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# Thistle Epistle

December 2025



## **Burns Night**

Burns Night is coming up soon - January 24th, 2026, at Mukogawa Commons. Doors open at 5:00 pm, and the program starts at 6:00 pm. As usual, there will be a full dinner, served buffet-style.

There will also be a full program of entertainment, including the address to the haggis, pipe band performances, highland and country dancing, Burns poetry, and social dancing to the music of Crooked Kilt. Tickets are now on sale, and are going fast. If you are looking for something different for a Christmas gift, and value experiences over material things, here is your chance!

Tickets may be purchased online at the Society's website [spokanescots.org](http://spokanescots.org). Tickets are \$65 for adults and \$50 for those under 18. There will be a no-host bar with an emphasis on single malt scotch, but also beer, wine and soft drinks.

To get to Mukogawa Commons, drive to Whistalks Way (where Spokane Falls Community College is located). Turn on Randolph Road, which leads into the Mukogawa campus. From there, signs will direct you to the Commons building.

If you have questions, please contact us by email at [inlandnwscots@gmail.com](mailto:inlandnwscots@gmail.com).



## **Seachdain Na Gaidhlig (World Scottish Gaelic Week)**

The Gaelic Conversation Group, led by Jessica Bruner, will be hosting an event celebrating World Scottish Gaelic Week on February 28th, from 1:00 to 4:00. The event will be held at one of the libraries in the area.

Fulling is a traditional finishing process for woven wool cloth that applies pressure, moisture and friction to woven textiles to make the fabric denser, smoother and more water-resistant by causing the fibers to interlock. In the Highlands this was known as "waulking" and was done by groups of women pressing the woolen fabric on tables by hand. Since this was a group and social activity it was accompanied by the women singing songs in Gaelic. Jessica is planning to mirror this by having woolen cloth available for hands-on waulking by participants, and teaching some Gaelic songs. All are welcome, of all ages: if you can reach a tabletop, you can participate. For those not yet up to table top height, Jessica will have coloring materials available.

Refreshments will be served.

We will be sending out a reminder email with the exact location in the new year.



### **National Tartan Day**

The Society will be celebrating National Tartan Day on Saturday, April 11th, at Shadle Library. As yet we have not done much detailed planning - too busy with Burns Night! However, we expect as always to showcase a variety of Scottish culture.



### **Tannahill Weavers**

The Tannahill Weavers are coming back to town!

Those who came to the last performance in Spokane of this acclaimed Scottish group in 2023, will remember what a great performance they put on. We are fortunate that they had such a good time here that they want to come back.



The Tannahill Weavers are one of the premier Scottish traditional bands. Founded in the 1960s, they still have two of the original band members, as well as two more recent recruits. Their name comes from their home town of Paisley, a weaving town near Glasgow, and Robert Tannahill, a Scottish poet who was from that town, and was writing shortly after the time of Robbie Burns. The Tannahills were the first to incorporate the great highland bagpipe into a band ensemble, and in 2011 were inducted into the Traditional Celtic Music Hall of Fame.

Arrangements under way are similar to those in 2023. The concert will be in Opportunity Presbyterian Church, at 202 N Pines in Spokane Valley, which is a great venue. Tickets will be \$25 for adults, and \$15 for those aged 10 to 17 - the same prices as last year. Kids 9 and under are free.

We hope you will come out to see this great band, and encourage your friends and those who enjoy Celtic music to join you!



### **COSCA**

The Council of Scottish Clans and Associations, to which our Society belongs, puts out a monthly newsletter. This month's issue is concerned with forging closer links between clans and associations, and trustees of Scotland's historic castles, battlegrounds and other sites, such as the National Trust for Scotland. They write:

“Scotland's castles, battlefields, estates, and landscapes are not static relics—they are living archives of lineage, lore, and leadership. For clan and family societies, these places are more than tourist sites; they are homes of memory, resilience, and identity.

The National Trust for Scotland (NTS), Scotland's largest conservation charity, protects over 100 properties and 270,000 acres of land. Since 2000, its sister organization National Trust for Scotland Foundation - USA (NTS-USA), has encouraged Americans to support this mission. In 2020, NTS-USA launched the Clan Partners program—a way for societies to formally link themselves to heritage sites.

In theory, clan and family societies would be the natural partners with the NTS for preserving and interpreting the historic sites that once shaped their ancestors' lives. In fact, only a limited number of societies are supported by the NTS. For example, NTS sells Irwin crest and tartan merchandise at their property, Drum Castle. At Crathes Castle, the NTS has a Burnett Clan Room that displays copies of the House of Burnett newsletter, *The Burnett Banner*.

