



# the Scottish Banner

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*A' Bhratach Albannach*

Volume 49 Number 6

NEWS FOR GLOBAL SCOTS

December 2025

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**The Banner Says...**

# Scotland's Highland reindeer



by Sean Cairney

I vividly remember going to bed with great excitement on Christmas Eve and placing some carrots, cookies and milk out for Santa and his nine-trusty reindeer. Of course I would as they have brought me presents; I even convinced myself I could hear the herd walking across our roof.

## UK's only free-ranging herd of reindeer

Those nine reindeer, led by Rudolph, travelled across the globe delivering presents to all the good, and those less so, kids who wrote their letters to Santa or visited him perhaps at a local shopping mall in the lead up to the big day. Today we may be used to Amazon or Temu home deliveries but back then this was a very big thing!

Today there are estimated to be about 9 million reindeer in the world. Some may be interested to learn Scotland is home to the UK's only free-ranging herd of reindeer, a remarkable population that roams the Cairngorm Mountains in the Highlands.

## Cairngorm Reindeer Herd

Twenty-five reindeers were introduced in 1952 by Swedish herder Mikel Utsi and his wife Dr. Ethel Lindgren, these reindeer were reintroduced after being extinct in Scotland for nearly 800 years. Their successful re-establishment is a testament to both ecological vision and cultural curiosity.

What makes the Scottish reindeer truly unique is their adaptation to the rugged, often harsh Highland environment. Unlike their Arctic cousins, these reindeer have acclimatised to

Scotland's temperate climate and varied terrain and have coats which suit the Highland winter weather. Reindeer have a dense undercoat and a thick outer coat of hollow "guard hairs". The hollow hairs trap air, creating an insulating layer that keeps out the cold and keeps the reindeer warm.

They graze on heather, berries, mushrooms, lichen, and grasses, and are well-suited to the mountainous landscape, often seen silhouetted against snow-dusted peaks or wandering through misty glens.

## Some may be interested to learn Scotland is home to the UK's only free-ranging herd of reindeer.

The Cairngorm Reindeer Herd, now numbering around 150, is carefully managed but allowed to roam freely across a vast expanse of some of Scotland's finest scenery. This semi-wild existence offers a rare opportunity for visitors to observe reindeer in a naturalistic setting—something not easily found elsewhere in the UK.

## A beloved symbol of the Highlands

Culturally, the reindeer have become a beloved symbol of the Highlands, especially during the winter months when they feature in festive parades and events across Scotland. Their presence blends Scandinavian heritage with Scottish wilderness, creating a unique fusion of folklore and conservation.

Moreover, the herd plays a vital role in environmental education and eco-tourism. Guided hill trips led by rangers allow people to engage directly with the animals, fostering a deeper appreciation for wildlife and the fragile ecosystems of the Highlands.

Scotland's reindeer are more than just a curiosity—they are a living link between past and present, wilderness and wonder, and a great example of how thoughtful rewilding can enrich both landscape and community.



Image courtesy of the Cairngorm Reindeer Herd.

## In this issue

Scotland's reindeer are sure to not feel crowded as they live in The Cairngorms, the UK's biggest National Park. I have been to this park, and seen its roaming reindeers, and its beauty is evident around every corner. I have also visited in winter when it is cold but still stunning and in this issue we highlight just some of the things you can do at this year-round destination should you be visiting over the quieter winter months.

We may be hitting some of the darkest months to be in Scotland but there are still lots of opportunities to see the light. This month we shine a light on some of Scotland's fire-based winter festivities and traditions which take place across the country.

Scotland is known for its incredible Hogmanay celebrations and less so for Christmas. In fact, Christmas was virtually banned in Scotland for hundreds of years and Christmas day did not become a public holiday in Scotland until 1958. However, Scotland has leaned itself to various Christmas traditions. Perhaps you will be celebrating this year with a tradition handed to us by a Scot?

## Adapted to Scottish life

Reindeer were once native to Britain, but it is thought both climate change and over hunting were causes to their great decline. It is fantastic to know that a healthy and stable population of reindeer have adapted to Scottish life over the last seventy years. The vision of Mikel Utsi and his wife Dr. Ethel Lindgren thankfully not just live on today, but thrives.

Should you find yourself in the beautiful Scottish Highlands any time of year consider visiting them in the Cairngorms. December is no doubt a very busy month for Scotland's reindeer as they have just a few public appearances to make.

On Christmas eve they will also likely be very busy and I may just leave some carrots out just in case... I wish you and your clan a wonderful Christmas and Hogmanay season!

**Do you have any comments from the content in this month's edition? Share your story with us by email, post, social media or: #ScottishBanner, #TheBanner.**

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**We appreciate your support and hope you enjoy this edition.**

**Gracing our front cover:  
Festive Ancient Forest  
Twi-LIGHTS experience.  
Photo: Landmark Forest Adventure Park.**

# Lost Paisley Witch Trials artefact discovered



**A** historic stone linked to the Paisley Witch Trials of 1697, the last mass witch execution in Europe, has been discovered and returned to Paisley, where it is now on public display. The Maxwellton Cross tondo, a circular granite stone that once marked the burial place of the ashes of those executed, has been returned after 16 years and is now being preserved at the Discover Paisley Hub, home of Paisley Tours, at 2 County Place.

Removed during street works in 2008, the tondo was long thought to be lost or destroyed. However, it has now resurfaced through a local heritage connection and been entrusted for long-term public display and research.

## A powerful piece of Paisley's past

In 1697, eight people from Renfrewshire were accused of witchcraft. Seven, four women and three men, were executed by strangulation and burning at the stake, and another took his own life in prison.

According to tradition, Agnes Naismith uttered a dying curse on the town before her execution. The ashes of the condemned were buried at Maxwellton Cross, sealed beneath an iron horseshoe to 'keep the curse at bay'. This recovered tondo once surrounded that horseshoe and remained part of the site for generations, forming a physical and emotional link to one of the most tragic episodes in Paisley's history. The current official bronze memorial tondo, designed by sculptor Alexander Stoddart, remains in place at Maxwellton Cross today and continues to mark the site. The recovered stone is not a replacement, but an earlier historic memorial piece that forms part of the layered story of how Paisley has remembered the victims over time.

## Where innocence was executed

Gayle Pollock of Renfrewshire Witch Hunt 1697 SCIO said: "This piece of stone denotes where innocence was executed and a dying woman's curse was spoken upon Paisley. If not for the Witch Trials of 1697 there may have been no thread industry and Paisley would be different. This is an important piece of Paisley's history that people now have the chance to see and reflect on." The recovered tondo is hand-carved granite, not concrete,

and is believed to date to the Victorian period (1800s). Its age was confirmed through individuals involved in the 2008 replacement works, who recognised its historical significance. The stone has been placed in a dedicated memorial display inside the Discover Paisley Hub. The display includes a carved wooden panel created by local craftsman John McGuiness, bearing the inscription: "True faith calls for understanding and mercy, not persecution and harm. 1697." A second inscription reads: "The most beautiful thing we can experience is the mysterious. It is the source of all true art and science." – Albert Einstein.

Gavin Divers, founder of Paisley Tours, said: "This isn't just a stone – it is a witness to injustice. It connects us to real people who suffered and died here in Paisley. We are honoured to care for it and ensure it remains on display here in Paisley, where it belongs. We are committed to handling this history with dignity. The accused were victims of fear and injustice, not magic. This display is about education, remembrance and giving Paisley's history back to its people."

*The tondo is now available for public viewing at Discover Paisley Hub (home of Paisley Tours), 2 County Place, Paisley PA1 1BP. Those wishing to explore the history further can join the Paisley Witches Walking Tour, which continues to run weekly and tells the full story of the 1697 witch trials through original locations and historical evidence. For further details visit: [www.paisleytours.org.uk](http://www.paisleytours.org.uk).*

## New London-Stirling rail route to open



**L**umo, the UK's leading Open Access rail operator, has announced it has secured five Class 222 six-car trains for its forthcoming route between London Euston and Stirling, beginning as early as Spring 2026. This expansion aims to enhance travel choice and connectivity for passengers along the central belt of Scotland both to England and to Stirling, offering five daily services with the operator renowned for affordability and efficiency. Lumo's new route will link London Euston directly to Stirling, and also gives Whifflet (serving Coatbridge), Greenfaulds (serving Cumbernauld) and Larbert their first-ever direct rail services to London, providing substantial economic benefits and new travel opportunities.

This expansion builds upon Lumo's successful Edinburgh route, operating via Edinburgh Waverley and London King's Cross, which has been instrumental in increasing rail travel's mode share compared to air between Edinburgh and London. Lumo is currently awaiting regulatory approval from the Office of Rail and Road (ORR) to further extend services to Glasgow, boosting connectivity for Scotland's passengers making domestic journeys and those across the border.

## Melbourne breaks World Record with The Great Melbourne Bagpipe Bash



**H**istory has officially been made at Fed Square in Melbourne. On Wednesday 12 November, hundreds of pipers gathered at Fed Square for The Great Melbourne Bagpipe Bash, together setting a new world record for the largest ever bagpipe ensemble. Presented by Fed Square and supported by City of Melbourne and ABC Radio Melbourne, the record-breaking performance saw a sea of tartan and kilts fill the city's heart as 374 bagpipers played AC/DC's legendary *It's a Long Way to the Top (If You Wanna Rock 'n' Roll)* in thunderous unison.

The event paid homage to the band's iconic 1976 music video, filmed on Swanston Street by Paul Drane for ABC's *Countdown*. Nearly fifty years on, that moment was brought roaring back to life, this time louder, larger, and led by pipers from all across Victoria, around the country, with some even travelling from New Zealand to take part.

The previous world record of 333 pipers, set in Bulgaria in 2012, was officially surpassed, confirmed onsite by adjudicators from The Australian Book of Records with the sound of the pipes echoing across the CBD. Katrina Sedgwick OAM, Director & CEO of MAP Co said "The Great Melbourne Bagpipe Bash was pure joy, bringing together musicians of all ages and backgrounds to celebrate our creative spirit and music legacy. Hundreds of bagpipers, an AC/DC anthem, and the heart of the city alive with music. Fed Square has always been the place where Melbourne comes to celebrate. Today, we made history together."

Afterwards, the pipers played *Happy Birthday* to Scottish actor Gerard Butler who was in the crowd of thousands to witness the world record performance, followed by *Amazing Grace*.



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# SCOT POURRI

## Piper Daniel Logan Laidlaw VC Memorial Appeal



My name is Kevin McLean and I'm a piper and member of the Ancre Somme Association Scotland Charity. We have a project running to produce and unveil a bronze bust of Piper Daniel Logan Laidlaw VC "The Piper of Loos" in his home village of Swinton, Berwickshire to mark the 110<sup>th</sup> anniversary of him going over the top at the Battle of Loos. Daniel Logan Laidlaw was born in Little Swinton, in the Scottish Borders, 26<sup>th</sup> July 1875, he died 2<sup>nd</sup> June 1950.

During WW1 he was known as "The Piper of Loos", the gallant Daniel Laidlaw played his pipes in "No Mans Land" until he was wounded, brave and courageous Piper Laidlaw served with the Kings Own Scottish Borderers. He received his VC from King George V, at Buckingham Palace in 1916. Piper Laidlaw VC is buried at St Cuthbert's Churchyard, Norham, Northumberland.

The Ancre Somme Association SCIO (ASA SCOTLAND CHARITY) a forces charity, with the support of the Laidlaw

Family, Swinton & Ladykirk Community Council, Swinton Primary School, and the people from the Village are working together to create a fitting Memorial for Piper Daniel Logan Laidlaw VC. The charity will commission a Memorial Bust and seek Heritage Funding to pay for the Bust and plinth, approximately £20,000.

Scottish sculptor Helen Runciman will produce the Memorial Bust. The Community Council agreed to a Memorial Bench, Flag Poles, Planters, and gravel to enhance the area where the Bust will be placed - we need your support people, this memorial means so much to the family, it will enhance the local area and the village, the school children will be involved in the project, this Memorial will leave a legacy for future generations.

**To support this project please visit:**  
<https://asascotland.enthuse.com/cf/piper-daniel-logan-laidlaw-vc-memorial-appeal>

**Kevin McLean**

open as a tourist attraction, this will no doubt become a stop for many visiting the region and I too will return once the castle opens its doors. The castle is so iconic for the city and turning such a prestigious building into a modern attraction is very exciting. The city is so compact and really does have some wonderful shops, pubs and restaurants.

Of course, there is so much to see within an easy day trip from the city it really is the perfect base for so much. I have also visited Culloden Moor, and this is such a special, solemn and important place for all Scots and their descendants to visit at least once, if like me it is a place that will stay with you forever.

I love all things Scottish and am a proud descendant of Caledonia.

**Claire Price**  
*St Catherines, Ontario  
 Canada*

### Inverness



Thank you for the wonderful article on Inverness, this is without question my favourite Scottish city and one which I so look forward to visiting. I first went to Inverness in the late 1980s and just loved the atmosphere, charm and friendly people. I am so thrilled to hear that Inverness Castle is about to

### Clan Hunter and Muirhead International Gathering 2026



**Madam Pauline with Macer Venatorus, Graham and Raymond Morehead, President Muirhead Clan Society.**

We are delighted to announce the dates of our next Clan Hunter and Clan Muirhead International Gathering. Celebrating 25 years of friendship Friday 24<sup>th</sup> July 2026 – Sunday 26<sup>th</sup> July 2026.

Book early to make use of our new early-bird special offer at: [www.clanhunterscotland.com/shop/gathering-2026](http://www.clanhunterscotland.com/shop/gathering-2026)

Madam Pauline and our team of tour guides look forward to welcoming you to your ancestral home at Hunterston Castle.

**Raymond Morehead**  
*President Muirhead Clan Society*

### A Bleak Christmas

**By: Kennedy Smith**

*Maw, aw Maw, oh whars oor lum?  
 The yin fur Santa Claus tae come.  
 We dae hae yin? so says ma chum,  
 Wee brains.  
 Wi aw the pressies, aw the fun  
 Fur weans.*

*Ach, wee Jim, tis sair tae say;  
 We aw went smokeless yesterday,  
 Save log-burnin' folks frae doon the brae.  
 Ye ken the yins,  
 The hoity folk wi' naught t' dae  
 For aye their sins.*

*But Maw, aw Maw, whit 'll a dae?  
 A'll no hae ony gemms t' play,  
 Nor jigsaw puzzles just tae lay  
 Aw ower the flair.  
 A'll greet aw day an' aw nicht tae.  
 An maybe mair!*

*Aw Jim, wee Jim a'll skelp yer lug.  
 Or fetch yer faither back frae pub.  
 He'll tan yer bum, A dinna dub -  
 A richt strawmash;  
 An hae ye greetin' like a dug.  
 So, dinna fash!*

*An so, it be in times like these  
 That World Wars stert in twos or threes;  
 An multiply like Gruyere cheese.  
 While ithers dither,  
 An' nations skelp wee chieles wi' ease  
 An yin an ither.*

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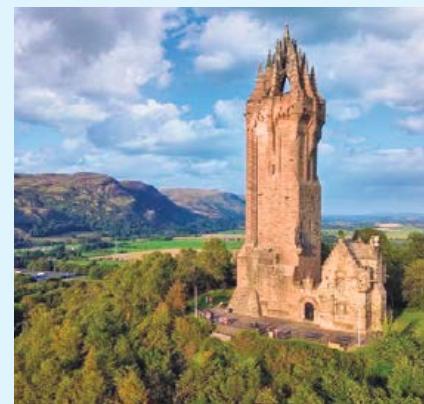
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#### Linlithgow Palace



Linlithgow Palace, birthplace of Mary Queen of Scots & St Michael's Parish Church.  
*Craig Duncan Photography*

#### The National Wallace Monument



The National Wallace Monument standing proud in Stirling.  
*Fly - Caledonia*

#### The Kelpies



Golden hour at The Kelpies, Falkirk.  
*Jamie Taylor Photography*

#### Ullapool

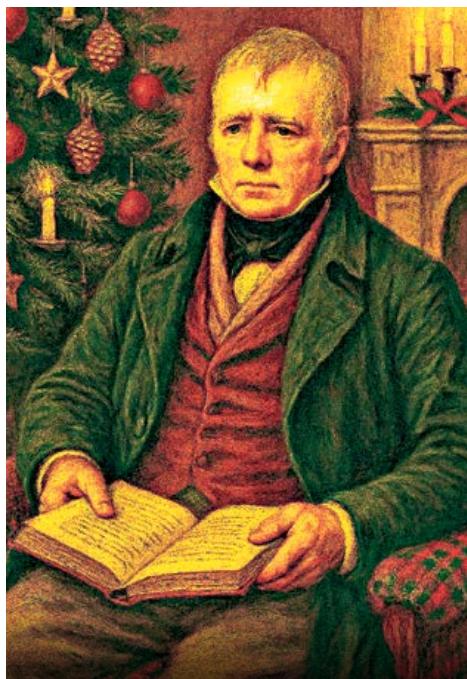


Beautiful day in Ullapool.  
*Mik Coia*

Pose your questions on Scottish related topics to our knowledgeable readership who just may be able to help. Please keep letters under 300 words and we reserve the right to edit content and length. Letters can be emailed to [info@scottishbanner.com](mailto:info@scottishbanner.com) or online at [www.scottishbanner.com/contact-us](http://www.scottishbanner.com/contact-us), alternatively you may post your letters to us (items posted to the Scottish Banner cannot be returned). Please ensure you include your full contact details should you require a reply. This page belongs to our readers so please feel free to take part!

# A Scottish Christmas

By: David McVey



*England was merry England, when  
Old Christmas brought his sports again.  
'Twas Christmas broach'd the mightiest ale;  
'Twas Christmas told the merriest tale;  
A Christmas gambol oft could cheer  
The poor man's heart through half the year.*

**A**familiar scene, the over-the-top medieval English Christmas feast. We hear less about the traditional *Scottish* Christmas. Instead, we're reminded that Christmas Day only became a public holiday here in 1958 and our preference was always for boozy celebrations at New Year. Of course, many Scots had Christmas Day off long before 1958 and, anyway, the Scottish contribution to Christmas tradition is greater than you might think.

Let's look at that verse with which we started. Yes, it's part of a jolly canto describing a rollicking medieval Christmas in a great English hall, but it's from a *Scottish* verse epic, Sir Walter Scott's *Marmion* (1808). As Scott describes, Scotland makes a contribution to the feasting:

*Nor fail'd old Scotland to produce,  
At such high tide, her savoury goose.  
Then came the merry maskers in,  
And carols roar'd with blithesome din...*

#### Christmas traditions

Scott crams in Dickensian levels of detail to this scene; plum pudding (Scott calls it 'plum porridge'), pies, carols, the boar's head, roaring fires, bells and mistletoe. The passage influenced later writers about Christmas, not least Dickens himself. Scott certainly promoted *Scottish* culture, but he put in quite a shift for England too. As well as this picture of an English Christmas, remember how he re-invented the story of Robin Hood in *Ivanhoe* (1818)?

The American satirist Washington Irving published a spoof *History of New York* in 1809 which invented a number of traditions - Christmas stockings, Santa Claus travelling in a flying sleigh - that subsequently became part of Christmas. In 1817 he visited Scott at Abbotsford (they were fans of each other) and they must have chatted a bit about Christmas traditions while the log fire roared and the candles flickered. Irving, who had

Scottish ancestry, went on to write more about Christmas; *Old Christmas* in 1819 described the festivities at the fictional Bracebridge Hall in England. Perhaps he'd discussed the *Marmion* frolics with Scott. Irving later met Dickens during the latter's tour of America in 1841. Two years later, Dickens produced the immortal *A Christmas Carol*. I wonder what Irving and Dickens had talked about?

#### The Scottish contribution to Christmas tradition is greater than you might think.

The composer Andrew Gant has written a couple of fascinating books about the origins of *English* Christmas carols; some of them prove to have more than a little Scottish influence. Gant writes of a book of songs entitled *Cantus, Songs and Fancies* which was published in Aberdeen in 1666 and credited to a John Forbes. In it there's a sacred song with a peculiar mix of characters and images which gets even odder when we suddenly go to sea in a ship, and;

*Our Lord harped, Our Lady sang  
And all the bells of Heaven they rang  
On Christ's Sunday at morn  
On Christ's Sunday at Morn*

By the mid-1800s, this song had evolved so that the number of ships had grown to three and 'On Christ's Sunday at morn' was 'On Christmas Day in the morning.' Yes, a little-known Scot called John Forbes played a major part in the story of one of our best-loved carols.

