



# the reel

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FEBRUARY TO APRIL 2001

## ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING

Friday 22nd June 2001

**THE AGM** of the Royal Scottish Country Dance Society (London Branch) will be held at St Columba's Church (Lower Hall), Pont Street, London, SW1 on **FRIDAY** 22nd June 2001. Tea will be served at 6 p.m. and the meeting will commence at 7 p.m. There will be dancing after the meeting.

**NOMINATIONS:** Nominations for the offices of Chairman, Vice-Chairman, Hon Secretary, Hon Treasurer and eleven ordinary members of the Committee must reach the Hon Secretary by 23rd March 2001. Nominations must be signed by the proposer and seconder and by the nominee, all of whom must be members of the Branch. If necessary, a postal ballot paper will be sent to Branch members with the May issue of "The Reel".

The present office holders and Committee members, and the dates on which they joined the Committee, are as follows:

Chairman	Simon Wales	1992
Vice-Chairman	Owen Meyer	1999
Treasurer	Daniel Capron	2000
Secretary	Margaret Shaw	1998

Judy Berry 1997; Jim Cook 1997; Jenny Greene 1973; David Hall 1994; Alexander McClintock 1997; Davinia Miln 2000; Jeff Robertson 1999; Pamela Ray 2000; Caroline Sloan 1996; Rachel Wilton 1993; Angela Young 2000.

All the above are eligible for re-election to the Committee.

**MOTIONS:** Motions for discussion at the AGM, which must be signed by the proposer and seconder, must reach the Hon Secretary by 23rd March 2001.

### AGENDA

1. Approval of minutes of the 2000 AGM.
2. Business arising from the minutes.
3. Report on year's working of the Branch.
4. Treasurer's Report and Statement of Accounts.
5. Appointment of Honorary President and Honorary Vice-Presidents.
6. Appointment of Officers and Committee of Management.
7. Appointment of one of the Committee of Management as Branch Representative on the Society's Executive Council, and any nomination by the Branch for one of the six elected members.
8. Appointment of Auditors.
9. Motions submitted in advance.
10. Any other business.

**Note:** Nominations for the appointment at 5, 7 and 8 above will be taken from the floor at the meeting.

**All members are encouraged to attend and contribute to the work of the Branch.**

## RANDOM JOTTINGS FROM SOUND COMPANY



**AN** invitation to contribute an article to "The Reel" is both an honour and a challenge. As the "house" newsletter of the London Branch, it seems inappropriate to indulge in a list of what we've done and where we've been. After all, many of you will have danced to our music and will therefore know a bit about us anyway!

That said, I know "The Reel" has a much wider circulation than just the South of England, and so perhaps a bit of background is justified.

Sound Company are Ian Robertson (fiddle), Chris Oxtoby (accordion) and Judith Robertson (piano/bass). Formed as a band in 1990, all three of us had spent our formative years playing for dancing in a number of different traditions.

Chris pursued a classical accordion training and achieved considerable success over a period of years. She is a former Thames champion and at the age of 17 was a finalist in the British championships.

At the age of 16, Chris began playing for dances and "learned the trade" with a number of bands including the Blue Mountain Band. Her own band, Folklore, ran for 10 years playing for local barn dances and weddings. At the same time, Chris was a member of the dance and music display team "London Folk" with whom activities included shows at the Albert Hall and foreign tours to Europe and Israel.

As so often happens in the musical world, Chris, Judith and I were serving a parallel apprenticeship very close by, but in complete (did someone say blissful?) ignorance of each other's existence.

Traditional music has always been a part of life for Judith and me – our father, Alan led his own band on accordion for some 25 years. The

Chiltern Ramblers achieved great popularity playing for dancing ranging from English through to American and even a little Scottish!

Just as the Chiltern Ramblers retired from "active service", pressure from the youngsters led to the formation of the Robertson Family Band. The first line-up was unusual with Alan on accordion, me on fiddle and Judith providing a bass line on clarinet. Gradually Judith moved to piano and a more orthodox line-up took shape.

The Robertson Family Band played for a number of years before a chance encounter led to our first Scottish dance in Cardiff in 1983. Gradually, Judith and I began to play with other Scottish bands in the South including Frank Reid and McBains. After two years and two records with the newly formed Craigellachie Band, a change of direction and a lucky meeting led to the formation of Sound Company.

So much for the history. But what makes Sound Company tick? I suppose there are five main answers to that question.

