

The Right Place at the Right Time

The stage was getting ready for Robert Burns. All the props were dragged to center stage. The scenes were a kaleidoscopic mix of political, religious, philosophical and personal backdrops that thrust Robert Burns into the precise entrance upon a theater teeming with potential creative energy. The cast of characters were drawn together to experience the soil of poverty and constant struggle and how their lives were the midwife of the flowering of Scottish language.

The sentiments of the English reduced all traces of Scottish language by selectively endorsing all literary works fluent in the English style. In the late 1750's the slaughter of Culloden had not faded from Scottish minds. **1** The admonition of wearing the highland plaid still evoked stiff penalties. As decreed from the Act of 1746, whereby King George II set specific forbidden attire for the Scots, not a "kilt, trowse, shoulder belt or any part whatsoever of what peculiarly belongs to the Highland Garb".**2** Burns was born the same year that Mozart and Handel passed away and John Wesley was at the height of his popularity. **3** The climate of the world was still in the threshold of new discoveries. The interiors of Africa, Asia and South America remained unexplored. **4**

Robert Fergusson's poetry had just scratched the surface of Scottish tradition with the threads of spoken dialects of Edinburgh, Aberdeenshire and Fife. When he died at the age of twenty four, Fergusson's work was green and still on the vine, although within reach of young Burns. Although his father, William Burns, was an ill-fated tenant farmer wedded to seventy acres of poorly drained ground, his engaging discussions about theology and philosophy had a significant impact on his son. Agnes Burns, his mother, possessed little worldly knowledge, though she was brimming with story and song. The hired housekeeper, Betty Davidson, was rife with superstitious tales concerning ghosts, fairies, wraiths, kelpies, dragons, apparitions, elf-candles, dead-lights, war-locks, spunkies, cantraps, giants, and other trumpery. **5** Such strange fruit was the springboard for Burns' "Tam O'Shanter" narrative. The red, red rose of his future wife, Jean Armour blushed the heart of Robert Burns and gave him the seeds for future poems. John Murdoch was the innovative and patient young school master providing the groundwork for literary challenges. It was James Johnson who was to step out on to this colorful stage and provide a platform for Burns to write and rewrite old Scottish songs for his undertaking of The Scots Musical Museum.

Robert Burns Roots and Early Schooling

In the village of Alloway, Ayrshire on a bitter cold morning on January 25th, 1759 the tiny wailing cry of Robert Burns broke through the bleak mid-winter.

Our monarch's hindmost year but ane
Was five-and-twenty days begun,
'twas then a blast o'Janwar win' (January wind)
Blew hanel in on Robin. **6** (first gift)

As young Burns character unfolds, his dreary plight of being tied to the craggy farm land engulfs him in despair. He worked very hard on the family farm, but languished more in the landscape of his dreams. "I formed many connections", he wrote later, looking back on his youth, "with youngers who possessed superior advantages, the youngling actors who were busy with the rehearsal of parts in which they were shortly to appear on that stage where, alas, I was destined to drudge behind the scenes." **7** Such is an actors sentiment when they are not privy to the last chapter of the script!

William Burnes (old spelling of his name) greatest desire was to give his children an education and moral foundation. Native of Kineardineshire, Burns' father was a well educated peasant with a wife who was fond of reading, although she could not write. Dr. Currie, the first editor of Burns' works states: "In the very humblest condition of the Scottish peasants every one can read, and most persons are more or less skilled in writing and arithmetic; and under the disguise of their uncouth appearance and of their peculiar manners and dialect, a stranger will discover that they possess a curiosity and have obtained a degree of information corresponding to these acquirements." **8**

