**Hogmanay**

Hogmanay, the first appearance in English coming in 1604 in the records as “*hagmonay”*, is the Scottish word for the last day of the year. It is normally followed by further celebrations on the morning of New Year's Day.

The origins of Hogmanay are unclear, but it may be derived from Norse and Gaelic observances. Customs vary throughout Scotland, and usually include gift-giving and visiting the homes of friends and neighbours, with special attention given to the first-foot, the first guest of the New Year.

**First Footing**

The most widespread national custom is first-footing, which starts immediately after midnight. The first person to cross the threshold of a friend or neighbour is the first-footer who will bring symbolic gifts such as salt (less common today), coal, shortbread, whisky, and black bun (a rich fruit cake), intended to bring different kinds of luck to the householder. Food and drink (as the gifts) are then given to the guests. This may go on throughout the early hours of the morning and well into the next day (although today we see people visiting houses well into the middle of January). The first-foot is supposed to set the luck for the rest of the year. Traditionally, tall, dark-haired men are preferred as the first-foot.

**Auld Lang Syne**

[](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:John_Masey_Wright_-_John_Rogers_-_Robert_Burns_-_Auld_Lang_Syne.jpg)John Masey Wright and John Rogers ca 1841

The Hogmanay custom of singing "Auld Lang Syne" has become common in many countries. "Auld Lang Syne" is a Scots poem by [Robert Burns](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Robert_Burns), based on traditional and other earlier sources. It is now common to sing this in a circle of linked arms that are crossed over one another as the clock strikes midnight for New Year's Day, though it is only intended that participants link arms at the beginning of the final verse, co-ordinating with the lines of the song that contain the lyrics to do so. Typically, it is only in Scotland this practice is carried out correctly.

As in much of the world, the largest Scottish cities - Glasgow, Edinburgh and Aberdeen – hold all-night celebrations, as do Stirling and Inverness. The Edinburgh Hogmanay celebrations are among the largest in the world. Celebrations in Edinburgh in 1996–97 were recognised by the *Guinness Book of Records* as the world's largest New Years party, with approximately 400,000 people in attendance. Numbers have since been restricted due to safety concerns

"**Auld Lang Syne” -** note "s" sound rather than "z” - is a Scots poem written by Robert Burns in 1788 and set to the tune of a traditional folk song. It is well known in many countries, especially in the English-speaking world, its traditional use being to bid farewell to the old year at the stroke of midnight. By extension, it is also sung at funerals, graduations, and as a farewell or ending to other occasions.

The song's Scots title may be translated into standard English as "old long since", or more idiomatically, "long long ago","days gone by" or "old times". Consequently, *For* “auld lang syne", as it appears in the first line of the chorus, might be loosely translated as "for (the sake of) old times".

**Auld Lang Syne – the words**

Should auld acquaintance be forgot,  
and never brought to mind?  
Should auld acquaintance be forgot,  
and auld lang syne\*?

For auld lang syne, my jo,  
for auld lang syne,  
we'll tak' a cup o' kindness yet,  
for auld lang syne.

And surely ye'll be your pint-stoup!  
and surely I'll be mine!  
And we'll tak' a cup o’ kindness yet,  
for auld lang syne.

We twa hae run about the braes,  
and pou'd the gowans fine;  
But we've wander'd mony a weary fit,  
sin' auld lang syne.

We twa hae paidl'd in the burn,  
frae morning sun till dine;  
But seas between us braid hae roar'd  
sin' auld lang syne.

And there's a hand, my trusty fiere!  
and gie's a hand o' thine!  
And we'll tak' a right gude-willie waught,  
for auld lang syne.

**Other Songs by Robert Burns**

**Ae fond kiss**

Ae fond kiss, and then we sever;

Ae fareweel, alas, for ever!

Deep in heart-wrung tears I'll pledge thee,

Warring sighs and groans I'll wage thee!

Who shall say that Fortune grieves him

While the star of hope she leaves him?

Me, nae cheerfu' twinkle lights me,

Dark despair around benights me.

I'll ne'er blame my partial fancy;

Naething could resist my Nancy;

For to see her was to love her,

Love but her, and love for ever.

Had we never loved sae kindly,

Had we never loved sae blindly,

Never met—or never parted,

We had ne'er been broken-hearted.

Fare thee weel, thou first and fairest!

Fare thee weel, thou best and dearest!

Thine be ilka joy and treasure,

Peace, enjoyment, love, and pleasure!

Ae fond kiss, and then we sever!

Ae fareweel, alas, for ever!

Deep in heart-wrung tears I'll pledge thee,

Warring sighs and groans I'll wage thee!

**My Luve's like a red, red rose**

O my Luve's like a red, red rose,  
That's newly sprung in June:  
O my Luve's like the melodie,  
That's sweetly play'd in tune.  
  
As fair art thou, my bonnie lass,  
So deep in luve am I;   
And I will luve thee still, my dear,   
Till a' the seas gang dry.   
  
Till a the seas gang dry, my dear,   
And the rocks melt wi' the sun;   
And I will luve thee still, my dear,   
While the sands o' life shall run.   
  
And fare-thee-weel, my only Luve!   
And fare-thee-weel, a while!   
And I will come again, my Luve,   
Tho' 'twere ten thousand mile!

