

A large, stylized illustration in shades of yellow and white, depicting a thistle and other floral elements, serving as a background for the text.

# Burns Night

## When

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25 January 2022

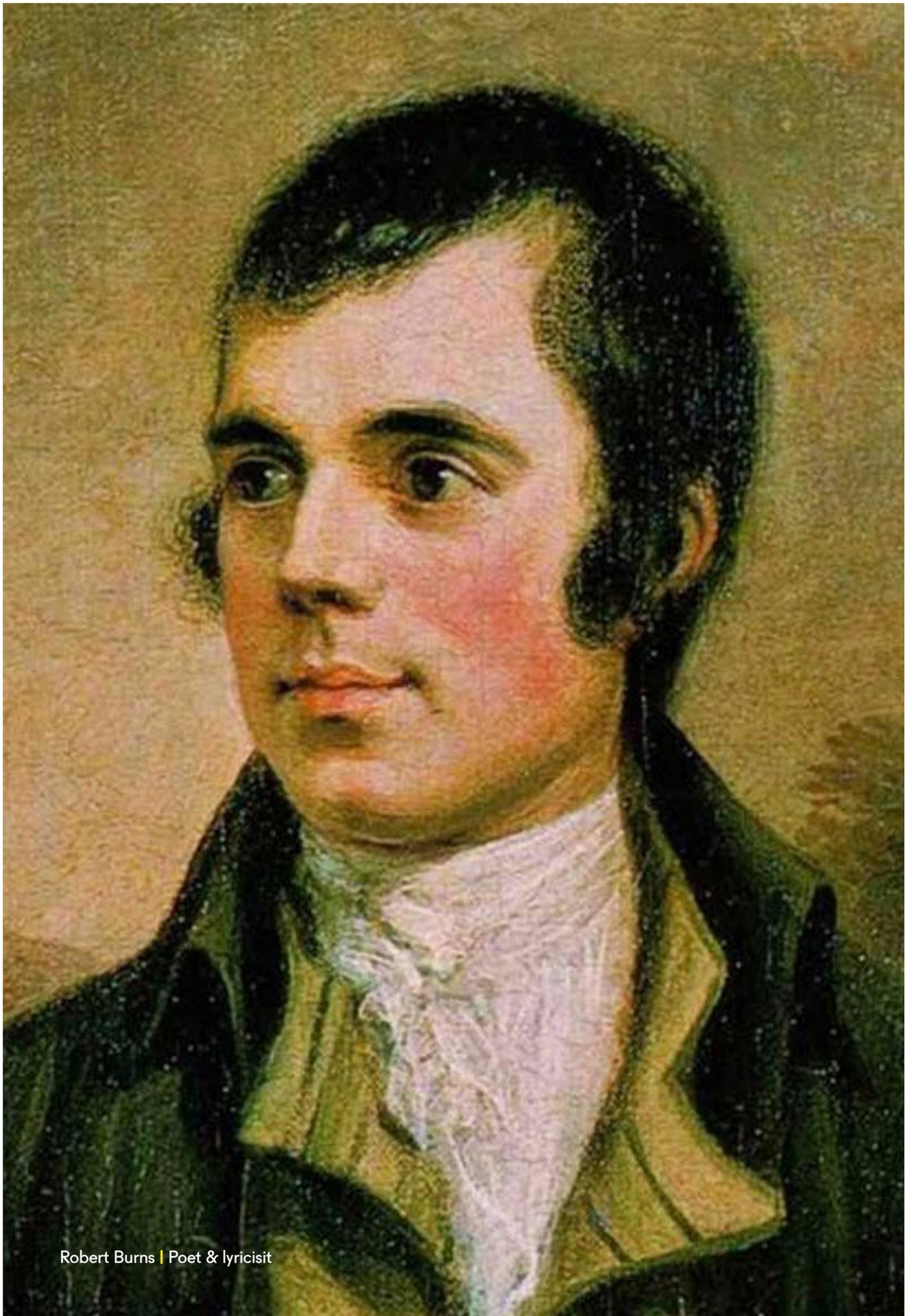
## What

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An annual celebration of the life and work of Robert Burns held on his birthday.

On January 25, we will celebrate Burns Night. As we gather together to honour the traditions of the annual Burns Supper, we are reminded of the special place given to music at these celebrations and of Burns' own contribution to music. Indeed, each year rousing choruses of Burns' Auld Lang Syne can be heard around the world as the New Year begins.

