

The Auld Alliance transcript

Do the Scots and the French like each other? Of course they do, we have the 'Auld Alliance' to prove it.

So what is this Auld Alliance?

A long, long time ago, in 1295 in fact, when Scotland was a country with its own King, the neighbouring King of England, a man called Edward, wanted to say who should be King of Scotland, Scots didn't like this and didn't want him to interfere.

To stop him interfering, they got help from friends who didn't like Edward either, these friends were the French. The two countries, Scotland and France, decided to stand up to Edward, they made a treaty which said if Edward invaded Scotland, the French would help the Scots and if Edward crossed the channel to fight the French, the Scots would cross the Scottish/English border and attack Edward. This treaty is called the 'Auld Alliance', the two nations have remained friends to this day.

But this treaty was not only a military alliance, it was very much a cultural and commercial alliance too. For example, if you were a Scottish importer of wine or other French goods living in France, you had dual nationality, five hundred years before the European Union was even thought of.

At the court of James IV, Scottish poets, such as Robert Henryrson, travelled to France to study and share their poetry.

Since the two countries were such good friends, they thought it would be a good idea if Scottish kings married French princesses whenever possible. For many years kings of Scotland went to France to look for a wife, they felt that this would make the friendship between Scotland and France even stronger.

One of these kings, King James V of Scotland, was so keen to have a French wife that he had two! Not at the same time of course. His second wife was called Mary of Guise; she was the mother of Mary Queen of Scots. When Mary Queen of Scots was old enough, she married Francis, the King of France's son. When Francis became King of France, Mary became queen of France and Scotland.

Mary lived in France and spoke French and was pleased to be queen of the two countries. However, Francis died young and Mary had to come back to Scotland with her mother, she brought with her so many Frenchmen that the area in Edinburgh where they all lived became known as 'Little France'. It is still called Little France today.

Other place names such as Champfleurie near Linlithgow, Burdiehouse - House of Bordeaux - in Edinburgh or Beaulieu near Inverness - 'beau lieu' or beautiful place - are all testimonies to our special relationship with France.

When the French in Little France spoke English, they also used some French words, the Scots found this amusing and they started to use these French words as well. So today when you say 'haggis', this is really the French word 'hâché' meaning 'minced'.

The word for a dish in Scottish 'achet' comes from the French word 'assiette' meaning a plate.

Even the word 'hogmanay' comes from the French, in the middle ages at new year, the French wished their relatives and friends a happy new year by giving them a bunch of mistletoe, the word for mistletoe in French is 'gui', instead of saying 'bonne année', they said 'Au gui l'an neuf' and kissed under the mistletoe.

This is where we get our tradition of kissing under the mistletoe.