

# HEATHER BELL

NEWSLETTER OF THE CALEDONIAN & ST. ANDREWS SOCIETY OF SEATTLE

[www.caledonians.com](http://www.caledonians.com)

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## NEXT GATHERING

Members of Caledonian & St. Andrew's Society will continue to gather using the electronic app Zoom for the next several months, due to the current health crisis and prohibitions on large gatherings of people.

Our next gathering is Sunday, December 13<sup>th</sup>, at 2:00pm. An e-mailed link will be sent to everyone who has computer access a few days in advance of this date. For those of you with a computer you can join by copying and pasting this address into your browser:

<https://us02web.zoom.us/j/713418301?pwd=K1ZUQnBOSE53YURUYjE4SW4ySjkxQT09>

You can also click on this link in the Heather Bell or listen by phone by calling 1-253-215-8782 and entering the meeting ID: 713 418 301 and then the passcode: 004905. For those without a camera on your computer, you can do both, letting you see everyone on the computer and connect with people on your phone.

## DECEMBER PROGRAM



Entertainment for the December 13<sup>th</sup> gathering will be Ryan McKasson, fiddle player. Ryan performed for Caledonian meetings with his sister, Cali, several times in the past. Cali passed away recently, but Ryan

continues to perform with several different bands. Ryan started learning the violin at the age of 4. He later joined the Seattle Scottish Fiddlers, headed by Calum MacKinnon, where he first began to play Scottish fiddle. He has gained a reputation as a performer, composer, collaborator, and teacher. He has performed with fiddler Alasdair Fraser and recorded with him and Natalie Haas on their album *Highlander's Farewell*. You can find out more about Ryan on his website:

<http://www.ryanmckasson.com>

For his concert, he will have a special PayPal arrangement if you choose to donate an additional amount beyond the fee paid by the Caledonians, a tip, for excellence in musical performance. The link is [https://paypal.me/ryanmckasson?locale.x=en\\_US](https://paypal.me/ryanmckasson?locale.x=en_US).

## FUTURE PROGRAMS

Plan ahead to join us each month for Caledonian gatherings on Zoom.

### January 10: Richard Hill, Gaelic Teacher

Richard will provide a program of poetry and songs by Robert Burns for our regular Sunday afternoon Caledonian gathering. Rich has 25 years of experience teaching Gaelic. There will be an opportunity to sing a few songs along with him.

### January 24: Virtual Robert Burns Supper

While gathering for an actual Robert Burns Dinner to enjoy platefuls of haggis, neaps, and tatties, is not possible at this time, Caledonians will be able to gather on Zoom with others in the Seattle area to pipe in the haggis and enjoy the poetry and songs of the bard at this special event. The usual toasts and a

video of Burns celebrations around the world will bring fond memories.

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## FACEBOOK

The Caledonians have a Facebook page at <https://www.facebook.com/seattlecaledonians/?ref=bookmarks>

Diana Smith frequently posts interesting articles and notices, so check back often.

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## SUNSHINE REPORT

Bonnie reminds people that she does not have e-mail, so please call her when you have information about Caledonians who are ill or passed away. Her phone is 425-806-3734.

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## Calendar of Seattle Area Scottish Events

At this time, we do not know of any Scottish events scheduled for our area, except our own online ones. Many groups and Scottish Highland Games that cancelled in 2020 are hopeful for 2021.

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## Recap of the November Caledonian Gathering



Susan McLain wore her Anderson tartan to perform in her home on her Irish harp for the November Caledonian gathering. Twenty-six Caledonians and guests enjoyed the concert. Susan graciously showed us four of her eight harps, in sizes from a small travel harp to a full-sized concert harp. She pointed out that many societies, not just the Celts, had harps. In fact, she said, any society that used the bow and arrow also developed a harp

(using the same motions,) tuned specifically to their musical tastes.

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## Reminder – It's time to Renew Your Annual Membership for 2021

Membership dues are what allow the Caledonians to book the fabulous fiddlers, singers, harpists, and bagpipers who have entertained us so well during 2020 while we couldn't meet in person and instead gathered using the Zoom app. The coronavirus pandemic has devastated music performers all over the world. Many who depended on venues at Scottish highland games and Celtic festivals for their living have found their concerts canceled and no future bookings possible. They have been amazingly receptive to our pleas for entertainment using Zoom. Please help us continue enjoying Scottish and Celtic performers from all around the USA and Scotland.