**Ye banks and braes**

Ye banks and braes o' bonnie Doon   
How ye can bloom so fresh and fair   
How can ye chant ye little birds   
And I sae weary fu' o' care

Ye'll break my heart ye warbling birds   
That wantons thro' the flowering thorn   
Ye mind me o' departed joys   
Departed never to return

Oft hae I rov'd by bonnie Doon   
To see the rose and woodbine twine   
And ilka bird sang o' its love   
And fondly sae did I o' mine   
  
Wi' lightsome heart I pu'd a rose   
Fu' sweet upon its thorny tree   
But my false lover stole my rose   
But ah! She left the thorn wi' me

**Welsh Christmas**

In the days before Christmas it was always customary to decorate your house with huge swathes of mistletoe and holly. Mistletoe was supposed to protect the family from evil while holly was there as a symbol of eternal life and always regarded as the sacred plant of the ancient druids.

The old Welsh custom of plygain has now totally died out. It was an early service in either church or chapel, sometimes beginning as early as three in the morning. At this service men - always men, never women - would sing Christmas carols for three or four hours, unaccompanied and in three part harmony.

Whilst waiting for plygain to begin families would occupy themselves in ‘Taffy’ making. Toffee would be boiled in pans over the open fire and then, when it was almost cooked, huge mounds of the toffee would be dropped into ice cold water. The moment it hit the water the "Taffy" would curl into strange and unusual shapes.

One less than palatable tradition on Boxing Day was that of holly beating. Boys and young men would take sprigs of holly and roam the streets looking for young women. When they encountered them they would hit out at their arms and legs, beating them with the holly - sometimes until their victims bled. One variation of this violent tradition - which probably had its origins in the scourging of Christ on his way to the cross - was for the last person out of bed on Boxing Day morning to be beaten with the holly sticks. Thankfully, for all concerned, this tradition seems to have died out towards the end of the 19th century.

As with Scotland, the tradition of "first footing" was always important in Wales. There were differences, however. If the first visitor across a Welsh threshold was either a woman or a red haired man it was considered terribly unlucky for the household.

The most renowned of the New Year traditions in Wales, however, was that of the Mari Lwyd, - the Grey Mare. There have been attempts to revive the tradition in certain parts of the country - not entirely successfully. The Mari Lwyd was a horse's skull covered with a white sheet and ribbons. It had false ears and eyes and was carried on a long pole.

Gangs of men and young boys would carry the Mari Lwyd from door to door. They had usually consumed copious amounts of alcohol and the procession would be accompanied by a growling cacophony of noise. When a door was opened the householder would be assailed by poems and insults - in Welsh - and to this they were expected to reply in like form. When the verbal battle had been won or lost the Mari Lwyd and her followers were invited inside for yet another drink.

In the 19th century the churches and chapels began to object to the violence and drunkenness that invariably accompanied a visit from the Mari Lwyd and, gradually, the singing of carols began to replace the poems and insults. There are many who say this "watering down" of the tradition led to the eventual demise of the Mari Lwyd.

Christmas, of course, did not end until Twelfth Night and in Wales the custom of hunting the wren was something that took place on this last night of festivities. Men would catch a wren, put it in a wooden box and carry it from door to door. Householders would then pay a penny for the privilege of lifting the lid of the box in an attempt to see the tiny bird.

**All through the night**

Sleep, my child and peace attend thee,

All through the night;

Guardian angels God will send thee,

All through the night.

Soft the drowsy hours are creeping,

Hill and vale in slumber sleeping,

I my loving vigil keeping,

All through the night.

While the moon her watch is keeping,

All through the night;

While the weary world is sleeping,

All through the night.

O'er thy spirit gently stealing,

Visions of delight revealing,

Breathes a pure and holy feeling,

All through the night.

Though I roam a minstrel lonely,

All through the night

My true harp shall praise sing only,

All through the night

Love's young dream, alas, is over

Yet my strains of love shall hover

Near the presence of my lover,

All through the night

Hark, a solemn bell is ringing,

Clear through the night

Thou, my love, art heavenward winging,

Home through the night

Earthly dust from off thee shaken

Soul immortal shalt thou awaken

With thy last dim journey taken,

Home through the night

**Ar hyd y nos - All through the night**

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| --- | --- |
| Holl amrantau'r sêr ddywedant  Ar hyd y nos  "Dyma'r ffordd i fro gogoniant,"  Ar hyd y nos.  Golau arall yw tywyllwch  I arddangos gwir brydferthwch  Teulu'r nefoedd mewn tawelwch  Ar hyd y nos.  O mor siriol, gwena seren  Ar hyd y nos  I oleuo'i chwaer ddaearen  Ar hyd y nos.  Nos yw henaint pan ddaw cystudd  Ond i harddu dyn a'i hwyrddydd  Rhown ein golau gwan i'n gilydd  Ar hyd y nos. | All the stars' twinkles say  All through the night  "This is the way to the realm of glory,"  All through the night.  Other light is darkness  To show true beauty  The Heavenly family in peace  All through the night.  O, how cheerful smiles the star,  All through the night  To light its earthly sister  All through the night.  Old age is night when affliction comes  But to beautify man in his late days  We'll put our weak light together  All through the night. |