Robert Burns - The Student

Five families of the surrounding villages resolved to hire an eighteen year old lad, John Murdock to teach their children. Teaching at a small schoolhouse in Alloway, Murdoch's approach to his students afforded them with a vast resource for intellectual stimulation. Prior to schooling, Burns and his younger brother, Gilbert, were introduced to English at home. They made rapid progress in class. Murdoch concurs: "As soon as they were capable of it, I taught them to turn verse into its natural prose order; sometimes to substitute synonymous expressions for poetical words, and supply all the ellipses..." **9** Influential English literature before the eighteenth century included Shakespeare, Milton, Arthur Masson, and Dryden, which provided Burns with a solid working of English expression. At the time most Scottish writers followed the English model of writing and ignored any Scottish idioms. At home he was exposed to a traditional form of prose through hearing his mother's ballads and native songs. "In the Scottish folk tradition and in the literary tradition represented by Ramsay and Fergusson he was eventually to find models to suit his own genius in poetry..." **10**

By the time Burns was fifteen he despaired of the demands of harsh labor that was needed to help run the farm. He describes; "the cheerless gloom of a hermit with the unceasing moil of a galley-slave", **11** A bright spot in this dreary backdrop is the presence of the lassies. It's no surprise that the wafting fragrance of love would so move him to consider composing a rhyme. "I was not so presumptive as to imagine that I could make verses like printed ones, composed by men who had Greek and Latin....I saw no reason why I might not rhyme as well as he...". **12** Once ignited with the animation of love, his natural inclination to rhyme flowed forth as the "spontaneous language of my heart". **13** In the course of breathing life in the poetic heart of language, women were inextricably drawn to the poet and as a result, he fathered eleven (six illegitimate) children in the process. "My passions when once they were lighted up, raged like so many devils, til they got vent in rhyme; and then conning over my verses, like a spell, soothed all into quiet" **14**

The Tarbolton Bachelors Club

It was in the town of Tarbolton, south of their farm in Lochlie, Burns found friendly countrymen of merit and an atmosphere of vitality and encouragement. It was this supportive rabble that could lend an ear to his pontificating pen strokes. In November 1780, the casual pub meetings and the companions that served as his audience, would later turn into the Tarbolton Bachelors' Club. Here in the crackle of night Burns and his friends would talk about religion, philosophy, or any topic of debate. This gave Burns the needed intellectual excitement that he could not share with the women of his life. Robert Burns took the lead in forming this exclusive club, outlining the rules and regulations. Burns rules include: "In short, the proper person for this Society is, a cheerful, honest-hearted lad; who, if he has a friend that is true, and a mistress that is kind, and as much wealth as genteely to make both ends meet - is just as happy as this world can make him." **15** It was this club and its agreeable members that would later honor Robert Burns by creating the first "Burns' Supper" in 1801.

The Kilmarnock Edition

In 1784, Robert Burns began to compile his poems in a leather bound journal he called the "Commonplace Book;" this reflected standard English speech mixed with the Scottish tongue. This book was to contain many musings, slivers of songs and honest contemplations. Sandwiched between the frustrations of the farm and Jean Amours' father threat to sue for the care of his illegitimate twins, Burns was enveloped in despondency. His yearning is reflected in the comments about his status and hunger for recognition:

We have never had one Scotch Poet of any eminence, to make the fertile banks of Irvine, the romantic woodlands and sequestered scenes on Aire and the healthy mountainous source and winding sweep of Doon emulate Tay, Forth, Ettrick, Tweed and this is a complaint I would gladly remedy, but Alas! I am far unequal to the task, both in native genius and education.- Obscure I am and I must be, though no young Poet, nor young Solider's heart ever beat more fondly for fame than mine. **16**

Despite the death of his father and misfortune biting at his heels, he was even more determined to write. In 1786, Burns published a volume of his poems east of Tarbolton at Kilmarnock, titled "Poems Chiefly in the Scottish Dialect". The Kilmarnock volume was a rare concoction of songs and poems, some written in English, but most outfitted in a prominent display of the commoners' Scottish speech. The early works of Robert Burns were never meant for avid readers, so the rustic and honest air of rural sentiments and fears permeate the Kilmarnock edition; this spelled success for Burns. Some of his notable early pieces in the book are: "The Twa Dogs," "Scotch Drink," "The Holy Fair," "Address to the Deil," "The Death and Dying Words of Poor Maille," "To a Mouse" and "The Cotter's Saturday Night." **17** To his delight the collection was a great success appealing to the local country folk and the highbrow of literary circles in Edinburgh. Burns' command performance of delicate subjects range from hypocrisy of the Calvinistic theology and dogma to the humorous and empathetic portrayal of a mouse's battle for survival handled with self assurance and craftiness.

