

The Dundee Reel

June 2024



Chairman's Remarks

First and foremost, I would like to welcome Janet Abel as the new Editor of the Dundee Reel and wish her every success in this role. Janet volunteered for this role and the promotion of Scottish Country Dancing in and around Dundee is entirely dependent on volunteers for the running of the Branch.

It was great to have a full house to celebrate the New Year with the First Foot Ball. Jim Lindsay and his band, with Gillian Ramsay on fiddle and Malcolm Ross on drums, provided the music and an interesting programme was prepared by Alison Malcolm. There were one or two less common dances on the programme which were approached with some trepidation by the Chair and others. However, these dances went very well and dancers thoroughly enjoyed meeting the challenge of something different.

The committee is aware that the food offering by the hotel is not as good as it once was. We have had discussions with the hotel about this in order to maintain the standard of our event. I fear that the price of the event will inevitably rise next year.

We enjoyed the annual Half Day School and Dance in the Morgan Academy. The class in the afternoon was taken by Janet Johnston in her inimitable style which was enjoyed by all. Janet had obviously done some research on dancing in Dundee which was reflected in two of the dances she taught.

The first was a tribute to Miss Margaret (Meta) Dow who was a founder member of the Dundee Branch. Alan MacPherson, the Society's archivist felt that her contribution to the early years of the Society and the Branch is not fully appreciated. He devised *Miss Dow's Strathspey* in her honour and it was this dance that Janet taught. The tune, *Miss Dow's Fancy*, also has a local connection having been composed by John Reid, the famous 'Dancie Reid' from Newtyle. *Miss Dow's Fancy* was first played by John Reid's orchestra at a Dundee Branch dance in the Training College Hall on 14 December 1934.

The second dance Janet taught was the *Armstrongs' Rant*, a strathspey devised by Dundee's own Douglas Henderson. The original tune is *Allan Gibb*, by Angus Fitchet, described by the late Robbie Shepherd as the "Dapper Dundonian".

Music for the afternoon was provided by David Oswald and he was joined by the rest of his band for the evening dance. David obviously enjoyed working with Janet and had done his own homework by adapting the original version of *Miss Dow's Fancy* for the accordion.

We were pleased by numbers attending both the Half Day School and the Dance and this is down to hard work by committee members promoting the events by distributing

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leaflets at dances around the country and thus continually building on the success of previous events.

Branch classes have continued with an encouraging increase in numbers at the Social Dancing on Tuesday nights. The numbers at the Advanced class have been slightly disappointing, particularly as they take place in the very attractive, but expensive, dance studio at Harris Academy and are supported by live music. Numbers have improved in the January – April term.

I consider the most important class that the Branch runs to be the Beginners Class. Without beginners being introduced to the joys and mysteries of Scottish Country Dancing there will be fewer people to support classes and dances and the activity that we love will gradually disappear. It is great and reassuring to be able to welcome recent members of the Beginners class like Angie, Shona, John and Lesley to the Social Class, the Advanced class and the Half day School and Dance. Lorna Valentine, supported by George and other Branch members is doing a grand job with the current class and, hopefully, they enjoyed the Beginners Dance on 27 April. Thanks to all those who came along to support our future dancers.

All these activities are run by volunteers. You do not need to be on the committee to contribute, in particular we are always looking for members with skills in the use of social media and various software packages. If you have any of these skills please have a chat with a committee member.

Yours, aye dancing.

Bill Cant; May 2024

Message from the Editor

Hello everyone. I would like to introduce myself as your new editor.

Firstly, my thanks go to George Watt who has worked so hard in producing the Reel over recent years. I know that I am speaking for all members in saying this. I hope I can begin to live up to his example.

Secondly, an apology for the delay in getting this edition out. You will see it is a bumper edition, although the delay is due to my extended holiday during which I had little access to the Internet and to learning a new skill in formatting and editing text. I have held back some contributions for the next edition. Apologies to those contributors.

For those who don't know me well, I have been dancing in Dundee since 1982, when I was introduced to the Dundee University Scottish Country Dance Society by a flatmate. The class was taught by Mary Currie. Some of you may remember that my husband also was a dancer at this time. In fact, a number of marriages happened between dancers in the student class. I danced throughout my student years and for a couple of

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years subsequently before my dancing career was interrupted by the onerous working schedule of a junior doctor and then the birth of our three children in fairly quick succession. I did try to return to classes, again joining the class taught by Mary Currie for the society, then held in St Peter and Paul's School at the top of the Hilltown. I didn't manage this for long, however.

When our two daughters were of an age to start dancing, I took them to Stella Phillips' class in Blackness Primary School, and, I am pleased to say, they enjoyed themselves immensely and are both still dancing. Our son, unfortunately, was not so keen. Sadly, my husband had to stop dancing because of a knee injury. I have managed to attend the Thursday class fairly regularly now since Jim Healy was the teacher. I count myself very lucky to have had such excellent teachers over the years.

