

M. J. GRANT

AULD LANG SYNE

A Song and its Culture





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8. The Song of New Year

First, what did yesternight deliver?
“Another year is gone for ever.”
And what is this day’s strong suggestion?
“The passing moment’s all we rest on!”
Rest on—for what? What do we here?
Or why regard the passing year?¹

The last of the three major traditions associated with *Auld Lang Syne* is that of singing it in the first minutes of the New Year (S_{NY}). In America, this is probably now the most prominent of all the *Auld Lang Syne* traditions, and the song is often found on Christmas/holiday albums for this reason. S_{NY} has also helped cement familiarity with the song: nowadays, whenever New Year arrives in a Hollywood film, M2 is not far behind. Many people’s first instinct is that this tradition must have been established via broadcast media and film, with a key role given to Guy Lombardo (1902–1977) and his band The Royal Canadians, whose New Year’s Eve broadcasts became an integral part of the American holiday. The material analysed in this chapter, however—mostly from newspaper reports of late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century celebrations in Scotland, London, New York and other parts of North America—shows that the tradition was becoming established well before this. Radio played a part, but merely amplified, or in every sense broadcast, what was already tradition for many groups and communities.

The second thesis that needs to be tested is that the tradition S_{NY} developed in Scotland and was transported abroad when Scots emigrated. Here again, there is a lack of evidence: it seems more likely, from the material collated here, that the Scottish diaspora did not merely transport the tradition, but possibly created it.

8.1 *A Guid New Year To Ane And A’*: The Scots and New Year

[...] however much the observance of Christmas may be gaining ground on this side of the Border, the New Year is still the great season of festivity in Scotland.²

That *Auld Lang Syne* should have become the song of New Year is perfectly reasonable when we consider the importance that festivity held, and holds, for the Scots. New Year

¹ Robert Burns, “Sketch. New Year’s Day. To Mrs Dunlop”, 1789 (K249).

² *The Scotsman*, 1 January 1890.

is one of the major events in the Scottish calendar. Within living memory, it was much more important than Christmas for many Scottish communities: Calvinist tradition did its best to keep Christmas as a purely religious feast, and the main focus of the winter celebrations subsequently remained New Year for longer than in other parts of Britain.³ Perhaps because of this, the traditions associated with New Year's Eve—or Hogmanay, as the Scots call it—have retained a much more local feel up to the present.

In many regions of Britain, older traditions linked the last day or days of the year with singing carols. In the area around Forfar and Angus in the east of Scotland, Hogmanay was long known as “Singin-E'en” for this very reason.⁴ Many regions practised the tradition which became known as *wassailing*. This term originates from central and southern England: the word “wassail” is said by William Dyer to come from the Saxon toast “wass hael” or “your health”. In former times, “the head of the house assembled his family around a bowl of spiced ale, from which he drank their healths, then passed it to the rest, that they might drink too”.⁵ Poorer people would carry their wassail bowl, decorated with ribbons, from door to door asking for something to fill it. Dyer gives specific information on the tradition as practised in Nottinghamshire, Gloucestershire and the Isle of Wight. Among the many Scottish traditions he discusses, he notes that Hogmanay was often celebrated with a supper. He also refers to a tradition still known in Scotland today, that of “first footing”—going to visit friends or relations immediately after midnight on New Year's Day.⁶

The tradition of first footing may unwittingly be linked to the establishment of *Auld Lang Syne* as a New Year song. In the mid- to late nineteenth century, people in Scotland often gathered in a public place, generally at a clock tower, to bring in the New Year, but the street party only continued until the bells had struck midnight; then, the crowd would break up to go home or go first-footing. By this point in the century it would have been second nature to sing *Auld Lang Syne* at parting, and the song's reflection on the passing of time, and on relationships that have stood the test of time, mean that *Auld Lang Syne* would fit the general sentiment of New Year. However, the celebration was just as likely to be marked by another song, *A Guid New Year To Ane And A'*. The text of this song was written by Peter Livingston (born 1823), whose *Poems and Songs* (1845) went through several editions in the nineteenth century. Like Hogg's version of *Good Night And Joy*—also a song related textually to the end of the

3 The newspaper report quoted at the start of this section notes that “Christmas as a time for the exchange of seasonable greetings has quite taken the place of the New Year”. Reports of the state of affairs at the main post office sorting centres were generally included in the round-up of events published each year in *The Scotsman*. Twenty years later, the report in *The Scotsman* again mentioned that Christmas was continuing to rise in popularity—an indication that, in fact, the older tradition of New Year was proving more resilient than people had thought.

4 Banks 1939.

5 Dyer 1876.

6 There are various customs associated with this practice: for example, bringing a piece of coal or some whisky to bring warmth and prosperity to the house; and it is traditionally lucky for the “first foot”—the first person over the threshold in the New Year—to have dark colouring.

year—one verse of *A Guid New Year* is similar to Burns's *Auld Lang Syne* (Fig. 8.1: the relevant lines are emphasized).

Fig. 8.1 Text of Peter Livingston's *A Guid New Year*, taken here from Livingston 1873 [1846], 126–127; textual similarities to Burns's *Auld Lang Syne* in bold.

*A Guid new year to ane an'a',
O' mony may you see,
And during a' the years that come,
O' happy may you be!
And may you ne'er hae cause to mourn,
To sigh or shed a tear—
To ane an' a' baith great an sma'
A hearty guid New Year.*

*O' time flies fast, he winna wait,
My friend for you or me,
He works his wonders day by day,
And onward still doth flee.
O! wha can tell gin ilka ane
I see sae happy here,
Will meet again and happy be,
Anither guid New Year.*

***We twa hae baith been happy lang,
We ran about the braes—***
*In ae wee cot, beneath a tree,
We spent our early days;
We ran about the burnie's side,
The spot will aye be dear,—
And those wha used to meet us there
We'll think on mony a year.*

*Now let us hope our years may be
As guid as they hae been;
And let us hope we ne'er may see
The sorrows we hae seen;
And let us hope that ane an' a'—
Our friends baith far and near—
May aye enjoy for time to come
A hearty guid New Year.*

The apparent connection between individual lines of this song and *Auld Lang Syne* should not be exaggerated, but it is not the only curiosity we have to deal with. For although the version of *A Guid New Year* which became established was to music composed by Alexander Hume (1811–1859), the song is listed in Livingston's own *Poems and Songs* as sung to the tune of *When Silent Time*. These are the opening words of Susanna Blamire's *The Nabob* (see Chapter 3): in other words, Livingston may have intended this song be sung to M-1. This also accounts for the difference in structure

between the version given here, and that generally sung in Scotland (and published by Hume), in which the first four lines are treated as a sort of chorus, and repeated after each verse. The question this raises is whether Livingston implicitly made a link between the sentiment of “auld lang syne”, in the widest sense, and the New Year. Some of his poems are directly derivative of Burns—the poem that opens the volume, *Sabbath in a Scottish Cottage* is designed as a counterpart to Burns’s *The Cotter’s Saturday Night*—and the lines resembling Burns’s *Auld Lang Syne* could be a conscious or unconscious paraphrase (or, indeed, a reference to Hogg’s *Goodnight And Joy*). As discussed in previous chapters, Blamire’s song was very well known in Scotland at this point, and Livingston may have been appealing to knowledge of that song, and its sentiment, rather than Burns’s *Auld Lang Syne* itself. It is also possible that the intended tune was the alternative to M-1 for Blamire’s verses already discussed in Chapter 2: the earliest published source I have seen for this other tune with Blamire’s words comes from 1848, but this might imply that the tune was doing the rounds at this point.⁷