“To a Mouse”
But Mousie, thou art no thy lane (Not alone)
In proving foresight may be vain;
The best laid schemes o’ mice an’ men
Gang aft a-gley. (Go often wrong)
An’ lea’e us nought but grief an’ pain, (Leave)
For promis’d joy!

The gulf between the rich and poor, concerned Burns:

“A Man’s a Man For That”
Is there for honest Poverty,
That hangs his head, an’ a ‘that,
The coward slave, we pass him by;
We dare be poor for a’that
For a’that, an’a that,
Our toils obscure, and a’that,
The rank is but the guinea stamp;
The man’s the gowd for a’that.

The literati of Edinburgh welcomed Burns and he quickly became the honored guest of the elite. For a brief time he enjoyed the celebratory response to his work. David Daiches states in his book, Robert Burns,

He was fully aware that in Edinburgh he was acting a part, that he was being trotted around the drawing rooms of the city to be on exhibition like “the learned pig in the Grassmarket”. He knew that it was not the quality of his poetry but the fact that he was a “Heaven-taught ploughman” that accounted for his social triumphs and he wondered uneasily how long it would last. **18**

Despite his achievement, Burns’ found financial support elusive, which prompted him to take on employment as an Excise Officer.

The Simple Bard, unbroke by rules of Art,
He pours the wild effusions of the heart;
And if inspir’d, tis Nature’s pow’rs inspire;
Her’s all the melting thrill, and her’s the kindling fire.**19**
Anonymous (front page of the Kilmarnock edition, 1786)

Robert Burns - The Songwriter

While in Edinburgh Burns met James Johnson, a passionate collector of Scottish songs. He was an engraver who was in the process of collecting and publishing old Scots, English and Irish melodies. Johnson approached Burns for assistance with the collection and Burns became totally captivated by the project. The title of the work was The Scots Musical Museum and between early 1787 and late in 1792 represented the bulk of Burns’ poetic production. **20**

This also prompted George Thomson to ask for Burns help in his collection called Select Scottish Airs. Burns had a poetic ear for the folk idiom and also a unique gift for writing verses and a chorus to a given air. **21** His attention was now solely on rewriting and restoring verses to the fragments of folk songs. He amiably poured himself into this project even without the merits of compensation. David Daiches states in his book, Robert Burns:

He could be tender, passionate, bawdy, satirical, jocular or plaintive. But always his songs were concerned with the realized moment of experience. His love songs are the antithesis of the love poems of Shelly: there is no philosophizing or Platonic enlargement about them; they concentrate on the experiencing self, indeed on what George Orwell in another connection called the “unofficial self”. One of the reasons for the worldwide popularity of Burns songs is that they tell the truth about human feelings without falsification or distortion. **22**

He created songs from fragments without melodies and songs with just parts of a verse or chorus. Sometimes he would just rely on a tune a fisherman would whistle to him as he journeyed across the bank and braes of Scotland. His desire to match his wits with the best of Scottish melody brought him innumerable benefits; “As the request you make to me,” Burns replied on 16 September, “will positively add to my enjoyment in complying with it, I shall enter into your undertaking with all the small portion of abilities I have, strained to their utmost exertion by the impulse of Enthusiasm.” **23**

