



NUGGET

Robert 'Rabbie' Burns

Summary: The life, loves and works of 'Rabbie Burns'; Scottish Mason.



Brother Robert Burns (1759–1796), unknown artist
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Robert Burns was born on 25 January 1759, as Robert Burness, the eldest of the seven children of William Burness, a tenant farmer. Robert's baptism entry¹ records his surname as 'Burns' rather than 'Burness' denoting the more common spelling in Ayrshire. He adopted this shortened form when he was 27 years old. He was, and is, Scotland's favourite son, and in 2009, he was voted 'Greatest Scot' by the Scottish public. He wrote some 368 songs and 191 poems and is widely regarded as the national poet of Scotland, and is celebrated worldwide.

He grew up in poverty and hardship, and the severe manual labour associated with becoming the principal labourer of the farm at 15, left its traces on him; in his stooped stance and weakened constitution. He had little regular schooling and got much of his education from his Father.

He had many casual love affairs, which gained him a reputation for dissoluteness. His first child, Elizabeth Paton Burns was born to his Mother's servant, Elizabeth Paton, while at the same time he was courting Jean Armour, the daughter of a stonemason, who bore him twins in 1786; they were wed two years later. Jean bore him nine children, but only three survived infancy. His various amours inspired many of his poems and songs.

Rabbie Burns was Initiated as an Entered Apprentice at Saint David's Lodge in Tarbolton on 4th July 1781, when he was 22, and Passed and Raised on 1st October, the same year. When this Lodge became dormant, he joined the Kilwinning Saint James Lodge, No. 135, and the minutes for 1784 show that he was heavily involved in Lodge business, attending all nine meetings, Passing and Raising Brethren, and generally helping to run the Lodge. In 1785, he was appointed Deputy Master, and between 1784 and 1788, his Lodge met 70 times. He was present at 33 of those meetings and occupied the Master's Chair at 25 of them. He was exalted a Companion of the Royal Arch in May 1787 at the St. Ebbe's Chapter in Eyemouth, and in token of their esteem, the Companions unanimously agreed to waive the usual admission fee. Over time, his fame grew and at a meeting of Lodge St. Andrew in Edinburgh in 1787, the Grand Master of Scotland, proposed a toast

to Burns, who had been appointed Poet Laureate of the Lodge. Further editions of the Kilmarnock Edition of Burns's poems were sponsored by the Edinburgh Freemasons, ensuring that his name spread around Scotland and subsequently to England and abroad. Burns continued as a very active Mason until his death. Having attended his final meeting on 14th April 1796, he passed away on the morning of 21st July that same year, aged just 37. His funeral took place four days later, on the day that his son Maxwell was born; his wife Jean was laid to rest with him in 1834.

Burns Night: After Saint Andrew's day on 30th November, Burns Night, celebrated on his birthday, 25th January, has become the second Scottish National Day, and is celebrated with Burns suppers around the world.

The celebrations start with a general welcome and announcements, followed by the *Selkirk Grace*. Then the haggis is piped into the room and around the table, before the reading of the famous *Address to a Haggis* after which it is cut open and served, with neeps and tatties (turnip/swede and potatoes). During the meal, Burns' *Immortal Memory* and other poems are read, toasts are proposed and drunk and the evening concludes with the singing of *Auld Lang Syne*.

References

1. <https://www.scotlandsppeople.gov.uk/article/news-celebrating-birth-robert-burns>
2. Harper, Paul, Famous Freemasons - A Prologue, <https://solomon.ugle.org.uk/mod/resource/view.php?id=2084>



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Papers offer a simple, direct means of advancement in a particular aspect of Masonic knowledge. They can be used in a variety of ways:

- Read at home for private study
- Shared for pre-reading by members of a discussion group
- Read aloud in Lodge or Chapter, or in an LOI/COI/new members forum
 - Followed by 'any questions'
 - As a precursor to a discussion (in which case much more time is needed, possibly more than double that allocated to the paper itself)
 - Supported by audio-visual aids, if necessary

They can be delivered by a single person or split into bite-sized pieces and read by multiple presenters (in which case, the speaker(s) should have read and practiced the delivery of the paper beforehand).

*Note: All biblical passages are taken from the Authorized King James version unless otherwise specified.

If the paper is to be used to introduce a discussion, the presenter will need to have thought about the material, done a little research, and prepared some open questions to engage with the audience. Kipling's dictum can be of help in preparing open questions, which should begin with one of his 'serving men', as follows: *'I keep six honest serving men (they taught me all I knew). Their names are, What and Why and When and How and Where and Who'*. Rudyard Kipling

If used as part of an event, the paper should be advertised and promoted by way of trailers, flyers and announcements, in summonses, letters, emails, notice boards, and on social media.

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Acknowledgement:

UGLE gratefully acknowledges Ray Hollins as the compiler and editor of this document, which is an extract from his series of ten volumes, collectively titled 'A Daily Advancement in Masonic Knowledge' and for his permission to publish it in this form.

He wishes to acknowledge the assistance of RW Bro Richard Fletcher, Past Grand Master of the Grand Lodge of Vermont in The United States of America, and the Masonic Service Association of North America (MSANA) who gave their permission for the use of a wealth of interesting and informative material within their publications known as 'Short Talk Bulletins' and MSANA references are made at the end of each Short Talk in full copyright acknowledgement. Each 'Short Talk' has been carefully re-written by WBro Hollins PAGDC, to provide supplementary information from a wide variety of sources used for the benefit of Freemasonry in general.

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