

# The Tattler



## Summer 2025 Edition

## President's Message

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The Robert Burns Association  
 of North America

Affiliated with the  
 Robert Burns World Federation Ltd  
 Kilmarnock Scotland  
 Club #1024

Dear Members and Friends,

I write to you with fond memories from our May 8–10 Atlanta AGM and Conference. That weekend continues to resonate—not just as a series of events but as a deeply felt reunion of Burnsian friendship, insight, and shared laughter. The Burns Club of Atlanta’s grace as hosts, the musical talents of our members, the toasts and the thoughtful conversations and contributions that filled every gathering, has stayed with me long after our farewells. I believe that it is essential to continue, as we have done annually for the last 45 years, to hold the AGMC to reinvigorate the sense of connection and purpose we share as an organization together. With July 21 now behind us, I hope many of you had a moment to reflect, whether in solitude or fellowship, on the 229th anniversary of Robert Burns’s passing. Earlier this summer, a number of truly memorable commemorations brought fresh energy to that reflection. In Philadelphia, the Rosenbach Museum & Library partnered with us and the South Jersey Celtic Society to host a “Behind the Bookcase” tour on July 16, offering an intimate, hands-on encounter with Burns’s manuscripts, including “Thou Lingerin Star,” followed by a heartfelt Scottish toast to his immortal memory. Meanwhile, in the Hudson Valley, the



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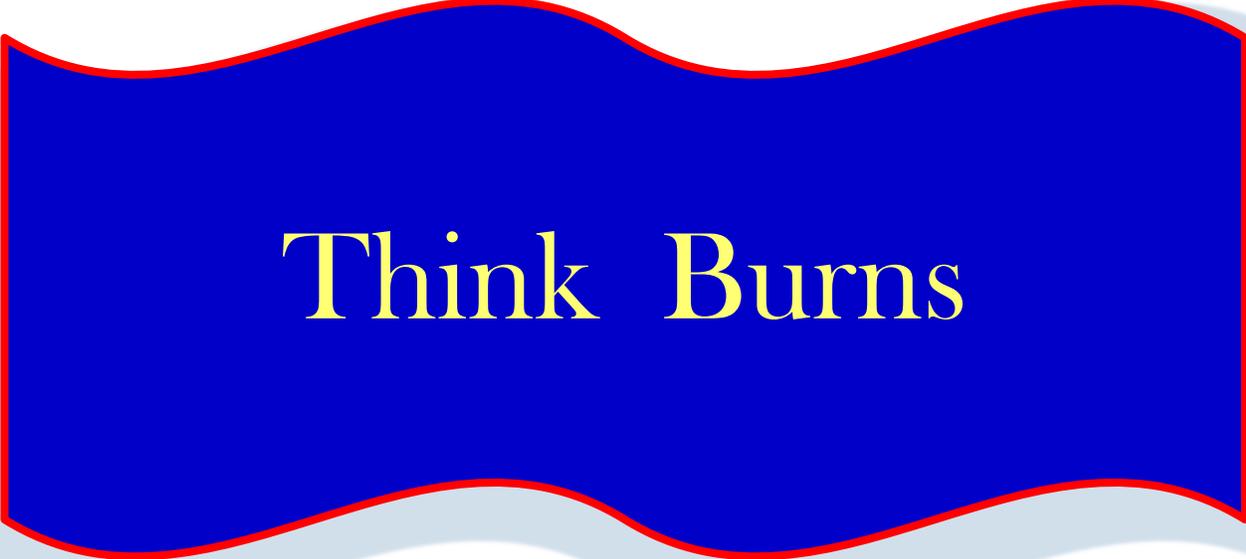
## President's Message (continued)

Bannerman Castle Trust staged the inaugural “Robert Burns Supper on Bannerman Island” on July 25. Guests embarked on a scenic cruise, were greeted by the Hudson Highlands Pipe Band, and enjoyed an atmospheric evening of Address to the Haggis, poetry, music, and fine fare, all for the sake of raising funds to preserve the island, a beautiful and fitting tribute to the Bard. The Greenock Burns Club, the “Mother Club” and founded on July 21, 1801, marked the date with poetry recitals and a tribute dinner, a tradition that still resonates today. These gatherings, from manuscript-toasts in Philadelphia, to a magical supper on an island, to the celebrations in Burns’s homeland, demonstrate the poet’s enduring reach and the ways his words continue to inspire fresh and heartfelt remembrance.