Robert Burns and the Lassies

It was the fires of love that first ignited Burns passionate expression into poetry; therefore it was natural for the romantic side of Burns, with his charming, down to earth manner, to be a magnet for the lassies. His affairs with Nelly Kilpatrick,, Clarinda (Nancy), Peggy Thomson and Alison Begbie, Elizabeth Paton, and Mary Campbell gave birth to more than just the flames of love. Elizabeth Paton and Mary Campbell both bore his illegitimate children. Jean Armour had two sets of twins by Burns before he claimed her as a wife. Burns’ slippery attempts to avoid the trappings of marriage followed him even after his return from Edinburgh’s elite literary circles. By 1788 he finally acknowledged himself as Jean Armour’s husband. With his success in Edinburgh from his writing, Jean’s father gave his permission to allow Jean to marry the poor ploughman poet. Such an acknowledgment was enough in Scots law to constitute a retrospective legal marriage.**24** Even the day of Robert Burns passing, Jean Armour gave birth to another of Burns progeny, nine children all together. Although Jean Armour stayed by Burns’ side for many years she was not able to share his interest in poetry, song and intellectual discourse which created a social chasm in Burns’ life. He sought out convivial friends and parties while Jean sat at home.

Robert Burns - Caledonia’s Bard

Burns weakened condition from rheumatic fever resulted in his death in 1796. Burns fastidious energy encapsulated the remnants of a scattered Scottish musical culture and bound it with

his enthusiasm for all generations to read, play and enjoy. If Burns were alive today, he would relish being considered a universal man appealing to all classes. In a time when English was accepted as the more genteel avenue, Burns went forth with a craggy countryman's dialect that spoke to even the prodigious gentry. His command performance at revealing ordinary emotions with astute clarity and wit engage today's modern musicians and readers. The stage is no longer set in just Alloway Scotland. The cast of characters have come and gone, each playing their role to emancipate beauty, zeal and pride in the muses of Scotland.

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Robert Burns' Time Line

1707 - Scotland loses in Parliament and is no longer an independent country, but part of Great Britain, (still Presbyterian though)

1730 - Allan Ramsey published Tea-Table Miscellany book of Scottish songs

1745 - The Jacobite's attempt to restore a Stewart king to the British Throne fail

1750 - William Burnes moves to Alloway

1757 - William Burnes wed to Agnes Brown of Kirkoswald

1759 - Robert Burns born in Alloway, January 25th

1765 - Robert and his brother, Gilbert, sent to John Murdock's school

1766 - The Burns family moves to Mount Oliphant, rents a farm

1773 - Burns writes his first song, Handsome Nell, for Nellie Kirkpatrick: Burns' sent to board with Murdoch at Ayr; Robert Fergusson's only book of poems published

1774 - Death of Robert Fergusson

1775 - Burns goes to the town of Kirkoswald to learn mensuration, surveying and dialing; Meets Peggy Thomson

1776 - The American Revolution

1777 - Burns family moves to Lochlie at Whitsun

1780 - The Tarbolton Bachelors' Club formed; Meets Alison Begbie

1781 - Robert Burns becomes a Freemason; Burn moves to Irvine to learn flax-dressing

1782 - Returns to Lochlie

1783 - Robert Burns starts his Commonplace Book

1784 - Death of William Burnes; Robert moves the family to Mossgiel

1785 - Burns completes the Kilmarnock Edition; meets Jean Armour; Elizabeth Paton bears his illegitimate child

- 1786 - Kilmarnock Edition published; Jean Armour bears twins; Burns arrives in Edinburgh; Mary Campbell bears his illegitimate child; Death of "Highland Mary"; Writes Address to a Haggis
- 1787 - First Edinburgh Edition of poems published by William Creech; First volume of the Scots Musical Museum published; Tours the West Highlands; Meets Clarinda
- 1788 - Acknowledges Jean Armour as wife; The 2nd volume of Scots Musical Museum is published
- 1789 - Burns becomes an Exciseman
- 1790 - The 3rd volume of Scots Musical Museum is published
- 1791 - "Tam o'Shanter" published; Moves to Dumfries
- 1792 - Burns promoted to Dumfries Pert Division and organizes capture of smuggling schooner the Rosamond; The 4th volume of Scots Musical Museum is published; submits songs to George Thomson for his collection Select Scottish Airs
- 1793 - Burns moves to Mill Vennel; The 2nd edition of his poems is published by William Creech; The French Revolution
- 1794 - Reissue of the Second Edinburgh edition; Tour of Galloway
- 1795 - Burns joins the Royal Dumfries Volunteers; Burns' daughter dies; Burns becomes ill with rheumatic fever
- 1796 - Death of Burns at Dumfries on July 21st; Jean bears their 9th child
- 1815 - Burns remains moved to the Mausoleum in St. Michael's Kirkyard from their original resting place
- 1834 - Death of Jean Armour

