelors' Club, gained a reputation locally as an outspoken critic of the church and became a freemason.

He had started writing seriously after his father's death in 1784 and this first collection, known as the Kilmarnock edition because that was where it was printed, emerged from the poems that had been passed around locally in manuscript form during 1784-85, gaining him regional notoriety.

The collection included some of his best writing, including *'The Twa Dogs'*, *'Address to the Deil'*, *'Hallowe'en'*, *'The Cotter's Saturday Night'*, *'To a Mouse'*, and *'To a Mountain Daisy'*, many of which had been written at Mossgiel farm, where the family had moved in 1785. Having already written a handful of poems in English, Burns found his true voice in the Scots language, writing in words that did not come from the classical dictionary but from everyday speech.

THE THEMES OF ROBERT BURNS' POEMS Burns' poems touched on themes of injustice, hypocrisy, the hard life of the countryman, radicalism, anticlericalism, sexuality, gender roles, Scottish cultural identity and man's inhumanity to his fellow man. He wrote scathing satires and tender love songs delivered in a direct, playful, yet sympathetic voice that spoke to all walks of life.

Throughout his life, Burns was on the side of the poor and the downtrodden and was always anxious to speak up for them. Inequality made him angry. He was an enthusiastic supporter of the French revolution in 1789 before it turned into a bloodbath and supported the American struggle for democracy led by George Washington.

Poetry was in Burns' blood, but the book was also born of financial necessity. The farm at Lochlea, where he worked with his younger brother, Gilbert, provided little money and an increasingly desperate Burns had considered leaving for the West Indies to find a job as an employee on the slave plantations. He had even booked a berth on a boat to Jamaica but had postponed the trip on several occasions.

The Kilmarnock edition got 612 advance subscriptions, mostly concentrated on around a dozen individuals who sold them to other admirers.

ROBERT BURNS' LIFE AND FAME By this time Burns had met and married Jean Armour, who bore him twins in September 1786, despite the strenuous attempts by Jean's father to prevent his daughter having anything to do with the poet owing to his opprobrious reputation.

After an enforced separation, Robert and Jean were reunited, and she remained his long-suffering wife until his death. She had nine of his children and took in and

nursed one of his several illegitimate offspring.

Burns arrived in Edinburgh, Scotland's cultural capital, in November 1786 as the sensation of the season. In a review of his poems in the literary periodical, 'The Lounger', Henry Mackenzie coined for Burns the famous epithet of the "heaven-taught ploughman". It was a sentimental moniker that stuck, the image of the rustic bard with plough in one hand and quill in the other composing poems in the Ayrshire fields. But it was far removed from the reality of Burns' life, which had been one of toil and hardship.

Burns knew he was different and special and held centre stage in Edinburgh with his powerful charisma and passionate way with words. However, he was also aware of his low social standing in polite Edinburgh society. Poets were certainly not meant to be peasants and he found the drawing rooms of literary Edinburgh reeking with pretension, which he derided memorably in his famous poem 'Address to a Haggis'.

In April 1787 an Edinburgh edition of 'Poems, Chiefly in the Scottish Dialect' was published, containing 22 additional poems to the Kilmarnock edition, and was subscribed to by over 1300 individuals. But Burns sold the copyright of the book to William Creech for 100 guineas and despite further editions appearing in London, Dublin, New York and Philadelphia, he made no money from these.

That same year the first volume of James Johnston's 'Scots Musical Museum', a collection of Scottish folk songs, appeared, including three songs by Burns. Burns would go on to contribute nearly 200 songs to future volumes of the publication, many published posthumously. He toured the Highlands and the Scottish Borders collecting old Scottish tunes to which he set his verses, thus helping to preserve the songs and keep a cultural tradition alive. Some of his bawdier lyrics were collected in a notorious volume entitled 'The Merry Muses of Caledonia'.

Despite his new-found fame in Edinburgh and beyond, Burns was struggling to support his family from either his poetry or the small farm he had leased in Ellisland, Dumfriesshire and he was forced to take a public service job in 1788. After a lifetime of unrewarded toil, he abandoned farming altogether in 1791 to become a full-time employee in the Dumfries excise, moving to a house in the town.

Undeterred by ailing health during the winter of 1790, and depression about the fading prospects of the farm, his muse remained undimmed and he continued his prolific output of songs and poems, completing his most famous poem and arguably his masterpiece, Tam o' Shanter, in November that year. Every year on the night of Burns' birthday, 25 January, or an evening close to it, his life and

work are celebrated as Burns clubs all over the world host traditional Burns Suppers.