Dues are \$35 for individuals and \$45 for couples/families. Checks should be made out to the **Caledonian & St. Andrew's Society of Seattle and marked for 2021 Membership.**

We are creating a membership directory again after a number of years without one, so **please include your address, phone number(s), and e-mail address(es)** when you send your check.

Send new and renewal memberships to:

Membership  
Caledonian & St. Andrew's Society of Seattle  
P.O. Box 27278  
Seattle, WA 98165-1778

Membership includes receiving monthly newsletters and a copy of the new membership directory. Information about upcoming Scottish activities and concerts (when they are able to resume) and reminders about gatherings are sent to members by e-mail as well.

## Articles and Topics About

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# Scotland and Things Scottish

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From *The Scottish Banner* and Wikipedia.

## Hogmanay

Until 1958, for nearly 400 years Christmas was not celebrated in Scotland due to the Protestant Reformation. For Scots, the big celebration would be at the Winter Solstice holiday, which became Hogmanay. It's not know exactly where the word comes from, although it is believed to have come from the French word "hoginane," meaning "gala day."

In Shetland, where the Viking influence remains strongest, New Year is still called Yules, deriving from the Scandinavian word for the midwinter festival of Yule.

Nowadays Hogmanay is mostly a chance to have a huge party and many communities go all out to put on a wonderful celebration, complete with fireworks and music. However, traditionalists still cling to a number of long-time practices.

"Redding the house" replaces spring cleaning in importance and many Scots adhere to the tradition of cleaning their houses to welcome in the New Year. Starting the New Year with a dirty house is considered unlucky. However, cleaning or doing laundry on New Year's Day is bad luck, because you might sweep or wash away the good luck.

First footing, a frequent part of Hogmanay celebrations, is when friends or family visit others' houses immediately after midnight to become the first person to go into their house in the New Year. Traditionally, the first footer should be someone who was not already in the house when midnight struck—hence the Scottish party tradition. The very first "foot," or visiting person, should traditionally be a tall, dark-haired man bringing gifts of a coin, a lump of coal, salt, shortbread, a black bun, and whisky to toast a Happy New Year. These gifts represented all the things the new year would hopefully bring, such as prosperity, food, flavor, warmth and good cheer. Fair-haired first footers were not particularly welcome after the Viking invasions of ancient times. Since Vikings were typically fairer haired, the arrival of a blond man could have meant imminent danger!

The Hogmanay Scottish custom of paying off all outstanding debts before the stroke of midnight

makes sense as everyone wants to start the new year without debt.

The Highland custom of saining (or blessing) the house and livestock goes far back in time, but has seen a come-back with some households. Traditional saining rites may involve water that has been blessed and sprinkled all throughout the house and then fumigating the house and byre with smoke from burning juniper. Once the smoke has been cleared by opening doors and windows, accompanied by spoken prayers or poetry, the woman of the house administers a restorative from the whisky bottle and the household sits down to its New Year breakfast.

One does wonder about Scottish customs when on the one hand the house must be cleaned since a dirty house at New Year's is unlucky, and on the other hand, the house is thoroughly smoked to remove all evil!

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## Men's Sheds

A social movement that originated some decades ago in Australia is the Men's Shed. It came to Scotland earlier this century and has really taken off. The Scottish Men's Shed is for all men who have "time on their hands" who might want to lead active lives, make a difference, and build their communities into something better. Older men and younger men, unemployed and employed, skilled and unskilled are all welcome.



The goal of these places is to be a permanent meeting place for men where lots of good community and healthy experiences take place. They include "everyday" men

willing to act with the skills they already have within their local community. They might work on a project, such as restoring a car, or learn to do wood or metalwork. They could be taught how to repair bicycles, or they may be helping the local community. Whatever work they are engaged in, the aim is to improve physical and mental health.