In November 2025, COSCA researched the perception of the NTS, NTS-USA, and the Clan Partnership program. Inquiries were sent to over 250 representatives of 42 clan and family societies that represented the families associated with NTS heritage sites or that were members of the Clan Partnership program at one time. Many expressed support for the work of the NTS, and others provided specific ideas for strengthening the partnership.

Clan societies bring more than money or manpower—they bring meaning. Their oral histories, archival research, and cultural practices add layers of interpretation that make a castle not just a structure, but a stage for kinship and leadership.”



### Nova Scotia

For several years my wife and I have been talking about a visit to the Canadian Maritime provinces: New Brunswick, Nova Scotia, Prince Edward Island and Newfoundland. One particular attraction was their reputation as a hub for Celtic music. This year we finally made it, at least to the first three.



All three were great places to visit, but my favorite turned out to be Nova Scotia. “Nova Scotia” is of course Latin for New Scotland, and I was surprised how strong the Scottish influence is, particularly in the north of the province which is known as Cape Breton Island. The provincial flag reflects the Scottish heritage: a reverse saltire with a lion rampant emblem in the center. The road signs are in English and Gaelic, and Gaelic is taught in the schools. There are old cemeteries where almost all the headstones have Scottish names.

We were not disappointed in the Celtic music scene. We went to a pub/restaurant featuring a Cape Breton fiddler and piano accompanist: the pub sign was also in both Gaelic and English. Just down the road from where we were staying was Judique (pronounced “Juh-dick”), in which there was a Celtic Music Interpretative Center. This had all sorts of exhibits, and a section where one could play samples of different types of Celtic music. It also featured a daily lunchtime concert which we enjoyed. As well as tourists such as ourselves, quite a few local regulars showed up to take in the concert and the surprisingly good lunch.



Cape Breton Island is also known for the Cabot Trail, a road which goes round the island and is sandwiched between the sea and the mountains, with spectacular views. Of course, a lot depends on the weather. The Maritimes are known for their wet and cool climate, but we were very lucky to have lots of sunshine throughout the trip. The only snag is that it is a very long way - but still closer than Scotland itself!

### Gravoir - a medieval hair-styling tool

St Andrew's Society member Charles Porter drew my attention to an article about an interesting historical find made at Eilean Donan Castle. This is a 13th-century castle in the Scottish highlands situated on a small tidal island where three sea lochs meet: Loch Duich, Loch Long and Loch Aish.



During excavation work commissioned by National Museums Scotland, archeologists dug up a trove of medieval items relating to the everyday life of the castle inhabitants. What excited the archeology team most was finding an incredibly rare medieval gravoir. As a lover of domestic history, naturally I had to find out more about it.



A gravoir is a tool used to part hair with precision and help in creating the elaborate hairstyles of the time. This one is carved into the shape of a hooded person holding a book and, according to National Museums Scotland, is only the third artifact of its kind found in the United Kingdom, and the first to be found in Scotland. According to Alice Blackwell, the senior curator of archaeology and history at the National Museums Scotland, gravoirs originated in France and the complicated hairstyles spread from there in the thirteenth century.

Most gravoirs found so far were made from ivory, but the Scottish find is made from red deer antler, giving it a local twist in its connection to European high fashion.

It made me think of a modern-day tail comb, only the gravoir is much prettier. Just for fun I looked up "tail comb" online. (It's also known as a "rat tail comb", apparently!) Here's what I found: A tail comb is an indispensable tool for precise work like creating perfect

partings, dividing hair into sections for coloring or braiding, and creating detailed styling and sophisticated updos. It certainly sounds like a modern-day gravoir to me!

*Anna Guthrie*

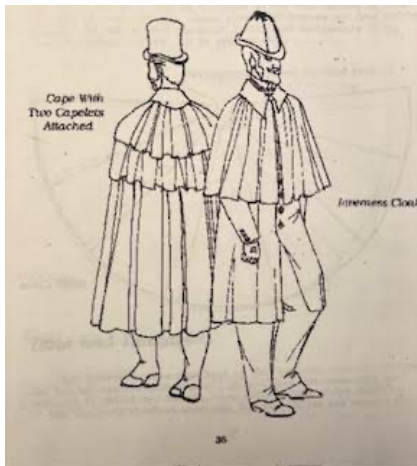
### Fun Fact About Eilean Donan Castle

If the castle featured above seems familiar, it is because this 13th-century Scottish castle has appeared in several films, including *Highlander* (1986), *Loch Ness* (1996), *The World Is Not Enough* (1999) and *Elizabeth: The Golden Age* (2007).

