

The Dundee Reel



December 2025, Issue 60

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Chair's Review of our Centenary Year

We have now reached the end of our Centenary year and I think that the whole Branch can be pleased with what we have managed to achieve.

Our first event of the Centenary Year was the First Foot Ball in the Invercarse Hotel. We enjoyed a very interesting programme, devised by Susan Robertson, with multiple references to the heritage of the Branch. The music was provided by Newtyle's Scott Band and his Band. Later in January we ran a

very well attended Workshop on Historical Dance run by Alena Shmakova from Les Danses Antiques in Edinburgh.

On Sunday 9th February, we were all piped into the Malmaison Hotel by Geoff Bardsley to celebrate the Branch's Centenary. We spent a very enjoyable afternoon, meeting old friends, recalling dances and dancers from the past and enjoying tea and cake. The display of memorabilia organised by our archivist, Helen Lawrenson, was particularly appreciated.

In the evening, congratulations to the Branch were broadcast on the Gary Innes radio programme, Your Requests, when he played the *Baldovan Reel* performed by the Olympians Dance Band just as they would have played it at the Dance in Rockwell School in June 1971.

March brought our regular Half Day School and Dance in Morgan Academy with the past Chair of the RSCDS, William Williamson, as the teacher. Over 60 people, including the current Chair, Gary Coull, and the Chair Elect, Sebastian Wanless, enjoyed the challenging and interesting class. After a picnic of fish suppers, we enjoyed some sparkling wine to celebrate the occasion. We were treated to a demonstration, by six Branch members, of the winner of the centenary dance competition, the *Dundee Centenary Strathspey*, devised by Sue James. The music for the evening dance was provided by Jim Lindsay and his 4 piece Band. Margaret Harley devised a very enjoyable programme and recapped the whole programme. We also enjoyed home baking with cup cakes suitably decorated.

In April, in honour of our Centenary, we were invited to submit a programme for the Autumn Gathering Ball. Members of the committee made useful suggestions, and a programme was submitted, which, with one change because of a clash with the Friday

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night dance, was accepted. As a nod to Dundee's contribution to dancing, it includes the *Baldovan Reel* and *J B Milne*, while the original tune for the first dance, *Granville Market*, is *Mary Currie* by Sandy Nixon.

We held a Nice & Easy dance in April, with the successful Beginners Class enjoying the atmosphere of a dance with live music. We were delighted to be joined by some beginners from the student's class. During April and May the theme for our very interesting Spring Socials in Harris Academy was, of course, Celebrations.

On the 14th of June we heard the very good news that another Douglas Henderson dance, *Kinclaven Bridge*, was chosen to be published by the RSCDS in Book 54. This dance was submitted to the RSCDS at the same time as the *Baldovan Reel* and it is a further tribute to the innovative dances devised by Douglas Henderson. The original tune for this dance is *Miss Dow's Fancy* by John "Dancie" Reid from Newtyle. We have previously highlighted Miss Dow, as a founder member of the Branch. We all danced *Kinclaven Bridge* at the First Foot Ball in January and there is an excellent photograph of men and women making the arches on the Branch website.

The next event in our centenary calendar was the Civic Reception at the City Chambers on Friday the 22nd of August, hosted by the Lord Provost. Our invitation was entirely down to the persistence of your hard-working Secretary, Sue Steele. A large number of members were able to attend, and the Lord Provost proposed a very well researched toast to the Branch. In it he mentioned our participation in events related to the city's twinning with Orleans in France and highlighted the fact that Dundee is planning to celebrate the 80th anniversary of the twinning in 2026. Let us hope that there is an opportunity to get involved again. The Branch was then presented with a plaque showing Dundee's Coat of Arms. Janet Abel, your Chair Elect at that time, replied thanking the Lord Provost for his thoughtful words, his hospitality and for the gift of the plaque.

We all enjoyed the buffet and then worked off some of the calories by dancing *Ruby Watson's Reel*, which was devised by Louise Fordyce, and our new *Dundee Centenary Strathspey*. It turned out that this was a particularly appropriate event to issue you all with your name badge to mark our Centenary. The Lord Provost was a very sociable person, chatting to everybody and he greatly benefitted from knowing who he was speaking to. The badges are also very useful as we welcome new and relatively new dancers to our events and visitors to the First Foot Ball.

Next came the Autumn Dance in the Morgan Academy on the 11th of October. George Watt devised a very interesting programme which featured dances which rarely appear on present day programmes. These included two dances, *The Den o' Mains* and *Knockendarroch* by Douglas Henderson, *Cousin Jim*, by Hugh Foss from an Angus Fitchet Scottish Dance Album and an unusual 8 by 24 bar jig, *Kenmure's On and Awa'* by Gow from 1822 and RSCDS Book 4. The excellent music was provided by Sandy Nixon and his band.

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The final event in our Centenary year was, perhaps fittingly, a new venture. We held a Beginners' Christmas Dance with a programme made up of ceilidh dances and easy Scottish Country dances and suitable for those just starting out on their dancing journey. It proved very successful and was much enjoyed by new and experienced dancers alike.