In any case, *A Guid New Year* became well-known with a different tune, written by Hume. Initially a church composer, Hume also published and wrote tunes or arrangements for many Scots songs. The first publication to include his version of *A Guid New Year* may have been *The Lyric Gems of Scotland*, which appeared in 1856.⁸ By the later 1860s, the song was familiar enough to receive centre-stage billing at a “Great Scotch Festival” to be held in the Queen Street Hall, Edinburgh on 1 January 1869: it was to be sung at the very start, by the entire company.⁹ One of this company was Hamilton Corbett, who is mentioned by name in a sheet music edition of the song published in 1885. A very brief review of new music publications in *The Scotsman* of 22 May 1872 describes Hume’s version of *A Guid New Year* as “A pretty well-known song, deserving the popularity it enjoys”. A concert to be played at Waverley Market in Edinburgh on 1 January 1878 was to start with a *Grand March* “*A Guid New Year to Ane An’ A*”, presumably integrating the song, the march being attributed to “Hewitt”; the concert was to end with a “Selection of National Melodies” that concluded with *Auld Lang Syne*.¹⁰

References to *A Guid New Year* at public Hogmanay celebrations start to appear around the same time as references to *Auld Lang Syne* in this context—in the 1880s—so it is difficult to say if one had chronological precedence. *The Scotsman* of 1 January 1880, for example, provides reports from Edinburgh, Leith, Dundee, Glasgow, and London, the most extensive being the report for Edinburgh. Two reports refer to *Auld Lang Syne*: in Glasgow, “On the hour having been struck, the carillon of bells in the

7 Bib. II/1848.

8 Bib. II/1856. The British Library attributes this volume to Hume, though no editor is named on the book itself.

9 *Edinburgh Evening Courant*, 30 December 1868.

10 *The Scotsman*, 1 January 1878. The concert featured the Band of the 75th Highlanders. At 2 p.m. on the same day, another concert was to be played by the Band of H. M. Scots Guards. The programme of that concert was to include “War Songs of Europe”, the last one being *Auld Lang Syne*.

steeple pealed 'Auld Lang Syne,' many of those in the streets below joining in the chorus"; at St. Paul's in London, meanwhile, "some of the more enthusiastic Scotsmen were to be heard singing 'John Barleycorn' and 'Auld Lang Syne' just a little before the witching hour, but such demonstrations were not common."¹¹ We will return to the London celebrations again later.

Other reports show a slightly different emphasis. In the more extensive reports of New Year 1883 from all corners of Scotland which appeared in *The Scotsman* on 2 January 1883, only one—from the town of Crieff—specifically mentions the song being sung after the chimes had struck, and before people dispersed for first-footing. For New Year 1887 there are four separate mentions of *A Guid New Year*,¹² with *Auld Lang Syne* mentioned in three cases. In the Borders town of Earlston,

The great event of this festive time is the ball of the Volunteers, which is held on the old year's night. [...] When 12 o'clock struck dancing was suspended and the whole company sang "Auld Lang Syne," which was followed by rounds of lusty cheers for the new year. The ball-room was then deserted for half-an-hour, the dancers going to their own homes or those of friends to exchange the compliments of the season.

This report, then, links the song specifically to the chiming of the New Year rather than the end of the party itself. In Kirkwall, Orkney, the same year, the Artillery band played *God Save the Queen* at midnight, and "afterwards paraded the principal streets playing 'Auld Lang Syne.'" In Linlithgow, meanwhile, the crowds who had gathered at the town hall heard the town band play both *Auld Lang Syne* and *A Guid New Year* after the bells.¹³

On 31 December 1888, *The Scotsman* published an article on *Auld Lang Syne*, without mentioning any link to the day's celebrations; this year marked the centenary of the first datable version of the song in Burns's hand, as the article's author notes.¹⁴ The report from Glasgow for the following year again indicates the tradition of playing song tunes on the church bells at midnight, but this time it is *A Guid New Year* that is played first:

The time-honoured custom of ushering in the New Year at the Cross steeple showed no signs of waning popularity, and long before the stroke of twelve the vicinity of the Cross was occupied by a vast swaying multitude. To while away the last few minutes of the fastly dying year, snatches of popular songs were taken up in different parts of the crowd, and the burning of coloured lights from windows in the vicinity was the cause of an outbreak of cheering every few minutes. As the hour approached, the excitement grew in intensity, and the low murmur of the thousand voices made it practically impossible for those at any distance from the steeple to hear the striking of the hour [...] The chimes in the Cross steeple rang merrily "A Guid New Year," and the chorus of the well-known

¹¹ *The Scotsman*, 1 January 1883.

¹² Specifically, at the Lord Provost's dinner for the poor in Glasgow; in Portobello/Musselburgh; in Linlithgow; and in Tarbert.

¹³ All quotations from *The Scotsman*, 3 January 1887.

¹⁴ *The Scotsman*, 31 December 1888, 9; author given as "H.H."

song was rendered in the heartiest manner by the good-humoured throng. Bottles were also much in evidence, and not without much difficulty from the swaying of the crowd, the New Year was pledged by not a few. The steeple bells afterwards chimed "Auld Lang Syne," and the crowd broke up with the usual cheering and singing.¹⁵

As at a later day in Japan, it is possible to imagine that this was the authorities' way of telling the good people of Glasgow to go home to their beds. In Paisley the same year, the striking of the midnight hour was followed by "profuse hand-shaking, and a general rendering of 'Auld Langsyne,' after which the assemblage broke up, and many went in pursuit of the pleasures of 'first-fittin'."¹⁶ In the first few minutes of 1891 in Glasgow, the chimes rang out *Auld Lang Syne*, "and the refrain was taken up by some of the younger and noisier portion of the crowd."¹⁷ In the same city, 1894 was welcome by the pealing of *A Guid New Year* before *Auld Lang Syne* was heard; on this occasion, the reporter estimated the crowd as numbering ten to fifteen thousand.¹⁸

Although the reports from Edinburgh's New Year are consistently the longest in *The Scotsman's* annual review, as befitting a newspaper based in that city, *Auld Lang Syne* is rarely mentioned. An exception is the description of the relatively low-key celebrations of New Year 1892–1893, when "A half-dozen young men in a state of picturesque intoxication made a feeble attempt to lead off 'Auld Lang Syne,' but it was a melancholy failure".¹⁹ In Aberfeldy that year, the crowds congregating in the town square sang *A Guid New Year*, while in Melrose, the small crowd sang *Auld Lang Syne* and then dispersed.²⁰ The crowd gathered in Coldstream to welcome 1895 sang *Auld Lang Syne* when it arrived, while in Dornoch, "The New Year was welcomed in time-honoured fashion by the town's brass band parading the streets playing 'A Guid New Year' and by the other usual demonstrations." In both Earlston and Melrose, balls were held in the towns' Corn Exchanges, and in both cases *Auld Lang Syne* was sung at midnight.²¹ Reports from throughout the 1880s and 1890s also show that the holiday was used as an opportunity for gatherings of fraternal organizations including the Oddfellows, with mentions of processions held by such organizations in several towns.