#### Deck the Hall

And then there's *Deck the Hall* (and, yes, it was originally 'Hall' not 'Halls'); the jolly tune of this carol is Welsh and dates from the 18<sup>th</sup> century with no real link to Christmas. The first incarnation of the words we know today was written by Thomas Oliphant (1799-1873), a Scottish composer who was related to Lady Nairne, the famous writer of Jacobite songs.

Oliphant had a distinguished career as a lyricist and Andrew Gant writes that 'it seems a little sad that such an obviously interesting and accomplished figure is known to us today entirely for one, rather modest, lyric.' And, omitting the 'Fa-la-las', this lyric runs;

*Deck the hall with boughs of holly  
'Tis the season to be jolly  
Fill the meadcup, drain the barrel  
Troll the ancient Christmas carol!*

In 1877 a somewhat stern American publication toned down the drinking references, and the third line became the faux-ancient 'Don we now our gay apparel'. Over the years, too, 'hall' for some reason became 'halls'.

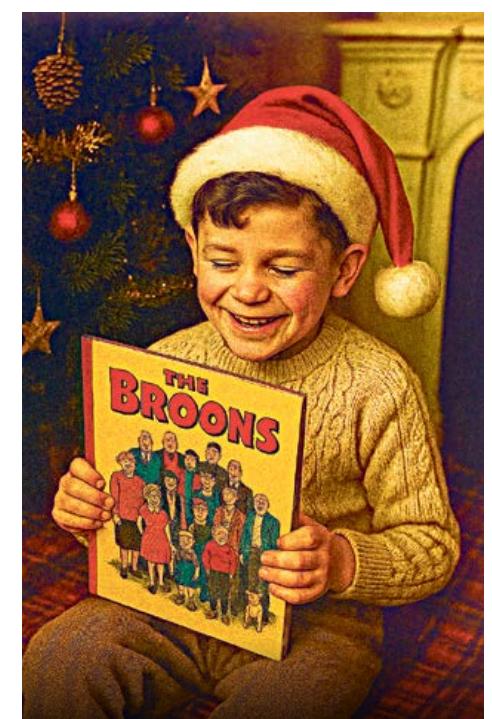
And then there's James Edgar. Who? Edgar was an Edinburgh man, born in 1843, who emigrated to the USA and set up Edgar's Department Store in Brockton, Massachusetts. In December

1890, he had the idea of dressing up as Santa Claus and walking around the store in the run-up to Christmas. He never got as far as setting up a grotto and listening to children's present requests, but if your children have ever pestered you because they want to see Santa in a department store, blame James Edgar.

#### The annuals

And finally, Scotland's greatest contribution to Christmas. What a thrill in the 1960s and 1970s to unwrap a present and find the 'annual' of your favourite comic; *The Beano* or perhaps *The Dandy*, *The Victor* or *The Beezer*. That glossy-covered hardback with the new-book smell that promised all the joys of your favourite comic, only much more!

These comics mostly began in the 1920s and 1930s and the best-known ones were published by the Dundee firm of DC Thomson and Co. The *Dandy* annual first appeared in 1939 with the first *Beano* annual the following year. These annuals spread far and wide but of particular interest in Scotland (and also popular in Northern England) were those collections of stories featuring *Oor Wullie* or *The Broons*, cartoon strips that appeared in DC Thomson's *Sunday Post* newspaper. These were published in alternate years; Christmas was defined by whether it was a *Broons* year or an *Oor Wullie* year. *The Broons Book* first appeared in 1940; the *Oor Wullie* book, of course, debuted in 1941.



How *Wullie* and *The Broons* celebrated Christmas, New Year or Easter or Hallowe'en had a great influence on we youngsters who devoured the annuals. *The Broons* and *Oor Wullie* Christmas and New Year stories always came at the end of the book, as the stories followed the sweep of the year. In recent years, the books have departed from this model, with Christmas strips even appearing in the middle! I'm not happy about this.

Scotland, then, has contributed a surprising amount to wider Christmas traditions and you can still, if you want, look forward to Christmas morning curled up with the *Beano* annual or *The Broons Book*. Whatever age you are.

est. 1992

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# SCOTSPEAK



**"We are over the moon about winning Britain in Bloom – it's such a tribute to our hard-working gardeners and greenkeepers as well as all the amazing community organisations, groups, and individuals who help to continue make Aberdeen's green spaces beautiful. We'd like to say a big 'thanks' to everyone who makes a contribution to our parks and green spaces and encourage everyone to come and see for themselves what beautiful – and award-winning – places they are. Aberdeen has a long and prestigious history in the Britain in Bloom and Beautiful Scotland competitions so it's a special win to get gold again."**

The Lord Provost of Aberdeen Dr David Cameron said Aberdeen is celebrating after it was announced the city has won gold in Britain in Bloom. The win adds to Aberdeen's extensive success, having won a medal in either Britain in Bloom or Beautiful Scotland every year since 2008. Aberdeen has been a regular winner since the Britain in Bloom competition was launched in 1964 and won gold in 2023.

*"Renfrewshire has always been an industrial area and it's important to the people of Lochwinnoch that the hardships faced by the miners and their families are not forgotten. I've had the privilege of speaking to family and friends of former miners and it's clear to see how much this recognition means to the community of Lochwinnoch. Barytes mining was dangerous and many men were killed or badly injured by rock falls, incidents with explosives and accidents while travelling to and from the remote mine. Some of these men were only in their twenties and I'm glad that we are able to remember their names and their stories today."*

Renfrewshire's Provost Lorraine Cameron said a memorial cairn and plaque has been unveiled in Clyde Muirshiel Regional Park to remember the men who lost their lives working in the Muirshiel Barytes Mine between 1942 and 1969. The disused mine is located high in the moorlands of Clyde Muirshiel Regional Park. Barytes is a high-density material often used as a filler and white pigment in textiles, paint and paper production. It also has uses in medicine and when drilling for oil and gas. The mine closed in September 1969 having been worked for about 200 years.

*"One of Scotland's national treasures, this extraordinary casket has been venerated as a relic of Mary, Queen of Scots for centuries. This highlight loan is part of National Museums Scotland's National Strategy, which sees collections and expertise shared with museums across Scotland. I'm delighted*

*that visitors to Aberdeen Art Gallery will get to see the casket up close. Beyond its connections to one of Scotland's most famous figures, it is a rare and spectacular piece of historic silver in its own right."*

Dr Anna Groundwater, Principal Curator, Renaissance and Early Modern History at National Museums Scotland, said one of Scotland's most cherished treasures, a rare French silver casket believed to have been owned by Mary, Queen of Scots, has gone on display at Aberdeen Art Gallery until January. Made in Paris, probably between 1493 and 1510, the casket is a superb and extremely rare work of early French silver, very little of which survives, even in France. It is likely that its long-standing association with Mary has kept it preserved for over 450 years.



*"The National Trust for Scotland looks after more puffins than any other organisation in the UK, so finding new ways to improve our care of puffins is vital to our conservation planning. It may be surprising to people that for a species as well-known as puffins we lack adequate methods to collect basic data, such as how many puffins there are in Scotland and how successfully they breed each year. This partnership and funding will finally give puffins their moment in the spotlight of technological innovation and create the essential tools we have so far been missing."*

Ellie Owen, the National Trust for Scotland's Senior Seabird Officer, said a new tool will revolutionise puffin census efforts. They are adapting a new technology that is an AI-enabled 'virtual fieldwork platform' designed to transform how ecologists monitor seabird populations, starting with Scotland's iconic and vulnerable puffins. Puffins are increasingly at risk of extinction due to several factors, including climate change and human activity, making monitoring their numbers crucial for conservation.

*"These Nature30 sites are an important first step in the mass movement we need to reverse nature loss, and to help us all to become more resilient to climate change."*

*They can deliver high quality nature, but also food, materials, energy and many other benefits to society, so we need to recognise, celebrate and reward them. Achieving the 30 by 30 target is hugely ambitious, but collectively Scotland can do it."*

NatureScot's Head of Protected Areas, Dr. Ben Ross, said Scotland is leading the way in the UK and Europe by recognising its first Nature30 sites as part of a global initiative to help halt and reverse nature loss. The four sites in Argyll, Lanark, Lochaber and Moray are the first to be named under the country's commitment to safeguard at least 30 percent of land and sea by the year 2030 – agreed at COP15 and known as 30 by 30.



*"Scots have a deep-rooted affection and strong cultural connection to porridge and every home has surely had the age-old argument of 'water or milk?' and 'with or without salt? Scotland's porridge heritage is as rich and warming as the dish itself and our map celebrates the creativity and passion of local producers, bakeries, and breweries as well as the history of porridge and oats relating to Scotland. It highlights locations - as far apart as Shetland, Islay, and Kelso - where visitors can enjoy porridge, oatcakes, or other oat-based experiences, including working mills, museums, and places to stay."*

Jill Walker, Director of Marketing and Digital at VisitScotland, said for those who like nothing better than to tuck into a bowl of hot and hearty porridge each morning, VisitScotland has launched a dedicated map, highlighting some of the great oat-based experiences across Scotland. *Scotland's Porridge: A Nation in a Bowl*, published by the national tourism and events organisation, calls it the "perfect fuel" to explore Scotland and includes a historical timeline of porridge in Scotland and some quirky facts, alongside 18 locations associated with the dish and other oat-based delicacies.

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## SCOTWORD

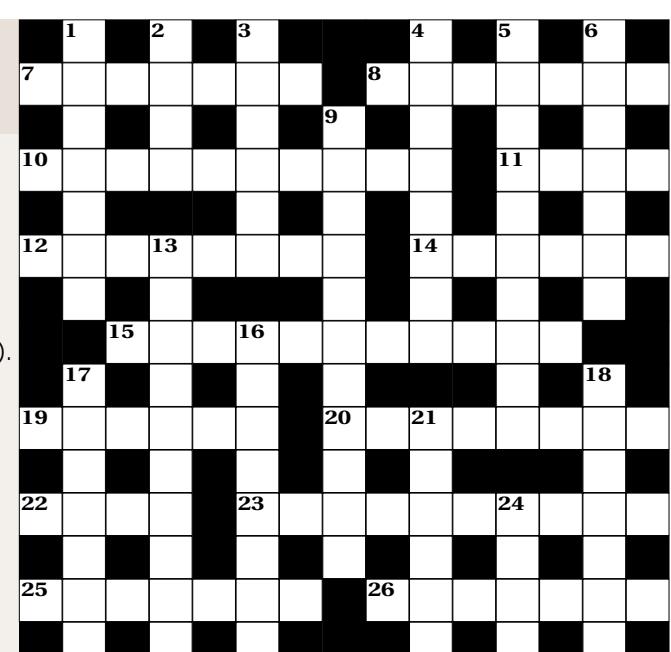
Here is a wee Scottish crossword for you to try!  
If you're stuck, answers can be found on page 22.

### CLUES ACROSS

- 7) Time to roam in Scotland! (7).
- 8) Burns birthplace (7).
- 10) Fishing port south-west of Girvan (10).
- 11) Melodies (4).
- 12) Moveable Scots households! (8).
- 14) A soft, porous cake (6).
- 15) This Scot is his bond! (4,7).
- 19) Condensed antacid (6).
- 20) They take illegally (8).

### CLUES DOWN

- 22) The female deer (4).
- 23) This Scot created a bond! (3,7).
- 25) Fussy to a Scot (7).
- 26) Catch the ferry here to Skye (7).
- 1) For ancient dates! (7).
- 2) Scottish first course! (4).
- 3) Colourful pigment (6).
- 4) Old high-ranking noble (8).
- 5) Waterway at Inverness (5, 5).
- 6) Top fastener (7).
- 9) Site of 1745 victory (11).
- 13) Town 3 miles north of Dumbarton (10).
- 16) 8 or 9 irons! (8).
- 17) The National Guard (7).
- 18) Parents' parent! (7).
- 21) At sea! (6).
- 24) Ben More is on this island (4).





Edna Wells, 100, with a card from the palace.

**G**reetings from Scotland – where we have been living in three rooms and navigating cardboard boxes. Yes, with the festive season almost upon us, the Christmas decorations are missing, and the doggies are confused. It has been stressful. Then we have just moved house. Not far away, but you will know what it's like.

#### A manse

For the chief and me, it is time to downsize, but getting a Scotsman to get rid of stuff is tricky; books, camping kit, whisky supplies, they do like to hang onto things. At least we have reduced the number of bedrooms. And swapped a large drawing room for a cosy sitting one. From a great big hoose, we are now the owners of a comparatively wee one. Smaller but stylish, home is now a historic Scottish manse.

# Lady MacGregor's Scotland

By: Lady Fiona MacGregor

*Lady MacGregor of MacGregor – otherwise known as British writer and broadcaster Fiona Armstrong – works for ITV news and current affairs. Fiona's husband is the Chief of Clan Gregor, Sir Malcolm MacGregor of MacGregor. She is an active member of Clan Armstrong, so their lives are interwoven with all things tartan. The couple live in the Scottish Borderlands, although filming and writing takes Fiona all over Scotland.*



Now a manse is a house next to, or near a church. It was where the minister traditionally lived and some men of the cloth still do, although dwindling congregations mean some kirks are being sold off – along with their manses. Our new property comes complete with a church hall. It sits in a walled garden and boasts an orchard and a view of a field of Galloway Belties.

We love it, but as the move is recent we know where nothing is. So, it has been a case of camping. Which, as you know, suits the MacGregor. I have said it before, but my husband's idea of a good time is a night in a tent on a windy Highland hill.

#### Centenarians

Yes, they make them hardy here. Which comes as no surprise to hear that for the first time, the number of centenarians in Scotland has topped a thousand. It must be the air. Especially for the ladies. Look away now, male readers, but the number of women centenarians outnumbers the men by almost ten to one. Whatever, it is some milestone, and as Lord-Lieutenant of Dumfries – the King's personal representative in this area – one of my very pleasant duties is to take these birthday girls and boys a congratulations card from the palace.

Last month I presented two lady centenarians with royal missives – among them, one Edna Wells. During the war Edna served with the WRENS. After the navy she went on to have a family and work for numerous charities. Edna has a life well lived and she tells me she will treasure the card from King Charles and Queen Camilla. I make the formal presentation and ask about the secret of a long life. The reply comes: just keep walking – keep busy... So, there you have it. Stay active. Which, in between emptying boxes, we do.

#### František Hekl

The chief and I head up to Ayrshire. To a loch where a memorial to a Czech pilot from WW2 is being unveiled. It is in honour of 26-year-old František Hekl who was flying with the RAF Volunteer Reserve and the 312 (Czechoslovak) Squadron.



Galloway Belties from Lady MacGregor's window.

In 1941, Hekl was on a training mission in his spitfire when it crashed into the waters of Loch Doon.

It is a moving occasion; wreaths laid in honour of the young man; speeches by military personnel from the Czech Republic. It is Scotland and the Czech Republic meeting in friendship and with respect. But the Scottish weather lives up to its reputation. We are all soaked through. How the pipers manage to play – yes, they even fly in tartan-clad musicians for the occasion – is a miracle. A Czech pipe band. How amazing that our Scottish traditions span the world!

But back to the house move. As Christmas approaches my aim is to make friends with those gorgeous Belties – and find the tree and the stockings. Otherwise, how will Santa know where to leave the presents?! From Scotland, I wish you a happy and peaceful festive season...



Blue Squadron Pipe Band from the Czech Republic.

## Tartan of the Month



### Winter in the Highlands Tartan

*The Scottish Banner is pleased to be offering the Tartan of the Month series highlighting a variety of different, unique and colourful tartans from around the world which are registered with the Scottish Register of Tartans in Edinburgh. The Scottish Register of Tartans was established by an act of the Scottish Parliament in November 2008 and promotes and preserves information about historic and contemporary tartans from Scotland and throughout the world. Text and image use are courtesy of the Scottish Register of Tartans (SRT).*

This tartan is part of a collection of fashion tartans intended to celebrate the highlands in Sweden. The climate in northern Sweden is markedly different from southern Sweden. In the south there are lowlands with long and warm summers, while in the north there are highlands with long and cold winters.

The Southern Swedish Highlands experiences the best of both. The colours are intended to reflect the landscape and weather experienced during the winter months in the Southern Swedish Highlands including: white snow, grey days, blue skies and frozen lakes. This tartan (reference: 14858) was designed by Mrs Asa Silfver and registered in June, 2025.

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# Archaeologists recover hundreds of Jacobite projectiles in unexplored area of Culloden

**A**rchaeologists from the University of Glasgow and the National Trust for Scotland have recovered more than 100 projectiles, including lead musket balls and cannon shot, from Culloden Battlefield. The discoveries were made by a team of archaeologists and volunteers led by the Trust's Head of Archaeology Derek Alexander and the University's Professor Tony Pollard.

The battle, fought on 16 April 1746, saw the decisive defeat of the Jacobite army led by Bonnie Prince Charlie by government forces commanded by the Duke of Cumberland's government army.

## The last battle fought on British soil

The new findings, from an area of the battlefield that had not previously yielded any archaeological discoveries, is fresh evidence from the last battle fought on British soil. The most striking result from the investigation, which took place between 13-18 October, was the recovery of over 100 projectiles, which included lead musket balls and cannon shot, the latter of which included what is believed to be a three-pound cannon ball fired by the Jacobite artillery. This collection of artefacts not only proves that archaeology from the battle has survived in this area but, the project leaders believe, it has provided evidence for one of the most dramatic episodes in a battle that from beginning to end probably lasted less than an hour.

A variety of techniques, including metal detector survey, trial trenching and test pitting were used to examine a portion of the battlefield which, on 16 April 1746, sat between the government and Jacobite lines. This area had failed to produce archaeological material in the past, possibly due to disturbances caused by a 19<sup>th</sup> century forestation, which created acid soils, and tree clearance in more recent times. The area is also boggy, which has provided further challenges for archaeologists. On the importance of these discoveries to the wider understanding of the battlefield, Derek Alexander said: "We are delighted with the results, especially as the ground we investigated didn't appear to hold out a great deal of promise. Our volunteers did a fantastic job of enhancing our understanding of the battle and the battlefield as it exists today. This new evidence adds to earlier findings, which include the scatter of objects related to the hand-to-hand fighting on Cumberland's left, to the south of the present site. We now have a clearer picture of where the various actions that made up the battle took place, and this will assist the National Trust for Scotland in enhancing on-site interpretation and the long-term management of the battlefield. We look forward to bringing the team back together to carry out a more detailed examination of the finds."

## The fate of the Jacobite cause

Professor Tony Pollard added: "We've only had time to make a rapid assessment of our results, but musket balls fired by Jacobite and government troops, including pistol balls fired by government dragoons, likely relate to one of the last actions in the battle. This fight took place between the initial battle lines, at a location where boggy ground slowed the Highland charge, and this in combination with heavy fire from Cumberland's line helped to seal the fate of the Jacobite cause. As the Jacobites retreated, a battalion of Irish troops in French service, fighting with the Jacobites, made a brave stand against hundreds of mounted men from Cobham's Dragoons and possibly Kingston's Horse, advancing from the right of Cumberland's line. The job of these horsemen was to cut down the disordered Jacobites, and we have recovered some of the shot fired from their heavy pistols. The Irish troops, numbering about 150 men, under their commander Lieutenant-Colonel Walter Stapleton, blocked this advance and according to an account by



Lead buck and ball shot found in a single location. Photo: Andy Jepson.



Left to right: Professor Tony Pollard and Derek Alexander at Culloden. Photo: National Trust for Scotland.

Adjutant General John O'Sullivan, one of Bonnie Prince Charlie's senior officers, fired volleys into the approaching cavalry. The red-coated Irish Picquets then found cover behind the walls of Culloden Parks but their surrender, after suffering heavy casualties, with Stapleton among the dead, was the only alternative to total annihilation. Being regular troops in French service, they were treated as prisoners of war rather than rebels, but none-the-less they suffered the privations of confinement on a prison hulk in the Thames before being repatriated to France in early 1747. This valiant action helped thousands of Jacobites get away from the field, but it gets only brief mentions in most of the history books. A more detailed analysis of the artefacts and their distribution pattern will be required before we can make a definitive statement but at present there are no obvious alternative interpretations."