Looking forward, I’m already excited to share that plans are well under way for our **2026 RBANA AGM and Conference in Edmonton from June 25 to June 28**. I can promise you a gathering rich in warmth, culture, and Burnsian joy, another opportunity to deepen our fellowship, explore new ideas, and celebrate the Bard’s legacy together. Until then, may the spirit of Burns, his generosity, his empathy, and his wit continue to light your summer. Thank you for being part of this community and for carrying forward the fire of friendship and verse that defines us.

Yours in Burns,

Mark Ferguson  
President, Robert Burns Association of North America



Think Burns

# RBANA Conference Announcement: June 26 to June 27, 2026

Join Us in Edmonton, Alberta for our Annual Celebration of the Bard

## Venue and Accommodation

The Edmonton Burns Club is pleased to announce its selection as the host for the upcoming Robert Burns Association of North America Conference, scheduled for Friday, June 26 to Saturday, June 27, 2026. This event will bring together individuals from across North America and internationally to honour the works and legacy of Robert Burns through a series of events, competitions, and entertainment.

The venue for this year's conference has been confirmed, and the EBC has secured a group rate for attendees at the Westin Hotel, Edmonton. To make a reservation, please call (780) 426-3636. The Westin is centrally located at 10135-100 St NW, Edmonton, AB T5J 1P7, offering convenient access to rapid transit for those interested in exploring sites beyond the downtown core. It is also situated near key attractions such as the Art Gallery of Alberta, the Royal Alberta Museum, the Winspear Theatre, and provides direct access to North America's largest urban park via the Edmonton Funicular.

## About the Conference

Over two days, attendees will immerse themselves in an atmosphere of camaraderie and inspiration, with opportunities to participate in lively debates, poetry readings, musical performances, and scholarly presentations. The conference promises not only to honour tradition but also to bridge past and present by encouraging conversations that link the enduring wisdom of Burns to the challenges and possibilities of our contemporary world.

Our goal is to create a vibrant forum for exchanging knowledge, exploring the legacy of Burns, and fostering meaningful connections with our fellow clubs and organizations. The conference will feature keynote addresses by experts on Burns, interactive panel discussions, hands-on workshops, networking sessions, and special events that celebrate the diversity and creativity inspired by the Scottish Bard.

Set in a dynamic and accessible venue, the conference will serve as a platform for participants to engage in dialogue, share insights, and envision the future of Burns' influence together. Whether you are an established scholar or an enthusiast eager to expand your understanding, this conference is tailored to ignite your curiosity and empower your appreciation of Robert Burns.



## Conference Themes

Our program encompasses a broad array of themes and topics, including:  
Thursday Evening, June 25, 2026 — A Reception for our Guests: The Edmonton Burns Club will host a welcome reception for early arrivals on Thursday evening at the Crown Suite. This location has served as the post-event meeting place after the annual Big Night Celebration every January and offers a venue suitable for informal entertainment and storytelling. The EBC will provide a range of beverages, including spirits, wines, and ales, along with light refreshments.  
Friday, June 26, 2026 — Tours and Ceilidh: The conference committee is arranging various events for attendees, with costs for ex-

## RBANA 2026 – Edmonton Alberta (continued)

cursions to be detailed on the Conference Registration Form. Planned venues include golf for outdoor participants and tours of historic sites focused on Scottish contributions to western Canadian history. The day will end with a meal and evening entertainment featuring a traditional Ceilidh.

Saturday, June 27, 2026  
— Annual General Meeting, Presentations, Quiz, and Burns Dinner: The RBANA conference will commence with the Annual General Meeting, during



which business matters will be addressed and the recipient of the Jack Hume Poetry Competition announced. Following the AGM, two keynote speakers will discuss the contemporary significance of Robert Burns, examining themes such as equity, social justice, and human emotion as they relate to current societal challenges. The enduring influence of Burns' work on modern movements and cultural discourse will also be explored. Subsequently, attendees are invited to participate in the annual Jim Connor Memorial Burns Quiz. The evening will conclude with a formal Burns Dinner featuring entertainment organized by the EBC conference committee.