These reports indicate that *Auld Lang Syne* was, at this point at least, not universally or at least not exclusively linked to the welcoming of the New Year in Scotland. They also indicate that although the singing of *Auld Lang Syne* at New Year was certainly practised in Scotland, people were just as likely to sing *A Guid New Year*, albeit often in conjunction with *Auld Lang Syne*. Clearly, we only have the reporting journalists' word for any of this, yet the consistency of the reports from many different towns over a long period does suggest that this was indeed the case. Later sources also indicate

15 *The Scotsman*, 1 January 1890.

16 *The Scotsman*, 1 January 1890.

17 *The Scotsman*, 1 January 1891.

18 *The Scotsman*, 1 January 1894.

19 *The Scotsman*, 2 January 1893.

20 Source for all quotes in this paragraph: *The Scotsman*, 2 January 1893.

21 *The Scotsman*, 2 January 1895.

the continuing tradition of the other song: of only three records held for Hogmanay in the School of Scottish Studies archives that mention singing, two mention *A Guid New Year* and none specifically mention *Auld Lang Syne*.²² As recently as 1989, an album called *Auld Lang Syne: A New Year's Party* used *Auld Lang Syne* to dance out the old year (in waltz time); after the chimes of Big Ben have been carefully blended in, the company switches to *A Guid New Year*.²³ Such practices remind us of *Auld Lang Syne*'s use as a song of parting—this time, saying farewell to the passing year—and given that many parties would break up just after midnight, there is again the possibility of a link between that tradition and the emerging tradition of singing the song at the turn of the year.

That Glasgow crowds figure strongly in reports of *Auld Lang Syne* at New Year, particularly when compared with Edinburgh, may have something to do with the structure of the city's population. The "Second City of the Empire" was home to many migrant workers from Ireland and the rural Highlands; more generally well-known songs may have had a better chance at such occasions in consequence.²⁴ On the other hand, in most of the cases mentioned here the singing is led from a central point, be it a carillon or a brass band. It is a different story when we turn to Scottish communities elsewhere, and the first place to look is London.

8.2 New Year at St. Paul's

The close relationship between Scotland and the celebration of the New Year can be seen nowhere more clearly than in comparison with England, specifically London. A report in the *Edinburgh Evening Courant* describing the holiday season in London in 1884 describes the cultural differences:

It is almost unnecessary to remind Scotch readers that their festive season—the New Year time—is very little observed in the metropolis. On New Year's Day the shops are open, and business goes on just as usual. The Scotch and French colonies, of course, make an exception as far as they can; but just as when in Rome you must do as the Romans do, so in London you must conform to the customs of the Londoners. There is one way in which Scotchmen here infallibly distinguish themselves on the last night of the year. Towards midnight it is their custom to assemble in large numbers round St Paul's Cathedral, and join in the singing of "Auld Lang Syne" as the stroke of the bell proclaims the death of the old and the birth of the new year. It is a very simple ceremony, and yet an agreeable

22 The twentieth century archive recordings of the School of Scottish Studies focus mostly on Scotland north of the Highland fault, which may be one reason for the lack of records. It is also possible that those interviewed focussed on aspects of the tradition which are not so common nowadays.

23 Jim MacLeod & His Band, *Auld Lang Syne: A New Year's Eve Party*, State Records 1989, British Library Sounds call no. 1CD0025101.

24 Paul Maloney has suggested that the tradition of amateur singing performances in Glasgow public houses, a forerunner of music hall, may have become so established because of the number of people living there who did not otherwise have an extended family or social network. See Maloney 2003, especially Chapter 2.

reminiscence of the “folks at home.” To miss it would in the eyes of some Scots amount to little less than a crime.²⁵

Just when this tradition became established in London is not clear—the report in *The Scotsman* from 1880, quoted previously, implied that it was by then a routine occurrence. The earliest report in *The Times* to mention the singing of *Auld Lang Syne* at New Year comes from 1886–87, and does not specifically link it to the Scots:

The bells of St. Paul’s began a merry peal soon after 11 o’clock, and continued ringing until midnight. As 12 o’clock approached a large crowd congregated around the cathedral to witness the heralding of the new year. As most of the people had been holiday making, the crowd was somewhat jovial, and groups were to be seen singing scraps of songs and snatches of “Auld Lang Syne”. The magnificent peal of bells rang out loudly in the frosty air, and must have been heard for a long way round London. Just on the hour of midnight the bells ceased to allow the clock to strike the hour, which it did in solemn and measured tones. As the last note was sounded the bells recommenced with a jubilant peal, and the new year was greeted by the crowd with a loud shout and a more or less general singing of “Auld Lang Syne.” Many other city churches added their peals.²⁶

It is unclear at what point word got out and more and more people started to take part in the annual gathering at St. Paul’s. *The Scotsman*, reporting on 1893–1894, noted that the crowd had indeed increased to the point where the Scots were in the minority, and that the chorus of *Auld Lang Syne* was sung immediately after midnight by the “various groups” present, who then generally proceeded to the nearest pub.²⁷ The report of the same event in the *New York Times* goes into slightly more detail: it notes that, previous to midnight, “the crowd gulped down whisky and shouted music-hall choruses, drowning the voices of the few who tried to sing hymns or make religious addresses”, and that the songs sung at midnight included *Auld Lang Syne*, *Rule Britannia*, *God Save the Queen*, the *Marseillaise*, “and a hundred other songs”. There was also a scuffle involving a group of unemployed people who aimed to steal the show, though their demonstration was kept under control by the police.²⁸

The festivities at St. Paul’s mirror many of the elements that marked Hogmanay celebrations in Scottish towns as well: the crowds gather in a central location for the purpose of hearing the bells strike the New Year; almost immediately afterwards, they disperse. The one difference is that while none of the reports from London mention the singing of *A Guid New Year*, they almost always mention the singing of *Auld Lang Syne*. There could be several reasons for this: *A Guid New Year* was not likely to be recognized by non-Scottish reporters, and for the same reason, when the percentage of Scots to non-Scots in the crowd diminished there would have been little hope of starting a rendition of that song. Similarly, while it is difficult to trace at what point *A Guid New*

25 “Our London Letter”, *Edinburgh Evening Courant*, 30 December 1884.

26 *The Times*, 1 January 1887.

27 *The Scotsman*, 1 January 1895.

28 *New York Times*, 1 January 1894.

Year became popular in Scotland, there is a good chance that this occurred after an alternative tradition had become established in London. Whatever the reason, we are left with *Auld Lang Syne* as an even more integral part of the New Year's celebration at St. Paul's than it was north of the border.