The pandemic has naturally cut back on Men's Shed activities all across Scotland as people are directed to stay home and places where people gather are closed. The result has been especially hard on men whose social and community interactions are often less than those available to women.

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## Stone of Destiny



The Stone of Destiny, sometimes called the Stone of Scone, a block of red sandstone, is an ancient icon of Scotland, used for centuries at the coronation of monarchs. It was used in the inauguration of the early kings of Dalriada and was taken to Scone Abbey by King Kenneth MacAlpin in the 9<sup>th</sup> century. In 1296 it was seized by English king Edward I, who had it installed in a Coronation Chair at Westminster Abbey in London. From that time on, it was part of the coronation ceremony for sovereigns of Great Britain and Northern Ireland.

On Christmas Day 1950, four Scottish students carried out an audacious theft of the stone from Westminster Abbey. Their aim was to return the stone to Scotland with the hope that it would promote their call for Home Rule.

The story is told that their feat almost didn't happen with one mishap after another. The first hurdle was when one of the students who had hatched the plan, Ian Hamilton, was caught hiding in the abbey by a night watchman. He talked his way out of trouble and returned late on Christmas Eve with the other three conspirators.

The second hurdle was that when they managed to get into the chapel where the Coronation Chair stands and pulled out the stone, it promptly broke into two pieces. They dragged the smaller piece outside to a waiting car.

When a policeman spotted them, Hamilton and co-conspirator Kay Matheson engaged in an embrace to make the officer think they were lovers. The policeman went on his route and with this third hurdle passed, the conspirators went back for the larger piece and dragged it out to a second car.

At first, the pieces were stashed in different places in England. When the theft was revealed, amid suspicion that nationalists were behind it, the border between Scotland and England was closed for the first time in 400 years.

A few weeks later, the conspirators were able to bring the two pieces back to Glasgow and hired a sympathetic stonemason to repair it.

In April 1951, the stone was left on the altar at Arbroath Abbey, where the Declaration of Arbroath was signed in 1320. Despite the symbolism, however, the authorities returned the stone to Westminster Abbey in 1952.

With the permission of the queen, the stone was returned to Scotland in 1996 and currently is displayed in Edinburgh Castle, where it has been placed in the Crown Room beside the Honours of Scotland. It is preserved and safeguarded by Historic Environment Scotland (HES).

A spokesman from HES said that since then the stone, "a priceless national icon for Scots, has become something of a talisman for Scottish nationhood, its symbolism becoming more significant in recent years than it perhaps was at the time it was taken in 1296 by King Edward I."

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## Hebridean Heritage in Herring Girl Knitware

A small Hebridean clothing company is ensuring that an age-old knitting tradition is kept alive. Using a workforce made up of skilled knitters and craftspeople, Herring Girl Knitwear is using unique patterns and styles first developed during the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries by a band of women known as "herring girls," who followed the shoals of herring around the British coast. The women, who came from all over the country and often spent months away from home, were employed in the gruelling work of gutting and curing the fish for merchants.

Island culture views the herring girls as resilient, hardworking, strong women. Living

conditions were poor and the work was hard, but these women spent their time off with singing, talking, and knitting. Their knitting patterns had a distinct connection to their home islands and the fishing industry. They often included designs such as anchors, sails, ship's wheels, knots, hearts or marriage lines.

Patterns and styles knitted by the original herring girls linked each island to its own identifiers. A person meeting a fisherman wearing a hand-knitted Guernsey (jumper, or sweater) could identify that person's home port just by looking at the pattern. The colors used were traditionally greens, blues, and browns, and the new company continues this tradition.

Herring Girl Knitware uses the official fishing port registrations to signify which community the patterns relate to. For instance, "CY"



Barra fishermen's Guernsey using the True Lovers Knot pattern.

represents patterns created by herring girls working out of the fishing port of Castlebay on Barra.

"SY" represents patterns associated with Storn-

oway on the Isle of Lewis and "BRD" for Broadford on the Isle of Skye. A unique quirk of the Herring Girls Knitware brand is that knitters are not identified by name. Instead each chooses the name and registration number of a fishing boat historically linked to that community.