The first has to be good music – wherever it comes from. Anyone who has heard us will know that our repertoire is not restricted to Scottish tunes, but ranges across borders and indeed across continents.

One of the main ingredients is my insatiable appetite for old music and associated inability to walk past a second-hand bookshop. Chris and Judith have tried all sorts of diversionary tactics to no avail – even a pub next door temporarily loses its appeal! The result, however, has been a houseful of tatty music ranging from 18<sup>th</sup> Century fiddle and song collections to books from all round the world which provide a wealth of ideas.

# CHANGE, BUT AT A PACE WE CAN COPE WITH

Of course, it is not just the music we play that influences us, but also the other musicians we listen to. Beside the “usual suspects” on the SDB scene, we are all avid musical consumers. Involvement in Folk Festivals gives an opportunity to hear the best of other cultures. Among our favourites would have to be some of the great Irish and American musicians we have heard, but there is always room for something entirely different. I well remember at one festival that after finishing our own evening dance we spent a wild and exhilarating couple of hours at a Cajun dance. If you want excitement, give it a try sometime!

The second factor is our determination to create a sound which is identifiably our own. The key to this is the fact that Sound Company is fiddle-led and proud of it! So many bands either have no fiddle at all (shame!) or have a fiddle fighting a losing battle against the might of the accordion (double shame!). Our preferred balance between the fiddle and accordion gives the band a lighter sound, scope to experiment with counter-melodies and a real opportunity for the two instruments to complement each other. It may be a little unorthodox, but this is what many identify with Sound Company and makes us different.

The third factor is friendship. Over the last 10 years, many people – musicians, dancers or neither – have become good friends. This is surely one of the main reasons for playing. Let’s face it – it is hardly likely to be the money!

Friendship with other musicians is particularly welcome. Here in the South it is easy to feel isolated from the goings-on in Scotland, so we have made a habit of regular trips over the Border to meet musicians and renew old friendships. We have been touched by the generosity and warmth shown to us – hospitality, new tunes and the feeling that we are members of a wider musical fraternity.

In 2000, we were delighted to make our third visit to the Shetland Accordion and Fiddle Festival – an event at which there is more musical talent than one might believe possible. So why invite Sound Company? I guess our Southern origin makes us a curiosity. Perhaps it is because we do not pretend to be Scottish. We just do our own thing and enjoy doing it!

Next comes variety. Call me a heretic, but wouldn’t life be boring if there was only Scottish music and dance? Our repertoire has a wide base, and that also goes for the kind of events we like to play for.

Outside the regular round of SCD events and ceilidhs, one of our favourite bookings is the Sidmouth Folk Festival in August. Here, a typical morning session may start with a Playford workshop which allows a much greater range of expression and musical freedom than the average Scottish Country Dance where three rhythms – jig, strathspey and reel – prevail. Next may come an American dance workshop where again we have the chance to let our hair down and enjoy the different discipline required to play for contras and squares. The astute among you may make a connection here to the American and Canadian tunes which appeared on our last two CDs.

The final factor is fun – there was even an argument for putting it first. People often comment that we look as though we enjoy our music. Sure do – dance music is meant to lift the spirits and there is nothing better than playing for an appreciative crowd intent on having a good time.

So what’s in a name? Are we Sound Company, or Sound Company? We’d like to think we are both, but above all, we are three people who enjoy the music and friendship that comes from working together.

**Ian Robertson**

[Do contact Ian for tickets to the Concert and Ceilidh he is organising in Wendover on 9/10th March. See page 5 for details. Ed.]

**THE** Society is on the threshold of major change. After years of debate in the Executive Council, a Strategic Plan and now a report from the Management and Membership Working Party, it seems there is general acceptance (though perhaps not the universal agreement claimed by the Working Party) that responsibility for managing the Society’s affairs should be in the hands of a small Management Board rather than the large Executive Council we have at present. This is welcome news.

The Executive Council, comprising a representative from each Branch, works well as a forum for passing information from Headquarters to Branches and for Headquarters to receive feedback on its activities, but as an executive it is hopeless. With more than a hundred people present it operates like an AGM with speeches, motions and votes. There is no real discussion, little opportunity to consider issues in their broader context and no room for compromise. It meets only twice a year so decision making is painfully slow and it takes a long time for individual representatives to get up to speed. Add the travel and administrative costs involved in getting all these people together and we have a pretty inefficient system. What should be put in its place?

