

# The Dundee Reel

January 2025, Issue 59

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## Chairman's Remarks

We are half way through the 2024/25 dancing season and we still have a lot to look forward to. First and foremost we will be celebrating our Centenary. The Dundee Branch was founded on the 9th of February 1925 at a meeting in Mathers Rooms, now the Malmaison Hotel. The Dundee Branch is the third oldest Branch of the RSCDS followed 10 days later by Perth and Perthshire and about six months afterwards by Aberdeen.

We intend to run all our usual events but with an emphasis on celebrating Dundee Branch's contribution to Scottish Country Dancing. This will involve inclusion of dances devised by Dundonians, dances celebrating members of the Branch and celebrating Dundee. The actual date will be celebrated on Sunday 9th February in the Malmaison with tea and cake.

The first event of the Centenary Year was the First Foot Ball, held on the 11th of January at the Invercarse Hotel. Susan Robertson devised an enjoyable programme with multiple references to the heritage of the Branch. The music was provided by Newtyle's Scott Band and his Scottish Dance Band. We had a great evening, with a good turnout although, sadly, a few of our regulars were missing due to health issues.

We will be holding our regular Half Day School and Dance in the Morgan Academy on March 22nd. The teacher will be the past Chair of the RSCDS, William Williamson and we hope to have the current Chair, Gary Coull, and the Chair Elect, Sebastian Wanless, joining us. The music will be provided by the ever popular Jim Lindsay and his Band. Margaret Harley has devised an interesting programme and bookings are already being received.

Finally, we shall have our regular Autumn Dance with music to be supplied by Sandy Nixon and his Band. Sandy is a native of Dundee, trained as a doctor at the University and is a regular, welcome visitor back to Dundee. George Watt has been asked to provide the programme. I am confident that his programme will have some interesting dances, combined with some old favourites.

I was delighted to receive five entries in response to my appeal for a new dance to celebrate our Centenary. The various devisors, currently anonymous, have all produced interesting dances which have been providing a challenge for the Social Class and which the Advanced Class will enjoy in February. There will be a complete dance through on Sunday 2nd March with final voting to follow.

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All these plans are only possible because of the hard work by my fellow Branch committee members. I am very pleased, and relieved, that Janet Abel agreed to take on the role of Vice Chairman (as well as editing the Dundee Reel!). She is already thinking ahead to the Dundee Branch's second century. I am incredibly grateful to all of the committee members for their enthusiasm and hard work on behalf of the Branch.

Yours, aye dancing.

Bill Cant; January 2025

## Message from the Editor

My sincere apologies for sending this edition out so late.

I wish you all the best for the New Year – our Centenary year. In this edition you will find news of the activities within the branch, and of our members, over the past six months. I hope you will find this interesting.

The committee has discussed posting copies of the Dundee Reel on the Branch Website. We would like there to be a record of Branch activities in this way to give potential new members an idea of what is available to them, should they join us. I have contacted all those who have written articles for this newsletter to request their permission to publish their articles in this way. In future, I will check with contributors that they give their agreement as articles are submitted. Please note that future copies of the Reel will be published in this way. Copies of the Reel will be emailed to members.

Janet Abel; January 2025

## RSCDS Dundee Branch Social Media Presence

### New Branch Website

Thanks to Mary Cant and to Mykola Mandra (an external IT expert) for their work in setting up the new website. Have you checked it out?.

[Scottish Country Dancing | RSCDS Dundee](#)

### RSCDS Facebook page

Do have a look at the RSCDS Dundee facebook page, which has some fantastic photos and videos of Branch members at various events.

[RSCDS Dundee | Facebook](#)

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## Round Up from the Classes

### Monday Evening Beginners' Class

7:30 - 9:30pm, St Mary Magdalen's Church Hall, Dudhope Crescent Road, Dundee, DD1 5RR. Restarted Monday 13<sup>th</sup> January 2025.

My approach to teaching the Beginners' Class is to encourage people to see Scottish Country Dancing as a pursuit they would wish to enjoy and make progress from 'Beginners' to the General or even the Advanced Class. I like to make sure the enjoyment comes first before worrying too much about steps and technique. Not everyone can be an advanced dancer but everyone can certainly get enjoyment from Dancing Scottish.