The fact that *Auld Lang Syne* was always sung at New Year at St. Paul's does not of itself explain the subsequent strength of the connection between this celebration and this song, which may however have to do with the development of New Year celebrations as a distinct event. Here as well the Scots played their part—for example, in the form of a “Grand Hogmanay Concert” at the Queen's Hall in London on New Year's Eve 1897: the advertisement informs us that *Auld Lang Syne* was to be sung at midnight.²⁹ The *New York Times*, reporting on events at St Paul's in 1898–99, noted that “The majority of those who had assembled were evidently Scotchmen, as was evidenced by the constant whistling of ‘The Cock o’ the North’”. The crowd, less than in previous years, numbered about two thousand, and sang *Auld Lang Syne* at midnight; they slowly dispersed “as the notes of the song died out.”³⁰

The reports for 1900–1901 in *The Times* are more extensive than most in that newspaper, probably because this New Year marked the start of the new century. By this time, watchnight services in churches, common for many years in Scotland, had become well established in England as well, and the report for the most part discusses the services at St Paul's Cathedral and Westminster Abbey. There is, however, also mention of the less devout celebrations outside St. Paul's:

For three hours last night—from half-past 9 to half-past 12—a dense crowd, numbering several thousand people, surrounded St. Paul's Cathedral for the purpose of celebrating the opening of the new century outside the historic building. The crowd, which was much larger than that of many years past, was a very heterogenous one, but was fairly orderly until about 11 o'clock, when the rougher element commenced to assert itself. Anything in the nature of a disturbance was, however, prevented by the strong force of police which had been posted outside the Cathedral. As the first stroke of 12 o'clock was struck by the Cathedral clock the opening strains of “Auld Lang Syne” were struck up, but the rest was drowned by the shouting of the crowd, and the considerable number of Scotsmen present, who make it a practice to place themselves outside the Cathedral on New Year's Eve, soon realised that they were in a minority. The Scottish air gave place to such patriotic songs as “The Absent-Minded Beggar” and “They all love Jack,” and the National Anthem, and the great concourse began to disperse as soon as the last stroke of the midnight hour had sounded.³¹

29 *The Times*, 31 December 1897.

30 *New York Times*, 1 January 1899.

31 *The Times*, 1 January 1901. *They All Love Jack* by Stephen Adams and Fred E. Weatherly was published between 1890 and 1899 and tells of Jack sailing off, much to the distress of the women at the shoreline. *The Absent-Minded Beggar*, composed by Arthur Sullivan to a text by Rudyard Kipling, was a plea for money for the war effort.

This report, written at the height of the Boer War, presents an early indication that the British patriotic connections of *Auld Lang Syne* were starting to wane. The report for 1904–1905 notes that “Just before midnight the singing of ‘Auld Lang Syne’ and the strains of the National Anthem made a curious medley, and as the midnight hour was struck on the bells in the tower of the Cathedral loud cheers were raised.” The crowd then began to disperse.³² Given the frequency with which *Auld Lang Syne* and *God Save the Queen* appeared together in the mid- to late nineteenth century, the reporter’s comment is interesting. But as that tradition was waning, so another arose. 1910 saw “the customary scene of merriment outside St. Paul’s Cathedral as the clock boomed out the hours of midnight”:

At the first stroke of midnight loud cheers broke forth from the crowd, to the accompaniment of various musical instruments and the bagpipes. Then followed a general clasping of hands and the singing of “Auld Lang Syne”.³³

At the Hotel Métropole the same year, a supper was followed by a formal ceremony welcoming the New Year:

To “Auld Lang Syne,” led by professional singers, or the strains of the National Anthem, with lights almost extinguished as the chimes of midnight broke upon the air, the guests at the special parties marked the incoming of 1910.³⁴

The “migration” theory for the establishment of the tradition S_{NY} thus appears proven to the extent that the Scottish diaspora in London seemed to have had a major hand in establishing it. They celebrated in Scots style, and used the song that was one of the strongest of Scottish symbols. It could also be that the diaspora’s stock of ethnic or national “symbols”, including songs, was more stable and possibly more clearly defined. And unlike in Scotland, this public celebration was more spontaneous, led neither by carillons nor town bands, and for this reason too more likely to fall back on a song of the status of *Auld Lang Syne*. The traditional association between the song and the theme of absent friends is a further reason why it should be sung—compare, for example, this quotation from a letter published in *The Scotsman* in 1864, from a Scot in China:

Our Christmas went off very well here. Plum-puddings out from home, cakes from Calcutta, and every delicacy Fortnum & Mason could invent, loaded the tables of most of the worthy hosts in Shanghai [*sic*]. The old folks at home were not forgotten, and “Auld Lang Syne” sung in a manner befitting sons of Scotland, and late inhabitants of the “grey metropolis of the north”.³⁵

Once the connection was made, and the song sung regularly on this occasion, a new inherited significance of S_{NY} would have every chance of becoming established, even

³² *The Times*, 2 January 1905.

³³ *The Times*, 1 January 1910.

³⁴ *The Times*, 1 January 1910.

³⁵ “Letter from China”, *The Scotsman*, 29 February 1864.

while the direct influence of the Scots on the proceedings diminished. In 1906, *The Scotsman* reported that

Though these gatherings were originated by Scotsmen, little of the Scottish element in them now survives. Scots Guardsmen, all the way from Chelsea Barracks, were freely sprinkled throughout the crowd, and a party of people occupying a balcony on Ludgate Hill were enabled to start “Auld Lang Syne” with the assistance of a cornet.³⁶

Likewise, in 1910–1911, “the Scottish element in the gathering here no longer predominates, and the cockney element is more in evidence, while the pipes have given place to the mouth organ”. Nevertheless, it was *Auld Lang Syne* that the crowd sang at midnight, though it is not mentioned in connection with the other parties and celebrations described, nor in an adjacent article in the same publication, on the custom of celebrating New Year. That there was still a discrepancy between Scottish and English attitudes to the celebration can be seen from the fact that in 1911–1912, although New Year parties continued at larger hotels, and those gathered at the Criterion Restaurant enthusiastically sang *Auld Lang Syne* at midnight,³⁷ there were also serious riots at the Longmoor military camp on New Year’s Day—triggered, it was said, by the refusal of English commanding officers to allow Scottish troops to celebrate in the manner to which they were accustomed.³⁸

8.3 America and the Bells

From a time when the memory of man runneth not to the contrary it has been the custom to ring in the new year with the Trinity chimes, and to hear this fine music the people come not only from all parts of New-York, but from neighbouring cities.³⁹

Across Great Britain, many people now rely on a live broadcast of the bell affectionately known as Big Ben for a sign that the New Year has started; in Scotland, the moment when the New Year arrives is still known as “The Bells”. In the late nineteenth century, the carillon in Glasgow led the singing of *Auld Lang Syne* and *A Guid New Year*. In nineteenth-century America, meanwhile, elaborate bell-ringing programmes were an important element in public celebrations and festivals, including New Year’s Eve.

A typical chimes programme for an American holiday celebration would consist of at least ten different tunes, with a strong focus on the most universally known songs: Scots and Irish songs, and airs from classical music, were mainstays of the programme, along with more specifically American songs. The Metropolitan Church of the Trinity in Lower Manhattan, the focus for New Year’s Eve celebrations in New York until they moved to the newly named Times Square in 1904, had a long-established practice of marking holidays with a bell-ringing programme. In 1860, for example, local

³⁶ *The Scotsman*, 1 January 1906.

