

The Deil's Awa Wi The Exciseman

Robert Burns

This song by Robert Burns says that excisemen, who collected taxes on alcohol and goods, were bad people, who deserved to be taken away by the Devil, and everyone would be so happy they would dance! At the time he wrote the song, Burns was himself an exciseman. He didn't enjoy his job but needed the money as he didn't earn enough from his work as a poet.

The story behind the song is that one day Burns and some other excisemen were sent to watch a suspicious looking boat called 'The Rosamund' that had been spotted off the coast in the Solway Firth. They confirmed that it was a French smugglers' vessel and that it was armed with a lot of crew on board. The excisemen would need backup before they could board the ship to capture the smugglers, so they sent a messenger to Dumfries to bring reinforcements. The messenger took a very long time and Burns grew impatient. One of his fellow excisemen recommended he write a song while he waited, so he went for a walk and on his return had written 'The Deil's Awa wi' the Exciseman'.

When the back up excisemen finally arrived from Dumfries, Burns and his comrades boarded the ship and captured the smugglers.

The deil cam fidd - lin' through the toon And danced a - wa wi' the Ex - cise - man And il - ka wife cries, 'Auld Ma-houn, I wish you luck o' the prize, man' The deil's a - wa, the deil's - a - wa, the deil's - a - wa wi' the Ex cise -- man, He's danced a - wa, he's danced a - wa, he's danced a - wa wi' the Ex - cise - man!

Listen to Track 21

Lyrics

The deil cam fiddlin' through the toon
And danced awa wi' the Exciseman
And ilka wife cries, 'Auld Mahoun, I wish you luck o' the prize, man!'

Chorus

The deil's awa, the deil's awa,
The deil's awa wi' the Exciseman
He's danced awa, he's danced awa
He's danced awa wi' the Exciseman

We'll mak our maut, and we'll brew our drink
We'll laugh, sing, and rejoice, man
And monie braw thanks to the meikle black Deil
That danced awa wi' the Exciseman

There's threesome reels, there's foursome reels
There's hornpipes and strathspeys, man
But the ae best dance e'er cam to the land
Was 'The Deil's Awa wi' the Exciseman'

Words

deil - devil
ilka - every
Auld Mahoun - nickname for Satan/devil
mak - make
maut - malt
monie - many
meikle - great/large
ae - one/single
cam - came