The Management and Membership Working Party have made some helpful proposals: an eleven strong, directly elected Management Board meeting six times a year with a proportion of its members standing down each year, supported by three directly elected Standing Committees each with its own sub-committees. I have some reservations about the last point, preferring a flatter structure with more Standing Committees, including youth and music, to reduce bureaucracy, but generally I am enthusiastic about these ideas. To compensate for losing their representation on an Executive Council it is suggested that Branches should have their own Convention to make recommendations to the Management Board. This in my view is essential because it is Branches that conduct the real business of the Society, running dances and classes, so they must be involved somehow in the decision making process.

So far so good but the Working Party have gone on to argue that, as well as changing the management structure of the Society, we must also change the rules for conducting elections and move to one member one vote. Fair enough in principle, except that the Working Party believe that the cost of this would be unacceptable to many members. They have therefore proposed a two tier membership: a lower level for those who ‘just want to dance’ and are presumed not to be interested in subscription books and voting rights, and a higher level who would enjoy the full range of membership services and the right to vote. The Working Party have not published any costs, but figures I have heard mentioned are £5 a year for the lower level and £30 a year for the higher level, which it seems even life members would be expected to pay if they wanted to vote in Society elections or sit on its Committees.

Not surprisingly, and as the Working Party acknowledge, the proposal for a two-tier membership has met with hostility in many quarters. The discussion group at the AGM in Troon was generally against the idea and members of the Executive Council, especially those representing overseas Branches, have forecast that very few people would take out the higher level of membership. I would be surprised if more than 10% of London Branch members paid the higher rate. And of the rest how many would bother to pay the lower rate if there was no tangible benefit for doing so? A two-tier membership would lead almost certainly to a reduction in the overall

number of members. There are other dangers in the proposal:

1. The financial implications are not clear. I note from the Working Party’s report that the Finance Committee will give a “good estimate” of subscription levels depending on the services provided. Until we have these figures and an understanding of the number of members required to make the subscription book and bulletin viable, it is hard to know whether this is the direction we want the Society to take.
2. The bond between Branches and Headquarters will be weakened. It is likely that some Branches will have no voting members in future and in many places there could be so few voting members that the sense of belonging to a worldwide family of dancers is lost. There will be nothing to differentiate Branches from Affiliated Groups.
3. The dancers least likely to pay the higher rate are students, other youngsters and families who are the ones we claim to be so anxious to recruit and involve in Society business. True, they may join at the lower rate but what will induce them to cross over into full membership? They will enjoy their dancing at local level ignorant of the wider advantages that the RSCDS brings.
4. In the past the Society was criticised for being elitist, often unfairly, but the image was damaging. Much has been done to counter that accusation, yet we are contemplating an institutionalised elitism in a two-tier membership system. Instinctively I feel that we are being offered the chance to buy votes and influence. The new elite will not be the best teachers or the most enthusiastic dancers, but the ones with cash.
5. The Society will lose its character of a mass membership, worldwide organisation. There will be many fewer full, or “real”, members of the Society, and those that remain will be more heavily concentrated in the U.K.

There are potentially far-reaching consequences in the membership system proposed by the Working Party, and without more information and more debate about the future direction of the Society I would be unwilling to support it. So does that mean that changes to the management structure must be delayed? No, because I fail to see why changes to the management structure have to be coupled with changes in our electoral arrangements. I agree we should aim for a system of one member one vote but it will take time to work through the practicalities. In the meantime there is an urgent requirement to create the Management Board. Without it the Society will fail to make significant progress on the twelve objectives of the Strategic Plan simply because the current Executive Council cannot operate strategically.

We currently have a system of Branch delegates voting at an AGM. It is not perfect but in an indirect way everyone gets a say, and no one has suggested that decisions reached at the AGM have been unfair or unrepresentative. It is the method used to elect the Chairman and Vice Chairman and it could be used to elect the Management Board and its Standing Committees, which I suggest to start with should be the six Standing Committees we have at present. The Executive Council would disappear to be replaced by the Branch Convention. Once in place the Management Board will be able to tackle the issues facing the Society including membership arrangements and, where necessary, put forward to the AGM proposals for further change. That way we can move ahead on matters where there is already general agreement (small Management Board) and pend for another day ideas that have not yet been fully worked through (two-tier membership). The alternatives are to do nothing and thereby fail to grip the issues raised in the Strategic Plan or to take a leap in the dark and risk damaging some of the defining characteristics of the RSCDS.

