



# Hogmanay

Learn better English with the British Council

**Do you celebrate 31st December? In Scotland it is known as Hogmanay. Read the article below about Hogmanay and try to answer the questions.**

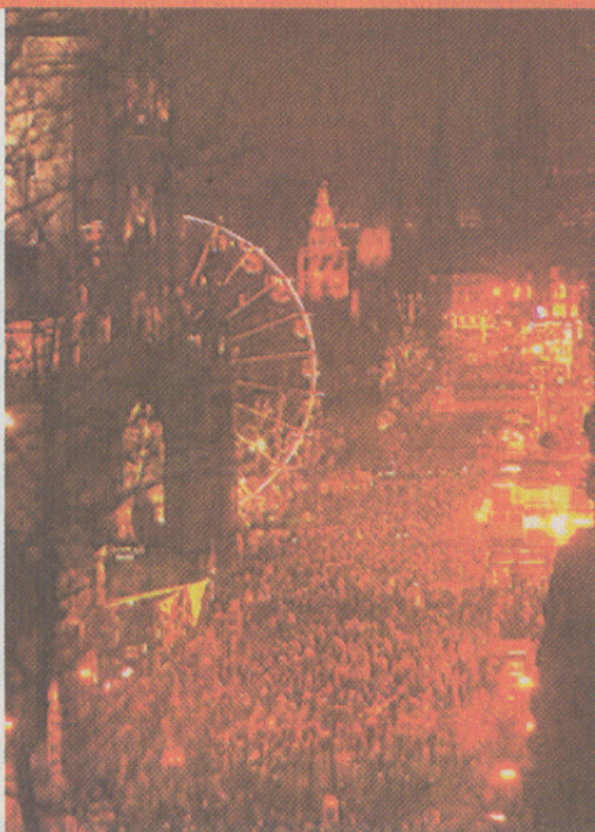
This is the Scots word for the celebration of the New Year. Its official date is the 31st of December. This is normally only the start of a celebration which lasts through the night until the morning of the 1st or, in many cases, the 2nd of January.

There are many customs, both national and local, associated with Hogmanay. The most widespread national custom is the practice of *first-footing* which starts immediately after midnight. It involves being the first person to cross the entrance of a friend's or neighbour's home and the giving of symbolic gifts such as coal or shortbread, intended to bring different kinds of luck to the householder. This can continue throughout the early hours of the morning and well into the next day.

An example of a local Hogmanay custom is the fireball swinging in Stonehaven, north-east Scotland. This involves local people making up balls of chicken wire, tar, paper and other flammable material to a diameter of about a metre. Each ball has two metres of wire, chain or non-flammable rope attached. The balls are then each assigned to a swinger who swings the ball round and round their head and body by the rope while walking through the streets from the harbour to the Sheriff Court and back. At the end of the ceremony any fireballs which are still burning are cast into the harbour. Large crowds flock to the town to enjoy this display which is more impressive in the dark than it would be during the day.

Until the 1960s, Hogmanay and Ne'erday (a contraction of "New Year's Day" in Scots dialect, according to the OED) in Scotland took the place of Christmas Eve and Christmas Day in the rest of the UK. Although Christmas Day held its normal religious nature, the Church of Scotland had discouraged its celebration for over 300 years. As a result Christmas Day was a normal working day in Scotland until the 1960s and even into the 1970s in some areas. The gift-giving, public holidays and feasting associated with mid-winter were held between the 31st of December and the 2nd of January rather than between the 24th and 26th of December.

With the fading of the Church's influence and the introduction of English cultural values via television and immigration, the transition to Christmas feasting was complete by the 1980s. However the public holidays associated with Ne'erday and the day after have remained despite the addition of Christmas Day to the public holiday list. Hogmanay still is associated with as much, or more, celebration as Christmas in Scotland. Most Scots still celebrate Ne'erday with a special dinner, usually roast lamb.



As in the rest of the world, the four largest Scottish cities hold all-night celebrations. The Edinburgh Hogmanay celebrations are among the largest in the world, though in 2003-4 most of the organised events were cancelled at short notice due to high winds. The celebrations have become an organised event, with even an official website:

<http://www.edinburghshogmanay.org/>

The celebrations planned for this year include a street party with music varying from French hip hop to Jamaican reggae and ska. The evening will also have a fireworks display, organised by the man responsible for the Athens Olympic firework display. The scale of the event is reflected in the fact that people from all over the world are expected to attend.

The Right Partner