Of those who have been attending on Mondays there is no doubting their enthusiasm for Scottish Country Dancing with some of them having joined the Dundee Branch. That is clearly a success. But the projected follow through to the other classes has not quite met with fulfilment. Some have been going to the Social Class and one exceptionally talented dancer has attended the Advanced Class. Others continue to attend the Beginners' class. They enjoy learning new formations, enjoy the combined sense of achievement when a dance is successful, enjoy the company – in fact enjoy everything Scottish Country Dancing has to offer. The next big step is to encourage them in building up their confidence and consider joining one of the other classes. Also, to attend our Branch Dances and other dances within our area. Longer standing members of the Branch can help by supporting the Nice and Easy Dance in April, which most of the beginners will attend.

New beginners wishing to learn will always be welcome.

Lorna Valentine; January 2025

### Tuesday Night Social Dance Class

7:00 - 9:00pm, St Andrew's Hall of St Andrew's Parish Church (Kingsgait Kirk), 2, King Street, Dundee, DD1 2JB (east of the Wellgate Centre, one block north of the bus station). Restarted Tuesday 14<sup>th</sup> January 2025.

Our Social Dancing class on Tuesday evenings has three teachers – Joyce Porteous, Alison Malcolm and myself. Each week we work through a wide variety of dances, which include those listed in upcoming event programmes. Some of these need to be re-visited after a first attempt. However, there is much laughter when we sometimes find the formations or the structure of the dances particularly challenging.

The members of this class include experienced dancers, and some who are perhaps no longer as fluid in their steps as we once were. We are especially delighted that some of

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the dancers who started at the Monday evening Beginners' class have become regulars on Tuesday evenings as well. This mix of dancing abilities is not evident during dances, as, like all good Scottish Country dancers, we work as a team to support each other.

Our Social Dancing evenings are relaxed and friendly, and include a break for tea/coffee and biscuits. We usually have a couple of sets, but there is plenty of room for more dancers to join us. Even if you can't come every Tuesday, we would be delighted to see anyone who would like to come along. Just turn up!

Sue Steele; January 2025

## Thursday Evening Advanced Class

7:00 - 9:00pm Dance Studio, Harris Academy, Perth Road, Dundee, DD2 1NL.  
Plenty of car parking available at the back of the school. Restarted Thursday 9<sup>th</sup> January 2025.

The ethos in the Advanced Class is to develop dancing technique whilst having fun with our dancing. Teaching concentrates on a particular formation or consideration each week, eg. pousettes in different tempos or use of hands and arms. This is done by working through several dances each week, sometimes simple, sometimes very complex. Some weeks we do step practise although this does not always happen. We have live music which is wonderful and greatly valued by class members. The class is held in the dance studio in the Harris Academy which provides excellent facilities, but is sometimes disconcerting because of the mirrors, in which class members catch sight of themselves and notice what is actually happening with their feet.

Class members are friendly and supportive of each other, welcome new people to class and dance mainly for enjoyment. There is a lot of laughter. But they all wish to improve their technique.

Separately from class, many of the group travel to dances in the area, buddying up and sharing transport. We're always looking for people to join us, both in class and at evening dances.

Fiona Mackie; January 2025

## 'Ceilidh to Country' Class, HERA

Only bookable through HERA, payable in advance. Wednesday evenings, 7.00-9.00pm at Harris Academy, Perth Road, Dundee, DD2 1NL. Will be considered again in Autumn 2025.

The Harris Education & Recreation Association (HERA) is a not for profit organisation delivering evening learning opportunities from the excellent facilities at Harris Academy. Mary and I were approached about the possibility of running a dance class on a

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Wednesday evening and so the Ceilidh to Country class was born. The class was advertised on HERA's mailing list and on their social media platforms. HERA ask for payment for the whole term up front with a minimum of 12 participants. Slightly more than 12 people signed up and the class ran for 10 weeks. Some participants had obviously done some dancing before and one came from an English Country Dancing background.

There has been the inevitable fall off in numbers but a core of 7 to 8 people meant that we were able to progress class members from the *Canadian Barn Dance* and the *Gay Gordons* through *Circassian Circle*, *Dashing White Sergeant*, the *Eightsome Reel* to *Duke of Perth*, *Postie's Jig* and *Flowers of Edinburgh*. They put on a demonstration of *Jig to the Music* at the HERA closing evening then enticed other attendees, including Councillor Crichton, up for a *Circassian Circle* at the end of the evening.

The core members of the class were very keen to continue for a second term but unfortunately we did not quite get the numbers to continue. Several of the members have, instead, joined the Monday evening Beginners' class.

