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a Guild new year

by Karon Grieve

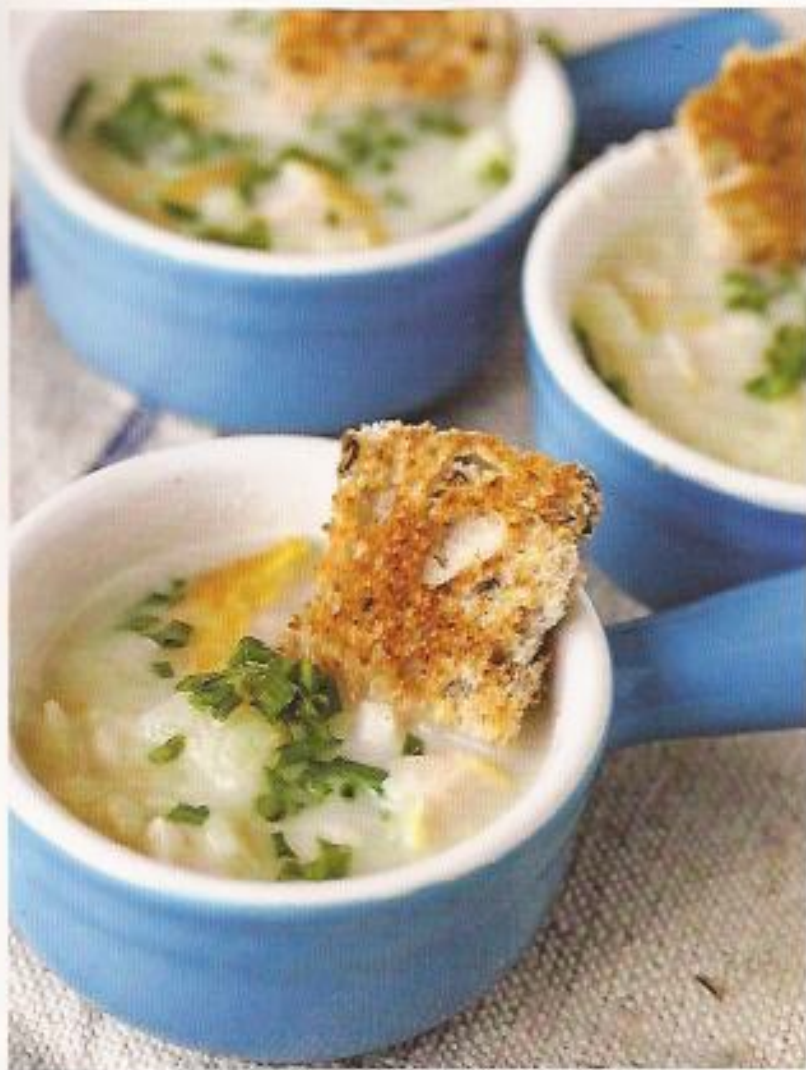
While it is true that most of the world celebrates New Year's Day, here in Scotland we tend to go a wee bit over the top in our festivities and even have our own special name for this big night – Hogmanay. It is thought to come from the old French “Homme est ne,” which translates as “Man is born.”

Hogmanay is very much a time for friends and family, and most folks tend to party with their neighbors. It is very much a Scottish tradition that you can drop in on your neighbors throughout the New Year celebrations, even after midnight, to “First Foot” them for luck in the new year.

Because it was snowing and the roads were closed, I held my party for just a few friends and neighbors; there was no way people could have come from any further distance. I welcomed my guests with a tartan wreath on the door, which I made from snips of old tartan ribbons and bows. The house was decorated with lots of tartan bunting that I made from vintage kilt cuttings serounged from an old kilt-making shop in Edinburgh years ago. >

There were 12 of us total, and I displayed a running buffet of Scottish-themed party food. We had Cullen Skink (a traditional fish soup with potatoes, smoked haddock, and cream), and had a lot of lovely nibbles including my Burns Baubles – haggis, neeps (turnips to those outside Scotland) and tatties (potatoes) – made as crumb covered balls and served on skewers with dip. In addition, I served mini venison burgers with rowan and red currant jelly, prawns wrapped in bacon with mushrooms, tiny crab and apple pies, and simple Aberdeen Angus steak toasts. For my lovely vegetarian friend Lis, there were some fun peppery pea spoons, Crowdie (a creamy Scottish cheese) croustades, and, of course, a lot of homemade calcakes, cheeses, and dips. >





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For dessert, we enjoyed traditional mini servings of Scottish favorites such as Cranachan and Flummery along with my fun, and rather boozy, Girder Jelly Jolts made with vodka and the classic Scottish soft drink, Irn Bru. I held with tradition when it came to little favors for my guests to take home by filling tiny vintage pressed glass bottles that I had picked up at thrift shops with whisky. They looked like miniature decanters! I also gave each guest a piece of coal in a little sack tied together with tartan ribbon.

It was a wonderful way to bring in the New Year. It was very casual and cozy in my old cottage with the log fire blazing in the hearth, candles flickering, and good friends chatting and sharing their news. My neighbor Alan played his bagpipes while we sang, danced, and raised our glasses. As midnight rang, we wished each other "A Guid New Year." *

Karon Grieve is a writer and blogger. Her latest book "A Wee Taste of Scotland" has just been released by Forth Books and is available on Amazon. You can catch up with her recipes and country chat from Scotland at her blog, karongrieve.com.