At the AGM on 2nd September, I handed over to Janet Abel who I am sure will receive the same high level of support for the Branch's activities as I have. Being Chair is a busy role and I have benefitted greatly from the amount of work done in the background by Sue Steele and Mary Cant.

Finally, it just remains for me to thank all the members of the committee and the wider Branch that have supported me over the last 3 years and to wish Janet and the new committee all the best moving forward into the Branch's second century.

Yours, aye dancing,

Bill Cant; December 2025

Message from the Editor (and new Chair)

Please help us promote RSCDS Dundee - word of mouth is our best way of advertising so please talk about the Branch with your friends and acquaintances. And for those of you who use social media, please forward our New Year message and the posts about classes which have been put onto our Facebook page and onto our website.

If you haven't paid your membership, this is a gentle reminder that it is overdue.

Janet Abel; December 2025

RSCDS Dundee Branch Social Media Presence

Branch Website

Scottish Country Dancing | RSCDS Dundee

RSCDS Facebook page

RSCDS Dundee | Facebook

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Class details:

Monday Evening Intermediate Class

7:30 - 9:00pm, St Mary Magdalene's Church Hall, Dudhope Crescent Road, Dundee, DD1 5RR

Weekly on Mondays, 12th January - 20th April 2026. Taught by Lorna Valentine.

This class is for Intermediate level dancers, concentrating on building on the skills learned in last year's Beginners' class. The focus will be on learning more dances using the formations already taught and learning new and more complex formations.

Tuesday Night Social Dance Class

7:00 - 9:00pm, St Andrew's Hall of the Kingsgait Kirk, 2, King Street, Dundee, DD1 2JB (east of the Wellgate Centre, one block north of the bus station).

Weekly, starting on Tuesdays 6th January 2026, until late March / early April.

Teachers: Sue Steele and Alison Malcolm.

This class usually concentrates on learning dances featured on upcoming programmes. If you want to practise before the event, this is the place to do it. The teachers are happy to take requests for dances if they are given notice beforehand. It is a fun social class with time for a tea break.

Wednesday Night Beginners' Class, Ceilidh to Country

7:30 – 9:00pm, Gymnasium, Harris Academy, Perth Road, Dundee, DD2 1NL
Plenty of car parking available at the back of the school.

Weekly on Wednesdays, 14th January - 25th March 2026 (except 18th February).

Taught by Mary Cant.

This class is for Beginners and started with ceilidh dances, building to simple, fun country dances with great music. Steps and formations will be taught along the way.

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.

Weekly on Thursdays, 8th January - 2nd April 2026. Taught by Fiona Mackie.

This class is for those who wish to learn correct technique in a fun and relaxed atmosphere. Participants will be expected to know the basic formations.

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Branch Events

Historical Dance Workshop: 'Dundee Dancing Masters and their repertoire between the 1770s and 1830s'

As part of the Centenary celebrations for Dundee Branch we held a Historical Dance Workshop on 26 January 2025. It was delivered by Alena Shmakova of *Les Danses Antiques* in Edinburgh and focussed on Dundee Dancing Masters between the 1770s and 1830s. It was Alena's first workshop held outside Edinburgh, and she put a lot of effort into finding local resources, connections and works. The Wighton Heritage Centre which is hosted within the main Dundee Library has a very large music collection and Alena was able to use these resources to create a varied programme for our workshop.

The event was well attended – over 32 people, which allowed 4 full sets throughout despite some having to leave early. The attendees were a mixture of branch members, visitors from nearby branches and non-members.



The workshop started with a mixer based on the dance '*La Corillon or Clap Hand Quadrille*' by Messrs Lowe & John Thomson from *The Messrs Lowe's Selection of Dance Music* (Edinburgh, c.1830), found in the National Library of Scotland. We danced to music from the same source book and generated through the Musescore Studio programme (a computer programme that has sheet music of all types and allows the chosen music to be played on appropriate instruments).

We moved on to dancing '*Selected figures of Allemande*', the dance form which was to eventually produce the figure we still use today. Doing Allemande as a specific style of dance included learning the step 'Pas de Rigaudon' as well as several different Allemande holds. The one that was 'opposite' of normal felt a bit weird! But English Allemande was great fun as you are side to side with your partner and facing opposite ways. The sequence we were taught came from a paper presented at an international symposium, and the music used was from a 1792 collection, published in Edinburgh and stored in the Wighton Heritage Centre.

We then learned about the Cottillion style of dancing which came over from France in the Georgian period, a dance form done in square sets. This included learning a new travelling step to use (remembering that we females would be wearing ornate wigs and thus needed to move very gently in order to take care of them...) The dance we were taught was *Cottillion N3* by Alexander McIntosh from his book, *Eight Cottillions and Four Country Dances* (London: Longman & Broderick, [c.1783 – 1798]) which also contained the music used. Cottillions use a 'chorus' and 'verse' effect by dancing the same sequence repeatedly within the dance, but using a variety of different moves called

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'changes' between. The changes we were using were drawn from Sr. de La Cuisse, *Le Répertoire des Bals, ou Theorie-Pratique des Contredanses* (Paris, 1762).