³⁷ *The Times*, 3 January 1912.

³⁸ *The Times*, 4 January 1912.

³⁹ *New York Times*, 1 January 1891.

councillors are reported to have had a long debate about the upcoming Independence Day celebrations—as is the way of councillors, they mostly debated the cost—and one of the arguments for supporting the ringing of bells was that it was such an old tradition. The programme of the tunes to be played in that case is similar in substance and actual content to those played around New Year later in the century, and includes *Auld Lang Syne*:

The following tunes will be performed on Trinity Church chimes at 6 A.M. and at noon, by James E. Auliffe: 1. Ringing the changes on eight bells. 2. Hail Columbia. 3. Yankee Doodle. 4. Gentle Zetilla. 5. Airs from “Fra Diavolo.” 6. Airs from “Norma.” 7. Samson, from Handel’s chorus, “Then round about the starry Heavens.” 8. A Concerto in Rondo, with various modulations in major and minor keys. 9. Old Hundred. 10. Ringing the changes on eight bells. 11. Blue Bells of Scotland. 12. Airs by De Beriot. 13. Days of Absence. 14. Last Rose of Summer. 15. Auld Lang Syne. 16. Happy am I. 17. Home, Sweet Home. 18. Airs from “Child of the Regiment”. 19. Airs from “Lucretia Borgia.” 20. Evening Bells. 21. Hail Columbia. 22. Yankee Doodle.⁴⁰

Popular tunes would also ring out at Thanksgiving: in 1880, for example, *Auld Lang Syne* was played alongside *Praise God, From Whom All Blessings Flow* as people gathered for the service.⁴¹

By New Year’s Eve 1890, the crowd around Trinity numbered around 5,000 people, and the celebration had turned into quite a spectacle. But “Although hundreds listened, no one heard the tune of ‘Auld Lang Syne’ with which the New Year was welcomed”, the reason being that the sound of horns drowned out the bells.⁴² Things had got so out of hand by 1892–1893 that the vicar, the Rev. Dr. Morgan Dix, cancelled the programme the next year, but by the year after that he had relented because of the strength of public feeling. Estimates put the crowd on that occasion, 1894–1895, at around 15,000. The programme—chosen by Rev. Dix—positioned *Auld Lang Syne* immediately before the last tune, *Home, Sweet Home*; there is no mention of singing at midnight.⁴³ This time, the tunes were audible, largely because the police had been busy confiscating several hundred tin horns.

The statement from 1890–1891 implies that *Auld Lang Syne* was played at midnight; other programmes, including those from other churches, suggest that the connection was anything but firm. The programme for St. Andrew’s Church in the same year, for example, places *Auld Lang Syne* in the middle of the programme (which may, or may not, have coincided with midnight); again the last song is *Home, Sweet Home*.⁴⁴ A comparison of the programmes of various churches on New Year’s Eve 1898, published in the *New York Times* (see Fig. 8.2), also throws up conflicting information. The

40 *New York Times*, 3 July 1860.

41 *New York Times*, 26 November 1880.

42 *New York Times*, 1 January 1891.

43 *New York Times*, 1 January 1895.

44 *New York Times*, 30 December 1894.

first—for Grace Church—has *Home, Sweet Home* being played at midnight, preceded by *Auld Lang Syne*, which in turn is preceded by *Coming Through The Rye*. The next programme—for St Michael's—includes *Auld Lang Syne* part of the way through, and the programme for St. Andrew's Protestant Episcopal Church does not include *Auld Lang Syne* at all. Neither did the programme for Trinity in 1898, which had been published the previous day: there, again, the last song was *Home, Sweet Home*.

One of the important services of the evening was held at St. George's Protestant Episcopal Church, where the old year was watched out and the new year in. Another such service took place at the Church of the Heavenly Rest, the rector preaching in each case. There were chimes at Trinity, the programme of which was printed yesterday; Grace Church, St. Michael's, and St. Andrew's. The programme at Grace Church, rendered by Miss Bertha Thomas, assistant organist, was as follows:

1. A Few More Years Shall Roll.
2. Chime Again, Beautiful Bells.
3. Bonnie Doon.
4. Selections from Verdi.
5. The Old Oaken Bucket.
6. Robin Adair.
7. Selections from Handel.
8. March of the Men of Harlech.
9. My Old Kentucky Home.
10. Coming 'Thro the Rye.
11. Old Lang Syne.
12. Home Sweet Home.
- 12 O'CLOCK.
13. The Heavens Are Telling.
14. My God Our Help in Ages Past.
15. Angels of Jesus.
16. He Shall Feed His Flock.
17. America.
18. Praise God, from Whom All Blessings Flow.

The programme at St. Michael's was:

1. English chime changes.
2. A Few More Years Will Roll.
3. Auld Lang Syne.
4. Robin Adair.
5. Hail Columbia.
6. Columbia, the Gem of the Ocean.
7. Yankee Doodle.
8. America.
9. Home, Sweet Home.

Several hundred people gathered at One Hundred and Twenty-seventh Street and Fifth Avenue last night to hear the chimes of St. Andrew's Protestant Episcopal Church. There were a good many tin horns in the crowd, and everybody was having a good time. The chimer was J. Grant Senia, and the programme, which was begun at 11:15 o'clock, and concluded at midnight, consisted of "English Chime Changes," "Red, White, and Blue," "Old Folks at Home," "Unfurl the Banner," "Rule, Britannia," "See, the Conquering Hero Comes," "Hail, Columbia," "Star of Freedom," "Yankee Doodle," "Sherman's March," "The Star Spangled Banner," "My Country, 'Tis of Thee," and "Praise God, from Whom All Blessings Flow."

A number of people went to St. Patrick's Cathedral at midnight, expecting that there would be a service there, and were much disappointed to find the doors locked. The service had ended some time before. There was a watch night service at the Metropolitan Temple, ending with prayer at midnight.

CELEBRATION IN BROOKLYN.

Chimes in the Old "City of Churches" Ring in 1899.

From tower and steeple the bells of Brooklyn, erstwhile the City of Churches, rang forth a wild tumultuous greeting to the new-born year last night. The bass-voiced bells in the lofty steeple of the Church of the Messiah flung out a booming welcome, in which the chimes in the belfry of St. Ann's melodiously joined. Then one upon another the church bells throughout the borough gave tongue until all were joined in a mighty chorus.

The ringing of the chimes at St. Ann's began at 11 o'clock. They were rung for half an hour, and then watch night services were held. At midnight the chimes were rung again. The bells played "O God, Our Help in Ages Past," "Watchman, Tell Us of the Night," "While with Ceaseless Course the Sun," "Days and Moments Quickly Flying," and "A Few More Years Shall Roll."

A programme similar to that at St. Ann's was tendered by the chimer at the Church of the Messiah.

The following programme was given by the bell chimer of the Church of Christ, on Bedford Avenue: "Auld Lang Syne," "My Country, 'Tis of Thee," "Ein' Feste Burg," "The Old Oaken Bucket," and "Scots Wha Hae Wi' Wallace Bled."

The close of the old year was celebrated with a solemn evening service in St. James's Pro-Cathedral, on Jay Street.