I am experimenting with the layout of the Reel, so you may see a number of different styles over the next few issues, until I find one I really like. I hope that my skills will develop as the issues roll off the press. Please let me know what you think – this is your newsletter, a chance to let us all know what our members are doing.

My thanks to all contributors and also to my daughter, Delia Abel, for support with IT skills. Please send me your news for inclusion in the next edition of the reel, which will come to you in mid September. I can only report the news I receive!!

Janet Abel; May 2024

Round Up from the Classes

Monday Evening Beginners' Class

7.30-9.30pm, St Mary Magdalen's Church Hall, Constitution Road.



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Joining the Scottish Country Dance class for beginners was one of the best things I have done in years. Everyone who attends the class is friendly, helpful and has made me feel welcome since the first evening. Some of the language was a mystery to me at first but I am now familiar with SCD terms such as reels, sets, allemande and ladies' chains. Our teacher, Lorna, explains the dance steps clearly and ensures that everyone is happy to continue before we move onto the next section. We often enjoy her little stories about where and how the dances originated. Lorna teachers with patience and a smile every week. We are very appreciative of all of the experienced dancers who come along each week to help to keep us right (or left) and encourage us as we practise our newly acquired steps. At the end of the classes we leave the hall happy, tired and with a feeling of achievement at having learned several new dances in a fun and encouraging environment.

Joan Ingram; March 2024

Tuesday Night Social Dance Class

7.00 - 9.00pm, St Andrew's Hall of St Andrew's Parish Church (Kingsgait Kirk), King Street (east of the Wellgate Centre, one block north of the bus station).

We first attended this class in 2018 when we moved to Dundee from Sheffield where we had been dancing and teaching for many years. As with any Scottish Country Dance Class, in the numerous parts of the world where we have been visitors, we were immediately made to feel very welcome. In autumn 2019 Joyce joined the rota of class teachers. In spite of the unfortunate COVID break the class has continued to thrive and we now regularly have two or three sets each week. The dances include something for all ability levels within the group of attendees, from those who have been attending the beginners' class to those who have been dancing for many years.

The teachers keep in regular contact with each other so that we are able to ensure a varied programme each week. We cover the dances which are on the local social dance programmes as well as a number of old favourites and some newly published ones. The aim is to ensure everyone has an enjoyable evening with plenty of socialising at the same time as getting some physical and mental exercise. It is good to see some younger dancers joining us.

We might add that there is still room for more dancers in the hall and hope that members of the Beginners' Class will be able to join us as they progress.

Joyce and Hugh Porteous; April 2024

Thursday Evening Advanced Class

7.00-9.00pm Dance Studio, Harris Academy, Perth Road. Plenty of car parking available at the back of the school.

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For those who are progressing in their dancing and wish to learn more technique and fine tune their skills or learn more complex dances, this class is perfect. We dance in a lovely venue in the dance studio with live music most weeks. The class is fun and friendly, interesting and challenging. We are so lucky to be taught by Fiona Mackie, who is much in demand literally across the world for her excellent teaching. There is usually a theme to the class programme, whether in the stories of the dances chosen or to work on a particular formation. Eg, we may be thinking about pousettes, in quick time, in strathspey, as a man or a lady, how we perfect our change of feet and when best to do this.

Many of the class members travel to dances in the surrounding area and we support each other with transport, cutting down the cost of travel and the cost to the environment. And making things more sociable. We are always delighted to welcome new class members.

Janet Abel; April 2024

Opportunities to get involved

Branch Website

Can you help? The time has come to refresh the Branch website. We are looking for someone to create and administer a new website for the Branch as the template for the current one is becoming out of date. The current one runs on Joomla but, going forward, it may be better to be based on WordPress or constructed using a website builder, eg Hostinger, and the domain name transferred to a new host.

If you have IT skills and are willing to help please email the committee at rscdsdundee@gmail.com

A new Dance for the Branch Centenary?

I know that there are people who say that the last thing Scottish Country Dancing needs is another dance, but it is our Centenary! We are not producing a book of dances, we just need one. Therefore, we are running a competition to devise a new Dance to celebrate our Centenary. I am asking you to put your thinking caps on and devise a dance. Perhaps if you have half a dance in your mind, now is the opportunity to think about the next 16 bars. It can be a reel, jig, strathspey or medley. There will be a very modest prize but you will have your efforts rewarded by your dance gracing the Branch's Centenary celebrations.

Entries should be submitted to rscdsdundee@gmail.com by 31 August 2024.