“Ev’n then a wish, I mind its pow’r
A wish that to my latest hour
Shall strongly heave my breast;
That I for puir auld Scotland’s sake,
Some useful plan or book could make,
Or sing a sang at least!”
1759-96

The Celebrated Burns Supper

The first “supper” was an informal spontaneous act of appreciation by Robert Burns friends. In his time, male companions would raise a pint and sip a dram of whiskey in a local village pub. The atmosphere would be replete with thoughtful conversation, the telling of stories and honest friendship of like-minded individuals. Enveloped in the dim lights of the pub, fiddle music would waft through the last morsels of a relaxed dinner. In the comfort of the pub, Auld Lang Syne was sung with friends and each gave toasts to the lassies. No great fanfare, no pipes, harps or dancing attended this gathering, yet the warmth and genuine appreciation for the written word and open minded debates laid the groundwork for Scotland’s contribution to the world.

Today the rituals and pageantry of the Burns’ supper celebrations affords us a glimpse of Robert Burns poetry and a slice of Scottish spirit. This portrait of time provokes insightful memories of a man who did not make strategic military decisions for his native Scotland’s defense, just the one fixed upon the murmur of his heart.....to write poetry. Scotland’s hero won a nation without firing a shot.

In July 1801, after his death, close friends of Robert Burns initiated the “Burns’ Supper.” Later the date changed to the anniversary of his birth on January 25th. Since 1859, close to nine hundred celebrations were reported from all parts of the globe. As far away as Moscow, Tokyo, Hong Kong, Saudia Arabia, Australia, England, New Zealand, Newfoundland, Canada, America and the heart of Burns country Ayrshire in Scotland, tables are laden with tartan tablecloths and Scottish fare all to welcome the Bard’s spirit of camaraderie and frank discussion.

Although Scots take this day seriously, it is punctuated with gaiety and laughter. Dress kilts and evening gowns complete with a clan tartan sash grace the shoulders of today’s guests. To enter the full spirit of the Burns supper, 17th century costumes add a flair of authenticity to the festivities. In Burns day the casual get-together’s were the territory of only the male indulgence. As the years gathered momentum, women made their presence more indispensable with preparations, planning and a female perspective. Presently the Burns Night also includes the lassies! Supporters display a full spectrum of expression during the Burns Supper ritual. While some may celebrate with scholars and formality, other can denigrate to quite a drunken recital! However, most festivities fall in the middle, with outspoken cheer and whimsy and a few who have kissed the whiskey “quaich” to excess.

The Welcoming Grace

The pipe bands gallantly parade through the banquet hall to signal the opening of ceremonies and the chieftain rises to welcome the guests. The tune of “Brose and Butter” or another appropriate tune welcomes all the guests.

The Selkirk Grace

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

A Burns’ night would not be complete without the fanfare of the procession of “haggis wi’ a’ the honours.” The ceremonial march begins with the traditional fare of haggis proudly displayed on the chef’s shoulders followed by the Chieftain’s piper and drummer. The procession is followed by the whiskey bearer, to which he will offer a dram to the chef, Chief, piper and drummer. “Slainte mhath!” (To your health!) and resounding applause ensues! Although haggis was probably not at Burns and his comrades casual meal, this dish so aptly represents Scotland, that it was natural for it to find a home here in this celebration of national spirit. The haggis, as Burns knew it, and as we know it today, is a tribute to the Scottish gift of making something of excellence out of cheap materials including ingredients of heart, lights and liver, beef-suet, oatmeal and onions minced together and sewn into the large stomach bag of a sheep. **17**

Address to a Haggis

Fair fa’ your honest sonsie face (plump)
Great Chieftain o’ the Pudding-race!
Aboon them a ‘e tak your place, (above)
Painch, tripe or thairm: (stomach) (intestine)
Weel are ye wordy of a grace (worthy)
As lang’s my arm

The groaning trencher there ye fill, (serving dish)
Your hurdies like a distant hill, (hips)
Your pin was help to mend a mill (skewer)
In time o’ need
While thro’ your pores the dews distil
Like amber bead.