<https://heradundee.org/hera-classes/>

Bill Cant, January 2025

## Branch Events

### The Annual General Meeting

Tuesday 3rd September 2024

The main decisions taken at the AGM were to approve an extension to the term of office for Bill Cant, Chairman of the Branch, for another year. We are very grateful to him for offering his continuing service in this respect. Janet Abel was confirmed as Vice-Chairman for this year, with a view to taking over as Chairman in September 2025. Djamila Dieleman has accepted the position of Membership Secretary, taking over from Mary Cant who has stepped down at the end of her term of office. Other office bearers remain the same; Joan Mitchell as Treasurer, Sue Steele as Secretary, Stephanie Haenicke, Sue James, Alison Malcolm and Graham Scott as Ordinary Members.

Subscriptions have remained the same this year.

Other issues discussed:

- Centenary Celebrations – details elsewhere in this edition of the Reel.
- Ways to attract new members, including using Social Marketing to advertise our Beginners Class and a new class entitled 'Ceilidh to Country' in association with HERA (the Harris Education and Recreation Association).

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## Social Media Experiment

Every Branch of the RSCDS is continually looking at ways of attracting new members, which means attracting people to Beginners classes. In the immediate aftermath of Covid the Glasgow Branch worked with a social marketing company to advertise and promote Scottish Country Dancing via social media, mainly Facebook. This appeared to be successful in attracting new people to classes.

In August 2024, Dundee Branch, along with a few other Branches, were invited by Jon Berridge at 12 Coates Crescent to participate in a similar exercise. The Committee and the teacher of the Beginners Class, Lorna Valentine, agreed to give this a try and start the Beginners season with a Taster Session which would be advertised on social media. We worked with the Social Marketing Gateway (SMG) from Glasgow and adverts went out on social media, which you may have seen. They were targeted at certain demographics in the Dundee area. These adverts directed anyone interested to book a place at the Taster Session, scheduled for 9<sup>th</sup> September 2024, on a Branch Eventbrite page. As mentioned at the Branch AGM, it all started very well and we reached over 36 bookings on Eventbrite so we stopped the advertising. This appeared to be a very promising figure, but we had been warned about a 25-30% attrition rate. A few more bookings appeared so we closed the booking on Eventbrite at 44.

On the 9th, we had the banner outside the venue, another inside and various volunteers, all geared for the Taster session. However, despite all our hopes only 5 (five) of the Eventbrite bookings turned up. This was obviously very disheartening.

The following Monday, the first day of our Beginners class, only 2 of the Eventbrite bookings returned to the Class, both girls in the age demographic we were looking for. Two of the non-returners were a couple where you could see that the bloke was not keen. I am pleased to say that the two girls and another taster attendee are continuing to enjoy the Beginners class.

We have spoken to SMG and Jon Berridge and there is certainly a problem with the Eventbrite system as we were getting bookings from outside Dundee including Ilford, Glasgow, Madrid, Lochgelly, etc which seemed strange. One of the problems with Eventbrite is that people appear to click on a free event and then don't bother turning up. We are very disappointed with the result and have been offered further social media support for a push in the New Year but we have not committed to that.

Aberdeen Branch ran a similar campaign with some fine tuning as a result of our issues. While they attracted 37 to their Taster session, subsequently numbers dropped to 7, 4 and finally 3. They have now integrated the 3 into their regular classes.

What does all this mean – well that is probably a discussion for another day. However, we must continue to use all means possible to attract new members to the activity that we all enjoy.

Bill Cant, October 2024

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## The Council of International Fellowship Ceilidh

Saturday 14th September 2024

Earlier this year we were asked if we would be able to host a ceilidh as part of the social programme for an International Conference for Social Workers from Scandinavia and Scotland which was being held in Dundee. The Branch Committee rose to the challenge, putting on a dance with Neil Galloway providing music for the evening. We would like to thank all members who attended to support our visitors and take part in the demonstrations.

On the night there were some difficulties with timetabling due to delays in provision of food at the restaurant where the group ate, outwith our control. Our MC, Bill Cant, made all participants welcome and led us through the programme. The group participated well, enjoyed the demonstrations, (*EH3 7AF, Gothenburg's Welcome and Mairi's Wedding*), and extended their thanks to us for hosting the event. Our American visitors were also delighted to be able to attend and sent thanks to us all subsequently.

Janet Abel, October 2024

## The Autumn Dance

12th October 2024

The Autumn Dance was held at the Morgan Academy, with Ian Thomson and his band playing. Unfortunately, attendance was less than hoped for, affected by several other events happening on the same weekend. We did benefit from the Saltire Society workshop being held on the same day, in that a number of their members attended to complete their day of dancing with us. This is a video taken at the event.