Bill Cant, Chairman; May 2024

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Branch Events

Some Pictures from the First Foot Ball

An excellent night was enjoyed by all those attending this event at the Invercarse Hotel on the 13th January 2024. For myself, this was somewhat tinged by nerves because I had been asked to help with the recaps for the first time. It has given me a newfound respect for all those who are skilled in this area. Despite this, I had a wonderful evening, enjoying the chance to experience many dances new to me in the varied and well-balanced programme. Thank you to Alison Malcolm for the programme, and to Jim Lindsay and his band for the superb music.



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The atmosphere can be inferred from the expressions on the faces of the dancers. This just says it all!!

Janet Abel,
March 2024

Thanks to Stephanie Haenicke for the photographs.



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Activities of Some of the Members

The Autumn Gathering

Last year's gathering was held on the first weekend of November 2023 in Glasgow at the Kelvin Hall, marking the end of the centenary year of the society as the 2022 event, held at the same venue, had heralded the start of the celebrations. Hundreds of dancers attended to debate the machinations of the society, to meet friends and make new friends and to spend as much time as possible dancing. There were classes to teach technique, talks to highlight the history of the society and to consider how to attract new members and two evening dances and a ceilidh to ensure that all attendees could enjoy the dancing.

A good number of the Dundee Branch attended, taking the opportunity for a weekend in Glasgow.

This is a really important part of how the society works, enabling the members to really have their say and influence the direction of RSCDS policy. Each Chairman of the RSCDS brings different ideas and their own style to the role, but they are held to account at the AGM where they have to persuade and answer to the members. Each branch sends delegates who take instruction from their own members as to how to vote on a number of motions put forward for discussion and decision. None is a foregone conclusion.

The music and the dancing were superb. Excellent demonstrations were put on by the Glasgow and International Youth groups. It is humbling to dance alongside such wonderful dancers, stimulating me, at least, to make bigger efforts to improve. But everyone is accepted and supported, with all contributing to the enjoyment. This was the overarching theme of the whole event – how can we attract new members and show others what a fun, healthy, accessible activity Scottish Country Dancing is?

Janet Abel; April 2024

Burns Night Demonstration

January saw a re-visit to Pitkerro Care Home in Dundee by a small team of Dundee dancers, this time being for Burns Night; (our previous visit was in December 2022 so we must have been OK to get a recall... or Don would rather say 'they were desperate!'). The Team was largely similar to a year earlier namely Mary Cant, Stephanie Haenicke, Bill Cant, Sue James, Don Marshall, Alan Thom (guest dancer from the Ericht), Lijun Wang and Alison Malcolm.

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Alison put together a collection of Burns dances for the event and a run through was scheduled for her house on 21st January. The Conservatory was again the venue but it was noted that all the ornaments were moved from the edges of the furniture this time so we didn't bounce them off with our dancing, while this time it was Bill's

dancing shoes that got grabbed by one of Alison's dogs rather than Don's! After the men picked who they were dancing with (it all seemed a bit of a loaded question when I was asked first who I wanted to dance with and declined to pick) a couple order was established and the walk through and then dance through commenced. The six dances, as listed below, are probably not that well known or danced regularly, so the walk through was very beneficial to get our heads round the intricacies ... from a Strathspey 2 Bar half circles of 3 ending in the side lines and left shoulder half diagonal reels, to Heel Tapping men turning their back on the women in the hornpipe. Possibly the three Ericht / Ceilidh Class dancers had a slight advantage as they had done the *Burns Bicentenary Reel* the week before ... however they had the disadvantage of doing the *Burn's Hornpipe* the night before the actual demo and had to remember not to do that variation!

The Dance Programme consisted of:-

*Burn's Hornpipe, Burns Night, Burns Bicentenary Strathspey,
Burns – 250 years, Burns Club, Burns Bicentenary Reel*

The 25th January saw us all assemble at Pitkerro just after 2pm where we were given a room to leave our belongings in, put our dance shoes on and for the women to attach their tartan sashes before being led down to the ground floor for our demo. This year we danced in a slightly larger room, with a larger audience. Once Mary had set up the music Bill and Stephanie lead the team out for the first two dances. After a brief introduction by Bill the dancing commenced, mostly going smoothly (with a few reminders from fellow dancers when brains went blank) the audience being pretty receptive to the dancing as well as to recognisable Burns tunes. The warmth of the Care Home meant the breaks between each of the remaining dances were very useful

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for drinking water as well as reading the crib for the next one. Finally coming to the end of our programme, and with quite a few Care Staff around, we persuaded them to all come and join us on the dance floor for a Circassian circle, and after a quick run through they all coped admirably with one or two revealing that they were dancers.

All too soon it was time to go, and we were given a large box of food as a donation for the local food bank, in lieu of a donation. Thanks to Alison for organising, Mary for arranging the music and to all of the dancers for their hard work, with all of us having gained knowledge of some new dances for future Burns celebrations.

