

CHRISTMAS IN SCOTLAND

New Year's is Hogmanay In Scotland - Where New Year's is Four Days Long

Celebrations, Ancient Traditions and Fire as Scotland Welcomes New Years



Hogmanay Torchlight Procession in Edinburgh

As Christmas festivities wind down all over the United Kingdom, the really spectacular parties in Scotland are just getting underway. New Year's is Hogmanay in Scotland - a four to five day blast, including parties, street festivals, entertainment and wild - occasionally terrifying - fire festivals that are Viking or pagan in origin. Enormous public New Year's events in Scotland, with something for the whole family, are held during [Hogmanay](#) with the biggest and most famous taking place in [Edinburgh](#).

Hogmanay Traditions for New Year's in Scotland

Besides concerts, street parties, fireworks and more earthbound fire spectacles, as well as consumption of one of Scotland's most famous products, Scotch whisky, there are a number of very ancient traditions associated with Hogmanay in Scotland. Some say these traditions are dying out in favor of public celebrations, but they can still be found in smaller communities and private celebrations:

- **Redding the House** Like the annual spring cleaning in some communities, or the [ritual cleaning](#) of the kitchen for [Passover](#), families traditionally did a major cleanup to ready the house for the New Year. Sweeping out the fireplace was very important and there was a skill in reading the ashes, the way some people read tea leaves.
- **First Footing** After the stroke of midnight, neighbors visit each other, bearing traditional symbolic gifts such as shortbread or black bun, a kind of fruit cake. The visitor, in turn, is offered a small whisky. A friend of mine who remembers first footing, also remembers that if you had a lot of friends, you'd be offered a great deal of whisky.

The first person to enter a house in the New Year, the *first foot*, could bring luck for the New Year. The luckiest was a tall, dark and handsome man. The unluckiest a red head and the unluckiest of all a red-headed woman. (So I guess I'd better wait until last myself)

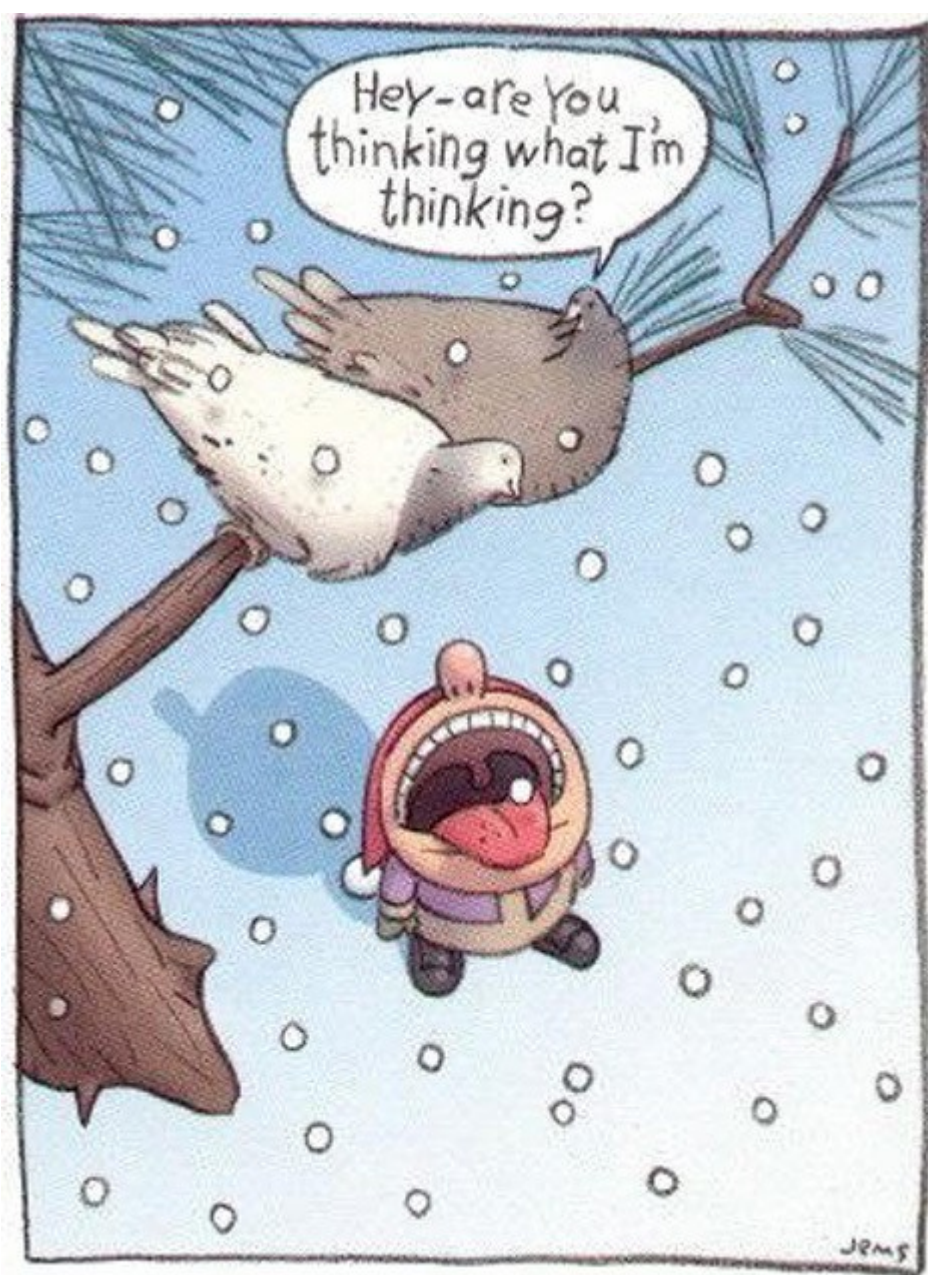
- **Bonfires and Fire Festivals** Scotland's fire festivals at Hogmanay and [later in January](#) may have pagan or Viking origins. The use of fire to purify and drive away evil spirits is an ancient idea. Fire is at the center of Hogmanay celebrations in [Stonehaven](#), [Comrie](#) and [Biggar](#) and has recently become an element in Edinburgh's Hogmanay celebration.
- **The Singing of Auld Lang Syne** All over the world, people sing Robert Burns's version of this traditional Scottish air. How it became *the* New Year's song is something of a mystery. At [Edinburgh's Hogmanay](#), people join hands for what is reputed to be the world's biggest [Auld Lang Syne](#).

Why Hogmanay in Scotland is So Important

Although some of the Hogmanay Traditions are ancient, the celebrations were elevated in importance after the banning of Christmas in the 16th and 17th centuries. Under Oliver Cromwell, Parliament banned Christmas celebrations in 1647. The ban was lifted after Cromwell's downfall in 1660. But in Scotland, the stricter Scottish Presbyterian Church had been discouraging Christmas celebrations - as having no basis in the Bible, from as early as 1583. After the Cromwellian ban was lifted elsewhere, Christmas festivities continued to be discouraged in Scotland. In fact, Christmas remained a normal working day in Scotland until 1958 and [Boxing Day](#) did not become a [National Holiday](#) until much later.

But the impulse to party, and to put the products of Scotland's famous distilleries to good use, could not be repressed. In effect, Hogmanay became Scotland's main outlet for the mid-winter impulse to chase away the darkness with light, warmth and festivities.





How To Rob A Snowman