**Andrew Kellett**

## COOK GOES CUCKOO! KUCKUCKSNEST COURSE

22nd – 26th November 2000

**WHERE** can 32 mainly advanced dancers lock themselves away in a country retreat with a top teacher for a 5 day course? Perhaps the village of Vollmerz near Schlüchtern, 50 miles northeast of Frankfurt (Main) in the Spessart area of Germany, may not immediately spring to mind. But this is the home of the Kuckucksnest, run by Carola Tress and Michael Fischer. Carola tells their story:

The Kuckucksnest was originally the local pub in the little village of Vollmerz. The actual pub bit was only a part of the building as was usual in earlier times, the rest comprising a bakery, a stable for a horse and a couple of cows, a pig sty and, most important for us, a proper "purpose built" dance hall with plenty of windows and a good floor. Although dancing nowadays seems to have withered away here to sitting in discotheques eyeing up the "other side" with the occasional disco-fox for a bit of physical contact, we are told by the more elderly villagers that in the "good old days" when they were young our dance hall was definitely the place to be on a Saturday night and the setting for "many a wild scene".

In those times it wasn't called Kuckucksnest but was generally known by the name of the owner. When he retired it lost both licence and name. For a few years it was lived in by a group of young artists and musicians who made music recordings (and used the hall for roller-skating!), but then they moved away and the building was left empty.

It was in this state – empty and very dilapidated, but with a certain special charm – that we discovered it and decided to try to restore it again. Admittedly the extremely beautiful countryside around Vollmerz wasn't the only reason for the choice of area. At that time (12 years ago) the WALL still divided Germany and reduced the value (and price) of buildings in the vicinity considerably. Three years after moving here the wall was demolished and we were suddenly almost in the centre of Germany which is very convenient for get-togethers, meetings and courses!

After much thought we decided on the name Cuckoo's Nest. Since cuckoos don't build nests it is free to interpretation and change, but at the same time it expresses our intention of providing plenty of "nest warmth and nourishment" for our guests. Built on three sides of a paved open sitting area it almost has a nest-shape form as you look up at it from the main part of the village below.

But what has this to do with SCD? A great deal indeed. Having taught at a variety of events around Germany, and become familiar with all the problems incurred at the various venues (distance between hall, accommodation and meals, state of hall floor, poor sound equipment, slow service in restaurants, etc.), I longed for a venue really suited to SCD courses: Dance hall, dining rooms and sleeping accommodation/showers all under one roof, a good kitchen so that meals can be freshly cooked and provided "on time" to fit the breaks, and also a nice garden to relax in especially on hot summer afternoons. However to bridge the gap between the Kuckucksnest as we first saw it and this idyllic picture required a great deal of imagination and an incredible amount of hard work. In fact I have to admit that we would never have succeeded had it not been for the amazing number of Scottish Country Dancers who were so filled with enthusiasm (and pity for us) that they popped up at all hours of the day and night to assist us physically and morally without even being asked! The local building authorities did wonder slightly why most of the "workers" travelled vast distances (I would especially like to mention Tina Helms, our architect, who came all the way from North Germany to advise us and provide plans), and were obliged to accept the unusual explanation that they were all Scottish dancers! In the course of renovation there were many occasions for being thankful that the locals,

and especially the neighbours, are a friendly and tolerant lot who accept things as they are. Men in kilts with rucksacks alighting from the bus are kindly directed our way without having to say a word as almost everybody who isn't local and doesn't quite fit the picture of a "normal" German.

After the first year of intensive renovation work we ventured to offer our first SCD course just for friends – four days over Easter. The house was far from finished but everybody was keen not to wait any longer. It really was chaotic but enormous fun. The beds consisted of mattresses on the floor wherever there was space, we cooked in our little flat part since the kitchen was still non-existent, and the new varnish on the hall floor hadn't dried as quickly as expected so that everyone was slightly "high" after the first evening. Anyone arriving early was given a paintbrush, screwdriver or bucket of plaster as appropriate and put to work. The warming-up exercises (skip-change round the room) were done around a long ladder on which a dancer was determinedly putting the final touches to the beamed ceiling! Anyway, in spite of the chaos everyone wanted to know when the next course would be, so we alternated between dancing courses and intensive renovation sessions throughout the year. Gradually a whole variety of different sorts of groups (choirs, theatre, schools, yoga and religious/spiritual) got to hear about the house and started coming as well, and the house itself gained steadily in comfort. Now we have a total of 32 beds in 12 bedrooms and a holiday apartment. All have wash basins and are simply but comfortably furnished with natural wood beds and furniture. The original pub room is used as a dining room and has been carefully restored to keep its character with dark panelling and fitted benches. Other group rooms for meeting and relaxing have been added and the kitchen is well equipped and the centre (and perhaps soul) of the house.