Sue James; April 2024

Winter School, Pitlochry

For those of you who have not experienced Winter School, I can highly recommend this wonderful interlude for its ability to brighten up the dullest dreary winter's day. It is always the third week in February – great timing for something to look forward to after the New Year! For me, it has a similar excitement to Christmas or Bonfire Night. There is a building anticipation as dresses are chosen and emails or texts arrive from friends met there previously. Every year there are new friends to be made, revelations revealed by excellent teachers who gently encourage improvements to dancing technique. And that's not to mention the delicious food, the camaraderie and fun of the evening soirees, the manageable shopping centre tempting one to a little luxury and the drama and pomp associated with the Blair Castle Ball on the last evening.

Margaret (Harley) and I have been attending since February 2016 when she retired and I celebrated a new job and a milestone in my career. And it really has got better and better. This year, more people than ever attended from the Dundee Branch, perhaps because the director of Winter School was Fiona Mackie. As always, she carried the whole event off with good humour, elegance and efficiency. She chose an expert teaching team and wonderful musicians to play for us. There was an expectation that we consider our dancing technique and aim to improve but the teaching was done in such a way as to mask the learning with fun and laughter. Everyone learns best when relaxed and happy. There is teaching for all – from intermediate level to very advanced and low impact. And this year there were many new faces as people came for the first time – although I am quite sure that it will not be the last for very many of this year's 'gold stars'. (The gold star identifies those attending for the first time so others can help them out if necessary).

Janet Abel; March 2024

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The Oban Weekend

It was quite a dreich Friday morning on the second weekend in March as I left Dundee. By the time I was driving along the side of Loch Earn the weather was improving and by the time I reached Loch Awe and Loch Etive it had become quite a pleasant journey. I was on my way to Oban and the 62nd Weekend School run by the RSCDS Oban and Lorne Branch. A friend, Toril, from Winter School had offered to put me up or to put up with me for the weekend!

All the events took place in the Corran Halls in Oban. It is a spacious venue which was able to accommodate the large number of dancers who were attending the weekend. The 1st event was a dance on the Friday night. The programme was made up of popular dances and the music was provided by Susan and Shona MacFadyen. It was a good opportunity to make new friends and to dance with friends from other branches. The branch members and friends provided a light supper at the interval.

There were two classes on the Saturday morning. Both classes were well attended and very much enjoyed. Our own Fiona (Mackie) was our teacher and Luke (Brady) provided the music. Fiona took us through several dances - *Blue Bonnets*, *The Dancers' Wedding*, *The Bramble Bush*, *The Scottish Ramble*, *The Fife Hunt* and *Tap the Barrel*. On the Saturday evening there was another, more formal, dance. We had a buffet supper before the dancing started. The programme was a mixture of familiar and less familiar dances and the music was provided by Luke Brady, Gillian Stevenson and Adam Brady who had travelled up from London.

By Sunday morning I was exhausted!

It had been a very enjoyable two days. I'd often thought about going to The Oban Weekend as I'd heard that it was very good. I was not disappointed! If anyone is looking for a weekend of dancing in March I would thoroughly recommend this event.

Margaret Harley; April 2024

And Another Demonstration

On Thursday 21st March a team of 8 dancers from the Dundee RSCDS visited the Riverside Care Home. The team danced a selection of well known dances with very well known tunes. The residents, their visitors and carers were soon clapping along to the music. The members of the team introduced each dance with a little of its origins and the display finished with the *Circassian Circle* when the staff joined in the dancing.

The team were made very welcome by everyone at the Care Home. As there is no fee for the display, we asked for a donation for the Food Bank and we were given a great box of goodies for this.

Alison Malcolm, March 2024

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Scottish Country Dancing in Gairloch, Wester Ross

In 2014, I retired from work in the NHS with the long-held ambition of renovating an old house in a remote part of the Highlands. My dream came to life in the form of a dilapidated cottage on the shores of Loch Ewe near to the village of Gairloch. Marianne, fortunately, shares my renovation ambitions and my love of the Highlands. We now have a very cosy home with one of the best mountain views on the planet.



Within a few weeks of starting on this project I was thrilled to find in the village, a vibrant group of Scottish Country Dancers led by our sprightly leader, Elna Lawrie, a protege of the infamous Miss Milligan.

Considering the local population is only about 2000 and vastly outnumbered by sheep, attendance at classes is excellent. We can nearly always muster 2 sets of dancers and sometimes 3 sets are possible. (We have yet to teach the sheep an acceptable pas de basques as they have too many legs – but we are ever-optimistic for woolly recruits).

We dance every Thursday evening in our Community Hall which is at the heart of social life in the village. Although it is a little utilitarian in ambience, it is a fine place to dance and has a good floor. Sadly, we do not have live music for our dancing but there are several excellent local musicians who may be persuadable to play for us in the future. Our season runs from mid September to the end of March when the tourist trade takes over many of our group's lives.