THE TRADITIONAL BURNS SUPPER These informal suppers vary from club to club, but the general format has remained the same since Burns' friends hosted the first recorded night in his honour around the anniversary of his birth in 1801. Guests gather as at any informal function and the host says a few words of introduction before everyone is seated and the Selkirk Grace is said. A starter of soup, usually a Scotch broth or Cock-a-Leekie, is eaten, before the centrepiece of the meal, a haggis, is brought in while a piper plays the bagpipes.

The host then recites 'Address to a Haggis' and at the lines 'His knife see rustic Labour dight, An' cut you up wi' ready slicht', draws and cleans a knife before plunging it into the haggis, slicing it open from end to end in dramatic fashion. A toast is then proposed to the haggis. Mashed potatoes (champit tatties) and turnips (bashed neeps) traditionally accompany the haggis.

When the meal is over, one of the guests makes a speech commemorating Burns and proposes a toast to the great man, known as the Immortal Memory. A toast is then made to the lassies' in recognition of Burns' fondness for the fairer sex and sometimes a female guest will reply with a humorous toast to the laddies'. Following the speeches there may be singing of songs by Burns and occasionally guests take to the floor in a whirl of Burns Scottish country dancing known as a ceilidh, although this is not a normal part of a Burns supper.

The most important thing about a Burns Supper is to have fun. After all, the man you're paying tribute to was certainly not averse to a wee party himself!

Jean Armour, Mrs. Robert Burns



National Galleries of Scotland

Jean Armour was the daughter of a stonemason in Mauchline, Ayrshire, where she met Robert Burns in 1784. When Jean fell pregnant Burns was reluctant to marry her but did apparently promise that he would stick by her. In September 1786 Jean gave birth to twins, but it was only after she had twins again in March 1788 that Burns married her. Jean bore Burns eight children and raised

one by a mistress, but only three survived into adulthood. She had a very good memory and an aptitude for quoting verse. Burns read almost all his work to her, and admitted benefiting from her judgment. After the death of her husband, whom she outlived by nearly 38 years, Jean lived a modest but comfortable life in their last family home in Dumfries. It is from this period only that portraits of her exist.

<https://www.nationalgalleries.org/art-and-artists/1954>

Scottish Recipe of the Month

Scottish Steak Pie Recipe

A thought from SJ: Since the Scots use this as a fast-food purchased from a butcher for new year's day, why not buy one premade? Or, maybe just buy puff pastry from the grocery store. Anyhoo, on with the real deal.

Pastry

225g plain flour	800g stewing beef (cubed)
pinch sea salt	2 tbsp flour
175g salted butter (softened)	1 tsp sea salt
squeeze lemon juice	1/2 tsp black pepper
100ml cold water (approx)	1 tsp worchestershire sauce
Pie Filling	1 tsp tomato puree
1 medium onion (chopped)	250 ml beef vegetable stock
1 tbsp butter	1 tsp sea salt



Pastry Directions: Sieve the flour and add the sea salt into a large mixing bowl. Add in the butter and rub the flour and the butter together in your fingers to create a bread crumb type consistency.

Add in the lemon juice and add in a little of the water. Start kneading slightly in your hands until a dough is formed. Add in enough water to create the dough, you might not need all the water as it is an approximate measurement.

Knead the pastry dough slightly for a minute and form into a ball. Place in the fridge for 15-20 minutes to chill.

Pie Filling

Add the butter into a large casserole style pan and cook the chopped onions in the butter for a few minutes.

Add in the beef and the flour and mix through well in the pan.

Brown the beef in the pan and season with salt and pepper. Continue cooking gently for a few minutes.

Remove the beef from the pan and place in a bowl or dish to cool.

Add the water to the pan the beef and onions cooked in and using a whisk, whisk up to get all of the lovely meaty juices off of the bottom of the pan. This is going to create our delicious pie gravy.

Add in your worchestershire sauce and tomato puree and whisk through.

Add your beef back into the pan and cook on a low to medium heat for approximately 1 hour until the beef is tender.

Gently pour the beef and gravy into the pie dish and set aside to cool while we make the pastry.

Pastry Step 2

Flour a large surface or chopping board and roll out the pie pastry to a large rectangular shape and then add 1 third of the butter in dots to 2 thirds of the rectangular shape. Fold one short side one third in and then again with the other side, seal the edges and place in the fridge for 15 minutes.

Roll out the pastry again and repeat the step above with the butter and the chilling for a total of another three times, using one third of the butter each time. Chill for a final 20 minutes.

Roll out the pastry to a large circular shape and cut out a circle to fit the top of your pie dish.

Brush over the top of the pastry with the whisked egg yolk and make a couple of slits in the top of the pie pastry bake in the oven at 160c for 20-25 minutes until the pastry has risen and is golden brown on the top.

Serve with root vegetables.

You can use bone broth or fresh stock instead of a stock cube.