During the tea-break Alena gave a very interesting talk on the Dancing Masters who were active in Dundee in the 18th and 19th centuries, showing the care she had put into her preparation. She told us about the self-publishing methods used and explained the family connections between Dancing Masters, naming them. Several were involved in the creation or recording of the music or step-sequences which we learnt to dance.

After the break we tackled a Quadrille, learning a new setting style step in order to enable us to complete it. We also learned that being perfect in the steps could be considered an issue - as it could mean that instead of being a valued guest you were a paid expert there to provide a partner. Also that there were different levels of teaching offered by Dancing Masters, depending on what you were able to pay (some steps were decoration and commanded a higher fee). The Quadrille we learnt was called '*Reel of Eight*' – not the *Eightsome Reel* but a much earlier predecessor/cousin of the modern dance. We danced this to '*Montrose Bridge. A Reel*' from *The Messrs Lowe's Selection of Dance Music*, and the dance came from the same collection, with input from a second volume by the Lowes which is held in the RSCDS archives.

We finished the workshop by dancing the closest thing to a modern Scottish country dance we tried here, *Tayside*. While not using the modern steps or formations, there were many similarities to the dances we regularly enjoy (we were in longwise sets, the first couple had a solo but the down the middle and back was 16 bars long!). This



- specific dance was done with the steps & figures used in the late 18th century, there was a second updated version from the early 1900s but we were unable to dance that due to time constraints. A Dundee-based dance teacher from about 1802-1824, Charles Bayne wrote *Tayside* in his book '*Six Favourite Scotch Dances With Figures Arranged for the Harp, Piano Forte or Violin composed by Charles Bayne, Teacher of Dancing, Dundee*'.

The sources for the Steps & Figures, *Country-Dancing Made Plain and Easy to Every Capacity* by A.D. (full name not given) originally published in London in 1764 and J.F. & T.M. Fletts, *Traditional Dancing in Scotland* (Routledge, 1985).

A vote of thanks by our Chair, Bill Cant, and cool-down stretches rounded off the event. This was a very interesting workshop and I thoroughly enjoyed it. Getting to grips with some of the steps wasn't easy, but everyone was starting at the same level. Discussing the meeting afterwards with others, they said they had got a lot out of it and had had fun – whether they were a new dancer or one with a lot of experience.

Heather Barnes, April 2025

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Written to commemorate the Inaugural Meeting:

Keeping Time

So they came
up the wide stairs with the grand sweep
of fairy tale: not to a ball,
like Cinderella, though the steep
entrance looked the same –
no, not to dance at all,
but they had come to keep
the appointment. To keep time.

So they came:
the Highland doctor from the west
(Chief of his clan), but living now
beside the Tay – greeting his guest,
the Highland lady with a name
known to all. She would tell them how
they should proceed, and all the rest
would listen: and would keep the time.

So they came:
the scholar poet who would teach
by day, and loved to walk
through Perth and Angus, known for
speech
and writing – matched in local fame

by the army doctor, who did not talk.
of his war exploits . . . but each
loved the music, and kept the time.

So they came:
the lady from a well-known family,
who farmed, and rode, and loved to
dance;
lawyers and teachers, two or three;
a young lecturer, with the same
enthusiasm for the chance
to bring more dancing to Dundee!
All, all of them would keep the time.

As they came
One hundred years ago,
full of the purpose that would start
a venture soon to bloom and grow,
and left the meeting all aflame –
we, too, have love of dance at heart,
and we remember: so
we pass the torch, and keep the time.

Helen Lawrenson, February 2025

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Celebration of the Inaugural Meeting of Dundee Branch

Sunday 9th February, 2025, 2:30 – 4:30pm; Malmaison Hotel, Whitehall Cres, Dundee, DD1 4AY

Our Chairman's address to the assembled company:

Good afternoon, ladies and gentlemen. I would like to welcome you all here this afternoon, to celebrate the Centenary of the Dundee Branch of the Royal Scottish Country Dance Society. It is great to see so many familiar, smiling faces.



I would especially like to welcome our Honorary Vice Presidents, Helen Beat, Stella Phillips and Helen and Brian Lawrenson. Sadly, Irene Cruickshanks is struggling with poor health and is unable to join us. These people have all done huge amounts of work for the Branch over many years.

I will start with an extract from the minutes of the first meeting.

At a meeting held in Mathers' Rooms, Dundee on February 9th 1925 at 4.30 pm, approximately fifty persons attended an address given by Mrs Stewart (Fasnacloich) Honorary Secretary of the Society.

Mrs Stewart explained the aims and objects of the Society in the realm of research into the Country Dances of Scotland. She also explained that the formation of local branches was with the object not only of practising the dances but also each member investigating the various differences of perhaps the same dance in different areas.

It was then explained that local branches made all their own arrangements and were self supporting.

Following upon Mrs Stewart's address Dr. A. E. Kidd moved from the Chair that 'Dundee form a Branch of the Scottish Country Dance Society' and this was seconded by Miss Sharp of Balmuir.

