

## **The Robert Burns Society of Kilmarnock, Canada**

On Saturday, Jan 23<sup>rd</sup> the Robert Burns Society of Kilmarnock, Canada held the usual wonderful celebration of the Bard and his works at Sam Jakes Inn in Merrickville, Ontario, about an hours drive south of Ottawa. Because the club's membership comes from such a wide area, including the State of New York, the club holds its annual business meeting first. Of major interest to the members was the future of Sam Sakes Inn. As many may know Sam Jakes Inn has been a first class quality country inn for about two decades. The Burns Society was started there in 2000 and has used the inn as a base ever since.

Due to a significant drop in the market in recent years, the management of the inn decided to convert the inn to a retirement residence and received approval to proceed just before Christmas. As a result many members of the society were extremely interested to know what the future held for the club. At the meeting the membership was assured that the new operation would still be able to host the society and continue with the annual Burns Supper.

Following the business meeting all members and guests mingled and met for a welcome from Inn Keeper Gary Clarke and President Scott Reid. Following the reading of a Burns poem the group enjoyed a dram of Linkwood single malt. Piper Jack Yourt then led the assembly through the inn to the Kilmarnock Room.

In total there were 26 members and 24 guests as well as several members of the Cape Breton Session, a local fiddle group who provided wonderful musical entertainment.

The Selkirk Grace was recited by Alex Macklin. In the early years of the club the tradition was that the Address to the Haggis was done either by the whole assembly or having each table recite one verse. That was revived this year so that following the piping in of the Haggis, each of the tables took a verse and led by Scott Reid well and truly "Addressed the Haggis".

Following a serving of a haggis tower, a superb buffet of roast beef with all the trimmings, was served by Chef Thomas Riding. The meal was topped off with individual servings of excellent Scottish trifle. During the evening draws were held for free drams. Rusty Brown presented a fine Bunnahabhain; Scott Reid presented a 16 year old Jura and read some Burns Poems. At every lull the fiddlers including several club members, who are regular members of the group, played some fine toe tapping music from both sides of the pond. David Barnes, who is a regular with the Cape Breton Session, sang "Flow Gently Sweet Afton" and "Is There for Honest Poverty". Scott Reid had to confess that he had mislaid his prepared speech to the Immortal Memory however, by using the theme set by David Barnes' introduction to "A Man's a Man" he continued sufficiently to keep the assembly's attention and proposed the Immortal Memory. The evening concluded with draws for a variety of prizes including surprise baskets of "stuff", a plaque of Robert Burns and a bottle of single malt whisky. At the very end the fiddlers continued for a considerable time with some fine tunes till only a few diehards still had the energy to sit and enjoy the music.

A number of regular members took the opportunity to stay overnight at Sam Jakes and enjoyed a fine country breakfast together.

From the comments received at breakfast, another great evening was had by all.

Scott Reid. President.

Unfortunately no one took any photos at the event. Perhaps next year??