<https://my.strathspey.org/dd/dance/14351/#videos>

This was a momentous day for myself, being the first programme that I have put together. Designing a programme is rather a daunting prospect when it's the first time, and when so many others complete the task with such skill. It matters such a lot – people are attracted to attend a dance by the programme, which affects everyone's enjoyment of the evening.

I was offered excellent advice by those more experienced, including information on the RSCDS website, more on the TAS website and a paper written by Mary Currie many years ago. Members will remember Mary's excellent programmes in years gone by and I enjoyed the connection, in that Mary was the teacher when I started to dance. There are several considerations, including how to help both musicians and dancers warm up for the rest of the evening. Not too much setting in the first dance, not too complicated or ornamented a tune, not too fast for feet or fingers to allow everyone to ease themselves into the evening. A good balance of reels, jigs and strathspeys throughout the evening,

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some interesting formations, but also some more straightforward compilations, perhaps variety in the form of differing configurations of the set, square, triangular, longwise, 3 or 4 or 5 couples... How to choose?

I decided to piggy-back my programme onto the very successful choices of the teachers during the previous Spring Socials, with the theme 'Familiar and Foreign'. I could 'steal' the expertise of those teachers and, in addition, use a number of dances which were more unusual and interesting, but which at least some local dancers had danced in classes. This was a good start. It took quite a while to develop something which seemed balanced and attractive and then I submitted it for evaluation by the committee of the Branch – an excellent opportunity for further advice and 'quality control'. Their comments were very helpful. A couple of minor revisions later and the job was done.

I did receive some positive comments subsequently. All I can hope is that other dancers enjoyed the evening as much as I did! The music was fabulous; the dancers present may have been fewer in numbers, but they were enthusiastic and kept going until the end.

Janet Abel, November 2024

## Teacher Training

Branch members have had success in achieving accreditation in RSCDS Units

We are delighted that several Branch members have undertaken training to be teachers of Scottish Country Dancing, through completing the RSCDS Units at various levels.

Lucy Abel achieved her Units 4 and 5 in this past year, Unit 5 being undertaken at Summer School 2024 in St Andrews. Lucy has dual membership of Nottingham and Dundee Branches. She is teaching the Beginners Class in Nottingham and also running a class at her workplace.

Rebecca Woods successfully achieved Unit 1 in March 2024 and went on to gain her Units 2 and 3 at Summer School 2024 in St Andrews. She continues to dance with the Advanced Class in Dundee when she is able to attend.

Sue James and Janet Abel both took Unit 1 in October 2024. Both were successful.

The Branch is looking to support others to be able to contribute to teaching by running a Basic Teaching Skills Workshop and a course for the Core Training for Instructors (CTI) qualification. Both of these are being planned at present, but are not yet fully confirmed. Watch this space for further details.

Anyone with an interest in pursuing training for teaching, please contact the editor, Janet Abel, if you have not already done so.



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## First Foot Ball

Saturday 11th January, 2025. Invercarse Hotel, Perth Road, Dundee, DD2 1PG.

This was the first event of our centenary year and very successful. Many of our members attended and many friends from neighbouring branches were present. The music, from Scott Band and his Band was wonderful. The programme reflected many connections with SCD in the Dundee area.



Come What May  
Happiness is SCD  
The Dundee Whaler  
Miss Hadden's Reel  
Toast to the Mousies  
Miss Dow's Strathspey  
Muirland Willie  
James Senior of St Andrews  
The Fireworks Reel



A Hundred Years Since  
The Chequered Court  
The Valentine  
J.B. Milne  
A Capital Jig  
Kinclaven Bridge  
The Scallywag  
The Water of Leith  
Mrs Macpherson of Inveran



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## Activities of Some of the Members

### Summer School 2024

When enrolment opened for Summer School this year, I decided – with no small amount of trepidation – to try the newly-rebranded Challenging High Impact class in Week 3. This turned out to be an excellent decision: in addition to a week of virtually uninterrupted sunshine, enjoyed by all attendees, the Challenging High Impact class were extremely lucky to take our morning classes in the marvellous Younger Hall. (This was not without some downsides: an emergency kitchen closure meant no tea at the break; your correspondent solved the crisis by borrowing a kettle from the Dean's office next door.)

