

# Scotland



In Scotland, the season of celebrating the birth of Jesus, was known as **Yultid**. The name comes from invading Scandinavians, for whom Yultid was the festival celebrated at the twelfth month, being the twelfth name of Odin, who was supposed to come to earth in December. Yultid would be disguised in a hooded cloak. He would sit awhile at the firesides listening to the people, and where there was want he left a gift of bread or coins.

The Scottish people celebrate Christmas rather somberly, with festivities beginning a few days after, spilling into New Year and Twelfth Night, which was known as **Nollaig Beag** (Little Christmas). They have their big celebrations on New Year's Day, called **Hogmanay**. There are several thoughts on where the word "Hogmanay" derived. One belief is that it is a kind of oat cake that was given to children on New Year's Eve. Another belief is that between 1500-1600, the French often called Christmas, "Homme est né" (Man is Born) which is thought by some scholars to be the origin of the word.

One Scottish tradition is called **First Footing**. The first person to set foot in a residence on New Year's Day is thought to profoundly affect the fortunes of the inhabitants. Generally strangers are thought to bring good luck. Depending on the area, it may be better to have a dark-haired or fair-haired stranger set foot in the house. The First Footer must make an offering, or **handsel**. This can be food, drink or fuel for the fire which must be shared with everyone present, including the visitor. Fuel, must be placed onto the fire by the visitor with the words, "A Good New Year to one and all and many may you see."



An old legend or superstition was that bad luck would come if the fireplace fire was allowed to burn out on Christmas Eve. It was believed that was at this time that the elves were abroad and only a raging fire would keep them from coming down the chimney.

On the **Oidhche Choinnle** (or Night of Candles) people placed candles in every window to light the way for the Holy Family on Christmas Eve and the

First Footers on New Years Eve. Shopkeepers gave their customers Yule Candles as a symbol of goodwill wishing them a “Fire to warm you by, and a light to guide you.”



bannocks

On Christmas day, people sometimes make big bonfires and dance around them to the playing of bagpipes. **Bannock cakes** made of oatmeal are traditionally eaten at Christmas.



shortbread

A result of Scotland's ancient relation with Scandinavia is the **Sun Cake**. Sun Cakes were baked with a hole in the center and symmetrical lines around, representing the rays of the Sun. This pattern is now found on the modern **Scottish Shortbread**. The



black bun

**Black Bun**, (the Twelfth Night Cake) is a very rich fruit cake, almost solid with fruit, almonds, spices with the ingredients bound together with plenty of Whiskey. The stiff mixture is put into a cake tin lined with a rich short pastry and baked.

However, this did not mean that people did not celebrate Christmas. Often they would go to Church before work, or at Lunchtime, or in the evening. They would have a Christmas Tree and a Christmas Dinner and children went to bed expecting that kindly old gentleman to call with a gift or two.

In Scots Gaelic, “Merry Christmas” is “**Nollaig chridheil huibh.**”

**Resources:**

Santa's Net. “Christmas in Scotland”. <http://www.santas.net/scottishchristmas.htm>

Christmas Around the World. The North Pole. “Christmas in Scotland”. <http://www.the-north-pole.com/around/scotland.html>

Christmas Archives. “Yuletide in Scotland”. <http://www.christmasarchives.com/scotland.html>