

BRING ON BURNS NIGHT

The traditional Burns supper is the best excuse to indulge in the most delicious Scottish ingredients, says **Suzy Pope**

Scotland is blessed with a bountiful natural larder. Forests filled with roe deer and fat grouse scruffling through the bracken. A necklace of fishing villages land lobsters, oysters and glistening fish every day. But it hasn't always been easy up north, especially after the harvest when the cold cloak of winter covered the land.

The first Burns supper was held by close friends of Robert Burns at Burns Cottage in Alloway in July 1801, five years after the Scottish poet's death. Haggis and sheep's head were served, they recited Burns' poem 'Address to a Haggis' and sang songs. In 1815, novelist Sir Walter Scott organised a Burns supper in Edinburgh on 25 January: a grander affair marking Burns' birthday. Two hundred years on we still celebrate the bard's works, pipe in the haggis, sing songs, recite poems and serve traditional, hearty Scottish fare to keep away the winter chill.

HAGGIS HISTORY

After the summer grazing, most livestock – particularly sheep – would be slaughtered, creating an abundance of meat at the season's end. Haggis was a way to preserve this meat, which would be spiced with pepper, nutmeg, coriander and sea salt and boiled in a sheep's stomach. As Burns wrote, haggis preserved sheep's 'paunch, tripe or thairm' (stomach, tripe or intestines).

Paul Wedgwood (Edinburgh Chef of the Year 2019) has been using haggis in his seasonal menus for 15 years at

his fine-dining restaurant, Wedgwood. 'I always sneak haggis into the menu somehow, whether it's the base of a sauce, a spicy mince alternative, or just a different take on the spices of haggis. I once served haggis-spiced chocolate as a dessert.'

Some modern chefs make their own haggis. Paul says: 'Many people think all offal tastes the same; it doesn't. You've got to adjust the spices to complement the meat. I've made haggis from grouse, squirrel, even kangaroo.' His lamb haggis has a touch of cumin, while he flavours his grouse haggis with rosemary. Far from a farm worker's meal, haggis is now centre of a Burns supper, addressed by poetry as if it were royalty.

THANK YOU FOR SMOKING

With 11,600 miles of coastline, fishing has been woven into the fabric of Scottish coastal life, economy and menu for centuries, and smoking fish has long been a way to preserve the catch into the winter months. Over 150 years ago, Shetland's salt fish was considered the best in the world by the Basque people who traded with the islanders. Fishwives in Arbroath would smoke haddock in half-cut whisky barrels with a fire underneath, and the resulting Arbroath smokies still find their way on to breakfast tables, butterflied open and dripping with butter.

The Moray fishing village of Cullen gives its name to Cullen skink, a

Fishwives in Arbroath would smoke haddock in half-cut barrels, and the resulting Arbroath smokies would be served for breakfast



Clockwise from top-left: A red deer stag; haggis, neeps and tatties; fishing village Cullen; Arbroath fishwives in 1954; a statue of Burns in Perthshire

Burns FACTS

As well as a bard, Burns was also a tax man later in life, collecting money related to the spirit he loved. He penned 'Scotch Drink' and published his own version of 'John Barleycorn', the Scottish (and English) folk song, as odes to whisky. Burns saw Scotch whisky as holding a particular symbolic significance for his beloved Scotland. According to legend, he was introduced to the spirit aged 22 when he was an apprentice flax-dresser in Irvine, Ayrshire before he turned his hand to farming. He died at the age of 37, after fathering 12 children, nine with his wife.

warming creamy fish soup and popular choice of Burns Night dish. According to legend, folk from the poor north couldn't afford beef for traditional 'skink' broth and substituted it with finnan haddie, a haddock cold-smoked with green wood and peat to give a delicate flavour. A hearty medley of onion, leek, potatoes and cream with delicate finnan haddie, Cullen skink is a delicious choice for cold January nights.

ROLLING THE OATS

In his 1755 *Dictionary of the English Language*, Samuel Johnson defines oats as 'a grain which in England is generally given to horses, but in Scotland supports the people.' Our grannies were on to something: the humble oat is now classed as a superfood. Oats have fuelled Scotland's workforce since early medieval times. 'In the 14th century, Scottish soldiers would carry a sack of oatmeal and a tiny griddle,' archivist and Scottish historian Sarah Moxey explains. 'They'd cook up small, pancake-shaped discs.' This is an early version of the Scottish rough oatcake, now a staple on the hippest of cheeseboards.