Watch night services were held at the Hanson Place Baptist Church, the Baptist Temple, and many other Brooklyn churches.

New Year's Eve entertainments were held at the Union League, Hamilton, Aurora Grata, Cortelyou, Midwood, Montauk, Norrombega, and Stuyvesant Heights Republican Clubs.

Fig. 8.2 Church bell programmes from New York, New Year 1898–1899. *New York Times*, 1 January 1899. Public domain.

All these programmes indicate that the vast majority of tunes played were among the most popular songs of the day: *Robin Adair*, for example, had been popular since the early nineteenth century. Also noteworthy is the inclusion of airs from Verdi and Handel, and one or two songs which may seem incongruous in this context (such as *Rule Britannia*: good tunes tend to be used despite the national tendencies of their words). That *Auld Lang Syne* appeared on these programmes is therefore not surprising. The prevalence of religious tunes after midnight may be explained by the fact that in 1899, New Year's Day fell on a Sunday.

The lack of any emphasis on *Auld Lang Syne* in 1898–1899 is all the more interesting considering that it had played a central role in the festivities the previous year. These were particularly special since, on the stroke of New Year, the new city of Greater New York was born. At the conclusion of a series of elaborate processions and celebrations, detailed in the *New York Times* the day before,

The united bands will play dance music until the hour of midnight, when they will accompany the voices of the singing societies with "Auld Lang Syne." As the words of the song announce the departure of the old year, the new flag of the city will be hoisted and a salute of 100 guns given.⁴⁵

The same paper goes on to give the programme for Grace Church—*Auld Lang Syne* is second-last, before *Praise God, From Whom All Blessings Flow*. It is therefore unclear if the singing of *Auld Lang Syne* by the collected forces relates to a New Year tradition as such, or if it was simply seen as appropriate to mark this historic moment. And if anything, the tendency in many of these reports is towards *Home, Sweet Home* as a song of New Year *and* as a song of parting, rather than *Auld Lang Syne*.

There are, however, other reports that suggest that the tradition S_{NY} was practised in some groups and communities. Not all of this evidence is linked to major public events, and much of it comes from other parts of the USA. A report of a party held by a Mr and Mrs Moore on New Year's Eve 1891, published in the *San Antonio Daily Light* (Texas) on 2 January 1892 tells us that "as the clock tolled the hour of 12 the company in one voice sang *Auld Lang Syne* and closed by wishing each other a bright, happy and prosperous New Year." The party had a "phantom" theme, and given that an old Scottish Hogmanay tradition involved children dressing in sheets and going from door to door, it is possible that the hosts were of Scots extraction.⁴⁶ At a Scottish party held by Mr and Mrs David Yule (*sic*) in Sandusky on New Year's Eve 1901, those attending sang *A Guid New Year* at midnight; this was followed by coffee, cakes and games, the party singing *Auld Lang Syne* before breaking up.⁴⁷

Other references to the song seem to point more to its existing social functions than to a specific link with New Year. A report in *The Constitution* (Atlanta, Georgia)

⁴⁵ *New York Times*, 30 December 1897.

⁴⁶ This tradition, the origins of the Hallowe'en tradition—Hallowe'en was New Year's Eve in the Celtic year—is still practiced in some parts of north-eastern Scotland.

⁴⁷ *Sandusky Daily Star*, 2 January 1902.

of 5 January 1895 mentions a New Year's reception held by the Capital City Club, the supper ending with the singing of *Auld Lang Syne*. In Richmond, Indiana on New Year's Eve 1901, the well-known comedian Adelaide Thurston gave a performance, after which she and her company entertained the audience until midnight: then "Miss Thurston recited a New Year's poem to the accompaniment of chimes, wished the audience a happy new year and requested all to rise and sing 'Auld Lang Syne'".⁴⁸ In the same year, the report of a party given at Calvary Baptist Church in Waterloo, Iowa says that "The evening was passed in music, readings and New Year's resolutions and at the close of the old year all the company joined in singing 'Auld Lang Syne'".⁴⁹ Another report from Iowa implies that the tradition had taken hold there by the first decade of the twentieth century. This is a short story published in *The Tribune* (Cedar Rapids, Iowa) on 30 December 1910, which contains the following description of the festivities: "New Year's eve we saw the old year out with a lot of merrymaking, singing 'Auld Lang Syne' hand in hand standing in a circle." The story in question is being recounted by a father to his young children, and recounts an incident before any of the children were born (in fact, it is the story of how their father and mother got together).⁵⁰

Back in New York, the use of *Auld Lang Syne* seemed well established in some contexts, but not others. One of the earliest consistent uses of S_{NY} comes from the annual New Year's ball held by the Tuxedo Club. The Tuxedo Club was part of an exclusive country retreat to the north-west of New York City; founded in 1886, it has been described as a reaction of the old established New York rich to the influx of "new money" following the Civil War.⁵¹ This is certainly reflected in their manner of using *Auld Lang Syne*, which would not have been out of place fifty or more years earlier. According to a report of their New Year's Eve Ball in New York, 1901, "all joined hands in the centre of the ballroom, the punch bowl was brought in, and all sang 'Auld Lang Syne', drinking the new year in."⁵² In 1902, the same thing happened:

At midnight, after two hours of dancing, the annual custom was observed. Before the stroke of 12 a punch bowl and many trumpets were brought in, and as the clock struck all joined hands in the centre of the ballroom and joined in singing "Auld Lang Syne". Then they blew their trumpets, and from the stage dropped an emblem inscribed "Happy New Year. 1903." Supper was served in the dining room at 1 o'clock.⁵³

There are further reports in this style from 1903, 1913–1914 (subheading reads "Dancers Join Hands Around Big Punch Bowl and Sing 'Auld Lang Syne'") and 1914–1915

48 *The Mansfield News*, Mansfield, Ohio, 2 January 1902.

49 *Waterloo Daily Times/Tribune*, 2 January 1902.

50 John C. Gassoway, "A New Year House Party. The Trick That Resulted in a Wedding", *The Tribune* 8/6 (30 December 1910).

51 For a brief history, see Kintrea 1978.

52 *New York Times*, 1 January 1902.

53 *New York Times*, 1 January 1903.