### Registration Details

Conference registration will open soon. RBANA members will be notified with details about hotel rates, conference fees, excursion pricing, and sponsorship options. The welcome reception, Ceilidh, and Burns Dinner are covered for guests registered for the full conference. Additionally, there will be an option for individuals to attend either

the Ceilidh or Burns Dinner separately.

Please note that breakfast and lunch are not included in the conference registration fee.

The Westin offers an exceptional venue with ample accommodations for all attendees, and

there are numerous dining options available in the downtown area for those interested in exploring a diverse range of menus. Partnership Opportunities Are you interested in helping to shape this transformative event? Organizations and companies are invited

to partner with us as sponsors, exhibitors, or collaborators. Your support will help make this conference a truly impactful experience.

### Stay Connected

To receive the latest updates, announcements, and speaker spotlights, follow us on our Facebook (search Edmonton Burns Club) social media platform, and the RBANA newsletter.

Contact our conference team at our club email address [edmontonburnsclub@gmail.com](mailto:edmontonburnsclub@gmail.com) with any questions or suggestions—you are an essential part of our community, and we value your input.

### Conclusion

The 2026 RBANA Conference promises to be a celebration of Robert Burns' legacy, a catalyst for collaboration, and a beacon for cultural appreciation. Join us as we explore the life and works of the Scottish Bard, build enduring connections, and inspire each other to reach new heights in understanding and appreciation. We look forward to welcoming you as we honour Burns' influence and shape the future of his enduring legacy together.

## The Cameron Report



Though they may have gone into their annual hiatus, preparing to resume their luncheon meetings in October, the Winnipeg Robert Burns Club have not been completely inactive the past few months.

As they have every July for longer than any current club member has been alive, they gathered on the grounds of the Manitoba Legislature, at the statue of Robert Burns, where a wreath was laid, by current President Janet Thompson, to commemorate the anni-

another seven days, spreading the word. Thanks to the anchors of our clubs appearances, President Janet, and Past Presidents Colin, Joyce Allen, and Jim Carrigan, who worked both weeks, while Darlene and I did attend during the second week.

The St Andrew's Society have also not been inactive, as they prepare for the upcoming St Andrew's Day Dinner in late November.



L to R: The club assembled before the statue; Piper Kirby McRae piped; PP Craig Oliphant sang some Burns songs; and Charles Cameron presented his Eulogy to Burns and tribute to Rosann Carrigan

versary of his passing. A eulogy was delivered, and a special tribute to a long time member, Roseann Carrigan, the elder sister of Past Club, and RBANA President Jim Carrigan, was also delivered, both by your trusty correspondent.

At the request of the editor, both are included as accompaniment to this report. Also, while the club did forgo attendance at the Manitoba Highland Gathering in June, we did make appearances during both weeks of Folklorama, Winnipeg's long running multicultural festival. We made our return, after several years absence, to the British Isles Pavilion, (right, top) where we were warmly received, and then moved halfway across the city to the Pavilion of Scotland, (right, bottom) for

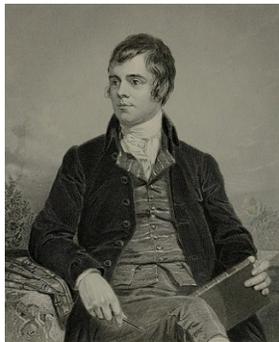
Members Mixers, at a local restaurant and Pub, both of which I attended. Another is being planned for October.



They have also held a Pop-Up Piper event in the city's largest park, (bottom right corner) and hosted two

## A Robert Burns Eulogy

Ladies and Gentlemen, Friends and Fellow Scots,  
Today we gather not just to remember Robert Burns, but to celebrate him—the ploughman poet, the voice of Scotland, the man who could squeeze a universe into a stanza and make a cow’s horn sound romantic. It’s been more than two centuries since Rabbie walked the misty paths of Ayrshire, quill in one hand and a dram in the other, but his words still echo louder than bagpipes at a wedding. And let’s be honest—he’d probably love the fact we’re all here in 2025, reading his verse, raising our glasses, and awkwardly trying to pronounce “sleekit, cow’rin, tim’rous beastie” without spitting on the front row. Burns wasn’t just a poet. He was a radical, a romantic, a roguish rascal, and—by all accounts—a man who never met a woman he couldn’t write a poem about... or father a child with. But more than his romantic escapades or rustic charm, we remember Burns because he spoke to everyone. He wrote for the poor, the proud, the heartbroken, and the hopeful. His verses didn’t sit on marble pedestals—they danced in the dirt with the people. He made poetry human. And that’s why, in 2025, when the world tweets and swipes and AI writes love sonnets for us, we still need Burns. We need his honesty. His empathy. His mischief. His unapologetic Scottishness. He taught us to honour the “best laid schemes o’ mice an’ men,” even when they gang a-gley. He made space for sorrow, for



joy, and for reflection over a shared cup of kindness—and he did it all in a tongue half the world had to Google, and the other half were raised on.