In his 17th-century description of the Western Isles of Scotland, writer Martin Martin remarked: 'Brochan [porridge]... is the constant food of several thousands of both sexes in these isles, yet they undergo many fatigues by both sea and land, and are very healthful.' To extend the shelf life of oats, preservation was key. It became tradition to turn oats into a paste with water, salt, and sometimes butter. The resulting porridge was stored in a wooden drawer and eaten over several days as small, solid squares not unlike the flapjacks and porridge bars that fuel marathon runners and cyclists these days.

STRAWBERRY FIELDS FOREVER

While dreich weather ruins Scotland's summer barbecue plans, strawberries grow plump and juicy and raspberries fatten in hedgerows. Blairgowrie in Perthshire became the UK's epicentre of berry growing over 100 years ago. A full 'tin village' was constructed to accommodate the women that would

come from the cities to pick fruit for a summer, and during the second world war, school children flocked from all over Scotland to pick Blairgowrie's berries.

My own first job was picking raspberries on a fruit farm in the Scottish borders aged 14. More fruit ended up in my mouth than in the punnets. At the end of fruit-picking season, a huge batch of cranachan was made for us to celebrate the end of the summer harvest. A pleasing muddle of creamy crowdie (soft fresh cheese from the Highlands and islands) or whipped cream, a tot of whisky and tart fresh raspberries, topped with oats. Cranachan is now a Burns Night favourite, ending the supper on a sweet note.

WATER OF LIFE

Of course, a big part of Burns Night is the whisky. 'The earliest record of distilling in Scotland was in 1494 tax records – the Exchequer Rolls,' explains Sarah Moxey. 'An entry lists "Eight bolls of malt to Friar John Cor wherewith to make aqua vitae" (water of life).' When Scottish parliament realised whisky's popularity in the 17th century, they added a tax. But the country's love of the barley-based spirit would not be quashed. Illicit stills popped up across Scotland and whisky smuggling was rife.

When the chill creeps into your bones and the wind howls down the chimney, there's nothing better than a warming dram of whisky, honey-hued and smelling of peat fires. In a country with dreich summers and blustery winters, a wee tot of whisky warms the heart and soul at the end of Burns Night. Slainte! ➤





SERVES 8 **V**
HANDS-ON TIME 40 mins
TOTAL TIME 50 mins, plus cooling and chilling

TIPSY LAIRD TRIFLE

This whisky-soaked version of a classic trifle is a must at Scottish celebrations like Burns Night.

- ◆ 100g caster sugar
- ◆ 2 cinnamon sticks
- ◆ 4 oranges, peeled and segmented
- ◆ 1 x 275g Madeira cake
- ◆ 150ml whisky liqueur (such as Drambuie or Glayva)
- ◆ 4 tbsp tipsy marmalade (see page 16)
- ◆ 400g thick custard
- ◆ 600ml double cream
- ◆ 3 shortbread fingers
- ◆ ground cinnamon, to dust

- 1** Put the sugar in a pan with the cinnamon sticks and 100ml water. Heat gently, stirring until the sugar has dissolved, then bring to a simmer. Add the orange segments and simmer gently for 10 minutes until syrupy. Remove from the heat and leave to cool.
- 2** Cut the Madeira cake into chunky slices and use to line the base of a trifle bowl, trimming and fitting as necessary so that the whole base is covered. Slowly pour over half of the whisky liqueur, ensuring all of the sponge gets a good drizzling. Top with the marmalade, spreading it out in an even layer. Drain the fruit from its syrup (this can be chilled and saved for making cocktails), then scatter the orange segments over the marmalade. Spoon the custard over. Combine the cream with the remaining whisky liqueur and whisk to very soft peaks. Spoon or pipe this over the top of the custard layer and chill for 1-2 hours before serving.
- 3** Just before serving, crumble the shortbread biscuits and scatter over the top. Dust with a little cinnamon to serve. Leftovers keep for 1-2 days in the fridge.

NUTRITIONAL INFO
 669cals; 48g fat (30g sat fat);
 5g protein; 1g fibre; 50g carbs;
 40g total sugars; 0.5g salt

SERVES 6
HANDS-ON TIME 1 hr
TOTAL TIME 3 hrs 15 mins, plus cooling

CHICKEN BALMORAL PIE

Chicken, bacon, haggis and whisky – the perfect combination for a richly decadent celebration pie.