Over the years we have also gradually built up a very keen group of about 30 Scottish Country Dancers who meet here for a two-hour class every Monday evening. This and the subsequent visit to the pub are one of the highlights of the week and a really good get-together of friends. To mark our 10th anniversary we hired the town hall in Schlüchtern for a ball which was



It's hard work at the Kuckucknest! Dancers enjoy a break

so popular that we are planning another one for the coming year. Business has picked up and the large variety of different groups for which we cater keeps us on our toes. However we still have time for outings in the beautiful countryside with our two Icelandic horses, and always find time for a cup of tea and a chat when friends drop by.

For groups interested in booking the house we have a homepage with further information and photos at: [www.kuckucksnest.com](http://www.kuckucksnest.com). This also includes our Scottish Country and Highland course programme with information on six courses of varying standards.

So, on the evening of Wednesday 22nd November last, your intrepid editor arrived in time for dinner followed by social dancing conducted by Carola, thus quickly encapsulating two main features of the Kuckucknest – good food and dancing.

Accommodation is in up to four-bedded rooms and, to share the load, everybody helped in setting up and clearing up after two meals each during

the course. This is not a disadvantage but all part of the fun.

On Thursday morning the hard work began under the tuition of Bob Grant of Edinburgh with the music of Stefan Schatz from the Stuttgart area. Enjoyable classes took place daily between breakfast and lunchtime. There was then free time until afternoon teatime after which, apart from Saturday, a further class took place before dinner. Each evening was devoted to social dancing, re-visiting many of the dances taught during the day.

During the Saturday evening dance, course member Stefan Barthel of Erlangen taught us a six-couple version of Ian Powrie's Farewell to Auchterarder. Stefan said that Andrew Dewdney devised this to save two couples sitting out when IPFTA was being danced. London Branch members will remember Andrew, who danced with the Demonstration Team, and whose work took him to Erlangen a few years ago where he is now a leading light in the local SCD Society.

After dancing each night, we adjourned to one of the common rooms to sing (from the Kuckucknest's Anglo-German song book), read, play board games or just chat and drink. In anticipation of late evenings (or early mornings) breakfast time officially became later as the course progressed. 10 a.m. breakfast on Sunday was welcome after ending the previous day at 3 a.m.!

The problem with the few hours free time between lunch and afternoon tea, is that the lure of the cakes dissuades one from lingering on one's excursions. However, one can easily accommodate local walks to the neighbouring village of Ramholz, with its castle and other old buildings, or uphill to the ruins of Steckelsburg Castle with its viewpoint. The longer Saturday afternoon break permits a trip to Steinau, where the Brothers Grimm grew up, an historic town with a marionette theatre. That afternoon "Pinnocchio" was showing, appealing to adults, children and editors alike.

Most participants were dancers from many parts of Germany. This time Sheila Roberts, a reader of "The Reel" who runs the dancing group in Strasbourg, and I were the exceptions. However, such is the small world of Scottish Dancing, we all mostly knew everyone else beforehand. Indeed this was one of those special occasions when all the right people were in the right place at the same time and the whole course was a treat.

**Carola Tress and Jim Cook**

### 2001 EVENTS

1-4 March & 20-23 September: Beginners (with some experience) and Intermediate SCD Course

(in German) taught by Carola (DM240).

12-16 April: Easter Intermediate/Advanced SCD Course (in English) taught by Derek Haynes, Carnforth (DM300).

19-22 April; Beginners/Advanced Highland Course (in English) taught by Derek Haynes (DM240).

(To explore the area between 16-19 April, extra nights B&B (DM25) can be added to the April courses).

11-15 July: Intermediate/Advanced Course SCD including Ball on 14th July (in English, if necessary) taught by Carola and Rudi Spägele (DM280). (The Ball can be attended on its own (DM35)).

21-25 November: Advanced SCD Course (in English) taught by Allison Russell, Ayr (DM300).