Metal detecting used to investigate the area. Photo: National Trust for Scotland.

## Record crowd celebrates Scottish and Kiwi culture at the 14th Hororātā Highland Games



Massed Bands Hororātā Highland Games 2025. Photo Rogue Images.



Nga Pu wai T whera welcoming the Chieftain. Photo Kathryn Taylor.

**A** record crowd of 11,000 people gathered at the Hororātā Domain on Saturday, 8<sup>th</sup> November, for the 14<sup>th</sup> Hororātā Highland Games — a celebration of Scottish and Kiwi culture like no other. One of the most moving moments of the day was the Chieftain Welcoming Ceremony, a powerful blend of traditions that epitomised the spirit of the event. The Kapa Haka group Ngā Puāwai Ō Tāwhera welcomed this year's Chieftain, Michael Fraser Milne, before 20 pipe bands saluted him in a mass performance that left many in the crowd emotional.

Once again, the Hororātā community delivered a world-class event, showcasing the power of community spirit and volunteerism. The Games featured 21 Scottish clans, 800 competitors, 230 volunteers, 13 market stalls, 8 performing groups, and 19 community organisations fundraising for their own causes. For many, the Hororātā Highland Games is more than just a one-day event — it's a source of inspiration that sparks new passions and lifelong involvement.

Rachelle McDowell, from Ashburton, shared how the event has shaped her daughter's journey. "Nine years ago, Charlotte made us sit there and watch bagpipes and Highland dancing all day at the Hororātā Highland Games," said McDowell. "Now she's beyond excited to be playing the bagpipes there for the first time — in four separate events — and coming away with a third-place medal."

## A real sense of belonging

Hororātā Community Trust Executive Officer Cindy Driscoll said this story captures the true spirit of the Games.

"I love that the Games inspires people to take up new passions — whether it's playing the bagpipes or drums, Highland Dancing, or heavy athletics," said Driscoll. "This is also true for our volunteers. When the community started the Games back in 2011, most of the committee hadn't even been to a Highland Games, let alone run one. Now they know all the ins and outs and have developed their own passion for creating something truly special."

Driscoll said the sense of community around the Games extends far beyond the Hororātā Valley. "There's a real sense of belonging that isn't just based on geography. Yes, we have lots of locals from our rural area, but people also come from Australia, Auckland, Wellington, Dunedin, and all over to be part of Clan Hororātā because they love being part of this amazing family."

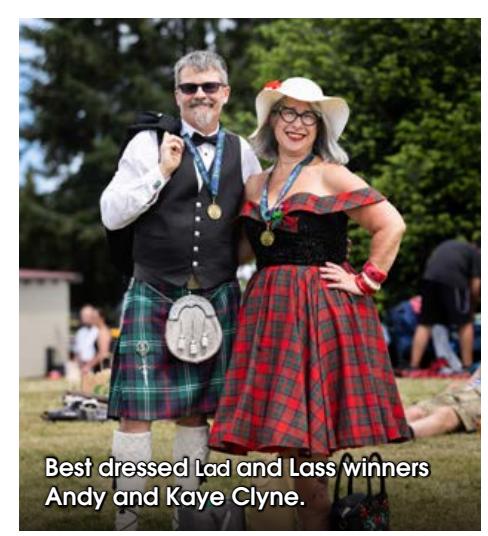
The event continues to be a major fundraiser for the region, helping local community groups thrive through grassroots fundraising opportunities. Funds raised by the Hororātā Community Trust through the Games are reinvested into community projects, including the Hororātā Hall renovation, a cornerstone project that will support the community for generations to come. "To all our sponsors, suppliers, entertainers, and volunteers — thank you for enabling the Hororātā Community Trust to put on the Games, which are more than just an enjoyable day out; they are inspiring people and helping our community thrive," said Driscoll. The Hororātā



Andrew Wain Competes in the Hororātā Stone - Oceania Heavyweight Championship.

Highland Games have become one of Waikirikiri Selwyn's signature events — a true celebration of heritage, heart, and rural ingenuity.

*The 2026 Hororātā Highland Games will take place on Saturday, November 7<sup>th</sup>. For details visit: [www.hororata.org.nz/highland-games](http://www.hororata.org.nz/highland-games)*



Best dressed Lad and Lass winners Andy and Kaye Clyne.

Photos courtesy of Kathryn Taylor.

# Unique Highland juniper forest given special European status in UK first



Coille Dundreggan.

In a UK-first, a genetically unique juniper forest at Trees for Life's Dundreggan rewilding estate in the Scottish Highlands has been awarded a special European designation to protect and enhance its globally significant diversity. The 10,000-acre estate in Glemoriston near Loch Ness now joins a European network of genetically important and well-managed sites classed as Gene Conservation Units – a status reserved only for long-standing native tree stands that meet specific criteria.

The network – managed in the UK by Forest Research, the country's principal organisation for forestry and tree-related research – aims to ensure coordinated protection for the genetic diversity of tree species at a European scale. It brings together sites recognised for their protection of genetic diversity and natural processes. Key parts of both the juniper and silver

birch woodlands at Dundreggan have received the prestigious classification – adding to recognition of their importance, and opening up opportunities for further scientific studies.

Gwen Raes, Trees for Life's Dundreggan Estate Manager, said "This designation underlines why letting our ancient woodlands grow back naturally is so important to us at Dundreggan, and it celebrates the remarkable remnants of naturally occurring and locally adapted juniper and silver birch that still survive on the estate. The unusually wet location for juniper, and the extreme westerly location of silver birch, have contributed to making their populations at Dundreggan very special. Through this designation and further management, we aim to ensure these unique woodlands secure the extra care and attention they need, so they are protected and enhanced going forwards."

## Dynamic conservation

Also key to the designation is the estate's use of 'dynamic conservation' which helps protect the trees' genetic diversity. The land is being managed to encourage natural regeneration – enabling the trees to continuously adapt to their specific environment, including weather conditions and temperature.

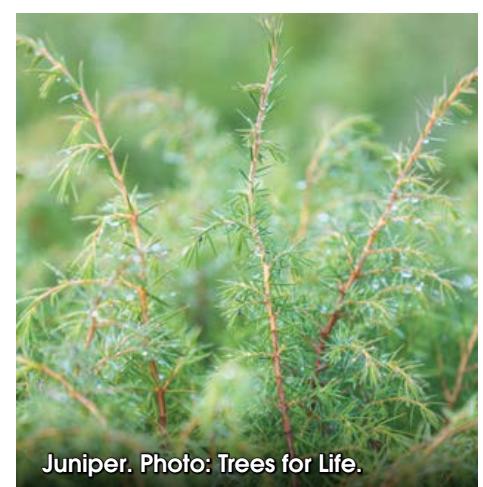
Forest Research scientist Tom Sim, responsible for registering the UK's Gene Conservation Units, said: "The juniper and silver birch at Dundreggan are naturally occurring without historic planting, and have likely adapted to their local conditions over many generations. As a result, we would expect the stands to be representative of distinct genetic variation for each species at a UK and European level."

Dundreggan has relatively high rainfall for juniper, and experts believe this could have driven some local adaptation. Juniper is a slow-growing evergreen shrub or small tree, with small blue-green needles and berries that ripen to a dark, blue-purple colour. It is more abundant in the drier, eastern part of the Highlands, where it reaches a larger size. The species boosts biodiversity by providing shelter and food for a range of wildlife including insects, mammals and birds. Juniper is also valued for its culinary, medicinal and ritual properties, including use of its berries in game dishes and its role in producing gin. Dundreggan is also at Europe's western edge of silver birch's natural range. This fast-growing species readily spreads over open ground, and supports many insects and other invertebrates, with over

300 species known to feed on it. The tree's roots draw up crucial nutrients, and its fallen leaves add richness to soil. As part of the Gene Conservation Unit designation, Dundreggan's juniper and silver birch will be regularly monitored to ensure their survival, health and successful natural regeneration.

Visitors to Dundreggan and its acclaimed Rewilding Centre can explore the lush juniper and birch woodlands and enjoy walks along forest trails, including an accessible, low-level Juniper Path, known as Ceum an Aitinn in Gaelic. In total, the woodlands on the lower part of the estate are home to some 50,000 juniper and 80,000 silver birch.

**Rewilding charity Trees for Life is committed to restoring nature-rich landscapes for people, nature and climate. Together with communities, it is restoring Scotland's natural and cultural heritage while supporting local livelihoods. See: [www.treesforlife.org.uk](http://www.treesforlife.org.uk).**



Juniper. Photo: Trees for Life.

## Outlander author Diana Gabaldon receives Honorary Doctorate from UHI



Diana Gabaldon.

and heritage to life, and promoted the Highlands to a global audience. Diana Gabaldon is best known for her *Outlander* novels, that blend of historical fiction, romance and fantasy that has sold 50 million copies in 39 languages across 114 countries. Her storytelling has inspired renewed international interest in Scotland's history, landscapes and traditions, and her work has been credited with boosting Scottish tourism through the so-called 'Outlander effect.'

The series now spans nine volumes, with a 10<sup>th</sup> in progress, as well as spin-off novels and short stories. It also inspired the award-winning television adaptation of the same name, and its prequel *Outlander: Blood of My Blood*, both filmed in Scotland. Fittingly, the UHI graduation ceremony took place in Inverness, the same location where the *Outlander* heroine, Claire, begins her time-travel journey in 1946. Gabaldon said: "I'm honoured and excited to take part in this year's graduation ceremony and very happy for all the new graduates. Congratulations!"



Dr Alexandra Dold.

Also graduating on the day was Dr Alexandra Dold (32), originally from Germany and now living in Glasgow, who will receive a PhD for her thesis examining *Outlander* as public history. Her research explores how Gabaldon's historical fiction uses narrative strategies such as intertextuality and the representation of historical research methodologies to shape perceptions of Scottish history, and how her storytelling invites readers across the world to engage emotionally and critically with the past. There is no one else in the world

who has solely focused on the novels and the specific narrative strategies, making Dr Dold quite unique as 'Doctor of Outlander'.

Dr Dold said: "I'm incredibly excited to be a 'Doctor of Outlander'. UHI Centre for History, has been fantastic in supporting my research... even though it is slightly unusual for a degree in History. My hope is that this research helps others see how stories like *Outlander* can make history more accessible, showing that learning about the past can be emotional, personal and inspiring."

Vicki Nairn, UHI Principal and Vice-Chancellor, added: "We are delighted to award Diana Gabaldon an honorary doctorate of the University of the Highlands and Islands. Through her remarkable storytelling, she has shared Scotland's history, language, and landscapes with audiences around the world, inspiring a deep appreciation of our culture and heritage. Diana's work has also brought real economic and educational benefits to our regions, and we are proud to recognise her extraordinary contribution today."

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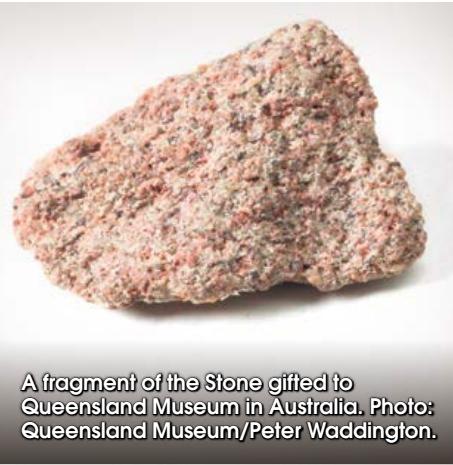
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## IN SCOTLAND TODAY



A fragment of the Stone gifted to Queensland Museum in Australia. Photo: Queensland Museum/Peter Waddington.

## New Stone of Destiny fragments uncovered by Stirling researcher

New research led by the University of Stirling has revealed the existence and fate of many fragments of the Stone of Destiny, notably those which were secreted away after the ancient artefact was taken from Westminster Abbey by a group of Scottish nationalist students early on Christmas morning 1950. The Stone split in two along a historic crack when it was dropped during its clandestine removal. Many fragments were created during a crude repair overseen by monumental sculptor and Liberal politician Robert (Bertie) Gray, shortly before the Stone was left for the authorities to collect at Arbroath Abbey in April 1951. Gray carefully numbered and curated 34 fragments and gifted these and further unnumbered fragments to family members, trusted political friends, nationalist politicians, and journalists at home and abroad, usually along with a letter confirming their authenticity. Fragments have been handed down by families and friends as treasured heirlooms, some encapsulated in items of jewellery.

Professor Sally Foster, of the University of Stirling's Faculty of Arts and Humanities, has discovered the existence of this body of fragments, only one of which was officially recognised when she began her research, and carried out a rigorous study of the fragments which transforms understanding of the history of the Stone of Destiny. Professor Foster's extensive detective work to uncover the stories of the fragments has involved newspaper and archival research, liaison with collection curators and institutional experts, and ethnographic work, including interviews. The lives of several fragments are traced, some of which were gifted to SNP politicians, including the late former First Minister Alex Salmond and two former MPs, and one fragment which travelled halfway across the world to Australia and is stored in a museum. In a new research paper, Professor Foster also offers a novel theory about a modern inscription on the underside of the Stone which has perplexed experts.

The earliest origins of the Stone of Destiny, or Stone of Scone, are unclear. It was certainly used in the inauguration of Scottish kings from 1249, until Edward I of England seized it in 1296 and subsequently gifted it to the Shrine of St Edward the Confessor at Westminster Abbey. Professor Foster said: "This is not just any stone.

When Scottish nationalists manhandled it out of the Coronation Chair and secreted it away from London's Westminster Abbey on Christmas morning 1950, this caused the English-Scottish border to be closed for the first time in 400 years, because, since the fourteenth century, nearly all English, later British monarchs, sat over the Stone during their coronation, in an act that symbolised the subjugation of the Scots. The use of the Stone in the recent coronation of King Charles and the Stone's move to a permanent home in the acclaimed Perth Museum has stimulated new historical and scientific studies, however the existence and significance of a diverse, dispersed body of small fragments of the Stone has been overlooked. Since my findings started to emerge, many members of the public have contacted me with their family's knowledge of credible Stone fragments, often accompanied by supporting evidence – but there are many gaps yet to fill."

The theft of the Stone, and the accidental damage, did not lead to criminal prosecutions because it was decided it was not in the public interest, and the authorities have not sought to prosecute those known to be in possession of fragments. The stone currently sits as the key exhibition of the new Perth Museum.

### Paisley crowned Scotland's Town of the Year



A view of Paisley from the roof of Paisley Abbey. Photo: Angela Catlin/Scotland's Towns Partnership.

Paisley has been named Scotland's Town of the Year in recognition of its ambitious regeneration and community-led transformation. The award, organised by Scotland's Towns Partnership, celebrates the towns across Scotland that are leading the way in creating vibrant, inclusive and sustainable communities and the judges awarded the title after being impressed by the critical point reached in the town's "resurgence" following unprecedented investment in its future. Paisley's new title reflects the scale and impact of Renfrewshire Council's ongoing investment in the town's cultural and civic infrastructure, which is helping to reshape its future and attract new visitors, residents and businesses.

Councillor Lisa-Marie Hughes, the Council's spokesperson for culture and chair of leisure and cultural charity OneRen, said: "Paisley is a town that's taking its radical past into the future - a vibrant, historic place that is one of the best to live, work and visit. This award is really exciting. For us as a council, it's recognition of the extensive work we've been delivering for almost a decade, as we put culture at the heart of our regeneration. What has been incredibly

important is the people that have come with us on the journey. We've worked closely with communities, residents and businesses and they've put their faith in the work we've done to revitalise the town. It's an incredible place, one we should all be proud to be part of. This award is for all the Paisley Buddies who can be proud to say Paisley is Scotland's Town of the Year."

Recent regeneration projects include the £22million transformation of Paisley Town Hall, a £7million redevelopment of Paisley Learning and Cultural Hub on the High Street, and a £3million refurbishment of Paisley Arts Centre. Next year, Paisley Museum – Scotland's largest cultural heritage project – will reopen as a world-class visitor destination and the new £85.5 million state-of-the-art Paisley Grammar School Community Campus will open its doors to pupils and staff. Paisley is Scotland's largest town, with a population of just over 77,000 people. Its residents are famously known as Buddies.

The town became prominent in the 12<sup>th</sup> century with the establishment of Paisley Abbey and transformed into an industrial town in the 18<sup>th</sup> century through its textiles mills, exporting products all over the world, including the Paisley Pattern, the tear-drop shaped design first used as part of the Paisley weavers' shawls.

### Scotland's population over 5.5 million people

Scotland's population passed the 5.5 million mark for the first time, in the year to June 2023, according to revised figures from National Records of Scotland (NRS). Releasing the latest figures for the year to June 2024, NRS said the country's population was now estimated to be 5,546,900. The population grew by 0.7% or 40,900 people in a year. Deaths outnumbered births in all but one of Scotland's 32 council areas. The population growth was largely driven by more people moving to Scotland than leaving. The population grew in most council areas, and it fell in five council areas.

Andrew White, head of population and migration statistics at NRS, said: "We can now say that Scotland's population passed the 5.5 million mark for the first time in 2023. This was driven by people moving to Scotland. The population increased further in the year to mid-2024. In every council area, more people moved in than left in the latest figures. Midlothian was the only council area to see more births than deaths in the year to June 2024. It is one of the fastest growing areas of Scotland alongside Glasgow, Edinburgh, East Lothian and West Lothian. The areas with declining populations are Argyll and Bute, Angus, Dundee, Na h-Eileanan Siar and Dumfries and Galloway. These areas haven't seen enough people moving in to make up for the gap between deaths and births."

The change to the mid-year population estimate for 2023 reflects the methodology used by the Office for National Statistics (ONS) to calculate long-term international migration. It is routine for ONS to revise its long-term international migration estimates over time as more data become available. The estimated population of Scotland in mid-2023 was 5,506,000, putting it over five and a half million for the first time.

### 100-year-old D-Day veteran awarded honorary degree



The University of Aberdeen has honoured one of Scotland's last surviving D-Day veterans with an honorary degree. Jim Glennie, who turned 100 this year, was presented with a Master of the University (MUniv) at a special ceremony at King's College Chapel. Born in Turriff, Mr Glennie was just 18 years old when he became one of the first Gordon Highlanders to land on Normandy's beaches in 1944. After being called up, he enlisted in the army and began his military service at the Bridge of Don Barracks in Aberdeen, before being sent to the front line to take part in Operation Overlord, the largest seaborne invasion in history.

He landed with the battalion at Sword Beach on 6 June 1944. Under intense fire, he helped comrades who couldn't swim reach the shore. But just two weeks later, after his company was ambushed, he was shot in the arm and shoulder. Following his recovery in hospital, Mr Glennie spent the rest of the war in prisoner of war camp, Stalag IV-B in Germany. After the end of the war, he returned to Turriff where he became a welder, working both onshore and offshore. He married his wife Winifred in 1953, with whom he had two children. His connection to his service didn't end with the Second World War: he has spent more than 30 years volunteering at the Gordon Highlanders Museum in Aberdeen, sharing stories with generations of visitors about his own wartime experiences and raising awareness of the sacrifices made during the war. Mr Glennie has previously been recognised for his military service: not only was he awarded the Légion d'honneur, France's highest national order of merit, in 2015, but this year he also received a British Empire Medal (BEM) in the King's New Year Honours.

Mr Glennie's son, James Glennie, said: "Today has been amazing for dad and the whole family. When we found out he was getting an honorary degree, the surprise was way up there. He doesn't seem to recognise that people think a lot of him. He's very down to earth and he doesn't really think he's done anything extraordinary. But this is very special. He's a Turriff loon, as he would say, who happened to land where people were trying to shoot him. He lost friends but he managed to last a few weeks before he eventually got shot. He comes from a tough generation. Initially, as a child, he didn't really speak about his experiences. I would see the marks on his arms and ask him about them but he'd just say 'it's something that happened in a war' and he wouldn't really expand on it. But when the Gordon Highlanders Museum opened, he started talking about things and would tell stories about what he went through. He's got good friends at the museum and he's the oldest one there now but that has really kept him going."

# Visit the Cairngorms this winter



Pine marten. Photo: Speyside Wildlife.

