

the Oat Newsletter.

To the Immortal Memory...and Absent Friends

January 25th is the birthday of Scottish poet Robert Burns (1759-1796). He is probably best known for having written “Auld Lang Syne”, the song sung around the world at the stroke of midnight every December 31st, but his importance stems from his having been a man of the people. He wrote using the Broad Scots dialect, and incorporated many astute political and sociological observations into his poetry, which was often very humorous. My personal favourites are [“To a Louse”](#) and (funnily enough) [“To a Mouse”](#).

What does this have to do with oats? Burns’ birthday is celebrated with Burns Suppers, which always include a reading of his poem “To a Haggis”. Haggis is essentially mutton and sheep’s offal mixed together with oats, onions, and seasoning and sewn into a sheep’s stomach, resulting in something that resembles an enormous sausage. At the International Oat Conference held in New Zealand in 2002, haggis was served at the banquet, and was [addressed](#) as it would have been at a proper Burns Supper. The photo below shows Sam Weaver, Darrell Wesenberg, and Deon Stuthman participating in the ritual.



(photo courtesy of Nick Tinker)

After a toast to the haggis and the sharing of the meal, there is always a toast to the Immortal Memory of Robert Burns. The most poignant part of the evening is also a toast, this time to Absent Friends. In this Internet Age, we are lucky to be able to communicate easily, even when we cannot be in the same room together. Still, over time, we lose members of our community as their "[race of existence is run](#)". [Deon](#) passed away in 2010, and, earlier this month, on January 9th, Ron McKenzie passed away.

So, then, here are my toasts to the Haggis (and the oats contained within it!), to the Immortal Memory of Robert Burns, and, most importantly of all, to Absent Friends.

Slàinte mhath! Good Health to you all!

-Charlene Wight (whose Grannie was a Burns), 21 Jan 2015.