The year's highlight for the class is our end-of-term party which involves: dressing in fine clothes; a banquet of the best home-made food; a copious supply of beverages and dancing to a selection of favourite dances learned over the previous year. The party used to alternate between Gairloch and Torridon village, our nearest neighbouring group of dancers. Sadly their group is less active at the moment but we hope it will revive soon.

After Torridon, our nearest neighbouring dance class is in Inverness where there is an abundance of active RSCDS groups and classes. The 3 hour return journey is a little off-putting but well worth the effort when we can muster the energy.

We have grown strong links between our Location Dance (LD) friends in Tayside / Fife and our Gairloch friends. Most notable was a 3 day LD expedition to Gairloch where we danced *Torridon Lassies* in the shadow of Beinn Eighe; *Never at Sea* on top of a WW2 gun-emplacement on a promontory in the Minch; and the *Gairloch Hornpipe* on the Gairloch pier, plus several other dances. The trip included the mandatory dance / party where several local dancers from Gairloch, Torridon and Inverness joined us and made for a wonderful convivial evening.

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In return, a number of Gairloch folks made the long journey to Dundee on a couple of occasions to join our Unicorn Ball and enjoy the unique atmosphere and dancing on the 200 year old Frigate.

I hope this short article gives a flavour of dancing life here in Gairloch. Please do join us if ever you find yourself in the area during our dancing season. A warm welcome awaits you.

Geoff Bardsley; March 2024



End of term Party participants, Gairloch, March 2024

Saltire Success

New Young Dancers' group in Fife and Tayside gets off to a lively start!

Saltire Scottish Country Dancers, a new group aimed at students and alumni in the Fife and Tayside areas formed by Thomas Rintoul and Lucy Phillips, has had an incredible first year.

After taking a team to the Newcastle Festival of Scottish Country Dancing in 2023, it was clear there was a desire for energetic, advanced dancing in the Fife and Tayside areas, specifically operating around St Andrews and Dundee. Saltire came from this, a group offering advanced workshops and lively social dances at affordable prices as a supplement to the University and Branch classes in the area, that often have to account for new dancers who need a bit more coaching, or experienced dancers who can't maintain a high energy level for as long.

In the past year, Saltire has hosted two advanced workshops and two social dances in St Andrews. One of those Social Dances was led by guest callers, Lorna Valentine and George Watt. Our numbers have grown significantly since forming. Our latest workshop attracted almost twenty young dancers from the area. We've enjoyed great support from existing branch dancers in the area, as well as some financial support from a Fife Council Culture Grant.

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The crowning achievement of Saltire's inaugural year was a very successful visit to the Newcastle Festival. Our Mixed team did incredibly well in a very competitive category, dancing the jig, *Les Remparts de Seville* and the exhausting but beautiful strathspey, *The Library of Birmingham*. Our Display was based on a trip to the Highlands and was remarked on very positively as being a very solid, well-choreographed and well danced Scottish Country Dance display, that didn't need to rely on a complicated theme with props or costumes. However, it was our Ladies team that really stole the show. Their



lively yet tidy performance of A *Capital Jig*, and their graceful strathspey *The Water of Leith* led them to win the trophy for the Ladies Class. What set them apart was that they achieved one of the most difficult aspects of competitive Scottish dancing – enjoying themselves and dancing as a team. We're incredibly proud of the team, particularly those for whom this was their first Scottish Country Dance competition.

This has been an auspicious start for Saltire SCD and we look forward to growing the group in the coming years, welcoming dancers of all ages to our workshops and dances in St Andrews and Dundee.



Videos of our Newcastle Festival performances can be found here:

<https://www.youtube.com/@saltirescd>

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Announcements of upcoming workshops and social dances will be made on our Facebook page (<https://www.facebook.com/SaltireSCD/>) and will also be posted on the Scot Dance Diary.

Lucy Phillips; March 2024

From the Dundee University Student Society, M



The 'Not so Easy' dance in Glasgow was absolutely lovely. I did have to rest a couple of dances so as not to exhaust myself but the programme was as impeccable as the band and the company.

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On Saturday 9th March, 2024, the Dundee University Society went to the Glasgow Music Festival and got 2nd place and 3rd place. I'm very happy to have taken part and am proud of our team.

After the competition we went to support our friends at the Glasgow Uni Ball! It was a lovely time and a great opportunity to see old friends again.

Sig Wallen; March 2024



Historic Dancing

It must be about three years ago that a friend asked me if I would like to come along to a Historic Dancing workshop. At first I was a little hesitant: I don't own a historic costume and didn't know anything about historic dancing. Would I be able to keep up with different steps, unfamiliar dances, etc.? But I was also intrigued and my friend assured me no costumes were necessary, so I went along. And I caught the bug.