He gave us Auld Lang Syne—a song that somehow says everything and nothing, that makes us cry without knowing why, and turns every Hogmanay into a wee global group hug.

And so, in 2025, as AI writes shopping lists and drones deliver Irn-Bru, Burns reminds us to hold fast to what makes us human: the power of words, the ache of love, the dignity of work, the beauty of song, and the warmth of friendship.

Let us not mourn his passing, but marvel at his staying power.

For a man born in a cottage with a thatched roof, who died before the age of 40, Rabbie Burns lives on in hearts and homes far beyond the banks of the Doon. He is not gone. He is sung. He is spoken. He is remembered.

So here's to the Bard—our national treasure, our poetic prankster, our eternal friend.

May his words always find a home on our tongues,

And his spirit forever dance in our ceilidhs.

Slàinte, Rabbie. You’re still wi’ us yet.

A Tribute Tae Captain Roxy  
In Loving Memory o' Roseann Carrigan  
Royal Canadian Air Force Nurse, Peacekeeper, Proud Scot



Oh Roxy lass, ye served wi' pride,  
A nurse in blue, aye, Air Force guide.  
Wi' gentle hands and heart sae wide,  
Ye stood by folk through storm and tide.

Frae bonnie Scotland ye did roam,  
But always kept yer roots at hame.  
Ye wandered far, yet ne'er alone—  
Wi' love for life, and heart full-grown.

In Winnipeg, yer light did gleam,  
Wi' Robert Burns Club's noble dream,  
The Intrepid lads, a storied team,  
And causes just, ye did esteem.

Wi' Victim Services ye stood,  
To lift up hearts the best ye could.  
In silence, strength and sisterhood,  
Ye gave this world yer very good.

Wi' tartan pride and voice sae sweet,  
Ye graced St. Andrew's honoured seat.  
Among the proud, yer heart did beat,  
In kinship warm, sae pure, sae fleet.  
At Oakview Home, yer journey's close,  
A peaceful rest, a sweet repose.  
But aye, yer spirit still arose—  
Like Highland winds, like blooming rose.

So raise a glass, and toast her name,  
A wummin kind, wi' heart aflame.  
For Roxy's legacy remains—  
In every soul she gently claimed.

Rest easy, Roxy, nurse and friend,  
Yer story's song shall never end.



## Robert Burns – The Italian Connection

Pietro Urbani.

You've never heard of him, have you? Definitely not a Scottish name; he was in fact an



Italian, born in Milan, Italy in 1749. He came to London as a youth, later moved to Scotland where he lived for several years and died broke in Ireland.

He probably came to London because of music but, while we're not told exactly, it may

be fair to suppose his real reason for coming to London was just to study music because the career path he followed was as a recognized musician, composer, singer, and publisher. Edinburgh at the time was the very center of Europe's great intellectual awareness, a magnet for foreign scholars, students and pretenders of all disciplines. Urbani was not alone, as an Italian there seeking to make a name for himself. Others who loved Scottish music included Signori Stabilini and Schetki but, only Urbani it seems, took a deeper interest in the culture of Scottish music. He sang it beautifully.

Urbani first appeared for a time in Glasgow in 1780 but moved on to Edinburgh four years later, by then thoroughly involved in Scottish music. He loved Scottish music, sang their songs, composed and taught Scottish music to students and, being Italian, one can be sure he also loved opera because while in Edinburgh in 1785, produced his only opera, *The Siege of Gibraltar*.

In the two years period, 1792 to 1794, Urbani published his own selections of Scots songs and improved on them with a *simple style and adapted graces*. His work was characterized by critic Henry Farmer in the "History

of Music in Scotland," as a "*highly meritorious piece of work, which was in addition scored for strings*." Others had their own opinions, including the Burns.