### Capes and Outer Coats

Overcoats and capes were worn at night and in inclement weather by all men in Victorian and Edwardian times. Nowadays, they are still worn as part of highland dress when it is raining.

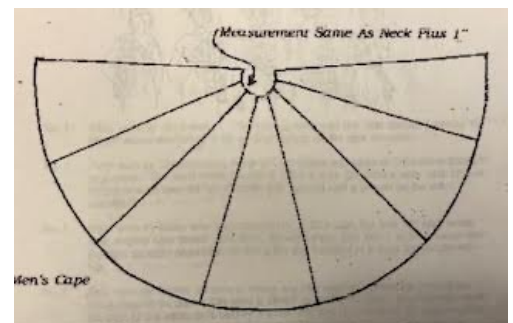
The overcoat looks like either a loose-fitting frock coat, or it looks like a slightly larger version of the modern overcoat. It is made of a heavy wool in some darker color and is thick and bulky.



The long cloak or cape was usually reserved for dressy evening occasions such as the opera. Shorter capes were worn for traveling or country wear. The most familiar of these is the Inverness coat made famous by illustrations of Sherlock Holmes. It is a wide-sleeved loose coat with a deep shoulder cape added. It first became popular in the 1860s.

To make a cape:

- Choose a fabric without a nap or pattern, so you may use the least amount of fabric to get maximum fullness. Choose a lining material.
- Cut the sections, with the outer material and the lining being identical.
- Sew each of the outer material sections together, and each of the lining sections together.
- Make a collar and sew it into the neck opening of the outer material.
- Pin the lining to the outer material, and then hang for a day or two to allow the materials to stretch before finally sewing together.



- After hanging, re-pin if necessary and then sew the lining to the outer material, turning the lining at the neck opening.
- Sew buttons and button holes to the front to fasten it.

*Based on an article sent in by Greg and Katie Roth.*



### **Scottish politics**

Not a lot to report. John Swinney remains First Minister, at the head of the Scottish Nationalist party. The composition of the Scottish Parliament remains little changed from the last report: out of 129 total seats, the SNP has 60, the Conservatives 28, Labour 21, the Greens 7, other parties 12, and the non-party Presiding officer 1.

At the last UK election in 2024 Labour surged ahead and overtook the SNP in popularity and seats won in the UK Parliament. However, the unpopularity of the current UK Labour government has eroded Labor support, and the SNP now are favored by the majority of Scots.

One significant item is that Reform UK now have a seat. Reform UK is the right-wing successor to the Brexit party, and is headed by Nigel Farage. Its policies are lower taxes, lower government spending, and less immigration. so it is following the rise of right-wing movements in the US and across Europe - although it does try to distance itself from the very far-right.

Looking at support for this Reform UK platform, a recent poll shows that the main concerns of the Scottish people remain the same as they have been for some time: the economy and health. Over half say their personal financial situation has worsened. 38% say it has remained the same, and only 10% say it has improved. As far as immigration goes, the majority do feel that there is too much. However Swinney believes that there needs to be more immigration of working-age people, simply because there are increasingly fewer workers to support an aging population. As far as the size and reach of government is concerned, and the level of taxation, most Scots feel the balance is about right.

As regards the independence movement, only 12% cite Scotland's constitutional future as being their most important concern.

Government finances in the UK have long been conducted on a centralized basis, with taxation raised in Scotland going to the UK Treasury, the UK Government sending funds for government services in Scotland and Wales, and the Treasury handling the national debt and the issuance of bonds. In the UK, government bonds are known as "Gilts", since they are presumed to be extra-safe investments. Scotland has now been given its own debt rating, which is the same as that of the UK. Scotland is now planning to issue its own bonds. The initial amount is 1.5 billion pounds. Rumor has it that these bonds will be known as "Kilts"! The UK Government issues 300 billion pounds of bonds each year, so the Scottish issuance amounts really only to putting a toe in the water. However, it does signal the long-term aim of an independent financial future for Scotland.

Other news items:

- Orkney is considering a 5 pound ( around \$7) entry fee for visitors to the islands. Tourists outnumber residents 20:1.

- Land reform is growing as an issue. In Scotland half of all privately-owned land is held by just 421 people or entities. The concentration of land in such few hands is a result of the 18th and 19th century hold by the aristocrats, with highland clearances contributing to the formation of large landed estates.
- Scotland's last operating nuclear power station is scheduled to shut down by 2030 - even though nuclear might be the most environmentally-friendly source of reliable power, and 63% of Scots agree that climate change is real and a major problem.



***Wishing you all a happy Hogmanay!***