



#### **Adventure # 4 – Burns Night**

The second biggest holiday in Scotland is Burns Night, the celebration of the birthday of Robert Burns, Scotland's most famous poet. As close as we are living to Scotland, we felt we had to cross back over the border and join our friends in Denholm for their Burns Night banquet.

A typical Burns Night banquet is about four hours long and includes a dinner of Haggis, Neeps and Tatties – a traditional Scottish meal and a favorite of Burns himself. (Neeps are turnips and Tatties are potatoes, both served chunky-mashed) There are serious salutes to Mr. Burns, humorous toasts, recitations of his poems, and singing of his songs. (Auld Lang Syne, as sung on New Year's Eve, would be the most recognizable to Americans) Our Burns Night was a very entertaining evening, with an extremely humorous "Toast to the Lassies" by one of the local men and an equally funny "Toast to the Laddies" reply by a local woman. The recitations of Burns' works were well practiced by the presenters, and as always, the music of the local Denholm folk musicians was lovely. We were out quite late, so we did not make it to the annual Selkirk Haggis Hunt the next morning.

This hunt is an annual affair where the locals of the borders region gather to hunt the wild haggis (not your domesticated, farm-raised haggis). These wild creatures remain just as God created them, living in the wild, growing their legs on one side longer than on the other side. This makes them incredibly adept at running around the sides of Scottish hills, making it very difficult for the hunters, with their traditional haggis-nets, to capture one of the fleet little creatures. Some hunters have foregone the nets and now use bow and arrow, or cricket bats.

In these challenging modern times, limits of one haggis per hunter are enforced, with a catch-and-release policy for those who net more than their

share. This is all done to maintain an adequate breeding stock in the wild, of course. Bagpipers lead the start of the hunt, to give the wee beasties fair warning that the hunters are coming. 'Tis only sporting, aye?

The snowdrops, one of the lovely wild flowers of northern Britain, are beginning to bloom. We have only seen a handful of these small white plants, but within a few weeks the Scottish hillsides will be covered with them. Sometimes they grow thick enough that they make the groundcover so white that it actually looks like snow has fallen again.



The extremely popular sport that the Brits (and most of the rest of the world) call football.....is what we in the USA call soccer. It seems that most cities and towns of any size at all in the UK have a football team, and there are 4 tiers of professional football in England and another 4 tiers in Scotland. That does not touch on the school and amateur leagues. I intend to join one of my new friends in attending a future game of the Morecambe Shrimps (yes, shrimps) for whom he has season tickets.

However, I was quite surprised to find that the university here actually has an American Football team, coached by one of my masonic lodge brothers who attended college at Texas A&M. The team played their last home game this week, so I



went to check it out. They play without goalposts (so no field goal or extra-point kicks), they just play for touchdowns. But other than that, it looks much the same as what we see every weekend back in the states. The game was played in a cold, misty, rain that made everyone very uncomfortable. Although undefeated this season before I attended, the home team, the Lancaster Bombers (named after the famous World War II airplane) went down to defeat in the mud. I seem to be jinxing all the local teams when I attend.



Lancaster City Lodge had its annual black-tie affair this weekend at Ashton Hall, which dates back to medieval times and has hosted kings of England in centuries gone by. Its Gothic style architecture (photo below) provided an unforgettable ambience as Wendy and I met new friends and partook of a five course meal (no haggis) that began with wine, then mushroom and tarragon soup, followed by a palate-cleansing sorbet, then the main course of lamb or salmon accompanied by two kinds of potatoes and mixed vegetables. Desert was either ginger parkin or fresh fruit pavlova with a cheese tray following that and then coffee and chocolates. Entertainment followed the meal. Naturally, the men were all in tuxedos and the ladies in cocktail dresses. The evening took five hours in all. When they plan a big evening, they go all out.



The line of scrimmage (above) for an English round of American Football.....and (below) a squad of English football cheerleaders.



Below are some photos of other sites we have encountered during the last two weeks, during which we have done less traveling as my responsibilities at the university have increased. The photos begin with the Methodist Church in nearby Garstang (built in the 1800s). We have found that there is one thing in common no matter whether the church is Methodist, Presbyterian, Anglican, or Church of Scotland.....and that commonality is the music of Charles Wesley. I have begun to think that Charles' reach through his music goes further than that of his brother John Wesley, who merely founded the Methodical (or Methodist) Church which took root so strongly in nearby Cornwall.





Here is the tower in downtown Hawick (pronounced "Hoick") in the Scottish Borders.



Below is a photo of Yorkshire in winter.....each of those small fields is partitioned off by a 3 foot tall wall of stone like the one in the foreground of the photo. This pattern goes on for miles and miles across Yorkshire.



Alas,.....the historian in me cannot let my facts remain incorrect. A recent newspaper survey showed that the majority of Americans visiting the UK had no idea what a haggis was, and fully 1/3 of them thought it was a native animal. A haggis is NOT a real animal. It is a traditional Scottish dish made using sheep offal, oats and seasoning, stuffed into a sheep's stomach, and cooked by boiling. Modern versions use better cuts of meat instead of offal, and sausage casing rather than sheep's stomach. Every little village in Scotland has a butcher, and every one of them has a haggis recipe.....just like old time village butchers in the US had their own sausage recipes. We have come to enjoy a good haggis, and the best we have found is made at the wee butcher shop in Denholm.

One more picture.....a wee cottage tucked away in the Scottish highlands.....or a high-priced five star hotel on the English coast.....you guess which.....

