

Hogmanay - Scottish New Year

Joanna Carter

BACKGROUND

New Year's Eve is celebrated all around the world but perhaps the Scots have the last word on how to really celebrate it. In Scotland there is a long rich heritage associated with this event. There is even a special name for it **Hogmanay**. Until recently, the 31st of December was considered more important than Christmas in Scotland. Many Scottish people had to work over Christmas in the past and so their winter holiday was at New Year when family and friends gathered for a party and exchanged kisses and presents, especially for the children. This occasion came to be known as 'hogmanay' and the tradition still continues today. In origin it is a much, much older celebration, probably inherited from the Vikings, for whom observing the passing of the shortest day was important.

Why is it called Hogmanay?

There is a lot of confusion over the origin of the word hogmanay. Nobody knows the real reason for the name, but there are many theories. Some say it comes from an Anglo Saxon word meaning Holy Month, others that it comes from the Gaelic *oge maidne* which means New Morning. There is even a modern day interpretation which is that it really means **Hug Many**, as it is important to embrace and kiss friends and relatives after midnight!

There are many ancient traditions that surround Hogmanay, that take place before and after midnight.

Before Midnight

Before *the bells* strike midnight, it's important to have the house very clean and tidy and to be sure that any rubbish has been taken outside. Also all debts must be settled and nobody must owe anybody money. The idea of this is that people *clear out* the old year and welcome in the young **New Year** on a happy note.

After Midnight

Immediately after the bells have rung, it's traditional for people to cross arms and join hands in a

large circle to sing *For Auld Lang Syne*. This song is now known all over Britain and in other English speaking countries, but it was originally written by Scotland's greatest poet Robert Burns, who often wrote in dialect. *For auld lang syne* means *in memory of past times*.

*Should auld acquaintance be forgot
And never brought to mind
Should auld acquaintance be forgot
For the sake of auld lang syne.
For auld lang syne, my dear,
For auld lang syne
We'll take a cup of kindness yet,
For the sake of auld lang syne.*

First Footing

After midnight it is also traditional to visit (or *first foot*) friends' and neighbours' houses. People should bring a gift of whisky, a lump of coal and some thing to eat: black bun, oat cakes or a delicious biscuit called shortbread. Those who stay at home hope that the first over the door step or the first foot is a tall, dark and handsome man as this brings good luck! Many gifts are exchanged and people offer *Het Pints* – a mix of a special beer called ale, nutmeg, whisky, sugar and eggs!

Recipe for Shortbread

150 g plain flour
50 g caster sugar
100 g butter

Sieve the flour into a bowl. Add the sugar. Rub in the butter. The mixture will be crumbly at first – continue until it clings together in heavy lumps. Put the mixture on a lightly floured board. Knead it lightly. Roll it out to a 20 cm circle and place on a greased baking tray. Prick over the top with a fork and flute the edges with your fingers and mark into 8/10 portions. Bake for 30 to 35 minutes at 170°C until cooked but not brown. Leave on the tray to cool slightly. Then lift off with a fish slice or similar and put it on a cake rack to cool completely.

Fire Ceremonies

In many parts of Scotland, there are ceremonies with fires, fireworks and torch processions at Hogmanay. Perhaps the most spectacular ceremony takes place in Stonehaven, near Aberdeen. Here giant fireballs are lit and swung around on two metre-long