## Farthing Coin

Have you ever read a book set in historical Scotland, England or Great Britain, where a farthing was mentioned? Have you ever wondered what that coin was, and how much it was worth?

The farthing coin, named from an Old English word for "fourth", was a unit of currency valued at one quarter of an old penny or 1/960 of a

pound sterling. The coin was minted in silver under the English king Henry III in the 13<sup>th</sup> century. Later, struck in copper, it was used during the reigns of eleven monarchs from George I through Elizabeth II in Great Britain and Northern Ireland. After 1714, when copper was harder to obtain and copper coins were easily defaced and became misshapen, farthings were minted in bronze.

The farthing obverse featured the monarch of the time, encircled by a legend describing their titles. The reverse originally had an image of Britannia, although from the time of king George IV an English wren was the image. Early minted farthings were by no means consistent in size, shape, and weight. It depended on the price of copper and its purity, as well as the skill of the Royal Mint or the companies they hired to mint coins. With copper, there was a high level of minting errors some years.

In Victorian times, a farthing could buy three oysters, with bread and butter, from an oyster-seller walking the streets of London. It was enough to purchase a sparrow at a market in London's East End. Since the farthing and the gold half sovereign were the same size, farthings were artificially darkened to avoid confusion that might occur if bright new farthings were issued.

In the years after World War II, the farthing was used more often since the price of bread was set by the government and the price included an odd halfpenny. Thus, a purchase of a half-pound loaf of bread always required a farthing, either in payment or as change.

The farthing's value was eroded by inflation during Queen Elizabeth's reign and commercial demand fell. Much as American stores prefer that purchases not be made entirely with U.S. pennies, shopkeepers in Great Britain

objected to being paid in multiple farthings, such as eight farthings for a twopenny bus fare or six farthings for a newspaper. And, as with the American penny, the value of the copper in the coin and costs of minting it came to outstrip its

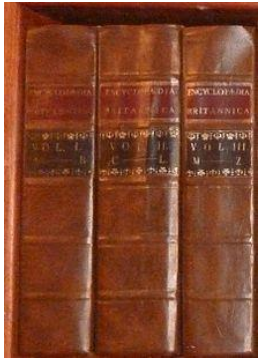


spending value. It ceased to be legal tender on 31 December 1960.

## Encyclopaedia Britannica started in Scotland

The first volume of *Encyclopaedia Britannica* was published in Edinburgh in December 1768. It was the idea of Colin Macfarquhar, a bookseller and printer, and Andrew Bell, an engraver, both of Edinburgh. Inspired by the intellectual ferment of the Scottish Enlightenment, they conceived of the Britannica as a conservative reaction to the French Encyclopédie of Denis Diderot, which was widely viewed as heretical.

The original first volume was a thick pamphlet, called a “number”. The first editor, William



Smellie, wrote most of the original pamphlet. He borrowed liberally from the authors of his era, including Voltaire, Benjamin Franklin, Alexander Pope, and Samuel Johnson. Although faulted for its imperfect scholarship, it had vivid prose and was easily navigated, leading to strong

demand for more issues. The first number was priced at sixpence.

One hundred of these “numbers” were released to subscribers in weekly installments, all of which eventually were bound together in three volumes totalling about 2,391 pages. The “numbers” included 160 copperplate illustrations, some of which, such as those depicting childbirth in clinical detail, were so shocking that some readers tore them out of the volume.

The idea that set the *Britannica* apart from other encyclopedias prior to that time was that related topics were grouped together into longer essays that were then organized alphabetically. The desire to update knowledge and add new topics resulted in new editions being published every few years.

The size of the encyclopedia increased at times to as much as 30 volumes and included thousands of maps, photographs, flags, and illustrations. In recent years it contained over 40,000 articles

written by scholars from across the world, including Nobel Prize winners.

In 1994, an online version of *Encyclopaedia Britannica* was launched, and its print edition ended publication around 2012. It has become unable to compete with the online encyclopedia *Wikipedia*, which is free and easily updated by users, although its online version still exists for subscribers, with articles written by scholars and a vast range of knowledgeable people.



A fellowship founded in Seattle in 1902 to foster a love of Scotland, her people, and her heritage.

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