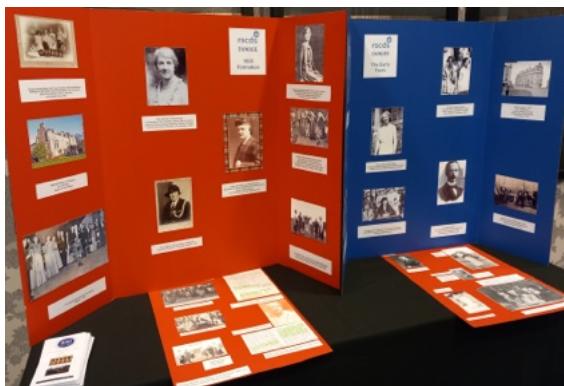
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So 100 years later we find ourselves in the same building, possibly even in the same room, celebrating 100 years of Scottish Country Dancing in Dundee. Do we think that those initial attendees would have expected that the Branch that they were forming would be around for a hundred years?

You will be pleased to know that I am not going to provide a blow by blow account of the Branch's activities over the last 100 years. Although some of us may be feeling our age, none were around for most of these years. The first 30 years of the Branch are covered in detail in Helen Lawrenson's excellent book which was produced for the 90th anniversary and which Helen has thoughtfully reproduced for the Centenary. Copies are available from Helen. In addition we are producing a booklet which will highlight some of the last 100 years of the Branch.

You will have the opportunity to review some of the memorabilia laid out on the tables. Mary is looking for names from some of the pictures.



My first introduction to Dundee Branch was in 1986 when I attended a class in Park Place Primary School taught by none other than Helen Beat. At this time Alice Mann was Chair and there was the Branch Club which met in the Angus Hotel. I later remember Mary Currie teaching a class in a school up the Hilltown somewhere. Mary Currie is best remembered for running Summer Dancing in the Marryat Hall with or without the help of the Branch. Eight dance programmes with

different dances on every programme. Mary also encouraged Branch members to go elsewhere to dances and was a great support to student dancers at the University.

Tom MacLeod with his wife Zena were active members at that time with his repertoire of stories and his bright yellow MacLeod tartan kilt of which he was very proud.

In the 1990's many Branches were invited to provide demonstration teams to appear at the Edinburgh Royal Military Tattoo. Much work went into this, including the making of new outfits for the ladies and practices led by Branch teacher Hazel Hall. Dancing out of

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the Esplanade into the High Street to the Massed Bands playing the Black Bear was an unforgettable experience.

The Branch has also benefitted from the music of many and varied musicians. At classes Alice Mann and Betty Tindall might have been the last of the old style pianists and more recently we had the late Bill Ewan playing keyboard. Both Jimmy and Muriel Boal played for classes and teamed up to become integral to the Maple Leaf Band.

This area has benefitted from many “local” dance bands. Just a month or so ago ‘Take the Floor’ played a recording of a 1980’s broadcast of Angus Fitchett and his SCD band. It featured Malcolm Ross and Hamish Smith who, we hope, will both be playing for us later this year with Jim Lindsay and Sandy Nixon respectively.

In the 1990s and into the new century, dances were held in the Marryatt Hall, the Blyth Hall in Newport and St Stephen’s and West Church Hall in Broughty Ferry. Popular bands were: David Anderson, Colin Dewar, Jim Berry, David Cunningham, Glencraig, Craigowl. and the Maple Leaf Band. One interesting feature of old dance tickets with programmes is that the band was frequently not mentioned.

In the early 2000’s John White was Chairman. John was an accordionist as well as a dancer and he suggested a First Foot Dance. As a result, the First Foot Ball in the Invercarse was born. It has now been running for over 20 years and is a firm and popular feature of the dancing calendar.

Now, we could not have dancing without teachers and musicians but the Branch would not have survived all these years without all the volunteers who help run the Branch. I look out and see former Chairs, George Watt, Shirley Mackie, Stella Phillips, Helen Lawrenson, Fiona Mackie; former Branch Secretaries, Mary Foster, Margaret Walkinshaw and the current one, Sue Steele. I see former Treasurers David Watt, Stella Phillips, I see former editors of the Dundee Reel, Mary Cant, who started the Dundee Reel, George Watt, Mary Connacher and the new editor Janet Abel. I see class secretaries, Mary Foster and Stephanie Haenike.



And I apologise now to anybody who I have missed. It is the work of all the volunteers over the last 100 years that have helped the Branch to survive and flourish.

One thing that did strike me when I reread the first pages of Helen’s book is the involvement of educationalists in the early days of the Branch. The first Hon Secretary, Mr James Forbes, Director of Physical Training, Mr Stewart Robertson, Director of

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Education and Miss Meta Dow, on Physical Education staff, Dundee Teachers' Training College. These people, like Jean Milligan, encouraged Scottish Country Dancing in schools which was an obvious source of members for the Branches.