It was following Johnson's publication of his fourth addition of the 'Scots Musical Museum,' that George Thompson an Edinburgh civil servant, decided he should contribute to the collecting of Scottish songs, airs and instrumentals, "*the most favored of our Scottish melodies, more elegant and superb*."

The problem with that was that George Thompson was a fool who had "*neither taste nor reverence nor pecuniary decency, although he claimed all three*." Thompson's view of many of the lyrics Burns wrote were that they were "silly." Consequently he had no compunction at all to alter or rewrite Burns lyrics to suit his ear. "*Thompson didn't even know that a ploughman who cannot even sing a note let alone a tune, might actually know more about folk-songs than he himself could have learned in a lifetime*." Burns' lyrics were altered, his rhythm and melodies often disregarded, and his knowledge of country people, their lives and culture, ignored.



With his observation of Thompson's attitude in mind, it comes as no surprise to learn that Thompson also considered Urbani to be a "*narrow, conceited and dishonest musician, acceptable only because Urbani sings Scottish song so beautifully*." Thompson, not impressed, referred to Urbani's work as a "*water-gruel collection*."

In 1795 Urbani went into competition in the music publishing business against Thompson with a partner named Liston. They set up their business as Urbani and Liston at 10 Princess St., Edinburgh. But alas, sometime

## Robert Burns – The Italian Connection (continued)

between 1806 and 1809 the business failed and Urbani, who lost money trying to promote the *Oratorios of Handle*, retreated to Dublin Ireland, where he died penniless in 1816.

Burns, whose reputation had deemed him a national treasure, was firmly established but was also nearing his mortal end. He first met Urbani, around 1793. It was said they met a second time at Lord Selkirk's estate on St. Mary's Isle, Kirkcudbright, during Burns' Galloway tour of 1794. Burns was accompanied by John Syme during the tour including their visit with Lord Selkirk and his son Lord Daer at their St. Mary's Isle residence but, there is no record of the presence of Urbani or any other foreigner being there at all. Readers tracing Burn's radical tendencies and knowledgeable of the Burns – Syme's trip know the trip was not just a tour of Galloway by the Bard but may have had, as it's primary purpose, to hold discussions about the Scottish Reform Party, Lord Daer's project. Then, it was considered radical, republican (small 'r') and dangerous to the crown. Sedition would be the charge if their actions were revealed and proved. Therefore, no mention of the presence of a foreigner like Urbani in their presence.

Earlier in April 1793 Burns sent to Maria Riddell, for her consideration, "*a new song which I have this moment received from Urbani and yesterday I set the fall to it. Urbani, whom I have met here beg them of me as he admires the air, but as I understand that he was rather an evil eye on your work, I did not choose to comply. However, if this song does not suit your taste, I may probably send it to him.*"

Burns apparently, asked George Thompson (right): "*Is whistle and I'll come to you*" one of your airs? I admire

*it much; and yesterday, I set the following verses to it. Urbani, however, if the song does not suit your taste, I may possibly send it to him. He is entre nous, a narrow, contracted creature; yet he sings so delightfully, that whatever he introduces at your concert must have immediate celebrity, praise and doubts!* It was late August, 1793, when Burns first sent to Thompson, "*Scots Wha Hae,*" with this postscript: *I have shewed (sic) the air to Urbani, who was highly pleased with it, and begged me to make soft verses for it; but I had no idea of giving myself any trouble on the subject, till the accidental recollection of that glorious struggle for freedom, associated with the glowing ideas of some other struggles not quite so ancient, roused my rhyming mania.*" The question arises once more, was Urbani at Lord Selkirk's and, if he was there, was his presence there specifically omitted because of the potential danger to him as a foreigner or, was he even there at all? A trivial point no doubt, but certainly leaves an empty hole in the story.

Burns wrote a letter to Thompson in September and said of "*Todlin Hame*": *Urbani mentioned an idea of his, which has long been mine; that this air is highly susceptible of pathos...I pointed out some verses that were unknown to him, to give them a trial for celebrity. Clarke (probably Stephen Clarke, musician), Told me what a creature he is, but if he will bring any more of our tunes from darkness into light, I would be pleased.*"

Johnson was more accommodating to Urbani than Thompson. In a letter to Johnson dated 29 June 1794, Burns asked: "*Pray will you let me know how many, and what are the songs Urbani has borrowed from your museum?*" Was something nefarious going on here that Burns didn't like? Urbani, encouraged no doubt by his borrowings from the museum, apparently told Alexander Cunningham that he had got the poet to collaborate fully with him. That was a lie that caught Burns off guard and,



## Robert Burns – The Italian Connection (continued)

when he realized Urbani's intentions, dropped him as a friend.