As winter in Scotland sets in, and the darker nights lengthen, now is the ideal time to plan your escape to gaze at the cosmos in The Cairngorms, the UK's biggest National Park. The Cairngorms is home to an 'International Dark Sky Park', which is the most northerly park of its kind in the world, so here are seven stellar stays or activities that you can do after dark in The Cairngorms this winter.

If the stars perfectly align, you can spot the Milky Way with one of the stargazing nights on offer at Tomintoul and Glenlivet's 'International Dark Sky Park'. It is one of the very best places in the UK to see the star-filled night sky or even the Aurora Borealis. As nature never sleeps, you can also book a nighttime mammal watching experience with Speyside Wildlife. If that doesn't appeal, you can book a cosy overnight glamping stay at Howe of Torbeg, followed by one of their Friday night star spotting events. At Cairngorm Bothies, you can also enjoy a luxury Stargazing Bothy Hamper or arrange a special group star party, and if you are near Aviemore, how about a nighttime story walk with storyteller Sarah Hobb, or illuminate the darkness with a fun 'Ancient Forest Twi-LIGHTS' experience at Landmark Forest Adventure Park. There is also a chance to see the stars above Loch Insh on their two-hour stargazing experience.

1. Tomintoul and Glenlivet 'International Dark Sky Park' The Tomintoul and Glenlivet areas were awarded Gold Tier status as an International Dark Sky Park in November 2018 by DarkSky International. It is one of the best places in the Cairngorms National Park to discover the wonders of the night sky.

Not only does this remote area have stunning dark skies, but it also has easy access, allowing everyone to enjoy a night sky brimming with stars with three Dark Sky Discovery Sites at Tomintoul Field of Hope, The Carrachs or Blairfindy Moor. The Cairngorms Astronomy Group runs stargazing events throughout the year which are designed to allow both visitors and locals to view the diverse wonders of the night sky through 8" and 10" reflecting telescopes, weather permitting. If it is cloudy, then there will be an indoor presentation on the same subject. [www.cairngormsdarkskypark.org](http://www.cairngormsdarkskypark.org)



2. Evening Wildlife Watching Hide near Aviemore-Speyside Wildlife has a special mammal watching hide situated deep

within the Caledonian Pine Forest near Aviemore in the heart of the Cairngorms. Badgers are regular visitors all year round, as are Pine Martens. A variety of Scottish wildlife may also visit the hide, including Tawny Owls, Red Squirrels and Roe Deer.

Each evening wildlife watching experience lasts approximately two and a half to three hours. Evening Wildlife Watching happens nightly from Easter to October. From November to Easter, they offer a reduced number of evenings per week. [www.speysidewildlife.co.uk](http://www.speysidewildlife.co.uk)



3. Wild Stargazing Evenings at Howe of Torbeg near Ballater-Immerse yourself in the gorgeous Cairngorms countryside with a cosy stay at Howe of Torbeg, near Ballater, in one of their bespoke, high-quality glamping pods in the heart of Royal Deeside & the Cairngorms National Park, only 5 miles from the picturesque village of Ballater. Set in an acre of land, surrounded by open farmland and birch woodlands, they offer a range of accommodation in Glamping Pods & an off-grid Shepherd's Hut.

During your stay, you can take some time out in a gorgeous natural setting, to discover the magic of the night's sky with Howe of Torbeg Wild Stargazing Evenings. On selected Fridays throughout autumn and winter, they offer guided stargazing sessions in small groups of up to 10 people in the stunning Cairngorms National Park, with its exceptional dark skies. Guests can make the most of the clear winter skies in the Cairngorms and gaze heavenward. [www.howeofotorbeg.co.uk](http://www.howeofotorbeg.co.uk)

4. Dark Skies at Cairngorm Bothies-Imagine yourself nestled under a blanket, gazing up at a sky so dark it feels like you could reach out and touch the stars. At Cairngorm Bothies, where the dark sky in the Cairngorms is a canvas painted with celestial wonders - far away from the city's glaring lights - unaffected by the light of pollution. This means you can enjoy unadorned views of the Milky Way or even catch a glimpse of the Aurora Borealis. Cairngorm Bothies offer Star Bathing Parties, for residents and non-residents alike. From October to March, they can organise bespoke special stargazing evenings which coincide with astronomical events or full moons. Cairngorm Excursions provide parking at Cairngorm Bothies and your group will be guided through the ancient Scots pine forest and the trails to a centralised location, with rustic log seating, hot drinks and a blanket to keep you warm. Red LED head torches are provided along with other goodies in the Star bathing goody bag. A guide will help you interpret the night's sky with the help of mobile phone devices with downloadable apps.

[www.cairngormbothies.co.uk](http://www.cairngormbothies.co.uk)

5. Stargazing Storywalk near Aviemore with Sarah Hobb- On selected dates in winter, you can book a short evening stroll in Aviemore to stargaze and explore Scotland's own Gaelic and Pictish stories of the stars from thousands of years ago with Sarah Hobb, a specialist outdoor storyteller. She weaves tales that belong in the landscape and skyscape of Badenoch and Strathspey and the wider Highlands and Islands.

The skies she describes are a rich tapestry of tales of characters and their adventures, from warrior queens to one-eyed giants. The walk includes a warming cup of foraged wild tea. [www.booking.storywalks.scot](http://www.booking.storywalks.scot)



6. Ancient Forest Twi-LIGHTS experience at the award-winning Landmark Forest Adventure Park at Carrbridge near Inverness. Between 22<sup>nd</sup> November and 4<sup>th</sup> January 2026 and again during the February Half Term (6<sup>th</sup> – 18<sup>th</sup> of February).

The 'Ancient Forest Twi-LIGHTS' experience will allow visitors to follow a one-kilometre woodland trail and immerse themselves in the enchanting ancient pinewood forest, illuminated by thousands of lights, sounds and effects. Special features include a UV light tunnel and a 'Red Squirrel Trail', a treetop journey that takes visitors eight meters up into the forest canopy for stunning views of the illuminated woodland below. Landmark Forest Adventure Park is taking part in this year's VisitCairngorms winter campaign, which is promoting the UK's largest National Park as the ultimate winter travel destination for 2025/26. The event incorporates the original Treetop Trail, built nearly 30 years ago and now expanded for improved accessibility, including buggy and wheelchair access. [www.landmarkpark.co.uk](http://www.landmarkpark.co.uk)



Stargazing at Loch Insh.

7. Stargazing at Loch Insh- Just outside the village of Kinraig, deep in the heart of the Cairngorms National Park, lies one of the UK's most magical stargazing spots. With minimal light pollution and wide-open skies, it's the perfect place to wrap up warm, step outside, and connect with the cosmos. Loch Insh's stargazing experience is a two-hour session designed for all levels of curiosity. It begins inside their cosy dome with an engaging presentation followed by an outdoor guided introduction to the night sky.

You'll learn what to look for once you're outside: constellations, planets, the Milky Way, and, if you're lucky, even the Northern Lights. The focus is on naked-eye observation, but you're welcome to bring binoculars if you'd like a closer look. The guide can also teach you some tricks with your smartphone for photography and using star chart apps. Just bring your tripod if you're interested in getting the best photos of the night sky. Dress for the cold with winter layers is strongly recommended. A low-light torch will help you navigate the woodland trails as our expert guides lead you to a few hidden local spots where the dark silhouettes of trees frame the stars above in dramatic contrast. Whatever the weather, you'll leave with the foundation and tools to know what you are looking at in the night sky wherever you are.

*To plan your visit to The Cairngorms National Park this winter, go to [www.visitcairngorms.com/winter](http://www.visitcairngorms.com/winter)*

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# Scotland's winter fire festivals



Torchlight Procession.

In the dark, seek light. In the cold, seek warmth. These most primal instincts have been part of the human experience since long before language, agriculture, art, or even the permanent home itself. For the entirety of our existence until just the last century, one thing and one thing alone provided both: fire. A reverence of fire is to winter what the delightful blooming of flowers is to spring. We gather to the flame in the darkest and coldest months because of the promise it holds for what lay ahead – if we manage to endure. Fire festivals have been celebrated in Scotland from the earliest days of our documented history, and no doubt well beyond. Some, despite the countless comforts of modernity, remain at the heart of communities and social life today.

What follows are just a few of Scotland's fire-based winter festivities and traditions, beginning with the most spectacular and ending with the most humble and intimate.

## Up Helly Aa



Up Helly Aa Vikings. Photo: Lloyd Smith.

In the 800s AD the sight of a group of Norsemen marching into a Shetland village bearing torches would have been a scene of terror. Since the 1800s that same sight has been a source of joy and jubilation unmatched at any other time of year. This is Up Helly Aa, arguably the most renowned and distinctive of Scotland's fire festivals.

In the early 19th century groups of young lads, many recently returned from the battlefields of the Napoleonic Wars, took to dragging barrels of flaming tar through the narrow streets of Lerwick. Property damage was common, and a minister in 1824 summed up the chaos thusly: "...the whole town was in an uproar: from twelve o'clock last night until late this night blowing of horns, beating of drums, tinkling of old tin kettles, firing of guns, shouting, bawling, fiddling, drinking, fighting."

A ban on this 'tar-barrelling' in 1874 was followed just two years later with the first organised procession through Lerwick, with torches and fire prominently reintroduced in 1881. The Norse elements only came later. The first longship was burned in the late 1880s, the leader known as the Guizer Jarl entered the scene from 1906, and his select Viking-costumed followers – the Guizer Jarl Squad – were introduced after the First World War. A surge of Norse-themed literature, plays, and antiquarian investigations in the mid-20th century helped put the Viking elements of the festival front and centre. On the last Tuesday in January squads of guizers dressed in themed costumes gather carrying wooden posts topped with paraffin-soaked sacks. The Guizer Jarl, who each year takes the name of a figure from the Norse sagas, leads them through the town. Streetlights are turned off, and the heady reek of paraffin and smoke fill the otherwise pitch-black night.

The guizers gather round a replica Norse longship to sing the 'Galley Song' before hurling their torches into it, making a pyre of the dragon ship. The guizers then sing 'The Norseman's Home' and proceed to Lerwick's multiple halls for a night of revelry with the whole community. The event is never, as a matter of pride, cancelled on account of weather. The following day is called Hop Night with further gatherings, singing, dancing, and no doubt the concoction of many a family hangover recipe. While Lerwick hosts the world-famous Up Helly Aa, variations occur throughout Shetland known as 'Country Up Helly Aas'.

## Edinburgh Torchlight Procession



On a far larger scale and with a far shorter history is the Edinburgh Torchlight Procession, which marks the official beginning of Edinburgh's Hogmanay Festival. There is something undeniably enchanting, even votive, about walking through the Old Town amid a sea of torch-bearers. 15,000 people or more form a serpent of fire through the streets, casting strange shadows on the sandstone buildings and a spell of awe over all involved.

The Torchlight Procession typically occurs on December 29th or 30th, with the first iteration going back only to 1993. This year it will begin in The Meadows, stream through the Old Town past Greyfriars Kirkyard and across the Royal Mile and culminate beneath Edinburgh Castle. Previous years have seen the procession end atop Calton Hill, a much more historically resonant location. For centuries at the winter solstice people would ascend the highest nearby hill to light a torch from a communal fire, bearing the flame with great care back to their own hearths. From Calton Hill celebrants would have seen hilltop fires crackling as far away as North Berwick Law in East Lothian, Largo Law in Fife, and Dumyat near Stirling.

Hogmanay remains the largest and most revered wintertime celebration in Scotland, more so even than Christmas. A Parliamentary Act of 1640 banned Yule celebrations, which were seen as idolatrous by the Protestant majority in the Lowlands. People could be fined, ostracised, or worse if caught celebrating Christmas. Christmas was not made a public holiday in Scotland until 1958, meaning that it was only privately celebrated in much of Scotland for over 300 years. If you've ever wondered why Hogmanay is such a hallmark of the Scottish calendar, now you know!

## The Stonehaven Fireballs

What could possibly go wrong allowing a group dozens strong to march through the streets of a village swinging tethered fireballs above their heads? As evidenced by only a few singed hairs through the decades, much less than you'd think.

Easily the most audacious of Scotland's fire festivals is the Stonehaven Fireballs. Near midnight on December 31st around 40 people take to Stonehaven's High Street armed with fireballs set within wire cages and swung round on cords. In addition to being very fun, this was traditionally done – as with many wintertime fire ceremonies – to help ward off harmful spirits and literally burn away the bad things accumulated through the previous year.

Fishing communities have always been exceptionally superstitious, and rituals to cast off bad luck were common the length and breadth of coastal Scotland. The earliest versions of the Stonehaven fireballs, dating back to at least 1908 and very likely a few decades prior, were composed of the scraps from the year's labours – torn fishing nets and ropes, scraps of leather, broken cork, rags, and whatever else was to hand. Burning these broken things was seen as an auspicious way to bring in the new year.

Some fireball swingers stop at the homes of people they know along the way, leaving their fireballs at the kerbside to enjoy a quick blether and drink before moving on. While the ceremony typically lasts around 20 minutes, this 'extended version' can carry on for up to an hour. First footing follows the fireball event. It used to be that only people born in Stonehaven could participate, but in recent years participation has broadened – though most of the volunteers involved are very local and all receive training to ensure that the fireballs remain tamed.

By: David C. Weinczok



## The Burning of the Clavie



The Burning of the Clavie. Photo: VisitScotland.

Another fire festival unique to the north-east of Scotland is the Burning of the Clavie in Burghead, celebrated on January 11th. Burghead contains the site of a major Pictish fortress astride the Moray Firth, from which its occupants did battle – with varying results – against viking onslights. It is upon the ruins of this very fort that the fire festival takes place.

The eponymous Clavie is a cask split in two and filled with staves. It is carried through the town with the assembled throngs following it until they reach the ramparts of the ancient fort which gives Burghead – with 'Burg' meaning a fort – its name. The Clavie is then affixed to a stone cairn and allowed to burn away. Pieces of the Clavie break off and tumble down the slope and are eagerly collected by locals to keep as good luck charms. Some fragments are sent to people born in Burghead – known as 'Brochers' – who have since moved away or are unable to attend in person.

So, why January 11th? In 1752 another Act was passed which replaced the Julian calendar with the Gregorian calendar across the UK. This resulted in eleven days being 'lost' that year. Many towns across Britain initially balked at the change, but Burghead decided to have it both ways – celebrating the New Year on both the 1st of January and again on the 11th.

## The Yule log

On the smallest yet perhaps the most universal end of the scale are the fire-based traditions of the home. Winter was, and remains, a time to coorie in, to tell tales around the hearth, gather with friends and family to sing and tell stories, and to while away the hours indoors mending things and deepening bonds. As discussed in my article from December 2023, these were the origins of the ceilidh, which simply means a 'gathering'.

Countless Scottish homes from at least the 17th century would have had a Yule log smouldering away in their fireplace. This private celebration of Yule was rarely intruded upon by the Reformation's ban on Christmas. A large log, ideally of ash or birch, was placed in the fire and kept burning for as long as possible. Some sources say an ideal Yule log would burn from December 25th all the way until January 5th.

In Gaelic the Yule log was called the *Cailleach Nollach*, the 'Christmas Oldwife', evoking the ancient Celtic creation goddess and bringer of winter. A female figure was sometimes drawn in chalk on Yule logs to represent her. So long as the Yule log burnt feasting could continue, and by its light and warmth innumerable people came together and outlasted the darkest days of the year. Pieces of the Yule log were often kept for the rest of the year, placed in attics and thresholds to cleanse the household and bring prosperity and peace for the year ahead.

# Celebrating 40 years of Deacon Blue

## *The Scottish Banner speaks to Deacon Blue's Ricky Ross*

Glasgow band Deacon Blue is celebrating 40 years of incredible music with an upcoming tour to Australia and New Zealand. Deacon Blue's Ricky Ross spoke to the Scottish Banner on 40 years of the band, their new album and just what audiences can expect with the upcoming tour.



**Deacon Blue is celebrating 40 years of incredible music. Can you tell us how the band formed and could any of you have ever considered the band would still be playing to audiences around the world four decades later?**

**RR:** We have a kind of floating anniversary, because Dougie the drummer and myself got together for the first-time round in 1985 and over the course of time, over the next year and a half, everyone else came in. We started recording late 86 and put out our first record in 1987, so it's one of these things that took a little while to get together and then once we started the recording with that first record in 1987, and the second one in 1989, we just kind of hit the road and did a lot of live shows. It was not until 1989 that we came to Australia, and oddly enough we never came back until 2019 and then came back two years ago again. As we have come back over these last two tours, the audience has grown enormously, and it's been really exciting to see.

I think the second part to the question is easy to answer, we could not have even considered it back then.

**Deacon Blue formed in Glasgow in 1985 during a time some incredible Scottish bands were on the scene such as Texas, Simple Minds and Hue and Cry. What was it like to be making music at such a golden age for Scottish music?**

**RR:** It certainly was an exciting time, lots of people were putting bands together then. People were coming up from London

to see the Scottish bands. People were making records, sometimes independent records, getting money to make more expensive records and going abroad to record. There was a lot of exciting things happening back then and musicians were getting a chance to work in different environments, and there were good studios to work in as well which was great. When you were in a studio you bumped into other musicians as well, so it felt like Glasgow was a great place for music.

You mention Simple Minds, we didn't know them. They were above our station at the time, they were just zooming ahead and had become huge and played Live Aid in America and that kind of stuff. They were definitely an inspiration for us. And I think the big inspiration at the time was that bands like Simple Minds didn't always go down to London, they made people come to see them. And that was the mantra we had that we would not go anywhere and would let people come and see us in Scotland. And that's kind of what happened and that's how we got started.

**Deacon Blue is synonymous with the city of Glasgow where you signed your first record deal from a car bonnet on the banks of the Clyde. What is it about Glasgow do you love and how much has the city inspired you creatively?**

**RR:** Glasgow is a unique city and has its own character. As a post-industrial city, it's got a great humour, it has a kind of humility, but it also has a great warmth.

There is also an attitude in Glasgow, it doesn't look elsewhere for it, it just knows what it is. The city does not try to import culture as there is enough there. There's a lot of artists, from musicians, painters, theatre, to film makers. There's a lot of stuff going on in Glasgow, because it's a big enough city to carry that, and there are a lot of stories to be told. For me Glasgow is a place where I've always written songs and has been a place I have found the stories to write those songs. For example, the song *Dignity*, the song is set in the south side of Glasgow, and I would look out my window and see council workers walking down the street with brushes and it inspired me to write it. That story and song basically started from looking at the world out the window and then you have a dream.

**Some may be interested to hear you were once an English teacher, do you think that background helped you write such great and timeless songs?**

**RR:** No, I think I've wrote these songs despite being a teacher. I enjoyed teaching but I was working away in the background on my music. I was growing up in the atmosphere of The Beatles and Bob Dylan and these people that were all song writers.

To me song writing was a sexy thing, I had no interest in making videos or dressing up and all of the paraphernalia that surrounds pop music. I had no interest in any of that stuff; I was interested and still am interested in the business of song writing. How songs kind of seep into your heart and change the way you think and make you want to turn around to go into a different direction. That's what has always captured me, and I think that's what I have always tried to chase really.

**Deacon Blue have just released their new album The Great Western Road. How does it make you feel to still be able to share with audiences not just iconic classics like Dignity and Real Gone Kid but also the great new music the band is still creating today?**

**RR:** The funny thing is when you start off with a song, sometimes you start off with very little. Then suddenly emerges a whole idea of a record and suddenly a song comes together and before you know it a couple of songs come together.

The basis of an album starts to form and it's lovely just to let that happen, that creative exercise to take its own course.

Of course, you just hope it connects with people, you know that basically the audience is yourself. You think if I'm interested in this, then maybe someone else will be. Then the next audience is the rest of the band, and if they think the songs have some value then maybe the audience does, and it's as simple as that really. It is lovely when it connects, and I think we've had an amazing reaction to the songs on this record from our audience. People tell us they are enjoying this new album and that has been a lovely thing for us.

**Australian and New Zealand audiences can join in the Deacon Blue 40th anniversary as you tour in January and February. How much are you looking forward to playing in the Southern Hemisphere and what can audiences expect from the upcoming shows?**

**RR:** Well, we have loved this part of the world, we loved it back in 1989, we loved it in 2019, and we loved it in 2023. As I said before that audience has grown and that's been really exciting to watch. People can look forward to the songs they know as well as songs from the new record.