These days are sadly long gone. If we want to continue to encourage the enjoyment and tradition of Scottish Country Dancing as we move into our second Century, we have to attract new people. That is why I believe that we have to concentrate our resources on Beginners Classes. We then have to encourage these new dancers to come to dances. That is how we will ensure that the Dundee Branch can survive and flourish for another hundred years.

I will now allow you get a cup of tea and cake. Do browse the memorabilia and most of all have a chat with your fellow dancers.

Bill Cant, February 2025



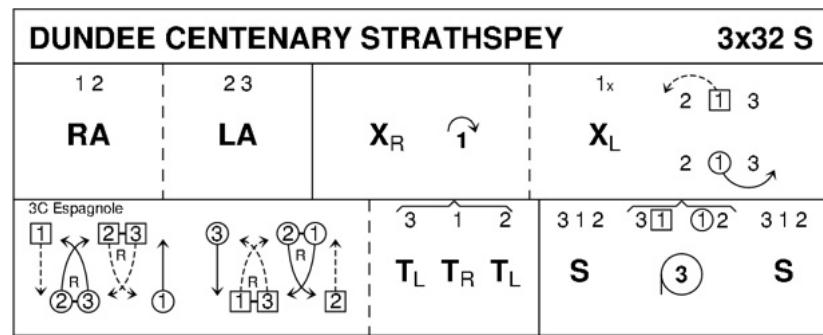
Centenary Dance Workshop

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

A workshop was held to revise and dance all 5 of the dances written in honour of the Branch Centenary. There were interesting and enjoyable aspects to all these dances, which had been taught in the Social and Advanced Classes prior to the afternoon. Dancing them all on the same day allowed those present to compare all the dances directly in order to vote for their favourite. It was a close run thing, but the worthy winner was the *Dundee Centenary Strathspey*, written by Sue James.

The other dances were *The Dighty Burn*, *Flight to the Ferry*, *Everyone's Dancing*, *Looking Back – Looking Forward*.

Full details of all these dances will be circulated to members in due course.



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Half Day School and Centenary Dance

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

Some pictures from the class and dance:



William Williamson, teaching



The Centenary Toast



Jim Lindsay, musician, Fiona, coach, and the dem team.



Evening Dance

An Autumn Gathering programme

In recognition of the fact that Dundee is the third oldest Branch and that we are celebrating our centenary this year, the Branch has been invited to provide the programme for the Saturday night Ball at the Autumn Gathering. That is the good news. The downside is that there will be 400 to 500 dancers all with their own opinion of what makes a good programme.

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That is before you get to the requirements and Guidelines. The main requirements are that there should be 16 dances in the programme and that they should all have been published by the RSCDS including the Collins Book. I always think that 16 dances is a bit on the short side and it does not make putting a programme together any easier. I do understand the requirement for mostly well-known dances.



Dundee Branch Members at the Autumn Gathering Ball

The Guidelines to bear in mind are apparently not “rules which cannot be broken” and some are obvious. A roughly equal mix of jigs, strathspeys and reels, a variety of formations and a mix of configurations of sets. The first dance in each half should be regarded as a “warm-up dance” with minimal pas de basque while the last dance in each half should be a 3 couple dance in a 4 couple set. Consideration should be given to the popularity, or

otherwise, of a big circle at the end of the programme. The final guideline is to consider dances from earlier books.

So, how did we go about preparing our programme. Well, as a starting point, I felt that 2 Dundee connected dances should be included. We then looked at the Autumn Gathering programmes for the last two years and asked the committee members for suggestions. As you would expect, they came up with some useful suggestions which made their way into the programme.

After much head scratching, scoring out and writing in, a programme was finalised and circulated round the committee for their approval. It was then forwarded with some trepidation to the Autumn Gathering committee. After a couple weeks, I was emailed and told that our programme was suitable with only one small change requested. Apparently both ourselves and the overseas Branch tasked with the Friday night programme had chosen *Linnea's Strathspey*. We were asked to provide an alternative but, as it was noted that 10 out of our 16 dances had reels, it would be preferable if our replacement did not have any reels. *Miss Gibson* provided the solution.

As for the details of the programme? For those who weren't able to attend, here it is:

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Granville Market
 The Saltire Society Reel
 Miss Gibson's Strathspey
 Torridon Lassies
 J. B. Milne
 Aging Gracefully
 John Cass
 The Irish Rover
 Joie de Vivre
 Bratach Bana
 Sands of Morar
 Baldovan Reel
 Miss Mary Douglas
 Neidpath Castle
 The Jubilee Jig
 Mrs MacPherson of Inveran

Bill Cant, May 2025



Fiona and Lorna, MCs for the Saturday Evening Ball, with Sebastian Wanless, Chair Elect

Nice and Easy Dance

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

A very successful dance for our beginners and well supported by Branch members. The programme was of dances taught in the Beginners' Class over the past year and included *Joie de Vivre*, *Maxwell's Rant*, *A Babbling Brooke*, *The Swan and the Tay*, *The Spring Fling Reel*, *Fair Enough*, *Catch the Wind*, *Virginia Reel*, *Newburgh Jig*, *The Summer Assembly*, *Anne McArthur*, *Off to Speyside*, *The Dancing Bees* and *Bill Clement MBE*.