(again, the subheading refers to the tradition: "Sing 'Auld Lang Syne' at Midnight, Before Punch Bowl, in Tuxedo Club").⁵⁴

Another group that traditionally sang the song at midnight was the Author's Club. A report from their festivities for New Year 1909–1910, states that

As the big clock began striking midnight the lights were lowered and the members, on the last stroke of the chimes, toasted the new year and sang "Auld Lang Syne," a custom which has obtained [at] the Author's Club for twenty year.⁵⁵

(The tradition of lowering the lights was followed by many hotels as well.) Again, the implication is that the custom was either still not general, or only recently developed elsewhere. The reports of other celebrations in the city that night describe the oftentimes theatrical arrangements made to mark the occasion, but none mention the singing of *Auld Lang Syne*.⁵⁶ The link between the song and taking refreshments, so ceremonially done at the Tuxedo Club, is probably not irrelevant: more than two decades later, in the film *Klondike Annie* (1936) starring Mae West, the band also plays and sings *Auld Lang Syne* when refreshments are served at the rather unconventional religious reform meeting West's character has managed to organise at a settlement in Alaska.⁵⁷

S_{NY} seems also to have become established tradition at certain of the hotels that staged elaborate New Year's celebrations: reports from the St Regis hotel in particular refer to *Auld Lang Syne* being sung there at midnight each New Year from 1911–1912 to 1913–1914. And given the prestige of some of the events listed, it is safe to presume that the tradition found other followers as well, much as fraternal organizations organize many of their rituals on the model of other fraternities. There are certainly occasional references to other celebrations and clubs using the tradition, though perhaps not as consistently as the examples just cited.⁵⁸

Despite the publicity given to these celebrations, many of which were attended by several hundred people, they are only one side of the story, and of particular interest must be how a consolidated tradition could arise. Here it is important to look again at the major public celebrations. In 1904–1905, the *New York Times* moved into its new building on what then became Times Square. This was the first year to witness the now legendary New Year tradition of a Waterford crystal ball dropping from the top of the Times building. Although Times Square clearly attracted large crowds, the reports testify that people continued to gather at other places as well, including at the older, traditional centre of Trinity. Around the second decade of the century, *Auld Lang Syne* appears more consistently at the end of the programmes played on the bells of Trinity

⁵⁴ *New York Times*, 1 January 1915.

⁵⁵ *New York Times*, 1 January 1910.

⁵⁶ *New York Times*, 1 January 1910.

⁵⁷ Dir. by Raoul Walsh (1936).

⁵⁸ For example, in 1911–1912 at the Hotel Plaza; in 1912–1913, at celebrations held at Webster Hall, sung by Madame Nordica; and in 1913–1914 at the celebration held by the Atlantic Yacht Club. See various articles in the *New York Times*, 1911–1914.

and other churches, but the end of these programmes did not necessarily coincide with midnight itself.

Other changes were afoot, however. In 1912, in an attempt to overcome the rowdiness that had become associated with New Year's Eve, the photographer and reformer Jacob Riis and twelve other citizens announced plans for what the *New York Times* called a "safe and sane" celebration:

Singers from various societies are to give concerts in Herald Square, Madison Square and City Hall Park, and the Salvation Army will give a concert in Union Square. There are to be band concerts at all these places, and as near midnight as possible the buglers are to sound "taps" as a signal for the audience to join in the singing of "America". The programme of singing will be "The Battle Hymn of the Republic," "Guide Me, Thou Great Jehovah," "Oh God, Our Help in Ages Past," "Nearer, My God to Thee," and "Auld Lang Syne".⁵⁹

Auld Lang Syne is the only one of the songs not to refer in some way to religion, but is placed at the end of the programme rather than at the more significant point (in this case at least) of midnight. The wider background to this event, and the trend it represented, becomes clearer when we look at reports of the following year. In 1913–1914, the *New York Times* sensed something of a new epoch in the way New Year was celebrated, partly because the police were now adept at arresting pedlars selling tin horns and buzzers. As a result, "There was a marked absence of rowdiness, and the confiscation by the police of New Year's Eve instruments of torture prevented the hundreds of squabbles and the scores of small riots that usually mark a New Year's Eve".⁶⁰ At Times Square,

It may be said of the crowd that, at this moment, though their means of making themselves heard were comparatively slender, they made wonderful use of the material at their command. Considering that there were ten times as many human voices as tin horns in the midnight racket, it was a fine effort. Those who heard it generally came to the opinion that New York has not yet advanced to the point where chimes and carols were prized by a New Year's crowd like plain noise on a large scale.⁶¹

This may explain why previous celebrations at Times Square do not mention the crowd singing—clearly, the point was to make a very different kind of noise. Simultaneously, though, we see the development of a different attitude to policing (literally) and leading the New Year's celebrations, with more emphasis on singing and less on squawking. This year again saw a programme of music being organized at Madison Square Gardens, starting with a band and proceeding to vocal music: the words of the songs were projected on lantern slides, and almost four thousand singers from various choirs and choral societies took part. At the stroke of midnight, *America* was

⁵⁹ *New York Times*, 24 December 1912.

⁶⁰ *New York Times*, 1 January 1914.

⁶¹ *New York Times*, 1 January 1914.

sung; the same practice was followed at an open-air concert held in front of Borough Hall in Brooklyn, the report of which mentions many songs but not *Auld Lang Syne*. Meanwhile, the bell-ringing at Trinity ended again with *Auld Lang Syne*, and the song was again sung at midnight at the party held in the St Regis hotel.

Taken together, these reports indicate that the tradition S_{NY} was established in some localities and in some group contexts by the late nineteenth century, and, increasingly, in the early twentieth century. Yet the song by no means had the kind of exclusive relationship with the celebration that it would begin to enjoy only a few decades later. How the tradition finally gelled is a more international story, again featuring bells, and now also featuring broadcasting.

8.4 Traditions Come Together

And suddenly it was the New Year, the dancing stopped and folk all shook hands, coming to shake Chris and Ewan's; and Long Rob struck up the sugary surge of *Auld Lang Syne* and they all joined hands and stood in a circle to sing it, and Chris thought of Will far over the seas in Argentina, under the hot night there.⁶²

In 1907, the songwriters Henry E. Pether and Fred W. Leigh published a song called *For Auld Lang Syne, Or, My Home Is Far Away*, one of many newer songs to refer to *Auld Lang Syne*, but possibly the first to explicitly relate this to New Year.⁶³ The song was recorded by Robert Carr for Edison Records around the same time it was published.⁶⁴ It tells the story of a man sitting at a camp-fire on New Year's Eve; his thoughts, as expressed in the second verse, are as follows:

"I see them", he murmurs, "the friends old and dear,
The good friends I left long ago;
Tonight they will think of me, lonely, out here,
And warmer their true hearts will glow.
And now they are singing the time-honour'd song.
And clasping their hands as they sing;
While, rising and falling, I hear the ding-dong
Of the bells as their welcome they ring."⁶⁵

After the third verse, the first verse and chorus of *Auld Lang Syne* are introduced, with the piano accompaniment mimicking the sound of bells; in the recording, an actual carillon is used to chime M2 before the song's finale.

This song's content suggests that the tradition S_{NY} was well established by this point. Further indications of its spread are found in the Jamaican newspaper *The Gleaner* in

62 From *Sunset Song* by Lewis Grassie Gibbon. This part of the story is set on the eve of World War I. Gibbon 1986 (1932).

63 See Chapter 10, below, for a fuller discussion of this phenomena.

64 Recording available at <https://archive.org/details/ForAuldLangSyneByRobertCarr>

65 Pether & Lee 1907.

1902: several issues from December that year hold advertisements for a set of New Year cards called “Auld Lang Syne”, probably directed at the island’s sizeable Scottish community. A further report comes from Winnipeg, suggesting that the tradition was established there no later than the first years of the twentieth century; immigrants to Canada in this period were overwhelmingly British, and the country had attracted many Scots:

As the old year departed and the new year marked another epoch in the advancement of the world many in Winnipeg were awake and the advent of 1907 was hailed joyfully in many ways. At the fire halls the year was rung out on the stroke of midnight, at many a social gathering healths were pledged, and in the workshops and offices that are busy during the night hours hands were clasped and greetings exchanged. The streets were alive with people and as the big clock in the city hall chimed out the fleeting moments of the old year there was a solemn stillness. Somewhere in the distance a dog howled and then with one accord the whistles of the railway shops and factories of the city started to salute the new born year.