His knife see Rustic-labour dight, (wipe)
An’ cut you up wi’ ready slight, (skill)

Trenching your gushing entrails bright
Like onie ditch; (any)
And then, O what a glorious sight,
Warm-reekin, rich!

Then horn for horn they stretch an' strive (spoonful)
Deil tak the hindmost, on they drive,
Till a' their weel-swallow'd kytes belyv (well swelled bellies)
Are bent like drums; (by and by)
Then auld Guidman, maist like to rise, (good man) (burst)
"Bethankit!" hums.

Is there that owre his French ragout, (stew)
Or olio was staw a sow (hodge-podge) (sicken)
Or fricassee was mak her spew
Wi' perfect scunner, (loathing)
Looks down wi' sneering, scornfu' view
On sic a dinner?

Poor devil! See him owre his trash,
As feckless as a wither'd rash, (powerless) (grass)
His spindle-shank a guid whip-lash (thin leg)
His nieve a nit (fist) (nut)
thro' bluidy flood or field to dash,
O how unfit!

But mark the Rustic, haggis-fed,
The trembling earth resounds his tread,
Clap in his walie nieve a blade, (large) (fist)
He'll mak it whistle;
An' legs, an' arms, an' heads will sned, (cut-off)
Like taps o' thrissle. (tops of thistle)

Ye pow'rs wha mak mankind your care,
And dish tham out their bill o' fare,
Auld Scotland wants nae skinking ware, (watery)
That jaups in luggies; (jumps) (small dishes)
But, if ye wish her gratefu' pray'r,
Gie her a Haggis!

Recipe for Haggis*

1) Haggis - Made Simple and Good

½ lb beef liver
1 med. Onion
½ c. oatmeal
½ c. suet, finely chopped
½ c. plus 2 T. beef broth
¼ t. each salt and cayenne

- Simmer liver about 10 min. or until juices run clear when pierced with a fork.
- Parboil peeled onion in separate pan about 5. min.
Cool liver and onion then chop finely together
Spread oatmeal on cookie sheet and toast about 5 min. in 350* oven; stir occasionally
- Mix ground meat mixture and oatmeal with remaining ingredients.
- Pack into greased baking dish and cover tightly with foil.
- Set on rack in deep pan; add boiling water about half way up dish; cover tightly and steam 1 ½ hours.

Serve hot

6 ¼ c. servings

2) Haggis (Genuine Scotch)

Procure the large stomach-bag of a sheep, also one of the smaller bags called "King's Hood," together with the pluck, which is the lights, liver and heart. The bags must be well washed, first in cold water, then plunged in boiling water and scraped. Great care must be taken of the large bag; let it lie and soak in cold water, with a little salt, all night. Wash also the pluck. Now boil the small bag along with the pluck; in boiling, leave the windpipe attached and let the end of it hang over the edge of the pot, so that impurities may pass freely out. Boil for 1 ½ hours and take the whole from the pot. When cold, cut away the windpipe and any bits of skin or gristle that seem improper. Grate a quarter of the liver (not using the remainder for the haggis) and mince the heart, lights and small bag very small, along with ½ lb. Of beef suet. Mix all this mince with 2 small teacupfuls of oatmeal, previously dried before the fire, black and Jamaica pepper and salt; also add ½ pint of the liquor in which the pluck was boiled, or beef gravy. Stir all together into a consistency. Then take the large bag, which has been thoroughly cleaned, and put the mince into it. Fill it only a little more than half full, in order to leave room for the meal and meat to expand. If crammed too full it will burst in boiling. Sew up the bag with a needle and thread. The haggis is now complete. Put it in a pot with boiling water and prick it occasionally with a large needle, as it swells, to allow the air to escape. If the bag appears thin tie a cloth outside the skin. There should be a plate beneath it, to prevent it sticking to the bottom of the pot. Boil it for three hours. Serve in a napkin on a dish, without garnish or gravy, as it is being sufficiently rich in itself.