We were also dealt a spectacular hand in our teachers: Diana Hastie, all the way from Australia, taught the first half of the week, and her mother, the inimitable Helen Russell, took the second half – even more impressive because she stepped in as a last-minute substitute! Both mother and daughter kept us on our literal as well as metaphorical toes all week, producing a seemingly endless supply of dances with tricky transitions, awkward foot changes, and a frankly unnatural left-hand allemande to the right (*The Auld Alliance*, Book 23). Our class musicians were Adam Brady and Aymeric Fromherz, both of whom provided lift with their wonderful piano tunes.



Following energy-preservation experiments last year, I planned to spend my afternoons napping in preparation for the evening dances. This decision was immediately thwarted by a request to participate in a photo shoot for some new RSCDS stock photography – on the promise that this would be still images only, with no dancing required. The photographers had other ideas, however, and in the end a group of 16 dancers spent

Tuesday afternoon dancing at full intensity at a number of picturesque locations around St Andrews. Our modelling rates were quite reasonable at the cost of one Janetta's cone each!

One of the many joys of the residential experience at Summer School (afternoon naps aside) is the way friendships grow out of the daily routine of meals and classes, walk-throughs and late nights in the party room: as well as catching up with friends from last year, I found myself hatching plans with the Oxford branch to join in their May Morning celebrations in 2025, and pencilling in a visit to the Manchester Gay Gordons on a trip

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down south. Mealtime conversations ranged from the absurd to the erudite (choreography for the salad bar; medieval Portuguese musical manuscripts) and revealed unexpected connections, too: a dinnertime chat with Frank Thomson led me to put together a last-minute morris dancing performance for the Friday ceilidh with Edward Bunting, a fiddle player on the musicians' course who also happens to play for St Alban's Morris.

The evening social dances were a real treat, as always, bringing together dancers of all ages and experience levels. It was particularly heartening to see so many enthusiastic youngsters attending Junior Summer School, and I found myself mesmerized by



two small boys who danced *J.B. Milne* perfectly, even finding time to direct others in their set. The evening dances were also blessed with absolutely fantastic musicians – in particular, I came away suspecting that the McFadyen sisters possess some kind of magical powers capable of curing sore feet. That is, at least, the only explanation for leaving the party room at 2am on the last night of Summer School, and feeling sad to not be dancing on the Sunday!

All in all, a thoroughly enjoyable week of equal parts fun and hard work, made possible by the efforts of dozens if not hundreds of volunteers from all over Scotland and the world. I'm already counting down the weeks until Summer School 2025!

Link to a video of a 32some Reel at the Friday garden

party: <https://www.facebook.com/groups/344481685884020/posts/2282914575374045/>

Link to a video of my morris dancing piece at the

ceilidh: <https://www.facebook.com/groups/344481685884020/posts/2282900852042084/>

(both of these are in the Summer School Week 3 Facebook group but I think they are shared publicly)

Jennifer Norris, Sept 2024

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## The Kiltwalk

11th August 2024

I took the bus early on the Sunday morning, travelling across to St Andrews to meet the then Chairman of the RSCDS, William Williamson, his wife, Linda, Gary Coull, current Chairman, Sebastian Wanless, past Chairman of the Glasgow Branch and now Chairman Elect, Jon Berridge, CEO of the RSCDS, his wife, Liz, and their dog. I was not an official participant in the walk, but had decided to go to offer support to the RSCDS group. It was the day after Summer School finished, and, although I thought I was up early to be able to meet them, others in the group had been partying late into the night in celebration of a very successful Summer School. They had not had much sleep.

I made my way to the start of the walk, walking against the flow of those who had already started out. The muster point was on the West Sands, in the dunes alongside the beach. There was much encouragement from a presenter as people neared the head of the queue to start and some group exercises to warm up the muscles. I was surprised at how little people were carrying for what could be an arduous trek, 21.5 miles in total. The day was very hot, no cloud cover, bright sunshine, little wind. For me, not ideal conditions for walking.

We set off along the Fife Coastal Path which follows the road to Guardbridge and Leuchars, on pavements and the segregated cycle path, hard underfoot. It was cool walking in a kilt, at least, although for some of the men, their kilts were heavier and warmer. At Guardbridge there was a welcome refreshment stop providing water, cereal bars and chocolate. And toilets. From Leuchars we left the roadside and walked through fields into the forest, across clearings and heathland. The trees provided some welcome shade. This section of the walk was really lovely. A little rough underfoot along a narrow path, but interesting country.