Alena Shmakova, the teacher, makes it fun and interesting to come to her classes. She is enthusiastic about historic dancing and always puts the dances in their historic context, so you learn more than simply steps and moves.

Most of the classes and workshops I have attended have focussed on Georgian times, with different themes, like Scottish Enlightenment, Regency dances, Country dances around the world, Dances by women (devised or composed by women).

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Learning historic dancing is not only rewarding in itself, it has also given me a new outlook on Scottish Country Dancing.

Who knew that in a country dance something as innocent as setting to your corner and then turning your partner could have deep political meaning? In this case, during and after Jacobite rebellions, it was a way to show Jacobite allegiance: you may bow to the new king (set to corner), but your true loyalty still lies elsewhere (dancing with/turning your partner).

When attending SCD classes, it never occurred to me to ask why some dances are done in a square set. Now I know it has to do with the fashionable French dances, like Cotillions and Quadrilles, which came to England and Scotland from the continent with French emigres after the French Revolution and again after Napoleon came to power. These French dances were danced in a square set. If you think the *Elephant's Stampede* is long – Cotillions and Quadrilles could last for half an hour (for one dance!).

Being German, I was soon curious about the SCD formation called “the German one” in French (I am of course talking about the Allemande). Thanks to historic dancing I now not only know that the formation is derived from a French Baroque dance called *Allemande* which is in turn derived from a German/Austrian dance called *The Laendler*, but I have now also danced Allemandes (not the SCD ones).

The version Alena taught us is a fun couple dance where the focus is for once not so much on the footwork, but on all the intriguing new ways a couple can find to do one- or two-handed turns and moves. At the time it was first deemed somewhat risqué, because some of the turns force the dancers into close proximity. One might even accidentally (!) touch one's partner's body!



*Showing the typical
"Allemande hold"*

If you are interested in dancing and willing to branch out a little bit from SCD, I can really recommend trying some historic dancing. Alena has a website where you can find lots of information and her latest classes, courses and historic walks:
<https://www.danseantique.com/>.

Unfortunately, she has so far only taught in Edinburgh and Stirling, but we are planning to invite her to Dundee next year for our centenary year with a workshop on historic dances devised by people from/with a connection to Dundee.

Stephanie Haenicke; April 2024

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Meeting Scottish Country Dancers in Interesting places.

I don't intend to give you details of all my holiday plans in future newsletters, but thought you might be interested in one event which happened whilst I was away this year. The reason for the delay in getting this newsletter out was partly my long-held ambition to walk the Pennine Way. I planned this for April 2024 and set out on the 16th. The walk was wonderful although tough and very challenging. It follows a route devised by committee after a suggestion made in the 1930s by Tom Stephenson, a journalist and lover of walking and the countryside. The route was made official in 1965 and is said to be 268 miles long. It runs between Kirk Yetholm in the Scottish Borders and Edale in the Peak District of Derbyshire.

On the 13th day of my trek, 28th April, I was joined by my daughter, Lucy, whom many of you will know. It was wet and we were crossing a high, empty moorland when we met a lady coming towards us wearing a large waterproof poncho or cape, covering her and her rucksack. Obviously another 'through walker' doing the whole trek. We stopped for a chat and asked what she would be doing when she arrived



Denise Peet with Janet and Lucy Abel

in Scotland. She told us that she was from America and would be visiting Glasgow, where she was going to a dance. Interesting, we thought, as she then elaborated and told us she was a Scottish Country Dancer. She was delighted to know that we, too, were dancers and invited us to visit should we ever go to Seattle.

I wonder whether anyone else has stories of meeting dancers in unforeseen and out of the way places? Do let us know!

Janet Abel; May 2024

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History Corner

The Music Of Jimmy Shand

It has been several years now since Jimmy Shand passed away. Like all very successful people, especially artists, he had his detractors as well as his considerable fan base. He was seen by many as the archetypal Scot: dour, humourless and tight fisted. His music was adored, not just in Scotland but around the world.

Jimmy Shand was seen as the man who brought Scottish music into the main stream, yet some of his biggest hits were not really that Scottish. *Whistling Rufus*, and *The Bluebell Polka* spring immediately to mind. Much of his recordings were of their time and now sound rather dated. Recording has, of course, improved enormously since those days with all sorts of technical electronics to balance and improve the sound reproduction. But many of Jimmy Shand's recordings were notated as, 'strict tempo' and some would argue that these recordings were often characterless. There was one awful LP., 'recorded live' from Leeds where the producer clearly decided to 'enhance' the recording with yelps and howls, similar to how native Americans were depicted by Hollywood! Apparently this would make it sound more 'authentic'.

