



## Auld Lang Syne and Hogmanay

As we prepare to bring in the New Year, please join in re-dedicating ourselves to the purpose of Rotary. Please pledge your time and effort to your club's projects, in addition to donating to the larger projects of Rotary International. Each person makes a difference in this world, and when we join together we surely do great things.

Thank you for being a part of this last meeting of the year. Many members have made pledges to support our work on a dictionary project with a sister club for students in the Turks and Caicos Islands. Additionally, we are embarking on a project for building a playground area for a set of schools in Rajkot, India. Guests, remember when you go to what we call a "terra" meeting, you have meal expenses, and we ask that you please consider leaving a donation with our club. After you finish the program today, please donate to our club's work using the "Donate to RECSWUSA" area on the left of the page.

For the New Year, I chose a tradition many of us participate in, the singing of Auld Lang Syne. Here is the history of the song from the web site of [Traditional Scottish Songs](#). We have also borrowed heavily from a number of [Wikipedia](#) pages, and thank them for drawing, however precisely, on the insights of thousands of people from around the world. Some find it an imperfect resource; we think it's a great starting point!

Farther along in the program is the traditional song, as rewritten by Robert Burns, for midnight on Hogmanay (emphasis on the last syllable). Hogmanay is the Scots word for the last day of the year and is synonymous with the celebration of the New Year in the Scottish manner. It is, however, normally only the start of a celebration which lasts through the night until the morning of New Year's Day or, in some cases, all the way to January 2nd.

The roots of Hogmanay seemingly reach back to the celebration of the winter solstice among the Norse, as well as incorporating customs from the Gaelic New Year's celebration of [Samhain](#). In Rome, winter solstice evolved into the ancient celebration of [Saturnalia](#), a great winter festival, where people celebrated completely free of restraint and inhibition. The Vikings celebrated Yule, which later contributed to the Twelve Days of Christmas, or the "Daft Days" as they were sometimes called in Scotland. The winter festival went underground with the Protestant Reformation and ensuing years, but re-emerged near the end of the 17th century.

There are many customs, both national and local, associated with Hogmanay. The most widespread national custom is the practice of ['first-footing'](#) which starts immediately after midnight. This involves being the first person to cross the threshold of a friend or neighbor and often involves the giving of symbolic gifts such as salt (less common today), coal, shortbread, whisky, and black bun (a rich fruit cake) intended to bring different kinds of luck to the householder. Although it is acceptable in many places for the first-footer to be a resident of the house, they must not be in the house at the stroke of midnight in order to first-foot (yes, it's a verb, too).

In a similar Greek tradition, it is believed that the first person to enter the house on New Year's Eve brings either good luck or bad luck. Many households to this day keep this tradition and specially select who enters first into the house. After the first-foot, also called "podariko" (from the root pod-, or foot), the lady of the house serves the guests with Christmas treats or gives them an amount of money to ensure that good luck will come in the New Year.

The visit of guests and providing them with food and drink may go on throughout the early hours of the morning and well into the next day (although in modern days, some people continue visiting houses until January 3rd). As noted above, the first-foot is supposed to set the luck for the rest of the year, so it is important that a suitable person does the job. A tall, handsome, and dark-haired man bearing a gift is strongly preferred, as according to popular folklore, a man with dark hair was welcomed because he was assumed to be a fellow Scotsman; a blond or red-haired stranger was assumed to be an unwelcome Norseman.

Each area of Scotland often developed its own particular Hogmanay ritual.



An example of a local Hogmanay custom is the [fireball swinging](#) that takes place in Stonehaven, Kincardineshire in north-east Scotland. This

involves local people making up 'balls' of chicken wire filled with old news paper, dried sticks, old cotton rags, and other dry flammable material up to a diameter of about 60 cm. Each ball has two meters of wire, chain or nonflammable rope attached. As the Old Town House bell sounds to mark the new year, the swingers set off up the High Street from the Mercat Cross to the Cannon and back, swinging their burning ball around their head as they go for as many times as they and their fireball last. At the end of the ceremony any fireballs that are still burning are cast into the harbor. Many people enjoy this display, and large crowds flock to the town to see it. In recent years, additional attractions have been added to entertain the crowds as they wait for midnight, such as fire poi, a pipe band, street drumming and a firework display after the last fireball is cast into the sea.

In the east coast fishing communities and Dundee, first-footers used to carry a decorated herring, while in Falkland in Fife, local men would go in torchlight procession to the top of the Lomond Hills as midnight approached. Bakers in St Andrews would bake special cakes for their Hogmanay celebration (known as 'Cake Day') and distribute them to local children.