3) Haggis (Scotch, Simpler)

Take two or three handfuls of oatmeal; brown in oven; add to this ½ lb. suet minced fine and any cold meat minced; but it is often made without the latter. Season with a little minced parsley, onion, salt and pepper. Mix with a breakfast-cupful of water, then put in a dish or pan with a close lid; boil three hours.

OR

½ lb. Minced suet, 10 tablespoonfuls oatmeal, pepper and salt mixed well together. Fill (not too full) a few of the small bags of the sheep got at the butcher's (well cleaned). Sew up with needle and thread, prick over to prevent bursting and boil in potato soup. (Makes a capital dinner for the bairns.)

*Recipe courtesy of John Thornton

Guests are treated to a serving of the Haggis.....and the “supper” begins! Amid the rambling of guests with their tasty morsels of haggis (warm and reeking...!), you will notice some faces wincing.....yet most are delighted at the mix of textures and mingling flavors at this strange meal of honor. A Bill of fare for Burns Night may be a colorful plate of traditional cuisine.

Bill O’ Fare

Cock-a-Leekie soup (Chicken & Leek soup)
Roastit Bubblyjock or Salmon (Turkey)
Champit Tatties and Bashed Neeps (Mashed potatoes & turnips)
Kebbuck an’ Oatcakes (Cream cheese and Oatcakes)
Topsy Laird (Sherry Trifles)
Tassie O’ Coffee

Another choice of menus:

Mossgiel Greens (Salad with Parmesan and molasses Caesar dressing)
Braw Beef Burnes (beef with Colcannon potatoes)
or
Nippy Sanquhar Salmon (Fish with Colcannon potatoes)
Ellisland Vegetables (Green beans and carrots)
Bonnie Jean’s Delight (Sherry raspberry trifle with chocolate)

Wine is also served and generous quantities of the finest
Scottish malt whiskey to raise a glass.

The Toasts

The toasts begin! Toasts to the Queen of England are present in Scotland and the United States. In the U.S., toasts can include the President of the United States, the Clans and Scotland. Although there are variations in the Scottish toasts and those of the United States, they all include the toasts “Tae the Lassies.” In Burns’ casual gathering, this was a time to toast to the lassies for their fare and gentle nature and as thanks for preparing the food. With grace and gusto, today’s speaker reflect on the importance of women in our lives and relate to Burns attitudes and relationships with women. These humorous sentiments allow us to laugh at our selves and be gracious in the juxtaposition of relationships. Although witty remarks bounce from the podium, tasteful and authentic expressions are always welcome. At “male only” gatherings the toast tae the lassies is generally more direct and poking fun at the state of women. The natural flow of masculine muscle flexing follows shortly thereafter! The following is a toast Tae the Lassies used in several Burns Suppers:

A Wumman's A Wumman..

A cleaner, cook, a mither, wife,
A job as weel, for a' that,
A skivvie a' her wedded life
Who else wid e'er dae a' that?
Far a' that, an' a' That,
She loves him still for a' that,
She surely must be off her heid
For puttin' up wi' a' that.

Noo drivin' trains an' flyin' planes,
E'en Prime Minister an' a' that,
An still wi' time to mind the weans,
A wumman's a wumman for a' that.
For a' that, an' a' that,
Her varicose veins an' a' that,
No man could surely stand the pace
O' being a wumman an' a' that.

For men are sure a helpless band-
They're just big bairns, for a' that,
without a wumman to haud their hand
They'd soon fair starve, an' a' that.
For a' that an' a' that,
She suffers the gawk for a' that,
Wha else could put up wi' a man.
His gallus ways an' a' that.