We try and mix it up a bit, we try to make each night special. Whatever we do one night wouldn't necessarily be what we do the next night, we try to make that the best night for that audience. We have just finished a UK tour and that was an exciting time, and a different tour than we've done before, but was again a creative one. We are very excited to come over and the whole band looks forward to playing to audiences in Australia and New Zealand.

**Deacon Blue tour Perth, Adelaide, Thirroul, Sydney, Melbourne and Brisbane between January 28-February 10. For full information and tickets: [www.daltours.cc/deacon-blue](http://www.daltours.cc/deacon-blue)**

**Deacon Blue tour Christchurch, Wellington and Auckland between February 12-15. For full information and tickets: [livenation.co.nz](http://livenation.co.nz).**



Ricky Ross.



Lorraine McIntosh.

# THIS MONTH IN SCOTTISH HISTORY

*Names & Places In The News From Today And The Past*

1 - The first volume of *Encyclopaedia Britannica* was published in Edinburgh, edited by William Smellie. **1768**



1 - First lighthouse in Scotland opened (at Kinnaird Head, Fraserburgh). It was built by Thomas Smith and Robert Stevenson. Kinnaird Head also became the first British location for a radio beacon, in 1929. **1787**

1 - English writer Jo (JK) Rowling moves to Edinburgh where she works on her first *Harry Potter* novel. **1993**

1 - Report of discovery of fossilised dinosaur footprints on the Isle of Skye. **2015**

2 - Mary Slessor, West African missionary, born in Aberdeen. Slessor was adopted by an African tribe, who called her "ma". **1848**

3 - Robert Louis Stevenson died in Samoa. The Edinburgh born author penned classics such as *Treasure Island* (1883), *The Strange Case of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde* (1886) and *Kidnapped* (1886). **1894**

2 - First BBC radio broadcast in Gaelic, a religious address from Aberdeen. **1923**

3 - His Majesty's Theatre in Aberdeen opened and soon became the city's leading centre of entertainment. **1906**

4 - King William I (Lion) died at Stirling and was succeeded by his son Alexander II. **1214**

4 - Treaty of London, releasing James I from his 18 years captivity in England. **1423**

4 - The first issue of children's comic *The Dandy*, including the character Desperate Dan, is published by Dundee-based publisher D. C. Thomson & Co. **1937**

5 - King Francis II of France, husband of Mary Queen of Scots, died. **1560**

5 - Subscriber trunk dialling (STD) is inaugurated on the U.K. telephone network when The Queen dials a call from Bristol to Edinburgh and speaks to the Lord Provost. This new system allowed for automatic dialling of long distance calls without the assistance of switchboard operators. **1958**

5 - Death of Sir Robert Watson-Watt, the Brechin-born inventor of radar. **1973**

6 - King Alexander II crowned at Scone. Alexander died, aged 50, on 6 July 1249 and was buried at Melrose Abbey in the Scottish Borders. **1214**

6 - The Battle of Dryfe Sands took place near Lockerbie, Scottish Borders, resulting in many casualties, it was a battle between the clans of Clan Maxwell and Clan Johnstone. Many were wounded by downward sword strokes known as "Lockerbie Licks". **1593**

6 - Charles Edward Stewart's entry into Derby. A reluctant Charles and his Jacobite army was forced to withdraw from Derby only two days later. **1745**



6 - The last 12 permanent residents leave the Island of Stroma. Sheep are still reared on the island. **1962**

7 - The birth of Henry Stewart, Lord Darnley, the Anglo-Scottish aristocrat and second husband of Mary, Queen of Scots. Mary married Henry, her first cousin, on the 29 July 1565, to be the uncrowned "King Henry". Darnley was the second husband of Mary and father of King James VI of Scotland and James I of England. He was assassinated in February 1567 by person unknown, although Mary's third husband James, Lord Bothwell, was seriously implicated in the murder. **1545**

8 - Mary, Queen of Scots, born Linlithgow Palace. The only surviving child of James V and Mary of Guise, Mary ascended to the Scottish throne following her father's death when she was only six days old. Mary Queen of Scots was beheaded at Fotheringhay Castle in England for her complicity in a plot to murder Queen Elizabeth I at the age of 44 years. **1542**

9 - King Malcolm IV, King of Scotland, died at Jedburgh Castle. **1165**

10 - The death of Duncan Forbes of Culloden, the Lord President of the Court of Session. As a prominent Whig, like many Scots Forbes supported the Hanoverian cause and used his influence to dissuade a number of clans from joining the Jacobites. **1747**

10 - Designer and architect Charles Rennie Mackintosh died in London. Known for his 'Glasgow style' with works such as the House for an Art Lover, the Scotland Street School, and the Glasgow School of Art. **1928**

10 - King Edward VIII abdicated and King George VI acceded to the throne. **1936**

11 - David Brewster, inventor of the kaleidoscope born. **1781**



11 - New modernised trains are introduced on the Glasgow Subway as part of a £288m upgrade of the city's underground rail system. Glasgow has the third-oldest underground rail transit system in the world. **2023**

12 - Anne of Denmark, wife of King James VI, born. **1574**

12 - Work on construction of "Hull 534", the Cunard liner *RMS Queen Mary*, at John Brown & Company's shipyard at Clydebank is suspended due to the Great Depression. **1931**

13 - William Drummond, poet, born. Drummond was one of the first notable Scots poets to write exclusively in English after the Union of the Crowns in 1603. **1585**

13 - The death of Thomas Glover, an industrial pioneer in Japan. Born in Fraserburgh, he is considered a national hero in Japan. Fraser brought the first steam train to Japan, and created the shipyard in Nagasaki which would eventually form the Mitsubishi Corporation. **1911**

13 - New Lanark is designated as a World Heritage Site. The New Lanark cotton mills opened in 1786 and are one of six UNESCO World Heritage Sites in Scotland. **2001**

14 - James V died at Falkland Palace. Mary Queen of Scots succeeded him. **1542**

14 - Glasgow District Underground opened, powered by electricity. **1896**

14 - Will Fyfe, comedian, died. **1947**



14 - University of Stirling instituted by Royal charter. **1967**

15 - The Zoological Society of Glasgow was founded on this day. **1936**

16 - Oliver Cromwell becomes Lord Protector of England, Scotland and Ireland. Cromwell was the only invader of Scotland to conquer the whole country. **1653**

16 - Thomas Blake Glover, founding father of Japan's industrialisation (including Mitsubishi) and Japanese Navy, born Fraserburgh. **1838**

16 - Scotland's largest airline, Flyglobespan, goes into administration. The airline flew routes from Scotland to Europe and North America. **2009**

17 - Marriage contract between James IV and Margaret Tudor signed by King James. **1502**

17 - Lord Kelvin, scientist and inventor, died. **1907**

17 - Petrol rationing was imposed following the Suez crisis and the closure of the canal. **1956**

18 - Many Scottish historical records were lost when the ship *Elizabeth of Burntisland* sank off the English coast. The records had been taken to London by Oliver Cromwell and were being returned to Edinburgh. **1661**

18 - Society of Antiquaries founded and incorporated by Royal Charter in 1783, the Society's purpose is "to investigate both antiquities and natural and civil history in general, with the intention that the talents of humanity should be cultivated and that the study of natural and useful sciences should be promoted". **1780**

18 - Death penalty for murder was formally abolished in Britain. **1969**



18 - Inverness was awarded city status. It was one of three regions in the UK to become a city marking the new millennium and the Queen's Golden Jubilee. Prior to Inverness Dundee was the last Scottish town to receive the distinction in 1889. **2000**

19 - *The Scotsman* newspaper moves to new offices at North Bridge in Edinburgh, remaining there until 1999. **1904**

20 - First General Assembly of the Church of Scotland. **1560**



20 - Entertainer Andy Stewart was born in Glasgow. Stewart is perhaps best known for his STV show, *The White Heather Club*, which began in 1960, and his songs *Ye Canna Shuv Yer Granny Off A Bus* and *Donald Where's Yer Troosers*. He died in 1993. **1933**

20 - Scottish advocate Margaret Kidd becomes the first British woman King's Counsel (senior lawyer) in Britain. **1948**

20 - Aberdeen beat European Cup Winners Hamburg 2-0 to become the first Scottish club to win the UEFA Super Cup. **1983**

21 - Robert Liston, who was born in Linlithgow in 1794, performed the first operation in a British hospital using anaesthetic (ether). **1846**

21 - A Pan Am 747 blew up and crashed at Lockerbie, Dumfries, killing 243 passengers, 16 crew and 11 Lockerbie residents. The Pan American jumbo jet bound for New York from London Heathrow was blown out of the sky by a terrorist bomb and crashes onto the Scottish town of Lockerbie killing all 259 passengers and 11 people on the ground. **1988**

22 - James Edward Stuart, the Old Pretender, son of James II, the deposed Catholic King of England, arrived at Peterhead in north-east Scotland to lead a Jacobite rebellion. **1715**

22 - Pop star Madonna married movie-producer Guy Ritchie at Skibo Castle, putting Dornoch into the media spotlight. The couple has since divorced but the wedding helped create a Scottish wedding boom. **2000**

23 - Major outbreak of cholera in Scotland. **1831**

23 - Fife born accordionist Jimmy Shand died. Shand's recordings are famous throughout the world due to his distinctive playing style on the button accordion, and later on the BBC with *The White Heather Club*. **2000**

24 - King William I (Lion) crowned at Scone. **1165**

24 - Edinburgh Castle surrendered to Oliver Cromwell. **1650**

24 - General George Wade was appointed Commander-in-Chief of the British army in Scotland after he had reported on the need for military roads in the country. **1724**

25 - The Jacobite army reached Glasgow. The military campaign to return a Catholic Stewart king to the throne in place of the Hanoverian Protestant King William III. **1745**

25 - Stone of Destiny removed from Westminster Abbey. Used as the coronation stone of the Scottish kings from the 10th century, the stone was removed by four Scottish university students whose story became a book and movie. The ringleader Ian Hamilton is a former contributor to *the Scottish Banner*. **1950**



25 - Christmas Day becomes a public holiday in Scotland. It was abolished in 1640. **1958**

26 - Alexander III, the King of Scots, was married to Margaret, the daughter of Henry III, King of England, in York. **1251**

27 - King Charles I, imprisoned at Carisbrooke Castle, reached an agreement with the Scots who offered military aid in exchange for a promise to establish Presbyterianism in England (but only for three years). **1647**

27 - Premiere of J M Barrie's play *Peter Pan* at the Duke of York Theatre, London. Barrie was born in Kirriemuir in 1860. **1904**

28 - James IV who liked to gamble played 'bylis' (similar to billiards) with a man described in records as "John Anderson that wantis the feit and handies". There's also a note mentioning that the king gave Anderson 14 shilling. **1501**

28 - Scotland's famous outlaw, Rob "Roy" MacGregor, died. He was immortalised in Sir Walter Scott's novel, *Rob Roy*. **1734**

28 - The Tay Bridge disaster occurred. 75 passengers were killed when the structure collapsed under a train during a storm. **1879**

29 - Charles Macintosh, who patented waterproof fabric, born in Glasgow. **1766**

29 - William Ewart Gladstone, UK Prime Minister on four occasions, born 1809. **1809**

30 - Rangers' first match at their new Ibrox Stadium, with capacity of 75,000. It was a 3-1 victory over Hearts in the Inter-City League. **1899**



30 - The Albion Motor Company was established. At first the firm made motor cars and commercial vehicles, but from 1913 concentrated on the latter. **1899**

31 - Prince Charles Edward Stewart, The Young Pretender, was born in Rome. Known as "Bonnie Prince Charlie", after the Gaelic pronunciation of his name, he led the 1745 Jacobite attempt to overthrow the Hanoverian monarchy. Bonnie Prince Charlie or the Young Pretender, was the son of James, the Old Pretender. **1720**

31 - 72 killed at Glen Cinema Fire, Paisley. **1929**

31 - The farthing coin (a quarter of an old penny) ceased to be legal tender. **1960**

# Iconic West Highland Way under pressure

**New Trust calls for public support to protect Scotland's most iconic trail path.**



Jock MacGillivray inspecting the West Highland Way path in the shadow of Buachaille Etive Mor in Glencoe.



The West Highland Way marks its 45<sup>th</sup> anniversary with a rallying call to the thousands who walk, run and cycle the 96-mile route each year: support is urgently needed to ensure the route remains open for future generations. More than 45,000 people have once again completed the West Highland Way this year.

The trail is a global hiking icon, recognised by National Geographic as one of the world's top 20 trails and contributing an estimated £20 million annually to Scotland's rural economy. A newly established charity – the West Highland Way Trust – is urging the public to back its vital work to raise funds to support projects which maintain and protect the path, bridges, steps and drainage systems that are coming under increasing strain from climate change.

## The enduring appeal of the West Highland Way

Jock MacGillivray, Senior Long-Distance Routes Officer with The Highland Council, has worked on the West Highland Way for



more than 36 years and says the effect of the change in climate over recent years has been striking: "The Long-Distance Route Team are on the path daily, carrying out inspections, maintenance patrols and repairs. We have always strived to carry out any work in a fashion that is effective but discreet. What has become evident over the last three decades is that the rainfall has become more intense, overwhelming drains and culverts that previously coped and threatening vital structures such as bridges. What has been especially noticeable, is that sections of the route, historically unaffected by the winter storms, are now being ravaged during these periods. Our priority has always been to keep the West Highland Way safe and open for walkers, despite the weather which is unrelenting."

Beneath walkers' boots lies a network of hand-built drains, steps and stream crossings designed to channel water and stabilise fragile ground. Once subtle and largely unseen, these defences are now being tested as never before. Without continued investment, key sections risk becoming impassable. That is why the West Highland Way Trust was established earlier this year – to fund the essential, often invisible work carried out by the five Access Authorities, communities and other stakeholders that keep the route safe, sustainable and spectacular. Robert Marshall completed his 100<sup>th</sup> complete West Highland Way recently, using his milestone walk to raise awareness and funds for the new Trust. Carol Matthews, a trustee of the West Highland Way Trust, said: "Robert's achievement showed the depth of connection people feel for this trail. His inspiring walk encouraged tremendous support, with many walkers keen to give back in recognition of their



## Did you know?

- The West Highland Way was Scotland's first official long-distance walking route, designated in 1980. It set the model for what later became the country's network of 29 Great Trails.
- The 96-mile route passes through the Loch Lomond and the Trossachs National Park and four local authority areas: East Dunbartonshire, Stirling, Argyll & Bute, and Highland, linking Milngavie on the edge of Glasgow to Fort William at the foot of Ben Nevis. Together these authorities form the West Highland Way Management Group and will continue to work with the West Highland Way Trust.
- Terrain includes farmland, lochside paths, ancient woodland, moorland, mountain passes and old drove roads. Iconic features include Conic Hill, Loch Lomond, Rannoch Moor, the Devil's Staircase and Glen Nevis.
- The trail is internationally recognised: it was the first European chapter of the International Appalachian Trail (2010) and continues to feature in global rankings of the world's best hikes.
- The route has inspired countless fundraising challenges and has generated millions of pounds for charities across Scotland and beyond.
- The West Highland Way has significant cultural connections: it features in literature, photography, music and art, and has been the subject of television and documentary coverage plus podcasts around the world.

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WEBCAST	
<b>December 19<sup>th</sup> - 31<sup>st</sup></b> available on demand	

This annual concert is a special fundraising event that supports our cultural outreach and scholarship programs.



Full details at  
[pipesofchristmas.com](http://pipesofchristmas.com)



## IN THE SCOTTISH KITCHEN



## Christmas turkey crown with orange

### Ingredients:

#### For the turkey:

2.2kg/4lb 14oz turkey crown  
2 tsp chopped thyme leaves  
50g/1¾oz butter, softened  
2 small oranges, one thinly sliced, one cut in half  
1-2 tbsp vegetable oil

#### For the gravy:

3 tbsp plain flour  
6 tbsp port  
450ml/¾ pint hot turkey or chicken stock  
splash Worcestershire sauce  
2 tbsp soy sauce  
salt and freshly ground black pepper

#### Method:

Preheat the oven to 200C/180C Fan/Gas 6. Loosen the skin on the turkey crown by pushing your fingers (or rubber spatula) between the skin and the meat, moving it around to get to the tricky places and taking care not to tear the skin. Mix the thyme leaves with the softened butter until well combined, then smear the mixture

underneath the skin of the bird. Arrange the orange slices in two neat rows under the skin, on top of the herb butter. Place one of the orange halves under the skin at the neck end of the bird, and any orange trimmings in the neck cavity. Transfer the turkey crown to a small roasting tray. Rub all over with the oil and season with salt and freshly ground black pepper. Roast in the oven for about 1½-2 hours, or until the juices run clear when the turkey is pierced in the thickest part with a skewer and no traces of pink remain. During cooking, check the turkey every 30 minutes, baste occasionally and cover with aluminium foil if it is browning too quickly. About 15 minutes before the end of cooking, squeeze the juice from the remaining half-orange over the turkey. Return the turkey to the oven, uncovered, to allow the skin to crisp up. Transfer the turkey crown to a serving platter and set aside to rest, covered in foil, for 30 minutes. Reserve the meat juices left in the roasting tray.

For the gravy, pour the juices from the roasting tray into a jug and allow to settle. Skim all but 4 tablespoons of the fat from the top, then tip the remaining gravy into a saucepan and heat over a medium heat until the gravy is just simmering. Whisk in the flour until the mixture is smooth and well combined, then pour in the port and stock and whisk again until smooth. Continue to simmer the gravy until it starts to thicken, then add a few drops of Worcestershire sauce and the soy sauce. Bring the gravy to the boil, adding any remaining turkey juices released while the meat was resting. Season, to taste, with salt and freshly ground black pepper, then decant into a warmed serving jug and serve with the turkey.

## Haggis and whisky stuffing

### Ingredients:

1 tbsp. butter  
250g. chestnut purée  
225g. rashers of smoked streaky bacon, chopped  
225g. dried apricots, chopped  
55g. fresh white breadcrumbs  
2 tbsp. chopped sage  
1 onion, diced  
1 tbsp. brown sugar  
2 egg yolks  
1 haggis, cut open, stuffing scooped out, skin discarded  
1 tsp paprika  
1 apple  
3 tbsp. whisky

### Method:

Melt the butter in a large, heavy-based frying pan. Add the diced onion and fry gently for 5 minutes, until softened. Set aside to cool. Meanwhile, set the apricots to soak in the whisky.

Mix together the cooled onion, soaked apricots plus the whisky, chestnut purée, bacon, breadcrumbs, sage, sugar, yolks, haggis stuffing, paprika and apple, mixing well. Stuff your turkey in the usual way, or bake the mixture in a large, greased baking dish or tin for 30-45 minutes.



*This month gather friends and family around and eat perhaps a bit more than you should and celebrate Christmas and Hogmanay with a great range of food and drink. From our table to yours-Happy Holidays!*

## Black Bun - A Hogmanay favourite



### Ingredients:

#### For the pastry

300g/10½oz plain flour  
75g/3oz lard, cubed  
75g/3oz butter, cubed  
pinch of salt  
½ tsp baking powder  
1 free-range egg, beaten, for glazing

#### For the filling:

200g/7oz plain flour  
300g/10½oz raisins  
300g/10½oz currants  
½ tsp ground ginger  
½ tsp ground cinnamon  
½ tsp ground allspice  
½ tsp mixed spice  
¼ tsp ground black pepper  
100g/3½oz dark muscovado sugar  
100g/3½oz mixed peel, chopped  
½ tsp bicarbonate of soda  
2 tbsp. whisky  
1 free-range egg  
3 tbsp. buttermilk

### Method:

For the pastry, sift the flour into a bowl and rub in the lard and butter until the mixture resembles breadcrumbs. Add the salt, baking powder and four tablespoons of cold water and mix to a soft dough. Turn out and knead into a ball. Wrap in cling film and leave to chill in the fridge while you make the filling.

Preheat the oven to 180C/350F/Gas 4 (fan 160C).

For the filling, mix all the ingredients together in a large bowl.

Line a 900g/2lb loaf tin with baking parchment. On a lightly floured surface, roll out two thirds of the pastry to a rectangle large enough to line the tin. Drape into the tin and press up against the sides. Spoon the filling into the tin, pressing down to compress.

