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## **LETTERS, LOCKS, AND SOCKS: THE MOST VIEWED RELICS OF ROBERT BURNS' LIFE**

Less than a year after launching the Robert Burns collection online, the National Trust for Scotland has revealed the five relics of the bard's life that have most captured people's attention.

In Spring 2024, the conservation charity launched a new portal giving unprecedented access to more than 2,500 historic items in its Robert Burns collection, including manuscripts, archives and artefacts, which are held in store for their long-term preservation and protection. The Trust cares for the largest collection of Burns artefacts, as well as the cottage he was born in, where the first Burns supper was held after his death.

After nine months of global access to some of the most interesting treasures in Burns' life, the Trust has revealed the five most viewed items, which give a sense of the public's fascination with Robert Burns the man and how he lived his life.

The top five items are:

- [Wooden Box containing Jean Armour's wedding ring, alongside two other rings](#): this box contains the wedding ring of Jean Armour, Burns' wife, flanked on each side by two other rings, one containing a lock of Burns' hair and a lock of Jean's hair.
- [Pair of Burns' socks](#): a pair of blue woollen knitted socks with the initials 'RB' at the top, believed to have been worn by Burns. The size eight socks date to around 1770 to 1796.
- [Auld Lang Syne](#): a fragment of the manuscript of one of Burns' most famous songs, known and sung the world over, dating from around 1793. Only six manuscript copies of this song are known to still exist.
- [Letter to George Sutherland](#): dated 31 December 1789, the letter to theatre-owner George Sutherland encloses a 34-line poem for Sutherland to use as a prologue at his New Year performance of the Dumfries theatre company in January 1790.
- [Lock of Highland Mary's hair](#): the lock of Mary Campbell's hair was preserved in a Bible, tied to a piece of dark grey card.

Caroline Smith, the National Trust for Scotland's Operations Manager at the Robert Burns Birthplace Museum, said: "This list features some of my personal favourites from our collection. It seems to be the personal objects that resonate with people, and that they help them form a connection with Burns the man, the ordinary guy who wore socks, just as much as the famous words he wrote.

"The box of rings is an amazing item as it was quite popular at the time to keep a lock of hair, but it's very special that the rings have survived all these years. Jean's wedding ring

is a precious item symbolising Burns' everlasting love, and it's hard not to feel the sentiment behind this.

"I think the initialled socks are incredible - just imagine your socks being kept and displayed in a museum almost 230 years after your death! There's something very humbling about them - they have clearly been worn and therefore mended a lot by someone, probably Jean, with a lot of care. It's a simple object but when I see pictures of Burns amongst society in Edinburgh, I imagine him wearing these socks.

"Auld Lang Syne is probably Burns' most famous song, and one of the collection's hero objects. With only six manuscript copies of the song still known to exist, it is a significant piece of Scottish cultural heritage and one of great international importance too.

"The letter to Sutherland is most significant because of the bird doodles on the back, which I think shows Burns' playful side.

"The Highland Mary story appeals to the romantic side of the poet. During a time when he had been banned by Jean's father from seeing her, Burns forged a relationship with Highland Mary Campbell and had made plans to emigrate to Jamaica with her. However, the successful publication of the Kilmarnock Edition changed his plans, and he stayed in Scotland and married Jean. Highland Mary's lock of hair had been preserved in the Bible that she had given to Burns when they are reported to have exchanged Bibles on the banks of the River Ayr. It is said that Burns still thought very fondly of Mary, who inspired several poems. 'Thou Lingering Star' was written around the third anniversary of Mary's death."

The Burns online collection was made possible thanks to the support of a member of the Trust's Patrons' Club and by donations from the National Trust for Scotland Foundation USA.

The Trust cares for other important sites in the life of Robert Burns, including the Bachelors' Club and Souter Johnnie's Cottage, where it is undertaking ongoing conservation projects to preserve these historic buildings. It will cost £330,000 to complete these works and the Trust requires £130,000 not currently covered by funding. Donations from generous supporters will directly assist the vital preservation of Burns' legacy at these iconic locations.

The 18th-century Gregg Fiddle is also part of the Burns collection, which was recently heard by 7,000 music fans at Hoolie in the Hydro in Glasgow and will be played in front of thousands more in New York City this April as part of Tartan Week's Hoolie in New York event.

For more information about these works, or to make a donation, please visit [nts.org.uk/burnsappeal](https://www.nts.org.uk/burnsappeal).

The Robert Burns collection can be found online at <https://www.nts.org.uk/collections/robert-burns-collection>.

**ENDS**

**Notes to editors**

## About the National Trust for Scotland

Established in 1931, the National Trust for Scotland is Scotland's largest conservation charity and cares for, shares and speaks up for Scotland's magnificent heritage.

Over the last 90 years the Trust has pioneered public access to and shared ownership of some of the most magnificent buildings, collections and landscapes in Scotland. It cares for more than 100 sites, from ancient houses to battlefields, castles, mills, gardens, coastlines, islands, mountain ranges and the plants and animals which depend upon them.

In March 2022, the National Trust for Scotland launched *Nature, Beauty & Heritage for Everyone*, its ten-year strategy which sets out the ambitions of the charity over the coming decade. From speaking up for Scotland's heritage which doesn't have a voice, to improving the lives and wellbeing of people across the country, and responding to the climate and biodiversity crisis, the Trust will build on its work in recent years to grow its impact and conserve and restore more of Scotland's heritage, as it moves towards its centenary in 2031.

Scotland's largest membership organisation, the National Trust for Scotland relies on the support of its members and donors to carry out its important work.

For more information on the National Trust for Scotland visit [www.nts.org.uk](http://www.nts.org.uk).

The National Trust for Scotland is a charity registered in Scotland, Charity Number SC 007410.