Spring Socials

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

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These were held at the Harris Academy dance studio. Teachers included some from our own Branch and others from neighbouring Branches. The classes attracted dancers from across the region and were fun, stimulating and very sociable. These classes were an opportunity to learn from different teachers who found interesting new dances for our enjoyment.

Kiltwalk Ceilidh

Sunday 17th August 2025, Slessor Gardens, Dundee.

The RSCDS requested our Branch to support the Society by providing entertainment at the annual Kiltwalk. Relatives and supporters of those walking waited at Slessor Gardens until their friends and relatives arrived and some of them joined us in some ceilidh dancing. Others enjoyed the music which was provided by Michael Taylor playing the accordion. We were well supported by members of the Branch and also demonstrated some country dancing. Our efforts attracted at least one person to join the Ceilidh to Country Class.



Civic Reception

6pm, Friday 22nd August 2025, City Chambers



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Branch AGM

Held at 7pm on Tuesday September 2025, at Andrews Hall, Kingsgait Church, Dundee.

Your new committee new committee were elected and are pictured here.

The main vote was to accept a £1 increase in single membership fees for the RSCDS.

Bill Cant, Stephanie Haenicke and Sue Steele were thanked for their contribution to the Branch at the end of their term of office.



Autumn Dance

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

Numbers attending our Autumn Dance were affected by other events happening in close proximity. But for those who attended it proved a very enjoyable evening, with an interesting programme of dances chosen for their relevance to this area and to the history of dancing during the last century. Thanks to George Watt for devising the programme and for the recaps.



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Beginners' Christmas Dance

Saturday 6th December 2025, Ward Road Gym; Scott Band Duo.



For the new committee, this was a very daunting event. Putting on a Beginners' Dance so soon after some of the Beginners Class started led to great uncertainty as to how the beginners would cope and whether experienced dancers would attend and enjoy the ceilidh and easier dances on the programme. In addition, this was a new event and was organised within a matter of weeks of the committee taking up their posts. It should be noted that the previous committee had done most of the organisation of all other dances to be held before summer 2026 and we are now planning dances into 2027! It felt like we needed to make snap decisions with no guarantee of success.

Yet, we should not have worried. Scott Band provided wonderful music, the venue was spacious and convenient, providing a good atmosphere and many of the experienced members of the Branch attended. The experience for our Beginner and Intermediate dancers was fun, relaxed and encouraging and a great time was had by all. We attracted dancers from across the region also, including students from Dundee and St Andrews and some beginners from Blairgowrie.



It just goes to show that we don't always need complicated programmes. Sometimes it's lovely just to relax and dance the simple things. And if this helps others to begin to attend dances outwith their classes and immediate area, it seems a very good start to our next century!

Janet Abel; December 2025

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History Corner

Miss Nora Sharp

In this Centenary year of the Branch, I was pleased to make the acquaintance of Alison Bell, the great-niece of our Miss Sharp, who became the first Branch Vice-President. Miss Eleanor Christian Sharp – known as Nora – was a scion of the mill-owning Sharp family, who lived at Hill of Tarvit. She grew up at Balmuir House, just outside Dundee, and came to know Mrs Stewart of Fasnacloich through their shared interest in Guiding, and in the teaching of traditional Scottish country dances; so she was eager to attend the 1925 meeting, in Mathers' Rooms, at which Mrs Stewart spoke about the possibility of a Country Dance Society being formed in Dundee.



At 31 years old that year, Nora Sharp was younger than most of those at the meeting. She was a remarkable and talented person: a complete countrywoman, interested in dogs and horses, riding with the Fife Fox Hounds, and also a skilled riflewoman. She had been Games Captain at St Leonard's School in St Andrews, and afterwards played both hockey and lacrosse for Scotland. At Balmuir she threw herself into all the estate activities, helping with the harvest and working with the animals; in the kennels she bred prize-winning Setters and Labradors. Later she would become a Senior Commander of the ATS, serving in France in WWII ... but that February afternoon her mind was on dancing!

Alison never met her great-aunt, but grew up with stories of her fascinating life. She was able to pass on to me some photographs of Nora which I had not previously seen, and it was interesting to contemplate the many facets of her life: she seems both at ease on the farm and elegant at a family wedding ... while we have to imagine her shining on the dance floor!



Helen Lawrenson, Branch Archivist; April 2025

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Why Dundee?

We are very proud of the fact that Dundee is the third oldest Branch of the Royal Scottish Country Dance Society. It is easy to say and it slips off the tongue rather nicely. Miss Milligan and Mrs Stewart of Fasnacloich had a meeting in the Mather's Hotel with some people in Dundee and then we became a branch of the fledgling Scottish Country Dance Society. All very cut and dried. But why Dundee?

Mrs Stewart and Miss Milligan did not stand in the Overgate, one with a drum and the other with a fiddle and try to encourage people to dance, amusing though that scenario might seem. No, they met in a posh hotel, a room booked specifically for that purpose and with several of Dundee's most respected dignitaries. The minutes lead us to believe that they held a meeting and a third Branch of the Society was born. But minutes are skeletons, they give us only the pertinent facts. I will endeavour to put some flesh onto those dry bones.

