

The Portmoak Community Woodland Group held another highly successful Burns Supper on 21st January. Portmoak Village Hall was packed as we celebrated not only the Bard but our own year of activities in the two community woodlands, Portmoak Moss and Kilmagad Wood.

We make a big thing of having lots of music - as diverse as possible. So we kicked off with Tom Brown piping in the haggis and continued after the meal with Mike and Craig Lithgow leading the community singing on numbers like Comin' Through the Rye and A Man's A Man for A' That, as well as performing their own original songs and arrangements. The Portmoak Players with baritone, Jo Falla, gave Burns poems arranged by Haydn. We had Lynne Hope on piano, Krys Hawryszczuk, oboe and Louise Batchelor, cello.

But before all that, Chloe Vlasto was a first class and beautifully dressed Poozie Nancy while her friend Kirsty Buchanan gave a loud and clear Selkirk Grace.

Dr Bill Carr performed his unique Address to the Haggis, with people sitting close to him protected by bin bags and bibs from the flying haggis. Bill always comes with new weaponry and a different costume so, for the record, he was wearing his modern Duncan kilt, with a tawny eagle feather in the hat. The weaponry included his dirk and his naval canon, which appeared in the film of the life of J M. Barrie. It didn't actually fire but you're never sure with Bill.

Tich Frier, the all-round entertainer, was back by popular demand to give his Immortal Memory, after leading the singing last year. The mark of a great Burns speaker is that you feel the Bard himself would have enjoyed being there, hearing his life and work communicated to a new audience. He was certainly hovering not far from Tich's shoulder.

He surely stayed on for Fiona Cooper's poignant To A Louse but who knows what he would have made of our final toast, Mosses, Waters, Slaps and Stiles. The ever-understated Dave Batchelor took us on a fantastic journey through the year's work with pictures of wolves in the Moss and flood water lapping beneath the houses in Kilmagadwood.

Couples, especially the innocent, newly-arrived-in-the-parish variety, have become very popular candidates for the Toast and Reply to the Lasses and Simon and Jessica Kay were no exception. They were hilarious from beginning to end, including their accounts of being ambushed for the task by members of the committee.

The company were also given free rein to come up with their own workings of Burns with modern themes. Trump and Brexit featured widely but the winner was a Swedish entry and don't ask what it was about.

There were also lots of raffle winners, with better prizes than ever, the chief one being a beautiful bird table made, in Dutch barn style, by Matt Hogg of Kinnesswood.