For the pie

- ◆ a 1.5kg whole chicken
- ◆ 1 carrot, unpeeled, roughly chopped
- ◆ 1 onion, halved
- ◆ 10 peppercorns
- ◆ 60g butter
- ◆ 110g streaky bacon, chopped
- ◆ 250g haggis, cut into chunky pieces
- ◆ 2 leeks, washed and thickly sliced
- ◆ 2 garlic cloves, crushed
- ◆ 2 rosemary sprigs, needles chopped
- ◆ 50g plain flour
- ◆ 200ml double cream
- ◆ 75ml Taste the Difference Highland single malt Scotch whisky
- ◆ 1 tbsp wholegrain mustard
- ◆ 1 x 375g sheet ready-rolled puff pastry
- ◆ 1 egg, lightly beaten

For the mash

- ◆ 750g potatoes, peeled and cubed
- ◆ 500g swede, peeled and cubed
- ◆ 80g salted butter
- ◆ 75ml milk

- 1** Put the chicken in a large stock pot with the carrot, onion and peppercorns. Cover with cold water and bring to the boil. Reduce to a simmer, cover and poach the chicken for 1 hour. Remove the chicken to a board and set aside. Bring the stock back to the boil and continue to boil for 15-20 minutes or until reduced by half. Strain to remove the vegetables and peppercorns and measure out 500ml in readiness for the sauce. Set aside.
- 2** Heat half of the butter in a large saucepan and fry the bacon and haggis for 4-5 minutes, or until starting to crisp up. Try not to move the haggis around too much or it will crumble. Remove to a plate with a slotted spoon, then add the remaining butter to the pan. Fry the leeks, garlic and rosemary on a low heat for 10 minutes, or until very soft.
- 3** Sprinkle in the flour and cook out for a couple of minutes, then slowly add the 500ml chicken poaching stock, whisking as you add it to prevent any lumps forming. Add the cream, whisky and mustard, then bring to a simmer and cook for 6-8 minutes or until thickened to a sauce-like consistency. Remove from the heat and season well.
- 4** Discard the skin from the chicken and strip off all the meat. Shred into chunky pieces and add to the sauce along with the bacon and haggis. Transfer to a pie dish and cool completely.
- 5** Preheat the oven to 200°C, fan 180°C, gas 6. Unroll the pastry and use to cover the pie dish, trimming then crimping the edges to seal. Brush with the beaten egg, make a steam hole in the lid, then bake on a tray for 30-35 minutes, or until crisp and golden brown.
- 6** For the mash, put the potatoes and swede in two separate pans of cold water and bring to the boil. Simmer for 15-20 minutes, or until tender – the swede may take a bit longer to cook. Drain and combine in one pan, add the butter and milk and mash until smooth. Season to taste and serve with the pie. ➤

NUTRITIONAL INFO
 1,188cals; 70g fat (37g sat fat);
 60g protein; 10g fibre; 68g carbs;
 11g total sugars; 2.8g salt



Get ahead

Prepare the filling and cool completely before assembling the pie. Cover and chill for up to 24 hours. Glaze again before baking, and add an extra 10-15 minutes when baking from chilled, to make sure that the filling is piping hot throughout.

MAKES 2 V GF DF
HANDS-ON TIME 5 mins
TOTAL TIME 5 mins

THE FLYING SCOTSMAN

Named after the iconic train it was created for, this sophisticated cocktail was a regular tipple on the Flying Scotsman's route between London and Edinburgh.

- ◆ 100ml Taste the Difference Highland single malt Scotch whisky
- ◆ 90ml sweet vermouth (we used Cinzano)
- ◆ 1 tbsp clear honey
- ◆ 1 tsp Angostura bitters
- ◆ ice cubes
- ◆ pared lemon zest twists, to garnish

- 1** Put the whisky, vermouth, honey and bitters in a cocktail shaker with some ice.
- 2** Shake well for 20 seconds, then strain into two tumblers filled with ice. Garnish with lemon zest twists and serve. ■



FOOD STYLING: KIM MORPHEW, PROP STYLING: TONY HUTCHINSON, ADDITIONAL PHOTOGRAPHS: ALAMY, GETTY IMAGES