Clearly there must have been a Scottish Country Dance presence in Dundee and the surrounding area. Scottish Country Dances were enjoyed extensively by all classes and indeed was socially intermixed by all classes. Dances at 'the big hoose' were enjoyed by all. However, in Dundee there must have been a structured Scottish Country Dance Association with an executive council, how else could this meeting have been arranged in advance? The minutes state there were 'approximately' fifty people there, but perhaps more telling is that the Chairman was absent and that Dr. A.E. Kidd stood in as Chairperson. This was no off-the-cuff meeting. There was already a well organised committee, possibly with representatives from several dance groups in attendance. For Mrs Stewart and Miss Milligan to turn their Dance group from an Edinburgh - Glasgow novelty into a National, Scottish entity, they had to expand. Dundee, the third City of Scotland, was both an obvious choice and an essential area of expansion. Without Dundee, would Aberdeen join? Indeed, without Dundee would there be much point in trying to persuade Aberdeen, sixty miles further north, to come on board and bypass Dundee? To put it bluntly, without Dundee their ambitions would be sorely dented if not completely scuppered.

There was another reason why Dundee was an attractive aim for those two ladies. Not only was there an established structure, Dundee held two aces; Miss Meta Dow and 'Dancie' Reid. Miss Dow appears to have been a very enthusiastic and popular dance teacher and was immediately awarded her Teacher's Certificate by the new society. Her partnership with Dancie Reid elevated them above the norm. Dancie Reid was well known in what is now the county of Angus, and there are many tales of his adventures. One such story was that before a dance in some village hall he discovered their piano was badly out of tune. Dancie enlisted the help of some brawnie country loons and sped off home to get his own piano. The lads somehow negotiated it out of Dancie's house, set the piano up in the boot of Dancie's car and sped off back to the hall. What this does show us is that Dancie was not only popular, he could also afford a sturdy automobile.

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The area beyond Dundee is also worthy of consideration. There were two very important attractions for Mrs Stewart and Miss Milligan, the Bowes-Lyons and the Airlies. Dancie, I believe, held classes for both families and it is not too hard to suspect that Miss Dow would have been asked to present suitable dancers to entertain and encourage the families of those two important houses of the realm to enjoy what would be considered a proper level of dancing. What a prize then that Dundee presented.

One can only surmise, indeed my whole discourse is such, that there would have been some serious discussion within that room in Mather's Hotel beyond the clipped minutes. Dundee was not known for being acquiescent and we are talking about some hard-nosed industrialists. I suspect their management skills had some bearing on the future administration of this newly formed Scottish Country Dance Society. Dundee would not be subsumed, or seen as inferior, to Glasgow and Edinburgh. It is not too hard to assume that the structure for individual Branches within the Society would have been discussed at some length. What we can say is that the successful conclusion of these talks in Dundee brought the three most important cities of Scotland together into a single dance society. To be part of this society would now become very attractive to other dance groups in cities and communities throughout Scotland and ultimately far beyond our borders.

For a more accurate history of our RSCDS Dundee Branch read:

PETRONELLA TO THE PRINCE OF WALES, An account of the Dundee Branch of the Royal Scottish Country Dance Society 1925-1955., by Helen Lawrenson.

One Hundred Years of Scottish Country Dancing in Dundee, by Mary Cant

George T Watt; October 2025

Kinclaven Bridge

In 2023, dancers enjoyed a Branch workshop of dances devised by Douglas Henderson of Dundee. One of his dances is the 4-couple strathspey, *Kinclaven Bridge*. Bill and I have crossed this bridge umpteen times on our way to Dunkeld or Pitlochry for walking, cycling and, last but not least, summer dancing in Pitlochry Town Hall.

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This bridge is of an unexpected construction. It has six unusual Tudor-style arches, which may appear to be very old. However, the bridge was actually constructed in 1905 using concrete, and was then faced with pink sandstone rubble. It crosses the Tay near Meikleour, just above the confluence of the rivers Isla and Tay. Like older stone-built bridges, it has triangular cutwaters (protrusions at the base of the piers) which improve the flow of water under the bridge and help prevent accumulation of debris.

The bridge replaced the Kinclaven Ferry, a short distance upstream. In the field to the northeast of the bridge is the remnants of an avenue of trees which led down to the ferry, as is indicated in old maps. It is possible to walk from the layby at Meikleour Beech Hedge through the field and down to the Tay. By walking under the nearest arch of Kinclaven Bridge, the use of concrete in its construction can easily be seen. The bridge is a category B listed building.

Mary Cant; February 2025



*Tokyo Scottish Bluebell Club,
dancing Kinclaven Bridge*

In memory of:

It is with great sadness that we say goodbye to two of our long-standing members.