This year, we are asking you to host your Burns Supper in aid of Help Musicians so that we can continue to provide a lifetime of support to musicians just like those who perform every year on Burns Night. So join us to help musicians across Scotland by collecting donations from your family and friends as you come together to pay homage to Scotland's National Bard.



Robert Burns | Poet & lyricist

# Who is Burns?

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Born on 25th January 1759, Robert Burns, known affectionately as Rabbie Burns, is a Scottish poet and lyricist. Hailing from Alloway in Ayrshire, his work includes Auld Lang Syne which is traditionally sung at New Year's (or Hogmanay) as well as Ae Fond Kiss, Scots Wha Hae and many others. He is known for writing in the Scots language and dialect and is widely considered to be the National Bard of Scotland.

Burns was the son of a tenant farmer and worked the family farm with his father and brother. By the age of 15 he was the farm's principle labourer. However, despite his family's limited means, he was well-educated. In fact, Burns' father and a few of his neighbours hired a private tutor called John Murdoch who had a significant impact on Burns. His love and skill for literature blossomed during this time. Given his background, one can easily see why the critic, Henry Mackenzie, exalted Burns as the 'Heaven-taught Ploughman'.

Burns also trained as an exciseman, collecting taxes for the government and intercepting illegal goods. It wasn't a particularly popular profession at the time and Burns himself noted this in his song 'The Deil's Awa Wi' th' Exciseman' - which is a prime example of Burns' own self-satire.

In 1786 Burns published his first book of Poetry - 'Poems, Chiefly in the Scottish Dialect'. This first edition was called the 'Kilmarnock Edition'. 612 copies were issued at a price of 3 shillings each (in today's money this would be an expensive volume).

Burns had then planned to emigrate to the West Indies but the success of his first volume instead brought him to Edinburgh where he prepared for the publication of his second edition 'The Edinburgh Edition'.

In the years after the publication of 'The Edinburgh Edition', Burns produced many of his most famous works, including 'Tam o' Shanter' (1790). However, towards the end of his life, he moved away from poetry and focused his time and creative energy collecting and composing songs for inclusion in James Johnson's 'Scots Musical Museum' and George Thomson's 'Select Collection of Scottish Airs'.

Burns died at the age of 37 in Dumfries on 21st of July 1796. However, his legacy lives on in the thousands of Burns Clubs that have been established worldwide to celebrate his life and work. Burns' lasting influence can even be seen in popular culture. It was he who coined the phrase 'Man's inhumanity to man' in his poem 'Man Was Made to Mourn' and like Steinbeck's *Of Mice and Men*, the title of J.D. Salinger's famous novel *Catcher in the Rye* also comes from one of Burns's poems - 'Comin' Thro' the Rye'.

# What is a Burns Supper?

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Held on or near Burns Night, a Burns Supper celebrates Robert Burns through music, poetry and a traditional meal of haggis, neeps and tatties.

The first Burns supper was organised as a memorial supper and held in Alloway, the poet's birthplace, in July 1801. 9 guests were in attendance, and they dined on a meal of haggis and sheep's head.

The two of the first Burns Clubs were in Greenock in Scotland where a Burns Supper was held in 1802, and in Paisley – a town which boasted a Burns Club from 1805. Scottish diaspora have founded Burns Clubs across the globe from New York to New Zealand. However, you don't have to be a member of a Burns Club to host a Burns Supper and many people follow Burns Night traditions in their own homes on 25th January.

# What happens at a Burns Supper?

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A traditional Burns Supper would generally follow this running order:

- 1 Piping in the guests:** this is the first feature of the evening when music has a role and where we can see the active association of Burns and the trappings of Highlandism – pipes and tartan.
- 2 The Selkirk Grace:** a prayer before eating.
- 3 Piping in the haggis:** again the strains of the bagpipe mark the arrival of the supper centre-piece – a dark pudding containing sheep's offal, oatmeal and spices.
- 4 'To a Haggis':** Burns's poem is recited as the reader cuts open the hot pudding, typically in a dramatic fashion. At the closing line 'Gie's a haggis!', the guests raise their glasses in a toast before settling down to eat a meal, the main course of which is usually the haggis accompanied with neeps [turnip/swede] and tatties [potatoes].
- 5 Toasts and Entertainment:** There then follows a series of toasts and entertainments, two of which are de rigueur, 'The Immortal Memory' (a keynote address on the life and works of the bard), and the 'Toast to the Lasses'.
- 6 'Auld Lang Syne':** The meal ends with a collective rendition of Burns's famous song.



## Helpful Resources

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[Celebrating Burns Night](#)

[Discover Burns' Scotland](#)