The atmosphere was friendly and supportive, so many people, all walking for their favourite charity. Some were seasoned walkers, fit and able; others were walking the distance for the first time and struggled more. The group spirit helped to encourage everyone to keep going although the next refreshment stop seemed a long way away in the middle of the forest.



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Replete, we carried on, through more forest trails, then out into the glare of the sun in a section of forest damaged by Storm Arwen and subsequently clear felled. These areas always look desolate and apocalyptic, but there were some signs of regeneration of the trees. The distance began to tell on some participants, particularly in the heat of the day. Our group pushed on to Tayport where there was another 'rest' and refreshment stop. No rest for us - we persuaded the DJ to play music for us to dance to, with an impromptu *Gay Gordons* alongside staff from CHAS who were there to encourage their supporters.

During the final section from Tayport to Dundee I began to flag as well, developing blisters on my feet. We filmed a version of *De'il Amang the Tailors* as we crossed the Tay Bridge, blocking the footpath for a short time and surprising all around us. Half a mile further and we approached the Slessor Gardens to receive our medals. The group raised funds for the RSCDS, more than £5000, before giftaid is taken into account.



Janet Abel, September 2024

## The Autumn Gathering

As usual, a group of Dundee Branch Members attended the Autumn Gathering event of the RSCDS in Edinburgh in November 2024. Some of us conscientiously attended the AGM meeting on Saturday 2nd November, contributing to the running of the Society. There was much discussion about finances and how to increase membership, in particular. It is interesting that membership is increasing across the world, in Europe and America in particular, yet falling here in Scotland. The main motions carried were to elect members to the various management committees. More information is available on the RSCDS website, within the blog.

[Autumn Gathering 2024 | Royal Scottish Country Dance Society](#)

Or, there is a full recording on the RSCDS YouTube channel:

[The Royal Scottish Country Dance Society - 95th AGM](#)

Others took a different opportunity, hitting the tourist trail in Edinburgh. Margaret Harley and I visited the Scottish Parliament building, having a very interesting and informative chat with the security man within the debating chamber. We had coffee and cake at Holyrood tea rooms, looked at the physic garden, visited the Canongate Kirk, went into the Scottish Library and caught the last day of a small exhibition about the Italian renaissance. Our walk took us up to the castle to look at the view from the esplanade, down a lot of steps into the Grassmarket and around beneath the castle to the end of

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Princes Street where we made our way to the restaurant on George Street for dinner. And along the way, we did a little Christmas shopping!

I had also visited Headquarters at Coates Crescent for the first time, taking advantage of their open day on Friday 1st November. It is conveniently located close to the east end of Princes Street in a corner position on Coates Crescent. The headquarters staff and Office Bearers of the Society were very welcoming, with lovely refreshments on offer. It was good to meet people from other branches and to browse the merchandise in the shop. There was also an interesting exhibition giving details of the history of the Society.



For most attendees the main event was the dancing. There were classes on the Saturday and Sunday, a dance on the Friday evening and a Ball on the Saturday evening. The room in the Meadowbank Stadium had a reasonable wooden floor and provided adequate space for the dancing. There was also a gallery from which some people watched the proceedings. Both dances had good programmes, excellent music and enthusiastic dancers from across the world. It is a fabulous feeling to be dancing with 300-plus other people, with bigger bands than normal. On the Friday Gordon Shand played with a five piece band and on the Saturday, Jim Lindsay played with a six piece band!

Next year's event is in Glasgow, from the 7<sup>th</sup> to the 9<sup>th</sup> November 2025.

Janet Abel, November 2024

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## The Road to the Isles: Islay 2024

As we have in previous years, our little band of dancers set out for Islay over the May Bank Holiday weekend earlier this year. We looked forward to re-acquainting ourselves with the Island itself, with George Watt and Lorna Valentine, and with the Islay dancers who always make us welcome and invite us to join them for their last class of the season. Some of us are not so able as we would like to be when dancing, but we don't let that spoil the enjoyment of the opportunity to dance with old and new friends on Islay.

This year, though, there were only seven of us staying in Port Charlotte. As so many of you will know, the RSCDS community was stunned by the sudden and unexpected death of Jane Rattray only a few weeks before our trip. Her funeral was packed and very true to Jane. The ceremony brought out her love of family, walking in the Scottish countryside and everything that she contributed to Scottish Country Dancing. There was even mention of how much she enjoyed her annual visit to Islay.