David Watt

One of our long standing members, David Watt, died in September this year. David was a former Treasurer of the Branch and regularly attended classes and dances in Dundee and Broughty Ferry. He was a member of one of the teams from the Branch who danced at the Edinburgh Military Tattoo in the 1990's. He often recounted the story of heading out on to the esplanade to dance just after a troop of horses had been performing but before anybody had the opportunity to clean up after them. He and his friend Jean Hutton attended all but one of the First Foot Balls since they started in 2002.

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David was 93 when he died. He kept himself as fit as possible and was still attending Susan Robertson's class in Broughty Ferry until the summer break this year.

At his well attended funeral his son spoke about David's modesty and how he only learnt of his father's success at school when playing badminton in the main hall at Morgan Academy. Next time we have a dance in the Morgan do look up and find David's name on the Science and Mathematics boards and on the Dux board. The year is 1950.

Bill Cant; November 2025

Irene Cruickshanks

One of our Honorary Vice-Presidents, Irene Cruickshanks, died in September this year, having been ill for some time before. Irene was justly honoured by her election to the post, as she had given long service to the Branch. She held the Society's Certificate as a dancing teacher, and in 1979 she began teaching a children's class at Craigiebarns. In the same year she became Branch Secretary, a responsibility which she continued to carry out until 1986.

Irene taught the Craigiebarns Class for two or three years, and later took on the children's class at Forthill. From the time the David Finlay Rosebowl Competition was launched in 1981, Irene always supported it enthusiastically. She would enter a children's team – sometimes two sets! – and also acted as Scribe to the Adjudicator, and Marshal for the teams. Children from Perth, Aberdeen and St Andrews entered over the years, and often took a trophy home with them: but in 1991, the Branch was delighted to see Irene's Forthill team winning the Junior Section!

For several years Irene was a Representative to the Executive Council at RSCDS Headquarters, and as well as teaching children's classes, she was asked to take the Adult Summer Class in both 1983 and 1984. Although she had ceased to be Branch Secretary, Irene rejoined the Committee in 1989. In 1991 she was elected Vice-Chairman, and served until the following year, when family circumstances required her to step down.

Irene was one of the most hard-working and reliable members of the Branch. She supported the Dundee Dance Festival in every way, willingly taking on important tasks behind the scenes – just as she did for all dances and other Branch occasions. You may not often have seen Irene in the photographs: she tended to slip to the back when the cameras came out. But when you needed someone to man the door, to provide refreshments for a party, to print out instructions or make a floor plan, you could trust Irene to get things done. She was a shining light in the Branch, and we will miss her.

Irene devised a dance, *The Twa Brigs o' Dundee*, which was printed in the Dundee Jubilee Book (1985) and reprinted in the Quaich Book. One of the recommended tunes,

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Irene's Strathspey, was written for her by Bill Hendry, a popular band leader in the 1980s. George Watt also devised a dance for her called *Irene Cruickshanks' Strathspey*.

Irene's family were very pleased with the good turnout of Dundee Branch members at her funeral as they were very aware of the importance of Scottish Country Dancing to Irene. This was reflected in the many familiar dance tunes that were played at the funeral.

Helen Lawrenson; November 2025

Upcoming events

First Foot Ball

Dancing to the music of Luke Brady and his band.

January 10th, 6.30 for 7pm, Invercarse Hotel, Perth Road, Dundee, DD2 1PG

Granville Market	The Edinburgh Toyshop
The Sailor	Elspeth Gray's Reel
The Bridge of Nairn	The Birks of Invermay
The Waternish Tangle	City Lights
The Reverend John MacFarlane	Mrs McLeod
The Silver Tassie	The Asilomar Romantic
Major Ian Stewart	A Capital Jig
Canadian Landscape	The Orchards of County Armagh
Highland Rambler	Deil Amang the Tailors

Half Day School and Dance

Dancing to Colin Dewar and his Band

Saturday 21st March 2026, Morgan Academy, Forfar Rd, Dundee DD4 7AX

Class: 2:30 - 5pm, Teacher: Rachel Shankland. Dance starting at 7:30pm

Hooper's Jig	Scott Meikle
The Silver Thistle	The Laird of Milton's Daughter
Monymusk	1314 (Thirteen-Fourteen)
Muirland Willie	Teacher's Choice Reel
None So Pretty	City Lights
Teacher's Choice Strathspey	12 Coates Crescent
Farewell to Balfour Road	The Starry Eyed Lassie
Sugar Candie	The Silver Grey
The Montgomeries' Rant	Mairi's Wedding

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Nice and Easy Dance

Dancing to Neil Copland's Scottish Dance Band

Saturday 25th April 2026, 7.30 pm, Ward Road Gym, Dundee, DD1 1NE

Granville Market	Flowers of Edinburgh
The Mad Hatter	Fisherman's Reel
The Dancing Bees	Dancing in Perthshire
Beeswing	Postie's Jig
The Falkirk Lass	The Yorkshire Rose
Johnnie Walker	Portsoy Links
Farewell to Balfour Road	The Deil Amang the Tailors
Orpington Caledonians	The Highland Rambler

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 dedicated email address, reel.rscdsdundee@gmail.com by the 31st March 2026.

The Editor