Jimmy Shand was, of course, the mainstay of the White Heather Club on TV and their tours of North America were phenomenally successful. Asked once if these were exciting days by a reporter he replied, 'I never get excited.'

The post war years were a time of re-establishing national culture from austerity and darkness back into the sunshine of peace and Jimmy Shand was at the forefront of this exhilaration, though I doubt if he saw it that way. There were of course a lot of other dance bands around, many from this area, whose recordings were equally as good but did not attract the same levels of exposure as Jimmy Shand. One could argue that the recordings of people like Jim Cameron or Lindsay Ross were more influential on today's musicians than Jimmy Shand.

If Jimmy Shand's recordings have paled with time many of his compositions most certainly have not. Marches like *John McDonald's March* or *Dundee City Police Pipe Band* are great favourites still, and waltz tunes like *Lunan Bay* or *It's Grand Among Your Ain Folk*, are as popular as ever. So - how important was Jimmy Shand in the development of Scottish dance music? He certainly brought Scottish Dance music onto the world stage and possibly helped to make Scottish Country Dancing a joyful form of exercise and companionship far beyond the Scottish diaspora. But was Sir Jimmy Shand, MBE, part of a line of development from the likes of Niel Gow to the present day, or a spectacular sideshow? Now there's a question!

George T Watt; March 2024

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SAGA in Dundee



Back row – Three musicians

Middle row – Dancers Alice Mann, Mary Currie, Margaret McCathie, Helen Elder (now Lawrenson), Helen Beat; singer Elizabeth Easson

Front row – Dancers David Hollings, Ally Tindall, Gordon Beat, Brian Lawrenson (singer David Easson in tweed jacket, centre)

In the 1970s the Dundee Branch coffers were low. The Society AGM, held in Dundee in 1973, had been a successful but costly affair, and we needed to increase our funds. One activity which usually produced donations was giving a display of dancing – something we did from time to time, for various occasions. Apart from three or four stints at the Pitlochry Highland Nights every summer, these were not regular commitments, and we could not depend on being invited to dance often for a lucrative return! It was Brian Lawrenson – later to become my husband – who hit on the idea of establishing a regular series of dance demonstrations for SAGA Holidays, which offered weeks all summer for holidaymakers who stayed in a university residence, Belmont Hall, during the students' vacation. Then a Branch Committee member, Brian taught at the university, and knew the Accommodation Officer, who was in charge of University Halls and Conference Bookings.

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Gordon Anderson put Brian in touch with Roger de Haan (later Sir Roger), who was then the organiser of Saga Holidays in Scotland. They discussed the possibility of some entertainment for the pensioners who would be staying in Dundee. During their week each group visited local sites of interest, went on bus trips into Perthshire, Angus and Fife, enjoyed some souvenir shopping, and sampled local cuisine. What would enhance their experience was an evening devoted to Scottish music and song, including, of course, Scottish Country Dancing! Could we provide this? Certainly, said Brian – and went away to plan a strategy!

In those days I danced in what was called the Demonstration Class, and we were accustomed to practise for displays at different venues on different occasions; but we were not a concert party! However, we had our contacts... the mother of Helen Beat, who was another Dem Class member, was Mrs Gladys Macdonald, who played the clarsach; and yes, Mrs Macdonald would join us to help entertain the troops! Betty Tindall, who sometimes played for dance classes, was a member of a trio called The Primary Colours (so named because they were all teachers in local primary schools!) – and they were also willing to play and sing Scottish songs for us on some evenings. I taught at Morgan Academy, where the head of Maths, David Easson, was a superb singer. He sometimes performed with his sister and her fiancé, David Robb. They agreed to take part, along with a former Morgan pupil, Mary Carroll, who was also a dancer. All that remained was to contact musicians to play for dancing, and of course we knew a number of those, so that was soon arranged. The SAGA Scottish Evenings were booked for Sunday evenings throughout the summer!

Working with the Dem Class teacher, Brian devised two programmes – Programme A and Programme B: the former was designed for a four-couple set, the latter for those nights when we had only three couples. We prepared two groups of dances, and each night we would perform two spots, between offerings by the musicians and singers. This was long before people generally used spread sheets; but Brian produced a chart showing all the dates, the programme to be used each night, and the list of available dancers. We each had the dates marked when we would be in the team (including reserves), and one dancer each time was designated as the Person in Charge, so that neither Brian nor anyone else was committed to organising things every night. It was left up to the singers and musicians what their contribution should be, but of course there would be songs in which the audience could join in the chorus.