Our friends on Islay remembered Jane well, and George had written *Jane Rattray's Jig* in her memory – which can be found in the Scottish Dance dictionary. It had its world premiere in the Gaelic School on Islay looking out over Loch Indaal. We did not have the opportunity to practice beforehand, and of course it was brand new to the Islay dancers. We missed Jane's patient teaching skills, which would have helped us to get her favourite

formations flowing more smoothly. Nonetheless, we laughed through the occasional loss of direction, and helped each other through the dance.

We have already booked accommodation for our 2025 Islay trip, hoping that we shall all be able to travel again. Maybe we shall be even slower to get about, and perhaps even earlier to retire at night. However, the companionship is rejuvenating, and the island and the islanders inspire us to revisit old haunts and to explore new ones. To borrow and amend a saying from another culture – next year in Port Charlotte!

Sue Steele, September 2024

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## Dancing in Hong Kong

A message from one of our members who lives in Hong Kong, dances there throughout the year and visits her other home in Dundee in the summer months:

Dancing in Hong Kong after the Covid is still a bit of a struggle! The HK Highlander is not functioning at the moment with quite a bit of people (most are European) left HK. But I did dance with a Chinese group, the teacher Stephen Li is the only fully qualified teacher in HK. He did his course in St Andrews some years ago! Like most groups all over the world there are different standards, but sometimes it's not easy to have different classes for different standards. So, one has to compromise with each other, but over all they are good.



Just after the summer, not everybody is back yet, so the number yesterday was quite low, but we were excited to see each other again to catch up. I just returned from Scotland as well. Stephen actually was in St Andrews summer school this summer!

I haven't been able to dance this summer in Scotland, hopefully I can find time next year. Yesterday was the second week after summer. So we did only four simple dances to warm up ... but still enjoyable!! Even with the air condition on full blast, it can still be a fitness test in such high heat and high humidity!!

Hope I can see some of the Dundee dancing friends next year!!

Will keep in touch and happy dancing to all.

Lucette Black, September 2024



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## History Corner

### How does a Dance get its name?

How does a dance get its name? This is something that has fascinated me ever since I joined the Dundee branch of RSCDS. Some are evocative of a place: *Rest and Be Thankful*, *The Grassmarket Reel*, *Balquidder Strathspey*; others conjure up images of dances in the 'big hoose' in bygone times: *The Duke of Atholl's Reel*, *MacDonald of Keppoch*, *Inverneill House*. Then there is the joy of *Mairi's Wedding* and the fun of the *Highland Rambler*; the tracing of the shape of the *Luckenbooth Brooch* and the graceful skating of Henry Raeburn's Reverend Robert Walker on Duddingston Loch. But there was one name that always puzzled me until recently. It seemed a strange name to give a dance, a dance that I met early in my dancing career and liked, for it was relatively simple and straightforward, one I could relax into and enjoy.

But why was it called *Pelorus Jack*? Where did that name come from? It stood out from all the other dance names and seemed incongruous until one day, in a context which had absolutely nothing to do with dancing, indeed dancing could not have been further from my mind, I came across Pelorus Jack, and suddenly it all made sense. To those of you who already know who Pelorus Jack was, my apologies, but please humour me and let me tell the story.



Recently appeared by the steps down to Broughty Ferry beach from the car park is a sculpture of dolphins. I have not been lucky enough to sight real, live dolphins in the Tay nor have I managed to see any in the Moray Firth,

which, I am told, is the place for dolphins. Indeed, I had given up all hope of ever seeing dolphins in the water in their natural state until, returning to Iona one summer's evening from a boat trip to Lunga and Staffa, a school of dolphins decided to accompany us and give us the most exhilarating display of their aquanastics.

What has that got to do with *Pelorus Jack*? Nothing, except to remind us of what friendly, intelligent and gregarious sea-mammals dolphins are, and of a kind of special affinity

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they have with us human beings. How did those dolphins know to come and entertain us on what would otherwise have been a rather boring passage back to Iona?

Pelorus Jack, I discovered, was a dolphin who from 1871 until 1912 met and guided ships through the French Pass on the northern tip of North Island, New Zealand. This was a treacherous stretch of water which extended from Pelorus Sound to Tasman Bay, but with Pelorus Jack to guide them no ship foundered, except for one. That was the barque *Penguin*, and the story attached to that was – one time in 1903, when Pelorus Jack was guiding the boat through the French Pass, a drunk on board took a pot shot at him. Fortunately for the mariners, Pelorus Jack was not fatally wounded and after a few weeks returned to his post, but never again did he guide the *Penguin* through that dangerous stretch of water. In 1907, the ship was wrecked with serious loss of life. In 1912, Pelorus Jack vanished. He had been guiding ships for 41 years and as dolphins have a lifespan of 20 to 40 years, one can assume that his days as a pilot were over. But for me, and every other dancer, *Pelorus Jack* lives on, and, knowing who he was, I shall now enjoy his dance even more.

