



Up & Cumming

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Christmas in Scotland

Scotland is known throughout the world for bringing in the New Year in grand style, especially Edinburgh which is host to the biggest Hogmanay street party in the world.

But Christmas also provides a wonderful opportunity to sample the very best that Scottish hospitality has to offer. Huge open fires, a few 'drams' of whisky, great food and even better company are the basic ingredients of a traditional Scottish Christmas.

The festive season is associated with the exchanging of gifts among friends and family and that tradition is no different in Scotland. But it's not just about getting presents and eating and drinking too much! We take a look at how the festival began in Scotland and which customs and traditions have endured through the ages.

The Early Beginnings of Christmas

The Vikings came to Scotland at the end of the 8th century and along with their well-documented penchant for conquest and plunder they left behind an early version of a festival which we still celebrate today. This mid-winter festival was given the name by which it is often known – *Yule* or *Yuletide*. The Norsemen had as hearty an appetite for revelry as for war and their Yule celebrations lasted for an epic 24 days! The overindulgence kicked off with a monumental feast on the eve of Yule. The Vikings stuffed their faces with vast quantities of food and drink

after which they stumbled off into the winter night to light a huge bonfire in the goddess' honour. Today, fire and light plays a major part in Yule celebrations in many areas of Scotland from Biggar to Shetland.

When William of Normandy conquered England in 1066 the English Princess Margaret fled north and was shipwrecked on the Scottish coast. Her Christian influence helped turn the previously pagan Yuletide season into a celebration of the birth of Jesus Christ.

Christmas Traditions

Christmas day remained the focus of Scotland's Yule celebrations throughout the Middle Ages. Many ancient superstitions and rites still held significance for Scots during this period, like the decoration of houses with evergreen trees and mistletoe. Our modern-day Christmas trees are newer versions of this ancient pagan idea that the evergreen tree represented a celebration of the renewal of life, while Celtic peoples long considered mistletoe to have magic powers. It was said to have the ability to heal wounds and increase fertility.

In Scotland a sprig of mistletoe continues to be hung from ceilings and in doorways to bring luck and ward off evil spirits, not to mention stealing a kiss from an unsuspecting party guest! The growing influence of continental

Europe in the Middle Ages saw Yuletide in Scotland develop into the Twelve Days of Christmas that is familiar to us today. This then became known as the Daft Days. By the time of the Reformation the Christmas celebrations came under threat from various bodies – the General Assembly tried to abolish it in 1638 and the Kirk got twitchy when the Restoration of the Monarchy arrived, and the festival was forced underground.

It was left to the Victorians to re-establish Christmas – they gathered together the remnants of many of the traditions from the past, some of which we still recognize today.

One such tradition that is still observed in Scotland is that of children hanging stockings on bedposts or near a fireplace on Christmas Eve in the hope that Santa Claus will fill them with treats such as fruit, nuts and coins while they sleep.

The tradition goes back to legends about Saint Nicholas.

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Christmas in Scotland (cont.)

One story tells of three poor sisters who couldn't afford to marry because they had no money for a dowry. To save them from being sold by their father, St Nick left each of the three sisters gifts of gold coins in the stockings they had left hanging out overnight. Saint Nicholas is the common name for Saint Nicholas of Myra, who had a reputation for secret gift-giving.

This historical character was the inspiration for a mythical figure known as *Sankt Nikolaus* in Germany and *Sinterklaas* in the Netherlands, which in turn was the inspiration for Santa Claus. Our modern image of Santa Claus as a jolly, portly figure stems from a Christmas poem written in 1822 by the American Episcopal minister Clement Clark Moore. The poem is called "A Visit from St Nicholas" and was written by Moore for his three young daughters. This poem is now better known as "The Night Before Christmas" and is read to millions of children, just before they put their excited heads down to sleep on Christmas Eve.

This poem also helped popularize Christmas Eve with the now familiar images of Santa Claus flying from house to house in his sleigh led by eight flying reindeer, waiting for the children to go to sleep so he could deliver presents.

In 1881 another American, the political cartoonist Thomas Nast, drew on Moore's poem to create the first likeness that matches our modern image of Santa Claus. Nast sketched Santa as a tubby, cheerful man with a big, white beard, holding a sack full of toys for children who had been good all year. Nast also gave Santa his red suit with white fur trim, his North Pole workshop, his team of worker elves and his wife, Mrs. Claus.

The singing of Carols is another popular Christmas tradition still alive in Scotland today. It began in England in medieval times when wandering musicians would travel from town to town performing outside the houses and castles of the rich. The musicians were literally singing for their supper – in return for the performance they hoped to get a hot meal or money. The word *carol* is thought to have been derived from the French word *caroller*, a circle dance accompanied by singers.