Music came over the night air and the strains of “Auld Lang Syne” could be heard in many parts of the city. The streets were full of noise and as society had made a night of it, there were many out to be reminded by the shrill whistles that according to the calendar the world was a year older and they stopped on the sidewalk and shook hands, uttering wishes for another prosperous year.⁶⁶

With so many communities over such a wide area now recognising the practice of singing *Auld Lang Syne* at New Year, the mould would seem to be set. World War I may have dampened the tradition and its exchange, or provided new channels for it to spread—it is difficult to tell. In the period after the War, however, a new element enters the mix, as witness this report from Trinity Church in New York from 1923. While people inside the church listened to a sermon condemning the activities of the Ku Klux Klan, people outside were gearing up to listen to the traditional programme of bell-ringing; and this year, those people may have been very far away indeed:

Through transmitters arranged in the steeple and mechanism installed in the crypt the New Year’s carols were carried to the American Telephone and Telegraph Company Building in Broadway, and from there broadcast from the high-power wireless on the roof.

Walter A. Clarke, the chimer, began to play the bells at 11:45 o’clock, and he continued until 12:15, swinging from one air to another. First, he played “Nearer, My God, to Thee.” Then came the solemn tones of “Holy, Holy, Holy, Lord God Almighty [*sic*].” In succession there followed “Lead, Kindly Light,” “O Come All Ye Faithful,” “America,” “Old Kentucky Home,” “Flow Gently, Sweet Afton,” “We Three Kings of Orient Are,” “Auld Lang Syne” and last, “Home Sweet Home”.⁶⁷

The programme for the event printed the week before, however, stated that the last song would be *Auld Lang Syne*, with *Home, Sweet Home* beforehand; the same was

⁶⁶ *Manitoba Free Press*, 1 January 1907.

⁶⁷ *New York Times*, 1 January 1923.

programmed to happen at Grace Church. The bells of St Patrick's Church were also broadcast: its programme placed *Auld Lang Syne* second, and the mostly religious songs ended with *The Star-Spangled Banner*.⁶⁸

Radio broadcasts from the New York churches were probably not as significant for the spread of the tradition as the broadcasting of another bell. On the same New Year's Eve, 1923, Big Ben was broadcast all over Britain to announce the New Year. A report in the *New York Times* of the events in London mentions that "A crowd of 10,000 gathered around St. Paul's Cathedral, where Scottish songs [*sic!*] were sung, in accordance with custom, to the strains of bagpipes." Continuing to describe how all the best hotels had put on special dinners, the report concludes that "Everywhere there was dancing and singing of 'Auld Lang Syne,' and the diners cheered one another and laughed as if there was no such thing as a Labor [*sic*] Government in sight and big income taxes waiting to be paid."⁶⁹ By the end of the 1920s, a special New Year's message to the Empire was broadcast around the world by radio, and there were reports that Britons abroad were often timing their own celebrations to coincide with this.⁷⁰ In 1930, the *New York Times* reports that both Big Ben's chime and the chimes of Southwark Cathedral were broadcast by American stations working together with the BBC, and the chimes were followed by the singing of *Auld Lang Syne*. Though weather conditions meant that only Big Ben itself could be heard properly, the message would nevertheless have been clear enough. Perhaps, however, New York had already and finally succumbed to the tradition *S_{NY}*. In 1929—the year when Guy Lombardo started his soon infamous New Year gig—the main focus of the celebrations was Times Square. The crystal ball dropped as ever; simultaneously, the electric bulletin running along the Times Building carried a New Year's greeting from the staff of the newspaper, preceded by a line from *Auld Lang Syne*.⁷¹

I break the search off at this point because the critical moment has clearly been passed and the critical point made. There can be no doubt that the advent of broadcasting and recording played a role in finally establishing the tradition of singing *Auld Lang Syne* at New Year. It built, though, on a practice which was already firmly established in many communities, quite possibly beginning in the Scottish diaspora, but reiterated through adoption by a number of other groups and communities, including ones with a high level of prestige. The many implied and inherited significances of the song up to that point seem to have fed into this new tradition: as the most famous Scottish song, but also a song that strengthens awareness of connections back to Scotland; as a song about the passing of time, and about raising a glass to friendships that have stood the test of time.

68 *New York Times*, 23 December 1923.

69 *New York Times*, 1 January 1924.

70 *New York Times*, 1 January 1928.

71 *New York Times*, 1 January 1929.

The more centralized and publicized a celebration becomes, the more likely that its traditions are to be reproduced de-centrally as well, not only because of the numbers of people involved at major, central celebrations, but because of the kudos that they possess. If broadcasting played a role, it did so by focussing attention: the countless local celebrations would have continued, but more and more may have chosen to tune into the few, centralized broadcasts of the New Year bells, joining in that moment with a larger community perhaps not visible, but certainly real; not merely imagined, but also—at least in part—heard.

What is perhaps most striking is the tenacity of this tradition, and the singularity of the connection, though I disagree with Anne Dhu Shapiro's comment that it is unexplainable.⁷² Many songs are associated with Christmas, and there are other songs dealing with New Year, but the connection between New Year and *Auld Lang Syne*, particularly among the people of America, goes beyond any of this. It is this connection that makes Tom Johnson's account of the performance by Avery Jimerson, a Native American of the Seneca people, quoted in the Introduction, so poignant. Indeed, there is something quite special about a tradition and a song so self-explanatory that even musicians whose names we would more normally associate with challenging accepted norms and traditions, with breaking with convention, and with not giving two hoots about popularism, could without any noticeable hint of irony launch into their very own and personal readings of M2 when the clock strikes twelve at their New Year's Eve gigs. The MC at a gig played by Jimi Hendrix and the Band of Gypsys at the Fillmore East on 31 December 1969 read New Year's greetings from the concert's promoter, Bill Graham, while an archive recording of Lombardo's version was played over the sound system; but this was merely the upbeat to Jimi Hendrix's own rendition of the song.⁷³ Frank Zappa played *Auld Lang Syne* at his New Year's Eve concert at the UCLA Pauley Pavilion in Los Angeles on 31 December 1977—or rather, 1 January 1978.⁷⁴ Sun Ra and his Arkestra, playing at the Jazz Center Detroit on 31 December 1980–1 January 1981 sent the crowd wild with their version, which begins with an upbeat hammond organ, proceeds with the brass section, and is overlaid with fragments of spoken text, some hardly distinguishable, but others very clear: "We'll drink a toast to auld lang syne.... HAPPY NEW YEAR!"⁷⁵

72 Shapiro 1990.

73 *Jimi Hendrix/Band of Gypsies Live at the Fillmore East*, Universal MCA/MCD 11931 (1999).

74 Source: bootleg recording held by British Library, call no. 1LP0048577

75 Source: bootleg recording held by British Library, call no. C833/4.