A. Dancer. The story of Pelorus Jack as told in Robert Hendrickson, Ocean Almanac.

Image: SaltDog Marine/ facebook

Angela Howkins; September 2024

## Historical Dance Workshop

Sunday 26th January, 2025, 2:30 - 5:30pm

St Andrews Hall, Kingsgait Kirk, 2, King Street, Dundee, DD1 2JB

Instruction was given by Alena Shmakova of Les Danses Antiques in Edinburgh. Alena teaches country dancing from the 18th and 19th centuries and has performed at various historic sites throughout Scotland. She has researched old Scottish dances, collecting dances and music from many sources, including diaries, memoirs and private letters. In this workshop, she will include dances with a Dundee connection, which she has found during her research.

More details will follow in the next edition of the Reel.



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## Upcoming events and Centenary Celebrations

For more information about events, please see the Branch website;

[Scottish Country Dancing | RSCDS Dundee](http://www.rscds.org.uk/branches/dundee)

### Celebration of Inaugural Meeting of Dundee Branch

Sunday 9th February, 2025, Malmaison Hotel, Whitehall Cres, Dundee, DD1 4AY.

2:30 - 4:30pm

An informal get-together for members of the Branch for a cup of tea or coffee and cake. Come and talk about your memories of dancing over the past 100 years!

Numbers have now been confirmed. We look forward to seeing you there.

### Centenary Dance Workshop

Sunday 2nd March 2025, St Andrews Hall, Kingsgait Church, 2 King Street Dundee, DD1 2JB. 2:00 - 5:00pm.

A chance to dance all 5 of the dances written for our centenary and vote on your favourite, plus another chance for all members to come together for a sociable afternoon. No need to book. Please bring a cup for tea.

### Half Day School and Centenary Dance

Saturday 22nd March 2025, Morgan Academy, Forfar Road, Dundee, DD4 7AX.

£25 for class and dance; students, £20. Class only £15

Dance only, £10, students £7; Spectators, £5; pay at the door.

The class, 2:00 - 5:00pm, will be taught by the past Chairman, William Williamson. A communal fish supper tea will be available after the class, or bring your own picnic. A reception for the Centenary will be held at 7:00pm and dancing starts at 7:30pm. All dances will be recapped..

Ruby Watson's Reel  
EH3 7AF  
The Westminster Reel  
The Silver Tassie  
The V-C Jig  
Teacher's Choice  
Alice Mann's Strathspey  
The Scallywag  
Kinfauns Castle  
The Castle of Mey

Mrs Macleod  
Links with St Petersburg  
Teacher's Choice  
The Glens of Angus  
Midnight Oil  
The Wind on Loch Fyne  
Dundee Civic Jig  
Jean Martin of Aberdeen  
Mairi's Wedding

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## Nice and Easy Dance

26th April 2025, Church Hall, Dundee West, 130/132 Perth Road, Dundee, DD1 4JW.  
7.30 -10.30pm

Programme to be confirmed.

## Spring Socials

Thursday evenings, starting on the 17th April, 2025, for 7 weeks. 7:00 – 9:00pm.  
Invited teachers each week, with a theme for the sessions of 'Celebrations'.

£6 per class.

Harris Academy, Dance Studio, Perth Road, Dundee, DD2 1NL. Plenty of parking behind the school at the entrance to the Sports Complex.

## Autumn Dance

Saturday 11th October 2025, Morgan Academy; Sandy Nixon and his band.

Programme to be confirmed.

## For dances in neighbouring areas and across Scotland:

Our friends in local Branches and affiliated groups in Broughty Ferry, Blairgowrie, Perth, Forfar, East Angus, St Andrews and Kirkcaldy are always delighted to see Dundee Dancers who travel to support them in their dances. To find out dates and programmes of these events, please see SCD Events Scotland (Scot Dance Diary), <https://www.scotdancediary.co.uk/>

If you would like to attend but need transport, please speak with your class teacher. Other members of the Branch are always very helpful in offering lifts when needed.

## And Finally:

Please submit articles for the next Dundee Reel to the new dedicated email address, [reel.rscdsdundee@gmail.com](mailto:reel.rscdsdundee@gmail.com) by the 6th April 2025.

The Editor