Burns wrote an angry letter to Cunningham in the Autumn of 1794: "*Urbani has told a damned falsehood. I made no engagements or connections with him whatever - after he and I met at Lord Selkirk's, we lived together three or four days in this town, and had a great deal of converse about our Scots Songs. I translated a verse of an Italian song for him, or rather made English verse to suit his rhythm, and added two verses which had been already published in Johnson's Museum. I likewise gave him a simple Scots song which I had picked up in this country, which he had promised to set in a suitable manner. I would not even have given him this, had there any of Mr. Thompson's airs suitable to it, unoccupied. I shall give you the song on the other page. Urbani requested me to lend him a hand now and then in his work. I told him, and told him truly, that such was my enthusiasm for the subject, had I met with him previous to my acquaintance with Mr. Thompson, I would most gladly have lent him any assistance in my power, but that now, until Mr T's publication was finished, I could not promise anything: however, that at a future period, when the humor was on me, I would cheerfully write a song for him. He hinted, I remember, something about using about using my name in an advertisement, which I expressly forbade. One thing he may mean: Johnson, I know, has given him full permission to anything I have written in the Museum. Beyond that, he had no right to expect, and for his impudence, shall never receive any assistance from me.*"

With that their friendship came to a screaming halt. The song that Burns referred to, 'on



the other page,' was "*O my Love's like the Red, Red, Rose,*" which Burns told Cunningham was the only 'species' of songs about which he and Thompson disagreed. "*What to me appears the simple and the wild, to him, and I suspect to you likewise, will be looked on as the ludicrous and absurd.*"

O, My Loves Like a Red, Red Rose, first appeared in Urbani's Scots Songs in 1794 to an original tune. Urbani explained that, "...the words of the Red Red Rose were obligingly given to him by a celebrated Scots Poet, who was so struck with them that when sung by a country girl that he wrote them down, and not being pleased with the air, begged the author to set them to music in the style of a Scots tune, which he has done accordingly." The songs first three stanza's appeared in the Museum in 1797, a year after Burns' death, played to the Neil Gow tune "Major Graham." That was the tune Burns specified. It also appeared in Thompson publication of Original Scottish Airs, 1799, 'improved' by the insensitive editor to fit Marshall Wishaw's Favourite', a tune double measure. The Red, Red Rose, and it only achieved popularity when it was matched to 'Low Down in the Broom,' an air that first appeared in the Caledonian Pocket Companion. Burns' lyrics and the air 'Low Down in the Broom' were first brought together by Robert Archibald Smith, the Paisley composer and editor in the Scottish Minstrel, published in 1821. To close the information circle so to speak,

two other foreigners to the Edinburgh musical scene were mentioned, Schetky and Stabilini. (left) Both were musicians and were drawn to Edinburgh by its intellectual and musical prominence. Schetky, Johann Georg (1740-1824), born in Darmstadt,

Germany, first met Burns in Edinburgh and was a music teacher there, by trade, and Girolamo (or Hieronimo) Stabilini (1762-1815), a celebrated Italian violinist and conductor living in Edinburgh from 1792 to his

## Robert Burns – The Italian Connection (continued)

death in 1815. He was conductor of the Gentleman's Orchestra and the Edinburgh Concerts. Burns made reference to attending one of his performances in the winter of 1786. Burns' life was a bit more involved than one supposes. Read your Burns! When you pick up an interesting lead, follow it and see where it goes. It's always amazing how the Burns story, when the little pieces come together, fill in a fuller picture revealing the realities of the hard times they lived it. But, they didn't know, did they?

George McClellan, USA Dir. RBANA

**F**or 15 years The Tattler has encouraged all clubs, to submit news of club events or activities.

As well, all members are reminded that they are welcome to submit articles or essays on Burns or Burns related topics for publication.

The deadline for submissions for the Autumn Edition, the final edition under the present editorship is Saturday, November 15, 2025.

The edition will be published and distributed November 30, 2025.

Our thanks for your interest and support over the past many years.