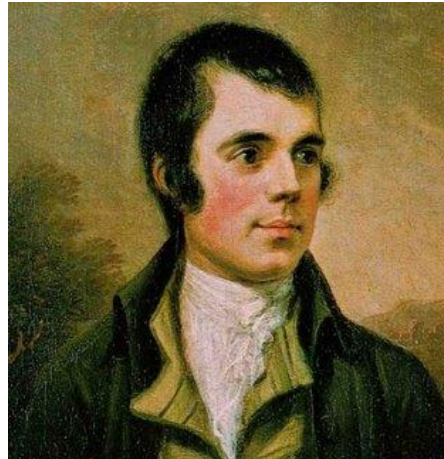


The 5 Minute Mason: The Story of Auld Lang Syne

*Should auld acquaintance be forgot
And never brought to mind?
Should auld acquaintance be forgot,
In days of auld lang syne?*

Undoubtedly, millions of people across the world sang Auld Lang Syne to see out the old year just a few days ago. Few people will know all the words and fewer still what they mean.

They are attributed to Robert Burns who apparently picked up the tune and some of the words from an old man singing in the dialect of southwest Scotland. The possibility is that Burns only wrote two of the five verses. But, as he did with numerous other Scottish songs, he modified them and, in some cases, purified them. The song was initially centered on two young men who had drifted apart after their early schooling, and who, after re-uniting, reminisced about their earlier times together, the happy experiences they had together and the kindly folk they met.



Brother Robert Burns

Robert Burns was initiated on July 4th 1781 in St. David's Lodge (now Lodge No. 133 under Scottish Constitution) in Tarbolton, after paying a degree fee of twelve shillings and six pence. As to his three degree ceremonies, there has been some disagreement as to where these took place. The consensus is that they were held in a local public house run by John Richards, a steward of the Lodge. When Burns became a Freemason at the age of 23 he quickly absorbed the superb symbolism of the Craft.

Congeniality was, for Burns, one of the most important virtues. For him, Auld Lang Syne is a heart-felt expression of his love of mankind and his ideal of International Brotherhood. The Masonic routine for this song is to form a circle in which everyone is equidistant from the center, demonstrating they are all equal. In this regard, the practice adopted in some lodges by placing the masters or other distinguished brethren in the center defeats the purpose of the ceremony associated with the song.

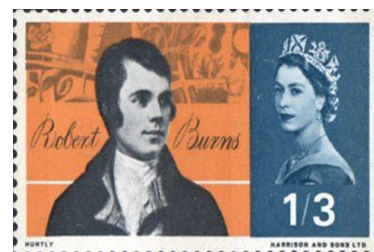
At the beginning of the song the brethren stand with hands by their sides, symbolizing they are relative strangers. The early verses should be sung (or hummed) very softly as brethren reflect both on cherished memories of earlier times together and on those brethren who have since passed to the Grand Lodge Above. When they come to the last verse, "And there's a hand, my trusty friend...", each brother then extends his right hand of fellowship to the brother on his left, then the left hand to the brother on his right. This symbolizes two things: first, that they are crossing their hearts; and second, that they have formed a smaller and more intimate circle of friendship. Now they have an unbroken chain of brethren who are close friends.

Robert Burns, poet, song writer, Freemason and patriot died in poverty in Dumfries, Scotland at the age of 37 on July 21st 1796. More than 12,000 people from all walks of life attended his funeral.

Two hundred and twenty years later, his life is celebrated by thousands of devotees throughout the world, and his timeless verses and songs of tenderness, wit and beauty have been translated into thirty- seven languages. A further example of the song's universality can be found in Lodge Norad (Nation) in The Czech Republic. Re-established in 1990 after the fall of Communism, Norad operates under the Scottish Constitution and closes its monthly meetings with "Auld Lang Syne," sung in Czech! The lodge meets in what was once the cellar of the Convent of St. Agnes of Bohemia, built by French stonemasons in 1234.

With his warm and abiding love for the whole brotherhood of mankind, Burns found in Freemasonry a splendid vehicle for the development of his philosophy. It is well known that Burns was about to depart for Jamaica just before his poems were published in July 1786. It is less well known that he came perilously close to joining the stream of Scottish martyrs being deported as political prisoners to Australia.

Burns lived in troubled times, typified by the American Declaration of Independence in 1776, the French Revolution in 1792, and the fervent "Reform Movement" in Britain striving to correct a badly flawed electoral system. As might be expected, giving expression to calls for liberty, equality and fraternity met with stem opposition from the deeply entrenched "establishment" classes, with their vested interest in property, politics and religion.



... The 5 Minute Mason: a series of nuggets from the Quarry of Freemasonry.SM

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