Hoosework's meant for two tae share,
The washin' up an' a' that,
But the eejit just gets in her hair
An' roond her feet an' a' that.
For a' that, an' a' that
She's nae time tee spare for a' that,
So he goes boozin' wi' his pals
While she gets oan wi a' that.

But when he rolls in fae the pub
Muckle fu' an' a' that,
An' then demands a plate o' grub,
She'll clip his ear for a' that.

For a' that, an' a' that,
He'll sleep wi' the dug for a' that,
The wumman micht weel be a saint,
But she'll no put up wi' a' that.

So suffer a' her finger wags,
Her sharpened tongue an' a' that.
An' jist ignore the way she nags-
God knows that she's worth a' that.
For a' that, an' a' that,
Her screechin' nark an' a' that.
A wumman fair o' face an' heart
Should treasured be for a' that.

Response to the Toast Tae the Lassies

The women in full sincerity and humor lend a balanced address to the men at the gathering. The gratitude is laced with mild lampooning and charm.

The Immortal Memories

All Burns' Night celebrations carry on the custom of relaying the "Immortal Memory of Robert Burns" while guests enjoy dinner. The "Immortal Memories" part of the program consists of many ways to pay tribute to Robert Burns. Songs of his can be played; poems recited.

The idea behind the "Memories" is that people can be encouraged to apply Burns values to their own life, to improve one's lot in life, and society; to re-examine Scotland's nationhood and make it a force for good among nations. It is the desire of Scots that people will be inspired by Burns to rediscover their true selves and to make the world a better place. **18**

"O wad some Power the giftie gie us
Tae see oursels as ithers see us!"

In Burns time he favored having a fiddler at the local pub, but contemporary Burns Night can include fiddlers, pipers, harps and hammered dulcimers. Highland dancers may do the famous sword dance. Scottish country dancing can entertain guests. In the U.S. Burns Suppers awards are given for service to the local chapters of St. Andrew's Society, youth achievement and the Tartan Award is also given. A word about our brethren who have "gone awa" may be added. When the speeches come to a close, Burns music is played. A favorite story or poem to tell is "Tam O'Shanter," "Address to the Unco Guild," "To a Mouse and Holy Willie's Prayer." A custom among one group is to pass around delicate artifacts as a Burns lost manuscript fragment.

A song which is sung worldwide is Auld Lang Syne.

Auld Lang Syne
Should auld acquaintance be forgot,
And never brought to mind?
Should auld acquaintance be forgot,
And days o' auld lang syne?

For auld lang syne, my dear,
For auld lang syne,
We'll tak' a cup o' kindness yet,
For auld lang syne

We twa hae run about the braes
An' pu'd the gowans fine;
We wander'd mornin' a weary foot,
Sin' auld lang syne.

We twa hae paidelt in the burn
Frae morning sun till dine;
But seas between us braid hae roar'd
Sin' auld lang syne.

And here's a hand, my trusty fere,
And gie's a hand o'thine,
We'll tak' a richt-gude willie-waught
For auld lang syne.

And surely ye'll be your pint-stoup,
And surely I'll be mine,
We'll tak' a cup o' kindness yet
For auld lang syne.

With a little planning, anyone can enjoy a Burns night celebration. Friendly celebrants and many a wee dram to toast the night awa' in between reciting Burns' poetry prose or song. In the midst of mirth and amusement be prepared to enter into a space that fosters an eloquence of Scottish essence, a scene which Burns himself would appreciate!

There is a tendency for a Burns Supper to be a formal tartan pageantry with flowing full dress kilts and sashes, but this type of Scottish display is more a modern feature. As a lowlander, Burns never wore a tartan. The "Supper" should celebrate Burns' sense of "A Man's a Man for a' That", which speaks of the universal connection we have to each other. In keeping with the spirit that celebrates the flowering of the written word, wear and eat what honors the authentic expression of self. Burns would certainly agree to that!