The Scottish Evenings were an incredible success – partly, perhaps, because we enjoyed putting them on! No-one was really nervous, because we had organised a repertoire with which we became very familiar; since we knew all those dances well, there was no need for continual practice. We enjoyed dancing *The Duchess Tree* and *Netherby Hall*, but probably the audience most enjoyed *Bonnie Anne* and *Postie's Jig*! As for the singers: the Primary Colours scored a hit with their whaling song –

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'Oh, the wind is on her quarter, her engines working free,
There's not another whaler that's sailing from Dundee
Can beat the old Balaena...'

while David Easson's group caused great hilarity with *The Jeely Piece Song* – 'Ye cannae throw pieces frae a twenty-story flat'. David Robb, who was a lecturer in the university's English Department, always wowed the audience with his rendering of McGonagall's *Tay Bridge Disaster*.

I think what the spectators most enjoyed was the stage at the end of the evening, when we invited volunteers to join us in a dance. Each of us would take up someone from the audience to dance a *Gay Gordons*, or perhaps *The Dashing White Sergeant*. Some of the Saga customers often came up to us for a photograph, and to say that 'the Scottish Night' had been the best part of their holiday! We all enjoyed the Saga venture, which continued for many years – until Saga stopped using Belmont Hall – and brought a regular healthy income for the Branch.

Helen Lawrenson, Branch Archivist; May 2024

Very sadly, In Memoriam



The dancing world was shocked to learn of the sudden passing of Jane Rattray. Jane was a friend to all, the cheery face that put all at ease. Always good humoured, she would help any new dancer come to terms with the various formations. A teacher, her classes were happy places and many of her junior dancers still dance in adulthood. Her dance programmes were always well balanced and well configured. Over the last few years, Jane has been one of Sue Steele's Islay brigade, a well loved addition to this humorous band of travellers. Jane will

be sorely missed by all who knew her, and our thoughts are with her family who were devastated by her death.

Many of us attended the trifle Charity Dance in Blairgowrie on the 5th April. The programme had been written by Jane and was recapped by other teachers in her memory. The evening had an added poignancy as we all remembered Jane in enjoyment of this activity which she, and we, love(d) so much.

George T Watt; February 2024

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Upcoming events

Summer dancing

please see SCD Events Scotland (Scot Dance Diary), <https://www.scotdancediary.co.uk/>

Dundee Branch AGM

Tuesday the 3rd of September 2024 in the St Andrew's Hall, Kingsgait Kirk at 7pm

Autumn Dance

Saturday the 12th of October, 2024; Morgan Academy, 7.30pm

The Branch Centenary

The Dundee Branch of the RSCDS was founded on 9 February 1925 at a meeting in Mathers Rooms, now the Malmaison Hotel. The meeting was addressed by Mrs Ysobel Stewart of Fasnacloich, one of the co-founders, along with Miss Jean Milligan, of the Scottish Country Dance Society. The meeting was attended by fifty people and as a result it was agreed to form the Dundee Branch. Dundee became the third Branch to be founded, after Glasgow and Edinburgh. Research by the RSCDS archivist shows that the Dundee Branch predates the Perth Branch by 17 days. The Aberdeen Branch was also formed in 1925, on the 16th of October.

The Branch Committee has been busy planning how to celebrate our forthcoming Centenary. We feel that as we already organise three successful events, the First Foot Ball, the March Half Day School and Dance and the October Dance, adding another event to the dancing calendar would be problematic. We also want to be in the position to support the celebrations of Perth and Aberdeen Branches just as we benefit from Perth and Aberdeen dancers joining us on the dance floor. We looked at the possibility of the dance being held in the Marryat Hall. However, this was not possible, and we will again use the hall at the Morgan Academy.

One of the things that we do feel is appropriate is to feature dances with a Dundee connection in the programmes of the dances that we hold during the year. We were obviously delighted that the Baldovan Reel was included in the Society's Centenary Book. Its deviser, Douglas Henderson, was responsible for devising over forty dances and we intend to feature some of these, and dances by other Branch members, in centenary year programmes.

One thing that we are not doing is producing anything to sell to you. Hopefully many of you still have your 90th Anniversary mug with the "Pillings" instruction for the real

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Dundee Reel, the 48 bar version, which is, of course, a jig. Is anybody still the proud, and careful, owner of the 1975 mug, celebrating the first 50 years?

We hope to organise one non-dancing event by returning to the Malmaison Hotel on Sunday the 9th of February 2025 for afternoon tea. This event will hopefully appeal to some older members of the Branch who feel their dancing days are behind them.

Elsewhere in this edition of the Dundee Reel, I have challenged you to activate the dance devisor in you and enter our competition to devise a dance for our Centenary. Similarly, the committee do not have a monopoly of ideas for Centenary celebrations, please get in touch by email at rscdsdundee@gmail.com with any ideas that you have for 2025. Similarly, if you would like to help organise any of these events, volunteers are very welcome.

Bill Cant, Chairman.

And Finally:

Please submit articles for the next Dundee Reel to janetabel2@yahoo.co.uk by the 8th September 2024.

The Editor