

The following text is written by Laura Green, a teacher based in West Lothian, and was originally written for The Chinese University of Hong Kong as part of a project on linguistic diversity.

Hogmanay

Hogmanay is the Scots term for New Year's Eve. This is celebrated across Scotland, and of course the rest of the world, on the 31st of December of each year.

For a lot of folk, some of the traditions have melted away, but when I was a wee lassie they were still going strong.

Yin of the traditions I know, one I experienced a lot when I was a wean, is first-footing. First-footing refers to the practice of welcoming a visitor into your house after midnight. Sae, traditionally, the first-footer is literally the first body to set foot in your house on New Year's Day. Some folk say, that traditionally, your first-footer must be a tall man with dark hair. Sae, when I was wee, we would bide in the house to hear 'the bells' - which is what we called the ringing of the bells of Big Ben in London, which we watched on the telly - and then we would head out to visit friends and neighbours. In other words, we wouldn't wait for a body to first-foot us, we would go out first-footing ourselves. My father, being the only man of my household, would be the first body to step on the door of our neighbour and he would also be the first body to step over the threshold into their house.

Another thing about first-footing is that the body who goes into your house first would usually bring you a wee present. Some folk would bring a lump of coal, said to mean that your house would be kept warm the full year round. But, when I was growing up in the 1980s, most folk had already done away with their coal fires, and had gas stoves or electric stoves. Sae we would take food or drink to help folk welcome in the New Year. If you were really traditional you would take some black bun, or some cloutie dumplin, but we would normally take something a bit easier to get a hold of, like shortbread. My mother wouldn't go for spending a lot of time in the scullery, you see, sae she wouldn't have had the time nor the inclination to make something like cloutie dumplin.

And it has to be said that my father wouldn't have dreamed of going first-footing without a drink for folk. Sae - he would take his own bottle - at least yin bottle - of whatever he was drinking, like whisky or rum, and he would make sure that his friend or neighbour had at least yin good measure of his bottle before he would take yin.

And finally - yin thing you should be aware of is the tradition of singing 'Auld Lang Syne'. While we would always watch folk sing this on the telly, and we were always familiar with the song - at least the first verse, anyway - we wouldn't usually go and sing it ourselves. I've never been at anybody's house that *does* do that at the bells, or just after them. The only time I've ever done that to mark the beginning of New Year is when I've been out at a bar or restaurant.

Sae - that was my Hogmanay.