Roll out three quarters of the remaining pastry to a rectangle large enough to cover the tin. Dampen the edges of the pastry with water and press the pastry lid on top to seal. Trim the edges and crimp using the tines of a fork. Roll out the remaining pastry, along with any trimmings, and use to make a bow to decorate the top, then attach with a little water.

Glaze with beaten egg and bake for two hours. Remove from the oven and leave to cool in the tin before turning out.

## Christmas carrots

### Ingredients:

9 medium carrots, peeled, topped and tailed  
250g/9oz. butter  
150g/5½oz. sugar  
3 tsp salt  
4 star anise

### Method:

Use a clean scourer to smooth the carrots and remove any peel marks (optional).

In a pan combine 400ml/14fl oz. of water, the butter, sugar, salt and star anise. Bring to the boil, then reduce the heat to a gentle simmer and add the carrots. Cook until the carrots are tender (approximately 45 minutes) and the volume of liquid has reduced by half.

Serve the carrots as a side dish with the reduced cooking liquid poured over.

## Christmas Bannock

### Ingredients:

1 ½ cups flour  
¼ tsp. salt  
3/8 cup confectioners' sugar  
1/3 cup finely minced candied fruit  
1/4 cup finely minced toasted almonds  
3/4 cup unsalted butter, cut into pieces and slightly softened  
1 ½ tbsp. granulated sugar

### Method:

Preheat oven to 325 degrees. To prepare by hand: On a cool work surface, combine flour, salt and sugar; stir to blend. Add fruit and almonds, tossing to coat fruit with flour mixture. Cut in butter with pastry blender or 2 knives until mixture resembles fine crumbs. To prepare in a food processor: In work bowl of food processor, combine flour, salt and confectioners' sugar. Pulse briefly until just blended.

Add fruit, almonds and butter. Pulse several times until mixture resembles fine crumbs. Press dough into 8-inch-square baking pan; sprinkle with granulated sugar. Bake until lightly browned (about 30 minutes).

Immediately cut into 1-inch squares. Leave in pan 10 minutes, then place cubes on wire rack to cool. Makes 64 cookies.

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# 5 Scottish laws that prove Scotland is one of a kind



Picture sourced from Pexels. Photo: Katrin Bolvtsova.

## Scottish solicitors and legal writer Joshua Julien Brouard explores Scotland's quirky laws, from Not Proven verdicts to freedom to roam.

From the courtroom to the countryside, Scottish law reveals just how closely rules can be tied to the way people actually live. Whether protecting open landscapes, shaping marriage ceremonies, or even governing farm work after a few too many drinks, these laws showcase a culture that prizes both practicality and freedom.

Curious? Read on as we explore five Scottish laws that will make you say, 'Only in Scotland!'

### 1. No Strings Attached: Contracts Without Consideration

"In Scotland, contracts don't require consideration to be binding; a reflection of the practical, straightforward nature of Scots and the country's civil law heritage. It's a system that prioritizes intent and agreement over formalities." - Phulah Pall, Head of Immigration at Jones Whyte Solicitors.

In English law, contracts typically require 'consideration' – a benefit or exchange between the parties involved. Scotland, however, takes a different approach: here, simply having the intention to form a contract is generally enough. So how did this distinction arise? The answer lies in Scotland's civil law traditions, which were heavily influenced by Roman law. Roman law placed a strong emphasis on obligation and mutual intent, rather than strict formalities, and these principles carried over into Scots law. This means that Scottish contract law can feel more practical and flexible than its English counterpart. Rather than getting caught up in the technicalities of what counts as a benefit, the focus is on the genuine agreement between parties – a reflection, some might say, of the straightforward and pragmatic nature often associated with the Scottish people. It's a subtle but significant difference that highlights how legal systems evolve in ways that mirror the societies they serve.

And if contracts show Scotland's pragmatic side, criminal law reveals an equally fascinating quirk.

### 2. Guilty, Not Guilty... and the Mystery Verdict

Did you know that in Scotland, criminal trials have historically included more than just 'guilty' or 'not guilty'?

There's a third verdict: 'Not Proven.' While it functions much like a 'Not Guilty' verdict, it carries a slightly different meaning – it signals that there wasn't enough evidence to fully exonerate the accused, leaving an air of ambiguity. The 'Not Proven' verdict has long been a subject of debate. Critics argue that it can be confusing for juries and the public alike, while others see it as a uniquely Scottish safeguard against wrongful convictions.

After years of discussion, the Scottish Parliament finally voted in September 2025 to abolish it. The aim is to simplify the system, remove uncertainty, and make criminal trials clearer and more straightforward for everyone involved. This change marks the end of a centuries-old legal quirk and reflects an ongoing effort to modernize Scottish law while balancing fairness, clarity, and justice. Yet not all of Scotland's quirky laws are about the courtroom or contracts; some are about the great outdoors.

### 3. How Scots Can Legally Wander Almost Anywhere

"The freedom to roam embodies Scotland's respect for personal responsibility and connection to the land. It allows people to explore and enjoy nature while balancing freedom with respect for property and the environment." - Charles Brown, Partner at Jones Whyte Solicitors.

Scotland is often hailed as one of the most progressive countries in the world when it comes to public access to land. Thanks to the Land Reform Act of 2003, the public has the right to access most land and inland water, and in certain circumstances, this can even include private estates. This approach not only benefits locals, allowing them to enjoy Scotland's natural beauty, but also supports tourism by making the country more inviting for walkers, cyclists, and outdoor enthusiasts.

Of course, this freedom comes with responsibility. Whether you're camping in the Highlands, cycling through a scenic trail, or simply taking a stroll, the principle of 'Leave No Trace' is key. Visitors are expected to respect the environment, wildlife, and the land itself, ensuring that Scotland's landscapes remain beautiful and accessible for

generations to come. And when it comes to freedom, there's perhaps no moment more personal than marriage; which, in Scotland, comes with its own legal twist.

### 4. Your Wedding, Your Way: The Scottish Legal Twist

Scotland has long been known for its people-first approach to the law, and few areas reflect this better than how it allows couples to marry. While England and Wales enforce strict formalities, including notice periods and requirements for licensed venues or registrars, Scotland takes a much more flexible approach. Couples can marry in a wider range of settings and be officiated by a broader variety of people.

The focus is on genuine consent rather than rigid formalities, making Scottish law uniquely accommodating and practical for life's big moments. And speaking of life's practicalities, some laws are less romantic; but no less important.

### 5. Tipsy and Tending Cows? Better Not Be in Scotland

"Quirky historical laws, like the prohibition on being drunk while tending livestock, showcase Scotland's practical approach to everyday life and safety. They may seem amusing today, but they reflect a long tradition of balancing personal freedom with community responsibility." - Ross Anderson, Partner at Jones Whyte Solicitors.

While potentially reflective of times past, Scottish law prohibits getting drunk while handling livestock. Peculiar?

Perhaps. Practical? Most definitely. Livestock can be unpredictable, and even the most experienced handler can be put at risk if impaired. This law isn't just about enforcement; it's about protecting both people and animals alike.

In Scotland, a tipsy farmer is no laughing matter. Being under the influence while tending to cows, sheep, or other livestock is not only dangerous but also against the law. It's a reminder that, in rural Scotland, responsibility and care are taken as seriously as tradition and hard work.

### Celebrating Scotland's legal quirks and wisdom

Scotland's laws, quirky, practical, and often steeped in tradition, from progressive freedoms like the right to roam to the now-abolished 'Not Proven' verdict, reveal how a nation's character and values are woven into its legal system.

Ultimately, these legal quirks tell the story of a country where law, life, and tradition are inseparably intertwined.



Picture sourced from Pexels. Photo: Lewis Ashton.

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# Calling the Clans

Welcome to our "Classified" listing of Scottish Clans, Societies and Clubs. If you would like to add your Clan please contact our office for full details. Our contacts are located on page 2. If you are contacting your Clan be sure to tell them you saw them in *the Scottish Banner* and please support these great community organisations.

## Clan Baird Society Worldwide

Membership is open to those descended from Baird, Barde, Bard, Beard, Baird, Brd, Bayard, Bardt, Barth and Biard or varied spellings of the name of Scottish origin.

In addition to the Society newsletter and the opportunity to associate with fellow clansmen members may query the Society genealogist. **For information write:**

Clan Baird Commander  
Richard Baird of Rickerton, Ury and Lochwood  
Rickerton House, Stonehaven, Scotland.  
Hereditary President of Clan Baird Society Worldwide

Debra J. Baird, Ph.D. FSA Scot, CBSW Convener  
Email: djbaird4@gmail.com  
Website: clanbairdsocietyworldwide.co.uk



### CLAN CARRUTHERS SOCIETY - INTERNATIONAL -

#### HEREDITARY CHIEF AND SOCIETY PATRON

Simon Peter Carruthers of Holmains  
Chief of the Name and Arms of Carruthers

Cordially invites all Carruthers and their descendants to join us in preserving our Clan and Family heritage.

Clan Carruthers Society - International officially representing Carruthers worldwide

[www.clancarrutherssociety.org](http://www.clancarrutherssociety.org)  
[clancarrutherssociety@gmail.com](mailto:clancarrutherssociety@gmail.com)

## CLAN DONALD in VICTORIA

Proudly affiliated with Clan Donald Australia, Victorian Scottish Union and Scots of Victoria Coordinating Group.  
Represented at all major Highland gatherings in Victoria.

### CLAN DONALD VICTORIA

President: Mr Norman A. Macdonald

Contact: secretary.clandonaldivic@gmail.com

Formed in 1934, with membership from many MacDonald, McDonald and Macdonald families living in Victoria. Membership available, with dance classes for Scottish Country Dance most Friday evenings in Gardenvale.

### CLAN MACDONALD YARRAVILLE

Hon Chief: Mr Lindsay McDonald

Contact: secretary@clanmacdonaldyarraville.com

A hereditary clan society formed by the children of Norman Hume Macdonald and Johan McKenzie Macdonald (nee Munro) who departed Scotland in 1854.



**FORBES**

[www.CLAN-FORBES.ORG](http://www.CLAN-FORBES.ORG)

**@CLANFORBESSOCIETY**

**@CLANFORBESSOCIETY**

**SIGN UP FOR A FREE NEWSLETTER!**

For more information:  
[Membership@Clan-Forbes.org](mailto:Membership@Clan-Forbes.org)

## CLAN BELL

Invites membership inquiries from persons named Bell (all spellings), their descendants and friends. Various resources available for genealogical research. Quarterly newsletter. Tents hosted at major Scottish games nationwide.

**Website:** [www.ClanBell.org](http://www.ClanBell.org)  
**Online membership:** <https://clanbell.org/membership.html>  
**Facebook:** <https://www.facebook.com/ClanBell>  
**Email:** President@clanbell.org  
**Clan Bell North America**  
49 Greystone Lane NW  
Cartersville, GA, 30121

## CHISHOLM

### Clan Chisholm Society of Australia Inc

Membership is invited from Clan Chisholm descendants of all spellings of the name (Chisholm, Chisolv, Chism, Chisum, Chisam, etc)

Contact: Kim Polley OAM  
PO Box 84, Longford, Tasmania, 7301  
**Email:** [kim.polley13@gmail.com](mailto:kim.polley13@gmail.com)  
[www.clanchisholmsociety.org/public/AUSmembership.php](http://www.clanchisholmsociety.org/public/AUSmembership.php)

## Clan Donnachaidh Society of New South Wales Inc., Australia

### Duncan Robertson Reid

People who bear any of the above names or other Sept names of Clan Donnachaidh "The Children of Duncan" are invited to join in our activities by participating in the Scottish Gatherings held in NSW.

**For information and membership application, contact Richard Harvey, Secretary**  
**Email:** [Ih100@tpg.com.au](mailto:Ih100@tpg.com.au)

## Clan Fraser Society of Australia

Invites all Frasers and Fraser septs to join our clan society.

All members receive a copy of our quarterly newsletter "Strawberry Leaves"  
Membership enquiries to Don Chitts  
Ph: (03) 9754 5120 [donchitts@hotmail.com](mailto:donchitts@hotmail.com)  
**Website:** <http://clanfraseraustralia.org>  
**Facebook:** <https://www.facebook.com/Pages/Clan-Fraser-Society-of-Australia/>  
482236358590288

## The Blair Society for Genealogical Research

Collect, preserve, and disseminate genealogical and historical knowledge and information concerning the Family of BLAIR in its various lines of descent and in all parts of the world.

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



A leading Scottish non-profit cultural and educational organization dedicated to preserving and promoting Scottish and Highland heritage and the arts through a wide variety of programs.

[contact@curriekindred.com](mailto:contact@curriekindred.com)  
[www.learnedkindredofcurrie.com](http://www.learnedkindredofcurrie.com)

## CLAN DONNACHAIDH SOCIETY

Membership open to all who share the Sept names Robertson, Duncan, Reid (and others) and anyone who has an interest in Clan Donnachaidh, its clanlands, history and heritage.

Visit our website for more information on the Society, our Clan Museum and Struan Kirk in Scotland, our DNA project, and to locate a branch near you.

[Website: www.donnachaidh.com](http://www.donnachaidh.com)

E-mail: [admin@donnachaidh.com](mailto:admin@donnachaidh.com)

Facebook: Official Clan Donnachaidh page (Robertsons, Reids, Duncans and others)

## Clan Galbraith Society

Includes name variations such as Galbreath, Culbreath, Gilbraith etc.

DNA testing project, members only databases, Biennial gatherings, blog, Quarterly journal.

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

## Family of Bruce International, Inc.

Family of Bruce International, Inc., the only such organization recognized by the hereditary chief of the Name of Bruce, The Rt. Hon. Earl of Elgin and Kincardine, is a non-profit organization established to create kinship amongst its family members and promote interest in the Family of Bruce and its history. Membership is open to persons who qualify by surname, by descent, or by recognized septs: Carlisle, Carruthers, Crosby, Randolph and Stenhouse.

**Membership inquiries should be directed to:**  
Donald E. Bruce President  
Polly A. (Bruce) Tilford, Secretary  
5561 Earl Young Road  
1051 Eagle Ridge Trail  
Stillwater, Minnesota 55082

## Clan Davidson Society in Australia Inc.

CHIEF Grant Davidson of Davidston cordially invites to membership all who bear one of the Clan Names, and all who can trace their descent from an ancestor bearing the name Davidson or one of the Septs shown on the member application form available from the Clan's Facebook Group link

<https://www.facebook.com/groups/36160657504253/> or by contacting the Hon. Secretary:

Dennis Hill, PO Box 519  
Baulkham Hills NSW 1755  
E:dhill1@bigpond.net.au, P: 0431 527 662

## Edmonstone Clan Society

Invites membership to anyone of the surname or variations: - Edmiston/e, Edmondston, Edmanson, Edmeston, Edmonson, Edmundson, etc. Chieftain Sir Archibald Edmonstone Bt of Duntreath

**Contact: Mal Edmiston**  
3 Laguna Ave  
Kirwan, Qld, 4817  
61 (07) 4755 4370  
m.edmiston@bigpond.com

## CLAN GREGOR SOCIETY

Est: 1822 in Edinburgh Scotland

**Patron:** Sir Malcolm MacGregor of MacGregor Bt

Membership enquiries for USA: [usa@clangregor.com](mailto:usa@clangregor.com)

**Rest of the World:** [membership@clangregor.com](mailto:membership@clangregor.com)



6 The Esplanade  
Broughty Ferry  
DUNDEE, DD5 2EL  
Scotland UK

## Clan Donald Australia

Under the patronage of the High Council of the chiefs of Clan Donald

**High Commissioner** John Angus Currie

**State Commissioners**

NSW John A Currie  
Qld A. Neil Macdonald  
SA Michael Murphy  
Vic Norman A Macdonald  
WA Pamela McDonald

[clandonald.com.au](http://clandonald.com.au)  
[clandonaldnsw.au@gmail.com](mailto:clandonaldnsw.au@gmail.com)

We are a family of many names, come & join your family!

## Elliot Clan Society, U.S.A.

Jim Dougherty - Clan President welcomes membership of all who are connected with this great border family.

Direct inquiries to: Marianne Elliott, Membership Chair  
Email: [marianne@melliott.com](mailto:marianne@melliott.com)  
**Website:** [www.elliotclan-usa.com](http://www.elliotclan-usa.com)

## Clan Gregor Society Australasia

All MacGregors and Septs of our clan are invited to join the Clan Gregor Society Est 1822 If you live in Australia or New Zealand, please contact our clan representative:

Frank McGregor  
PO Box 14 NORTH HOBART TAS 7002  
Email: [clangregoraustralia@gmail.com](mailto:clangregoraustralia@gmail.com)  
Web: [www.clangregor.com](http://www.clangregor.com)

## Clan Gregor Society Australasia

"Royal is our Race"

## HOUSE OF BURNETT INTERNATIONAL, INC.

THE WORLDWIDE BURNETT SOCIETY

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

ARE YOU A BURNETT, BURNET, BURNETTE, BARNET, BARNETT, BARNETTE, BERNIT, BERNAT, BURNAP, BURNAT, MACBURNET, OR OTHER SPELLING VARIATION; MARRIED TO A BURNETT, OR A DESCENDENT?

**President:** Alistair Cameron

**Secretary:** Terry Cameron

[secy.nationalclancameronaustralia@gmail.com](mailto:secy.nationalclancameronaustralia@gmail.com)

[www.clan-cameron.org.au](http://www.clan-cameron.org.au)

## Clan Donald Queensland

Commissioner: Neil Macdonald  
Ph: 0412 090990  
Email: [clandonaldqld@optusnet.com.au](mailto:clandonaldqld@optusnet.com.au)  
Web: [www.clandonaldqld.org](http://www.clandonaldqld.org)

ELIGIBILITY: Those with the name of MacDonald

Macdonald McDonald McDonell, Donald,

OR of one of the Septs of Clan Donald,

OR with a connection through family lineage.

***There is no joy without Clan Donald***

## Clan Farquharson

BRAEMAR

EDDIE & 1315 FORTCAULD

I Force Mae Fieen

I Fear Mae Foe

[ClanFarquharson.us](http://www.ClanFarquharson.us)

## American Clan Gregor Society

Est 1909

Membership inquiries welcomed from MacGregors of all spellings and Septs

Gregor Grier MacAdams MacNish Magruder  
McGehee Gregory King Peter Fletcher  
Gregg Lecky Black and many others

Contact our registrar: **Jeanne P. Lehr**

**11 Ballas Crt.**

**St. Louis, MO 63131-3038**

Phone: 314-432-2842, [registrar@acgsus.org](mailto:registrar@acgsus.org)

website: [www.acgsus.org](http://www.acgsus.org)

## Clan Hamilton Society

Hamiltons and those of Hamilton descent are cordially invited to join the society.

Inquiries to be sent to:  
Sheri Lambert, Treasurer  
P.O. Box 5399  
Vernon Hills, IL 60061  
visit our website:  
[www.clanhamilton.org](http://www.clanhamilton.org)

## McAlpin/e

and variant spellings

Commander: Michael T. McAlpin

### DISCOVER YOUR HERITAGE!

Contact: [membership.macailpein@gmail.com](mailto:membership.macailpein@gmail.com)  
Website: <https://macailpein.com/>



## MacLaren

Clan Labhran

Clan MacLaren Society of Australia

Information about the Clan and application for CMSA membership is available on the website or via the email address below.

Membership is open to MacLarens (all spellings), Septs, individuals and families with an association to the Clan.

<https://clanmaclarena.org/>  
[clanmaclarena@gmail.com](mailto:clanmaclarena@gmail.com)



## Clan MacNicol

Chief: John MacNeacail  
of MacNeacail and Scorrybreac

Contact: Secretary Mal Nicolson  
55 Arcadia Ave  
GYMEA BAY NSW 2227  
[www.clanmacnicol.org](http://www.clanmacnicol.org)

## Clan Hay



April Rich  
28 Oxbow Drive  
Willimantic, CT 06226  
[clanhaymembership@hotmail.com](mailto:clanhaymembership@hotmail.com)

The American Branch of the First Family of Scotland welcomes inquiries from descendants of Hay(s); Haye(s); Hayne(s); Hey(s); Alderton; Armill; Ayer(s); Constable; Con(n); De La Haye; Delgatie; Delgate; D' Ay(e); Dellah'aY; Errol(); Garrad; Garrow; Gifford; Hawson; Haygood; Hayter; Hayward; Haywood; Haynie; Hayden; Hayfield; Hayne(s); Leask(e); Leith; Lester; MacGardagh; Peebles; Peebles; Peoples; Turriff; Tweeddale; Yester

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



## MacDougal, MacDowall, & ALL Associated Families

YOU are invited to join CMSNA!  
We would love to share  
Scottish heritage and  
traditions with YOU!