In Glasgow and the central areas of Scotland, the tradition is to hold Hogmanay parties involving singing, dancing, the eating of steak pie or stew, storytelling and consumption of copious amounts of alcohol, which usually extend into the daylight hours of January 1st.

Institutions also had their own traditions. For example, amongst the Scottish regiments, the officers had to wait on the men at special dinners while at the barrack gates, an escort is challenged by the sentry with, "Who goes there?" The answer is, "The New Year, all's well."

An old custom in the Highlands, which has survived to a small extent and seen some degree of revival, is to celebrate Hogmanay with the saining (Scots for 'protecting, blessing') of the household and livestock. This is done early on New Year's morning with choking clouds of smoke from burning juniper branches, and by drinking and then sprinkling 'magic water' from 'a dead and living ford' around the house ('a dead and living ford' refers to a river ford which is routinely crossed by both the living and the dead). After the sprinkling of the water in every room, on the beds and all the inhabitants, the house is sealed up tight and the burning juniper carried through the house and byre. The smoke is allowed to thoroughly fumigate the buildings until it causes sneezing and coughing among the inhabitants. Then all the doors and windows are flung open to let in the cold, fresh air of the new year. The woman of the house then administers 'a restorative' from the whisky bottle, and the household sits down to their New Year breakfast.

The Hogmanay custom of singing "Auld Lang Syne" has become common in many countries. "Auld Lang Syne" is a traditional poem reinterpreted by Robert Burns, which was later set to music. It is now common for this to be sung in a circle of linked arms that are crossed over one another as the clock strikes midnight for New Year's Day, although in Scotland the traditional practice is to cross arms only for the last verse.

So, let's link our e-hands and give the song a go! The song is below, with words which may need some explanation defined alongside. There is also a full "translation" into modern English that follows.

Tuning note: hmmmmmmmmmm. Good. 1-2-3:

[Auld Lang Syne](#) ("Former Days and Friends")

Should auld acquaintance be forgot,  
And never brought to mind?  
Should auld acquaintance be forgot,  
And auld lang syne!

Chorus: For auld lang syne, my jo, (jo = "dear")  
For auld lang syne,  
We'll tak a cup o' kindness yet  
For auld lang syne.

And surely you'll be your pint stoup, (stoup = "tankard")  
And surely I'll be mine,  
And we'll tak a cup o' kindness yet  
For auld lang syne!

Chorus

We twa hae ran about the braes,  
And pou'd the gowans fine, (gowans = "daisies")  
But we've wander'd monie a weary fit  
Sin' auld lang syne.

Chorus

We twa hae paidl'd in the burn (burn = "stream")  
Frae morning sun til dine,  
But seas between us braid hae roar'd (braid = "broad")  
Sin' auld lang syne.

## Chorus

And there's a hand, my trusty fiere,  
And gie's a hand o' thine,  
And we'll tak a right gude willie waught  
(gude willie waught = "friendly draught")  
For auld lang syne!

Hmm. We may need to practice. While singing with others around the world online has its charms, not being able to actually *hear* everyone else proves a problem with staying in tune, it seems. If you prefer to hear a pro, crank up your speakers and click [here](#). Here is the "translation" into modern English. Somehow I prefer the Burns version.

Days Long Ago (another possible translation of the title)

Should old acquaintances be forgotten  
And never be remembered?  
Should old acquaintances be forgotten  
and days long ago.

Chorus: For days long ago, my dear,  
For days long ago  
We'll drink a cup of kindness yet  
For days long ago!

And surely you'll have your pint tankard  
And surely I'll have mine.  
And we'll drink a cup of kindness yet  
For days long ago.

## Chorus

We two have run about the hills  
And pulled the daisies fine  
But we've wandered many a weary mile  
Since the days long ago.

## Chorus

We two have paddled in the stream  
From morning sun till dinner-time  
But the broad seas have roared between us  
Since the days long ago.

## Chorus

And here's my hand, my trusty friend,  
And give me your hand too,  
And we will take an excellent good-will drink  
For the days of long ago.

If this romp through the year's memories prompts any of you to decide to make a pilgrimage to Edinburgh or elsewhere in Scotland to explore all of this in native detail, you can find plenty of info online at (where else?) <http://www.hogmanay.net/>.

Finally, you'll find on the next page a couple of pictures (Creative Commons-licensed ones, of course) from the 2007 celebrations in Edinburgh.



Torchlight  
procession and  
fireworks on Calton  
Hill, Edinburgh, 29  
December 2007.

"Near the bottom of  
Calton Hill" by  
photojenni from  
Flickr.com



"Smoky Acropolis" also by photojenni  
from Flickr.com, with the same caption  
and taken at Calton Hill the same day.

Best wishes to all our eClub's  
members and guests for a  
wonderful 2010!

Carol Anderson and  
Rushton Hurley