Christmas in Scotland Cities

Scotland today has a host of enchanting events to entertain all ages at Christmas.

Glasgow

Princes Square, the upmarket shopping centre on Buchanan Street in Glasgow, provides a beautiful festive setting for an annual season of traditional carol performances for local charities. The famous lights at George Square illuminate the city centre signaling the start of Glasgow's Christmas party. *Glasgow on Ice*, the city's popular winter festival in George Square, with thousands flocking to one of Europe's largest outdoor ice rinks.

Keep the kids quiet by taking them along to the award-winning Santa's Grotto, also at George Square – Scotland has more Christmas grottoes per capita than anywhere else in the UK!

On the same theme of Christmas family fun, the Irn Bru carnival at the SECC is Europe's biggest indoor funfair, with more than 50 thrilling rides. St Enoch's Square plays host to the city's German Christmas Market. Here you can wander through the decorated chalets and sample some of Germany's finest produce such as gingerbread, sausages and a wide selection of beers and wines.

Conclusion

We hope you enjoy the festive season and get an opportunity one day to visit your homeland Scotland.

Happy Yule Season!



CLAN RUSSEL - RUSSELL



This name is probably derived from "rous" meaning red and early bearers of the name no doubt had red hair - and were probably of Norman or French extraction. While the name is by no means confined to Scotland, it is within the top 50 most frequently found names in the country.

The name is one of the earliest surnames recorded in Scotland, the first being a Walter Russell who witnessed a charter in Paisley Abbey some time between 1164 and 1177. John, son of Robert Russel of Duncanlaw granted land to found a Hospital between 1180 and 1220. Robert Russel of Berwickshire was a big enough landowner to be required to sign the Ragman Roll and pay homage to Edward I in 1296.



Russels can be found in Aberdeenshire where Rozel, an English baron who had fought at the siege of Berwick and the Battle of Halidon Hill in 1333, obtained an estate at Aden. The family was described as "Russel of that Ilk" implying that they were substantial landowners. As such, Russel is one of the clans and families of Scotland with a coat of arms recognized by the Lord Lyon.

Not all Russells were recorded for their good works. Jerome Russell, a monk, was burned at the stake in the High Street, Glasgow, for heresy in 1539

There was a significant family of Russels in Selkirkshire in the Scottish Borders and many entered military service in India in the 18th and 19th centuries.

In England, a family which began with a Rufus (another form of Russell), rose to become the Dukes of Bedford. The 3rd son of the 6th Duke of Bedford studied at Edinburgh University where he was greatly influenced by the independent and democratic philosophy taught there. He became a great Reformer and was an architect of extending the franchise for the Westminster parliament in the first Reform Act of 1832. His grandson, the 3rd Earl Russell, was also an independent thinker, better known as the philosopher Bertrand Russell.

Russell was the 47th most frequent surname at the General Register Office in 1995.



Scottish Humor



A Scotsman was invited for a visit to the home of his Canadian friend. Soon after the Scotsman arrived, he glanced out the window to see a huge beast just outside. He pointed, and asked his Canadian friend, "Och, lad, what's that?" The Canadian replied, "Oh, that's a moose." The Scotsman stared in disbelief, and replied. "That's a moose?! Well, how big are yer cats around here?"



Recipe of the Month

Yuletide Toffee Squares

Preparation

1. Heat oven to 450F. Lightly grease a 15 x 10 pan.
2. Combine oats, sugar, margarine, corn syrup, vanilla and salt. Mix well. Firmly press mixture into the pan. Bake 12 minutes, or until mixture is brown and bubbly. Cool completely.
3. In a saucepan or microwave, melt the chocolate chips and shortening. Stir constantly if melting on the stove. Spread evenly over the oat base, and sprinkle with nuts. Chill until set, and cut into bars.

Ingredients

- 4 1/2 c Oats, uncooked
- 1 c Brown sugar
- 1/2 c Margarine, melted
- 1/2 c Dark corn syrup
- 1 tb Vanilla
- 1/2 ts Salt
- 1 pk 12 oz chocolate chips
- 2 tb Shortening
- 2/3 c Chopped nuts

Future Games 2010

Queen Mary Scottish Festival – Long Beach, CA. – Feb. 13th ~ 14th

Sonora Celtic Faire – Sonora, CA. – March 12th ~ 14th

Kern County Scottish Games – Bakersfield CA. – April 10th

Sacramento Scottish Games – Woodland, CA. – April 24th ~ 25th

Modesto Highland Games – Modesto, CA. – First Part of May

(Note that the Membership insert is for New Members.)

(Existing members should have received renewal notices already in their mail – Thank You!)