Learn MORE at  
[www.MacDouall.org](http://www.MacDouall.org)



## Clan MacLaren

MacLaren MacLaurin Lawrence  
Lawson Low[e]

Low[e]ry Law[e] Patterson  
MacPatrick MacRory

Mark A. McLaren, President  
[President@clanmaclarena.org](mailto:President@clanmaclarena.org)



## Clan Macpherson Association

Clan Macpherson welcomes enquiries from Macphersons and members of our Associated families.

Information about local activities visit our web site [www.clan-macpherson.org/branches](http://www.clan-macpherson.org/branches)

Africa. Derek Macpherson  
African.Chairman@clan-macpherson.org

phone +265 999 512 620

Canada. Denise Lagundzin  
Canada.Chairman@clan-macpherson.org

phone +1 519 507 4465

Europe. Bodo Bernd Schmitz  
Europe.Chairman@clan-macpherson.org

phone +0152 538 19 355

New Zealand. Tony Macpherson  
New Zealand.Chairman@clan-macpherson.org

phone +64 274 587 812

Scotland & Northern Ireland. Moray G Catherach  
SandN.I.Chairman@clan-macpherson.org

phone +44 7810 860 528

The Clan Macpherson Museum is located in Newtonmore, Inverness Shire PH20 1DE,

at the junction of the A86 and B9150 It is open from 1<sup>st</sup> April to 31<sup>st</sup> October.

Ph + 44 1540 673 332. See <http://www.clan-macpherson.org/museum/>



## CLAN HOPE of Craighall Society

INTERNATIONAL & AUSTRALIA  
President & Commissioner: Stephen J. Hope  
[president@clanhope.org](mailto:president@clanhope.org)  
[www.clanhope.org](http://www.clanhope.org)

UNITED STATES OF AMERICA  
High Commissioner: Richard Rex Hope  
[highcommissionerusa@clanhope.org](mailto:highcommissionerusa@clanhope.org)

Membership Chair: Cynthia Hope Henderson  
[membership@clanhope.org](mailto:membership@clanhope.org)  
[www.clanhope.org](http://www.clanhope.org)

CANADA  
Commissioner: Scott Hale  
[commissionercanada@clanhope.org](mailto:commissionercanada@clanhope.org)  
[www.clanhope.org](http://www.clanhope.org)

<https://www.facebook.com/groups/ClanHopeofCraighall/>



## Macfie Clan Society of Australia

Invites anyone interested in our Clan and its  
ancestral heritage to contact us. Various Clan names  
include McPhee, MacFee, Macfie, McAfee, Fee, Phee,  
McDuffy, Duffy, McCathie and many more.

For more information please email:  
[colonsay@bigpond.net.au](mailto:colonsay@bigpond.net.au), visit us at  
[facebook.com/clanmacfieaustralia](http://facebook.com/clanmacfieaustralia) or our  
website:[www.clanmacfie.com.au](http://www.clanmacfie.com.au)

## Clan MacLellan

Kevin S Gates  
Treasurer  
2610 Kuykendall Dr.  
Arlington, TX  
76001-6726



Email: [treasurer@clanmaclellan.net](mailto:treasurer@clanmaclellan.net)

Invites all MacLellans and their descendants regardless  
of surname spelling to join in preserving our heritage.  
Various family names are MacLellan(d), McClellan(d),  
McLellan(d) and Gilliland.

Visit our website: [www.clanmaclellan.net](http://www.clanmaclellan.net)



## The Clan MacRae Society of Australia and New Zealand

If your surname is MacRae,  
or you are descended from a person having the  
surname MacRae (any spelling) or that of a Sept of  
the Clan then you are eligible to join our Society.

**Australian Contact:** Roslyn MacRae 0412 291 054  
email: [clanmacraeaustrnz@gmail.com](mailto:clanmacraeaustrnz@gmail.com)

**NZ Contact:** Sue Tregoweth  
email: [sue.treg1@gmail.com](mailto:sue.treg1@gmail.com)



## CLAN IRVING HEREDITARY CHIEF AND PATRON

Rupert Irving of Bonshaw  
Chief of the Name and Arms and 20th Clan Chief

Cordially invites all Border Irvings & Irvines  
and variations of the Name to join in  
preserving our Clan and Family history!

DISCOVER YOUR HERITAGE!  
[www.clanirving.com](http://www.clanirving.com)



## Clan MacInnes Int'l Assn. of Clan MacInnes (Aonghais)

Worldwide, we welcome descendants  
of all spelling variations, including  
(Mc)Angus, (Mc)Carse, (Mc)Ginnis, (Mc)Guenis,  
(Mc)Inch, (Mc)Innes, (Mc)Innis, (Mc)Kinnis,  
(Mc)Masters, (Mc)Neish, (Mc)Ninch, and more.

Scott McInnis, Member Services: [scott@macinnes.org](mailto:scott@macinnes.org)  
or visit [WWW.macinnes.org](http://WWW.macinnes.org)



## Clan MacLennan worldwide

- Newsletters
- Extensive Clan Genealogy & Books
- Videoed talks - linked from Genealogy page
- Highland Games
- DNA Project
- Research assistance

Become a member now  
[www.clanmaclennan-worldwide.com/join](http://www.clanmaclennan-worldwide.com/join)



## Clan MacLeod

### Societies of Australia

Membership is open to MacLeods and Septs (of any variant spelling)  
and descendants. **Septs:** Askey, Beaton, Bethune, Caskie, Harold, Lewis, MacAndie, MacAskill, MacAulay, MacCabe, MacCaig, MacCaskey, MacClure, MacCorkill, MacCrimmon, MacGillechallum, MacHaigh, MacRaild, MacWilliam, Norie, Norman, Tolmie, Williamson

- NSW, ACT & Qld - Peter Macleod 02 4397 3161
- Victoria & Tas - Rhonda McLeod 0411 227 330
- South Australia - Alex McLeod 08 8327 0925
- Western Australia - Ruth MacLeod 08 9364 6334
- Email: [peter.macleod@exemail.com.au](mailto:peter.macleod@exemail.com.au)

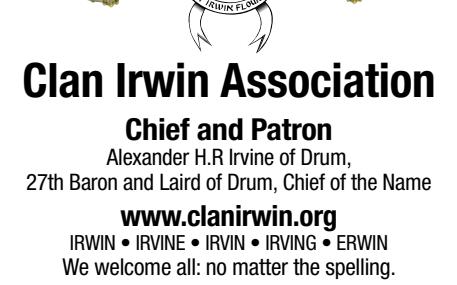


## Clan MacRae Society of North America Granted Arms in 2008

We invite MacRaes of all  
spelling variations and their  
descendants to join our Clan  
MacRae Society. Learn your  
Scottish MacRae history and  
family lineage!

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

Need more info? Contact:  
**Dean McCraw, President**  
912-596-8624  
[dean.mccraw1@gmail.com](mailto:dean.mccraw1@gmail.com)



## Clan Irwin Association

### Chief and Patron

Alexander H.R. Irvine of Drum,  
27th Baron and Laird of Drum, Chief of the Name

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

IRWIN • IRVINE • IRVIN • IRVING • ERWIN

We welcome all: no matter the spelling.



## Clan Mackenzie Society in Australia

Inviting all  
Mackenzies to join  
us in celebrating  
our heritage.

Visit our website for further information

[www.clanmackenzie.org.au](http://www.clanmackenzie.org.au)



## CLAN MACNEIL ASSOCIATION OF AMERICA

invites all MacNeils, regardless of  
surname spelling, to join us in  
celebrating our heritage!

website: [ClanMacNeilUSA.us](http://ClanMacNeilUSA.us)  
Find us on Facebook, Twitter, & Instagram  
@ClanMacNeilUSA



## Clan Little Society, Inc.

Welcoming Little/Lytte/Lytle and the like.

- Promoting our Scottish heritage
- Hosting tents at Scottish games
- Connecting our families
- Maintaining our genealogy and DNA

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

Registered in the State of Georgia, USA

Proud Member of COSCA



## Clan MacKenzie Society of New Zealand

We welcome all MacKenzies

All spellings and from all Septs  
[Secretary.clanmackenzie@gmail.com](mailto:Secretary.clanmackenzie@gmail.com)  
[www.clanmackenzienz.org](http://www.clanmackenzienz.org)



## Clan Morrison Society of North America

Clann MhicGillehoire: Morrison + Gilmore + Brieve

Membership cordially invited from  
those who are connected with this  
great Clan, i.e., Morrison, Morison,  
Gilmour, Gilmer, Gilmore, Murrison or  
descendants of eligible name.

[www.clanmorrison.net](http://www.clanmorrison.net)

**Clan Muirhead Society**  
A NON-PROF.CORP.  
Muirhead, Muirhead, Morehead, Morehead  
and all Variant Names  
[www.clanmuirhead.com](http://www.clanmuirhead.com)  
Rev. Ret. Chev. Raymond L. Morehead, GOTJ, FSA Scot,  
Chief Officer Elect Clan Muirhead Society  
Email- [raymondktj@msn.com](mailto:raymondktj@msn.com) or [raymond@clanmuirhead.com](mailto:raymond@clanmuirhead.com)

**Clan Ross America**  
Representing the great Highland Clan of Ross since 1976.  
  
Michael Ross, President  
Nancy Ross-Anderson, VP Membership  
18865 Cooper Street, Apple Valley, CA92308  
membership@clanross.org  
info@clanross.org  
[www.clanross.org](http://www.clanross.org)

Scottish Associations and Societies



THE AMERICAN-SCOTTISH FOUNDATION, INC.

Through our platform of projects and events ASF helps share and strengthen the heritage and cultural message of Scotland's past and future. A bridge between the United States and Scotland.  
[www.americanscottishfoundation.org](http://www.americanscottishfoundation.org)

 The American-Scottish Foundation semper scotia

**Scottish Gaelic Society of Victoria**  
Founded in 1905  
[www.scottishgaelicvictoria.com](http://www.scottishgaelicvictoria.com)  
**Scottish Gaelic Language Classes**  
Wednesdays 7:00 - 8:30 pm during school terms  
at Kathleen Syme Community Centre,  
251 Faraday St, Carlton and on Zoom.  
**Scottish Gaelic Choir of Victoria**  
Tuesdays 7:00 - 9:00 pm during school terms  
at Kathleen Syme Community Centre,  
251 Faraday St, Carlton and on Zoom.  
Enquires: [scottishgaelicvictoria@gmail.com](mailto:scottishgaelicvictoria@gmail.com)

**CLAN MUNRO ASSOCIATION**  
AUSTRALIA & NEW ZEALAND  
  
We would be pleased to welcome as a member, anyone interested in their Clan heritage with the names; Munro, Munro, Monroe and the septs, Foulis, MacCulloch, Dingwall, MacLullich and Vass.  
BECOME A MEMBER, VISIT  
[www.clanmunroassociation.org.au](http://www.clanmunroassociation.org.au)  
[memberships@clanmunroassociation.org.au](mailto:memberships@clanmunroassociation.org.au)

  
**Clan Sinclair Australia**  
Membership and inquiries from all Sinclairs, Sinclair Septs and Sinclair descendants.  
For further info contact  
President: Wayne Sinclair 0417 146 174  
Secretary: Liane Sinclair 0410 045 263  
E: [clansinclairaustralia@hotmail.com](mailto:clansinclairaustralia@hotmail.com)  
[www.clansinclairaustralia.com](http://www.clansinclairaustralia.com)

  
**Caledonian Society of WA Inc.**  
Promotes Scottish Culture and Traditions in Perth, Western Australia  
For further details contact John: 0427 990 754  
Email: [caledoniansocietyofwainc@gmail.com](mailto:caledoniansocietyofwainc@gmail.com)  
[www.caledoniansocietyofwainc.com](http://www.caledoniansocietyofwainc.com)

  
SHOULDER TO SHOULDER  
The Society of St. Andrew of Scotland (Queensland) Limited  
ABN 30 093 578 860  
Invites membership of all people of Scottish descent or association  
The Secretary, P.O. Box 352, Mt Gravatt, QLD 4122  
[www.standrewsociety.com](http://www.standrewsociety.com)

**Discover Your Nesbitt/Nisbet Ancestry**  
  
[ibydeit.org](http://ibydeit.org)  
[nesbittnisbet.org.uk](http://nesbittnisbet.org.uk)

  
**Clan Sutherland Society in Australia Inc.**  
Contact: M Williams, Secretary  
[clansutherlandsocietyaustralia@gmail.com](mailto:clansutherlandsocietyaustralia@gmail.com)  
<http://goldenvale.wixsite.com/clansutherlandaus>  
Facebook: Clan Sutherland Society in Australia

  
**Hunter Valley Scots Club Inc**  
Promotes and supports all forms of Scottish culture in Newcastle, Hunter Valley and surrounding areas.  
Members and interested people are welcome to attend activities such as Burns Night, Caledonian Night, St Andrew's Day, and other social functions.  
Web: [hvscots.org](http://hvscots.org) Email: [hunterscots@gmail.com](mailto:hunterscots@gmail.com)  
P.O. Box 34, Kotara NSW 2289

  
**Scots of Victoria Coordinating Group**  
Supporting the Scottish Community in Victoria  
Suite 87, 139 Cardigan St Carlton Vic. 3053  
Email: [resource\\_centre@scotsofaus.org.au](mailto:resource_centre@scotsofaus.org.au)  
Website: <https://scotsofaus.org.au>  
Facebook: [Facebook.com/ScotsOfVictoria](https://Facebook.com/ScotsOfVictoria)

**OLIPHANT CLAN & FAMILY ASSOCIATION**  
of North America  
  
The only home for all Clan Oliphant in the Americas.  
Oliphant - Olyphant - Oliphant  
Olifant - Olifent and all descended  
ClanOliphantMembership@gmail.com  
[www.OliphantOfNorthAmerica.org](http://www.OliphantOfNorthAmerica.org)

  
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For Membership Information contact:  
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Email: [secretary@robertburnsclubmelbourne.org.au](mailto:secretary@robertburnsclubmelbourne.org.au)

  
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# Victorian crofting records online for first time



Photo: Scotland's People.

Records of the lives of Highlands and Islands crofters and cottars who fought for their rights more than 140 years ago are online for the first time. Around 16,000 entries from the landmark Napier Commission are now available to search on Scotland's People. The Napier Commission was a public inquiry set up by the government in 1883. It investigated Highlands and Islands crofters' claims of unfair treatment by landlords. A crofter was - and is today - someone who pays a landlord rent to live in a small farm known as a croft. They often work a small piece of land with a few animals grazing on common land.

Cottars were farm labourers or tenants who occupied a cottage on a croft. They sometimes received accommodation

in return for their labour. The Commission asked landowners to fill in forms detailing crofting and farming on their land.

These records became a unique rural census, revealing how families lived, worked, and survived. If your ancestor features in the records you may be able to discover details of their landlord, land, rent, livestock, and other occupations. If your ancestor was a landowner, you can see details of crofters and cottars who rented from them.

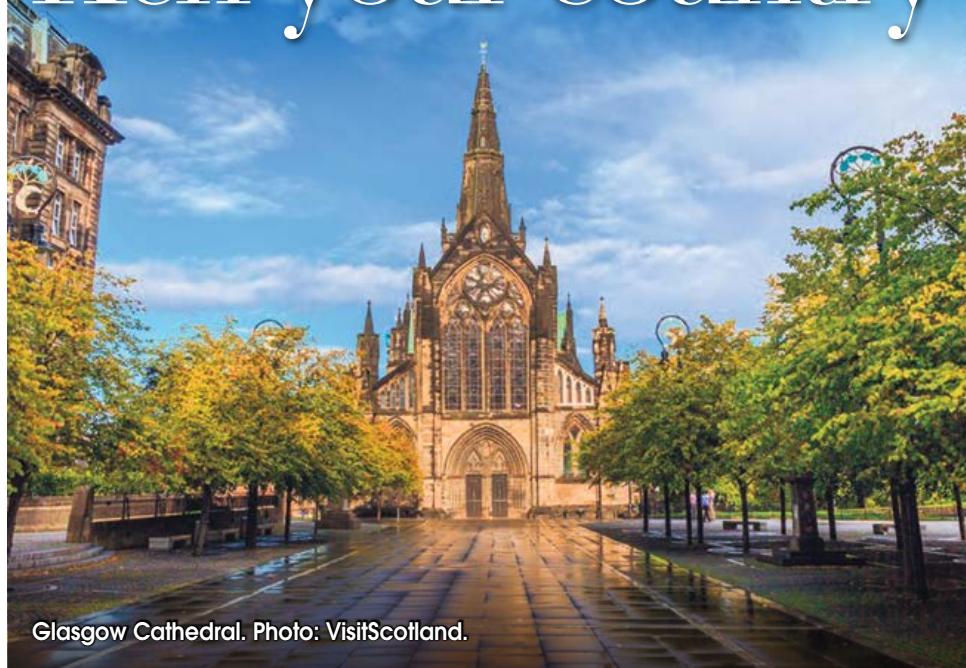
## The voices of ordinary people of Scotland

In 1883 a Commission toured the Highlands and Islands of Scotland. Officially named the 'Royal Commission of Inquiry into the Condition of Crofters and Cottars in the Highlands and Islands', they were tasked with interviewing crofters and cottars to understand and obtain evidence about their way of life and challenges facing them in relation to living conditions, rent and farming.

The Commission was one of the first times that the voices of ordinary people of Scotland were captured and heard within the corridors of power. It provides an unparalleled recording of lived experiences from communities in the Highlands and Islands in this period of time.

*Around 16,000 crofters and cottars can be searched for a fee at: [www.scotlandspeople.gov.uk](http://www.scotlandspeople.gov.uk). The records are also free to browse in the site's Virtual Volumes.*

# Ken your country



Glasgow Cathedral. Photo: VisitScotland.

**H**ow well do you know Scotland? To test your knowledge, we have assembled ten fun questions on its geography, history and culture - but if you get stumped, the solutions can be found underneath. Good luck!

- 1) Name the deepest inland stretch of water in Britain?
- 2) In which city was the first U.S. Burns Club inaugurated in 1847?
- 3) It lives for 60 years and can be found on the beds of several Scottish rivers - what is it?
- 4) Which Scottish hero's dying words were, "Let the piper play Return No More"?
- 5) In auld Scots what was a carling?
- 6) Which mountain dominates the Royal Estate at Balmoral?

- 7) Was Glasgow Cathedral built before or after the Reformation?
- 8) Which islands comprise the group known as the Small Isles?
- 9) Where in Scotland would you find Sodom?
- 10) In auld Scots which part of the body is called the pow?

### Answers

- 1) Loch Morar at 1077 feet.
- 2) New York.
- 3) The freshwater mussel.
- 4) Rob Roy MacGregor.
- 5) An old woman.
- 6) Lochnagar.
- 7) Pre-Reformation.
- 8) Canna, Eigg, Muck and Rum.
- 9) A settlement on Whalsay, Shetland Islands.
- 10) The head.

# Being Scottish is Bags of Fun!

Ditch plastic-go Scottish!

Most bag styles also include a handy inside key/coin zip pouch.



### Single Scottie Canvas Bag

The sturdy canvas bag comes with a lovely pattern of Scottish Terrier Dogs. Includes an interior key/coin pouch and strong black webbed handles.

H30cm W40cm D15cm



### Multi-Sheep Jute Bag

The sturdy bag comes with a colourful pattern of Scottish sheep. With green webbed handle and interior zip key purse.

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### The Multi Scottie Dog Canvas Bag

The sturdy canvas bag comes with a lovely pattern of Scottish Terrier Dogs. Includes an interior key/coin pouch and strong black webbed handles.

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### Red Tartan Jute Bag

Tartan in jute, featuring a red tartan design-no words needed to say Scotland with this bag! With matching red ribbed handles and interior zip key purse.

