

**ORANGE AND DISTRICT SCOTTISH ASSOCIATION  
AND BURNS CLUB INC**

**Profile of Guest Speaker GARRY BARNSLEY, OAM**

**Annual Burns Supper – Friday 31 January 2014**

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**SHORTBREAD, HAGGIS AND THE POETRY OF BURNS  
AT BONNIE ORANGE**

**The poetry of Robert Burns was written more than two centuries ago, but according to Burns enthusiast, Garry Barnsley, the words of the great Scottish bard are as powerful and instructive today as they were when first published.**

Shortly to visit Orange for the annual Burns Supper (Friday 31 January 2014) hosted by the Orange Scottish Association and Burns Club, Mr Barnsley reminds us that New Year's Eve will doubtless see millions of Australians singing *Auld Lang Syne*, but that many of the revellers would be startled to learn the origins of the song.

“We link hands and robustly sing Burns's chorus, often little reflecting on what the words mean. The song is written in the obscure Scottish dialect of English (Scots English) and its title literally means ‘old long since’. But it may now best be rendered as ‘for old times sake’:

*For auld lang syne, my dear  
For auld lang syne,  
We'll tak a cup o' kindness yet,  
For auld lang syne.*

“This is Burns at his sentimental best, and it has become the universally recognized song of parting – to bid farewell to the old year and welcome the new”.

**What is it about the poetry of Robert Burns that still brings admirers together to celebrate his life and works, half a world away from Scotland, and over 200 years after his death at the early age of 37?**

“Robert Burns does not fit comfortably into a solemn society of dead poets” contends Mr Barnsley: “He earns rapture not so much for highbrow intellect, but more for his very down-to-earth creative genius.

“His words move us ‘be we ever so poor’. Burns declared a man a *man*, no matter what his formal education, social standing or wealth. The man’s ‘the gold’, he said – and rank doesn’t matter. Burns was a proud patriot, and the fiercest critic of snobbery. These are sentiments very familiar to any egalitarian and independent-minded Australian.

“At the same time, he was a keen observer of human frailty and wrote ‘if only we could see ourselves as others see us’. His poems could be serious, or witty, or patriotic - or they could melt a girl’s heart. Today, Burns is named among the top ten poets of all time”.

**Garry Barnsley, a retired lawyer, lives in Mittagong in the NSW southern highlands and has been prominent in Scottish-Australian introspection for 40 years – “since I fell in love with a very bonnie young girl from a seriously Scottish Australian family, and learned to play the bagpipes - so she’d agree to marry me!”**

Garry and his wife Nerida, who both grew up in the southern highlands and went to Bowral High School, started the Bundanoon Highland Gathering in 1978 when they were members of the local pipe band:

“We returned home from a trip to Scotland and recognised that Bundanoon’s amphitheatre-like oval was the ideal place to host a gathering – with pipe bands, Scottish dance, traditional games like toss-the-caber, and interesting stalls.

“We coined the phrase ‘Bundanoon is Brigadoon’ and that seems to have captured everyone’s affection. Within just a few years the gathering soared in popularity with the strong support of local volunteers and community groups”.

**Today, 35 years on, ‘Brigadoon’ attracts 15,000 visitors to its one-day-in-April gathering, and has raised over one million dollars for charity and community development.**

Garry remains in touch with Brigadoon as its Patron, and both he and Nerida have served as Chieftain of the Day. For many years Nerida conducted a shortbread stall at the gathering, raising tens of thousands

of dollars for the Children's Hospital by baking every piece of shortbread herself. Later, she established a shop at the village of Sutton Forest for 23 years that became famous as *A Little Piece of Scotland*. Though Nerida has officially 'retired' she now maintains a more manageable outlet for her wares in the Mlttagong Antiques Centre.

**Garry and Nerida went on to initiate a range of community projects over their long marriage, including the Berrima Court House Museum, the Exeter Olde English Village Fayre, an Irish Festival at Sutton Forest, and Bowral's world-famous Bradman Museum of Cricket.**

They also established a solo piping contest for youngsters, now in its tenth year, called *The Silver Tassie*, referring to the trophy awarded annually to the Australasian Young Piper of the Year.

Garry and Nerida have both been recognized through the award of the Medal of the Order of Australia.

**Because no Burns Supper would be complete without haggis on the menu, Garry will be setting the right tone for an evening of Scottish celebration with a recital of the famous Burns poem 'To a Haggis'.**

"Robert Burns praised the fine eating qualities of haggis, describing it as the Great Chieftain of the Pudding Race" observes Garry. "But I believe he had his tongue firmly planted in his haggis-filled cheek! So newcomers to this Scottish delicacy must come to supper prepared for aristocratic theatrics.

**"From long experience, I know that haggis is best washed down with fine Scotch whisky. But it's vital to get the ratio right – two drams of whisky for each mouthful of haggis!"**

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