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### Single Scottie Jute Bag

Jute is a strong plant fibre and this lovely bag features a wee Scottie dog, with red webbed handles and trim and black gusset.

H30cm W30cm D20cm



### The Highland Coo Jute Bag

This shopper includes an iconic Highland coo design-including a wee black coo! Green bag with black ribbed handles.

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### Thistle Jute Bag

This sturdy bag comes with a lovely pattern of Scottish Thistles and purple edging and interior zip key purse.

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### Tartan Scottie Jute Bag

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### Scottish Dialect Canvas Bag

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# WHAT'S ON - SCOTTISH EVENTS

Enjoy Australia and New Zealand's top Scottish event listings in the Scottish Banner. Please check direct with event contacts for the most up to date information. You can also see our latest updates (including events listed across Scotland and North America) or add your event at: [www.scottishbanner.com/events](http://www.scottishbanner.com/events)

## Australia

### DECEMBER 2025

#### Treasures of the Viking Age:

#### The Galloway Hoard

#### 1-January 26, Melbourne, VIC

The Galloway Hoard is the richest find of rare and unique Viking-age objects ever made in Britain or Ireland. Melbourne is the second stop on a world tour of the exhibition, *Treasures of the Viking Age: The Galloway Hoard*, and it is the first time this precious collection of objects has ever travelled outside the United Kingdom. One of Europe's most important archaeological finds of the century will be showcased in a landmark exhibition at Melbourne Museum, 11 Nicholson St. Carlton. Info: [www.museumsvictoria.com.au/melbournemuseum](http://www.museumsvictoria.com.au/melbournemuseum)

#### Daylesford Highland Gathering

#### 6, Daylesford, VIC

Gather your clan and come to Daylesford for a 'wee' bit of Scottish culture with a full day of piping, drumming & dancing at Victoria Park. Info: [www.daylesfordhighland.com](http://www.daylesfordhighland.com)

#### Perth Scottish Fiddlers-Sea Pictures

#### 7, Perth, WA

An afternoon of music and song inspired by the sea, with a range of pieces from Scotland, The Shetland Islands and Scandinavia at St Andrew's Church (hall), 259 Barker Rd, Subiaco. Info: [www.perthscottishfiddlers.com.au](http://www.perthscottishfiddlers.com.au)

#### Mackay & District Pipe Band

#### St Andrews Day Ceilidh

#### 13, Mackay, QLD

Get ready for a night of music, dancing, and a buffet so good you'll forget you came to hear the bagpipes at Northern Beaches Bowls Club. Info: [www.mackaypipeband.com.au](http://www.mackaypipeband.com.au)

#### Pipes of Christmas Concert Webcast

#### 19-31, Virtual event

For nearly three decades, The Pipes of Christmas has brought the joy and beauty of Celtic Christmas traditions to life for the holidays. The beloved concert brings together world-class musicians, soloists, and performers from across America and the UK for a stirring celebration of the Christmas season and the Celtic spirit during this International Concert Highlights online special. Info: [www.pipesofchristmas.com](http://www.pipesofchristmas.com)

#### Gallus Christmas Ceilidh

#### 21, Perth, WA

Gallus Ceilidh Band will keep you spinning and reeling like never before! We believe in enthusiasm before excellence, so come along, gie it a go and swing your pants!! Let our signature combination of traditional Scottish reels and jigs lead you into the dancing, while the surprising twist of rock, dance and techno beats and maybe the odd Christmas favourite at Perth Mess Hall. Info: <https://megatix.com.au/events/gallus-christmas-ceilidh>

## Scotword answers from page 6

### Across:

7 Gloamin	1 Almanac
8 Alloway	2 Kail
10 Ballantrae	3 Sienna
11 Airs	4 Alderman
12 Caravans	5 Moray Firth
14 Muffin	6 Hairpin
15 Sean Connery	9 Prestonpans
19 Bicarb	13 Alexandria
20 Poachers	16 Niblicks
22 Hind	17 Militia
23 Ian Fleming	18 Grannie
25 Finicky	21 Afloat
26 Mallaig	24 Mull

### Down:

#### Happy Christmas

#### 25, Nationwide

*The Scottish Banner* wishes all our readers, advertisers, followers and friends a very Merry Christmas/Nollaig Chridheil!

#### Happy Hogmanay

#### 31, Nationwide

*The Scottish Banner* wishes all our readers, advertisers and friends a very Happy Hogmanay and best wishes for a happy and healthy 2026!

#### Caledonian Society of WA Hogmanay Ceilidh

#### 31, Inglewood, WA

See in the New Year with music by the Heel n Toe Ceilidh Band. Come and enjoy a really fun night out at Bob Daniels Community Centre, 895 Beaufort St. All ages welcome. Info: John: 0427 990 754 or [www.caledoniansocietyofwainc.com](http://www.caledoniansocietyofwainc.com)

#### Hogmanay Hootenanny 2025

#### 31, Trevallyn, TAS

Calling all lovers of Scottish culture and lively celebrations! Prepare to kick off 2026 in true Scottish style at Tasmania's most electrifying NYE event at Max Fry Memorial Hall, 60 Gorge Rd. Info: [www.ceilidh.com.au/hogmanay](http://www.ceilidh.com.au/hogmanay)

#### JANUARY 2026

#### Maryborough Highland Gathering 2026

#### 1, Maryborough, VIC

A new year celebration like no other back for its 163<sup>rd</sup> instalment this New Years Day. Athletes, dancers, musicians, and those who just want to soak up the incredible atmosphere of pipe bands and traditional Scottish culture at Princes Park. Info: [www.highlandsociety.com.au/highland-gathering](http://www.highlandsociety.com.au/highland-gathering)

#### Society of St Andrew of Scotland (Queensland) Burns Supper 2026

#### 23, Brisbane, QLD

Join in the traditional celebration of the life and works of Scotland's national bard over an evening filled with piping and song, fine dining, toasts, fun and friendship at United Service Club Queensland. Info: [www.ssaqlq.tidyhq.com](http://www.ssaqlq.tidyhq.com)

#### Scottish Weekender 2026

#### 23-25, Glenworth Valley, NSW

Pitch your tent, pack your tartan, and come away for a weekend of music, tradition and laughter. Join Mary Kiani and friends for a Burns Supper & Ceilidh. Info: [www.scottishweekender.com.au](http://www.scottishweekender.com.au)

#### Saint Andrew Society of WA Burns Supper

#### 24, Perth, WA

Grab yer kilt & come along and join the Society in celebrating Robert Burns. There will be the traditional speeches, a few Burns' poems, and a 'wee nip' to toast the Bard. Your ticket includes entry into a quality door prize raffle. The night will include a few Scottish reels, jigs, and waltzes to the accompaniment of the Heel N'Toe Ceilidh band. Tickets include entry into a Door prize raffle, as well as a three-course meal at Astral Ballroom, Crown Resort Perth, Great Eastern Highway, Burswood. Info: [www.saintandrew.org.au/upcoming-events](http://www.saintandrew.org.au/upcoming-events)

#### Happy Burns Night

#### 25, Nationwide

Celebrate the life and legacy of Robert Burns on the anniversary of his birth in 1759. The tradition of the Burns Night Supper was first held in 1801 by the poet's friends, five years after his death. Pay tribute to Scotland's National Bard at events across the world!

#### Deacon Blue 40<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Australian Tour

#### 28-February 10, Various venues

Deacon Blue announces 2026 Australian Tour celebrating 40 years of music. Scottish pop-rock icons Deacon Blue is thrilled to announce their return to Australia to celebrate the band's 40<sup>th</sup> anniversary and the release of their latest studio album, *The Great Western Road*. With performances in Perth, Adelaide, Thirroul, Sydney, Melbourne and Brisbane. Info: [www.daltours.cc/deacon-blue](http://www.daltours.cc/deacon-blue)

#### Canberra Burns Club Burns Supper

#### 31, Kambah, ACT

Celebrate Robert Burns with the Canberra Highland Society and Burns Club with Scottish music and food at Canberra Burns Club, 28 Kett St. Info: [www.burnsclub.com.au](http://www.burnsclub.com.au)

## New Zealand

### DECEMBER 2025

#### Wellington Gaelic Club Ceilidh

#### 13, Wellington

A ceilidh is held in the City of Wellington Pipe Band Hall, corner Stoke and Hanson Street Newtown, from 8.00pm – 12.00am. We are a very family-oriented organisation, and we encourage participation by all ages and encourage the opportunity for you to wear some tartan. Info: [wellington-gaelic-club-commun-gaidhealach-wellington.weebly.com](https://wellington-gaelic-club-commun-gaidhealach-wellington.weebly.com)

#### Jenny Mair Highland Square Day 2025

#### 13, Palmerston North

The Jenny Mair Highland Square Day is set again to showcase a raft of talent from across the country, with pipe bands, solo bagpipers and solo drummers converging on The Square. Info: [www.facebook.com/ManawatuScottishSociety](http://www.facebook.com/ManawatuScottishSociety)

#### Pipes of Christmas Concert Webcast

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#### Happy Christmas

#### 25, Nationwide

*The Scottish Banner* wishes all our readers, advertisers, followers and friends a very Merry Christmas/Nollaig Chridheil!

#### RSCDS NZ Branch South Island Summer School Ilam

#### 28-January 5, Christchurch

A week of fun-filled Scottish Country Dancing, music, and social events. Immerse yourself in the rich traditions of Scottish Country Dance and enjoy a vibrant community of dancers from all around New Zealand, Australia, the UK, the USA and many other countries. Info: [sites.google.com/summerschool2025-26.co.nz/rscds-nz-summer-school](https://sites.google.com/summerschool2025-26.co.nz/rscds-nz-summer-school)

#### Happy Hogmanay

#### 31, Nationwide

*The Scottish Banner* wishes all our readers, advertisers and friends a very Happy Hogmanay and best wishes for a happy and healthy 2026!

#### Waipu Highland Games 2025

#### 31, Waipu

End the year celebrating Scotland with pipe band displays, Scottish dance, athletics, Clans and more at Caledonian Park. Info: [www.waipuhighlandgames.co.nz](http://www.waipuhighlandgames.co.nz)

#### JANUARY 2026

#### RNZPBA 2026 Summer School

#### 7-11, Christchurch

The RNZPBA hosts a full-on week of learning in small group and individual sessions, workshops and master classes. There is something for everyone at Summer School no matter your age, stage and ability level. Callum Beaumont and Steven McWhirter will headline the 2026 RNZPBA Summer School at St Andrew's College. Info: [www.rnzpba.com/summer-school/](http://www.rnzpba.com/summer-school/)

#### Happy Burns Night

#### 25, Nationwide

Celebrate the life and legacy of Robert Burns on the anniversary of his birth in 1759. The tradition of the Burns Night Supper was first held in 1801 by the poet's friends, five years after his death. Pay tribute to Scotland's National Bard at events across the world!

#### Turakina Highland Games

#### 31, Turakina

New Zealand's oldest festival of sports, music & dance at the Turakina Domain, Cameron Rd. Info: [www.turakinahighlandgames.co.nz](http://www.turakinahighlandgames.co.nz)

## Scotland

### DECEMBER 2025

#### Christmas at the Botanics

#### 1-30, Edinburgh

The Royal Botanic Garden Edinburgh comes alive with breathtaking light installations and sparkling displays to bring festive cheer to everyone. Info: [www.rbge.org.uk](http://www.rbge.org.uk)

#### Hoolie in the Hydro: The Big Yin

#### 13, Glasgow

Scotland's biggest night of traditional music will celebrate Glasgow comedy and folk music legend Sir Billy Connolly. With a star-studded bill for the Billy tribute, the line up of singers will play their part in marking 60 years since Sir Billy formed the beloved Humblebums and pay tribute to one of Glasgow's most iconic sons as the city celebrates its 850<sup>th</sup> birthday at the OVO Hydro. Info: [www.ovohydro.com/events/detail/hoolie-in-the-hydro-2025](http://www.ovohydro.com/events/detail/hoolie-in-the-hydro-2025)

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#### Happy Christmas

#### 25, Nationwide

*The Scottish Banner* wishes all our readers, advertisers, followers and friends a very Merry Christmas/Nollaig Chridheil!

#### Winterlight

#### 27-31, Stirling

A dazzling new winter festival that will light up your December evenings with spectacular live music, featuring some of the biggest acts in Scottish music including headliners Skerryvore, Mànran, Elephant Sessions and Kinnaris Quintet and a Hogmanay Ceilidh, The Albert Halls Stirling. Info: [www.stirlingevents.org](http://www.stirlingevents.org)

#### Scottish Fiddle Orchestra Hogmanay Concert

## &lt;h4

By: Judy Vickers

# The Christmas theft of the Stone of Destiny

**Seventy-five years ago this month on Christmas Day in 1950 four Scottish university students plotted to steal the historic Stone of Destiny from Westminster Abbey in London and return it to Scotland. The daring heist made worldwide headlines, and it is now housed again in Scotland, but some of the stone may have journeyed far greater as Judy Vickers explains.**



Stone of Destiny. Photo: © Historic Environment Scotland.



Gavin Vernon, Ian Hamilton and Alan Stuart.

**W**hen a policeman caught a couple canoodling in their Ford Anglia outside Westminster Abbey in the early hours of Christmas Day 75 years ago, he was inclined to be indulgent. After all, the pair told him they'd just arrived from Scotland and hadn't been able to find a hotel – and who could resist a "no room at the inn" story at Christmas? The incident sums up all the key parts of the tale of the theft of the Stone of Destiny – hiding in plain sight, events going very far from plan and the making of a legend which is still giving up its secrets today.

Because the couple in the car were Ian Hamilton and Kay Matheson, two of the four Glasgow University students who carried out the notorious heist of the ancient Scottish coronation stone, seized by the English in the 1300s. The other two, Gavin Vernon and Alan Stuart, were at that moment hiding behind the jemmied door of the abbey – and a chunk of the Stone was lying on the back seat of the car.

## Scottish nationalism

The four had arrived in London on December 22, 1950, with the idea of taking the Stone to highlight the cause of Scottish nationalism. All four were members of the Scottish Covenant Association, which was campaigning for a Scottish Parliament. And the iconic Stone was an ideal target – used in coronation of Scottish kings for centuries before being looted by the English king Edward I, known as the "hammer of the Scots", it was housed at the bottom of a coronation throne built specially for the purpose in the abbey.

Firstly, Hamilton had hidden in the abbey at closing time, with the idea of letting the others in when all was quiet, but he was caught and thrown out by the nightwatchman. The next night, Vernon and Stuart were also foiled. In the early hours of Christmas Day morning, they tried a different tack.

The three men jemmied a door, managed to get inside and freed the stone from the throne but to their horror, the heavy block

broke in two as they tried to drag it to the door. Hamilton grabbed the smaller piece of stone – still a hefty 40kg – and scarpered.

As he was heading for the car parked nearby, though, Matheson, the getaway driver, spotted the policeman approaching. "I drew the car in as closely as I could and Ian quickly pushed the stone into the back seat of the car and threw a coat over it," she said later. Moved on by the officer, the couple drove off with the piece of Stone still concealed.

Stuart and Vernon fled the abbey but Hamilton – who would later be a contributor to *the Scottish Banner* – returned and lugged the chunkier piece of Stone out of the abbey by himself. He also found the keys to the second Anglia on the floor of the dark abbey – they had fallen out of his coat pocket earlier. He took the larger piece of stone to Kent where it was buried with the idea it would be returned to Scotland once the inevitable furore calmed down. Matheson took the smaller piece to a friend's house. Hours later, when the theft was discovered, pandemonium broke out.

## Myths

There are plenty of myths about the origins of the Stone – one that it was the Biblical Jacob's pillow and came to Scotland from the Holy Land; another that it came from Egypt, brought by an Egyptian princess, Scota; yet another that it is actually part of the Irish Lia Fáil – also known as the Stone of Destiny – that the High King of Ireland had lent to the ancient Scottish kingdom of Dalraida, who never given it back.

And in fact, Irish nationalists had attempted to steal the Stone in 1884. Modern tests show that it is probably hewn from stone local to Scone – but then that just adds to the legend that Edward was in fact palmed off with a fake. Certainly, many medieval descriptions of the Stone don't match its modern appearance. But wherever it came from – and whether the 66cm by 41cm by 28cm sandstone block with an iron ring on each end was the original object that at least 42 Scottish kings used in their coronation – its seizure from Westminster Abbey was big news. For the first time in

400 years the border between Scotland and England was closed as the hunt began.

The students managed to get the two pieces of Stone back to Scotland where stonemason Robert Gray joined the two pieces back together with metal dowels. Already the myth was that the dowels were hollow and that Gray placed a message in one but just last month another twist emerged. Professor Sally Foster, of the University of Stirling, revealed research showing that Gray gave 34 fragments of the Stone away. Back in early 1951, detectives were closing in on the students – they had discovered that Ian Hamilton had taken out every book on the Stone from the Mitchell Library in Glasgow – so feeling they had made their point, in the April the students left the Stone at Arbroath Abbey, draped in a Scottish flag.

## Returned to Scotland

The Stone was returned to London – ironically driven out of Glasgow Central Police Office in a Jaguar in full view which the waiting press ignored as they assumed it was a ruse. There it remained in a vault until it was used during the coronation of Elizabeth II in 1953.

On the 700<sup>th</sup> anniversary of its theft from Scotland, the Stone was officially returned. Now it is housed in Perth Museum, after having journeyed to London for a brief visit for the coronation of King Charles III in 2023. It still attracts controversy – in July a 35-year-old man from Sydney was arrested and charged with malicious mischief after an alleged hammer attack on the glass case containing the Stone, which was undamaged.

None of the students were ever charged over the theft – the authorities feeling perhaps wisely that they would be in a lose-lose situation with a guilty or not guilty verdict making the foursome either martyrs or heroes. And there would be the tricky matter of having to prove ownership of the Stone. Hamilton, who went on to become a lawyer, said: "I've defended a lot of daft people during 30 years as a criminal lawyer, but I doubt very much if I've defended anyone who was as daft as we were then."



Kay Matheson one of the four students who removed the Stone of Destiny from Westminster Abbey. Photo: Scottish Political Archive, CC BY-SA 2.0, via Wikimedia Commons.



Coronation Chair with Stone of Scone, Westminster Abbey. Photo: Cornell University Library.

## Global fragments

Just last month there was a new twist in the tale of the Stone. Professor Sally Foster, of the University of Stirling, revealed research showing that Robert Gray, the stonemason who had repaired the Stone when it was left in two pieces after the students' heist, had taken 34 fragments, chipped off as part of his repairs which he gave away as gifts. Only one was officially recognised when she began her research, but she has been on the trail of the rest – and has also discovered there are slivers of stone other than those taken in 1951.

More than that, she says some have definitely travelled worldwide – including one which was last heard of in Canada – and she'd be keen to hear from anyone who can help her with her investigations. She told *the Scottish Banner*: "Yes, there are, and are likely, fragments outside Scotland dating from the 1951 repair, and other periods. I know of some examples which also travelled with people on their holidays to show to people, or when they migrated." Several of the fragments were distributed to Scottish politicians, including former First Minister Alex Salmond, but one was gifted to a visiting Australian tourist by Gray. On her death in 1967, the family donated the fragment, accompanying letter of authentication and Gray's business card, to Queensland Museum.

Another ended up in Canada. Prof Foster says: "Journalist Dick Sanburn received numbered fragment 25 in April 1951 – it ended up behind his desk as editor of *Calgary Herald*. I'd love to know what happened to it after that!" And she added: "From public responses since 17 Jan 2025, I know that tiny, tiny fragments and grains of the Stone (sweepings, even) were collected by another person present at the repair. Some of these have ended up with families presently in Canada and Norway, some mounted in jewellery. The 1951 fragments might have been given predominantly to people who lived in Scotland from 1951 to 1974 (the period in which we know Gray distributed them), but they moved, or the people to whom they donated them have moved. I don't yet have a full picture of what happened to all the numbered, nor indeed unnumbered fragments, but I would anticipate that some of their journeys have been global, and a concentration within the Scottish diaspora is inherently likely."

**If you have any information on any Stone of Destiny fragments, you can get in touch with Prof Foster via the contact page at <https://thestone.stir.ac.uk/>.**



A fragment of the Stone gifted to Queensland Museum, with its certificate of authenticity. Photo: Queensland Museum - Peter Waddington.

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