Full details available from Carola Tress at the Kuckucksnest, Ramholzer Strasse 2, 36381 Schlüchtern-Vollmerz, Germany; Tel: ++49 6664 8246; Fax: ++49 6664 919663; E-mail: [kuckucksnest@gmx.de](mailto:kuckucksnest@gmx.de).

# LONDONERS ABROAD

*And, staying in Germany, thank you Brian and Marion Pierson of the Croydon and District Branch for sending me a review of the last Rechberg Weekend:*

## RECHBERG 2000

27 – 29th October 2000

**HAVING** read about the International Scottish Country Dance Weekend for Advanced Dancers in "The Reel" No 231, we decided to travel by car stopping with friends in Belgium en route on the Thursday. We left Brussels early Friday morning, drove through Luxembourg, France and into Germany and, 600 miles after leaving London, were winding our way up the hills from Schwäbisch Gmünd into the village of Rechberg in the early evening sunshine.

We checked into our guest house and, after a reviving dinner and beer served by members of the Tamburin Scottish Dancers, enjoyed an evening class dramatically led by our teacher Derek Haynes and beautifully accompanied by Jennifer Wilson on piano. Dancers arrived from all over Europe, were of a consistently high standard and danced with much vigour. Eye contact was very noticeable although the giving of hands in Strathspey reels appeared to be totally absent.

The Saturday classes started early at 9.00 a.m. and the dancing was held in the nearby Community Hall which was cantilevered out from the hillside and fully glazed with outstanding views over southwest Germany. Coffee/beer breaks and strudel delicacies were most welcome between the strenuous and mentally challenging sessions which continued after an excellent lunch until 3.30 p.m. Your editor led a group of us up the hills to the castle, church and a local hostelry for refreshment where passers by were most interested to see hikers in kilts and were issued with complimentary copies of "The Reel"!

The evening Ball was outstanding with Sound Company providing superb music. The enthusiasm and applause of the dancers demanded many encores and Derek's Black Mountain Reel was danced three times before we tucked into a magnificent buffet. The second half appropriately commenced with Jennifer's Jig and the Ball finished at 1.00 a.m. It was indeed fortunate that we could at least put the clocks back one hour before we started the final session on Sunday morning.

We would like to thank Karen Schnabl and the Tamburin dancers and their helpers for such an enjoyable and demanding weekend.

**Brian and Marion Pierson**

*[The next Rechberg International Advanced Weekend takes place from 26-28th October 2001 and will be the 30th Anniversary of the event. Jim Rae will be teaching and Pat Clark, Keith Smith and Green Ginger will provide the music. Please contact Karin Schnabl, Kaissering 23, D-73557 Mutlangen, Germany if you are an advanced dancer who would like to receive an invitation in May. Ed.]*

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*London Branch members also go to Belgium to dance and teach:*

## DANCING IN GHENT

10th – 12th November 2000

A FEW gallant London RSCDS dancers sallied forth to spend a weekend's dancing in Ghent, organized by the town's Flemish Caledonian Society. We knew the name of the organisers, the location of the dancing and our hotel address – and not much else. The pleasingly vague outlines

of our venture were further blurred by a delicious bottle of wine consumed on our speedy Eurostar trip to Brussels. We chatted animatedly. Country dancing, pipes, Highland, Irish dancing, singing – yes, there were so many activities to try. Well, just another sip.... of that fruity Sauvignon.....

The reader may suspect at this point that their London representatives were going to make a distinctly poor impression on their Belgian counterparts: surely, at this rate, our pas de basque would be less than crisp, our covering somewhat ragged, our strathspeys lacking in control?

Our readers need not fear. After the local train tipped us out in Ghent the frosty air and a long, tedious bus journey restored us to clarity long before we arrived at our hotel in the cobbled heart of Ghent.

In the evening there followed a magical, albeit freezing, tour of the town – church spires rearing up all around, medieval wooden bridges full of shadows, intricate Renaissance guild houses lining the glinting canals. We learned about Ghent's prosperous medieval past based on the cloth trade, its industrious people, its architectural heritage (16 museums, 5 abbeys, 6 castles, 10 churches!) and its network of canals and islands. This cultural feast was followed by an excellent, typical Belgian meal during which we got to know our ever-obliging host and organizer Carine Pace-Luyckx.

On Saturday morning we arrived at our bustling dance venue. Would-be pipers and drummers clattered off down corridors, Highland hopefuls spiralled away upstairs, country dancers were swooped upon by their teachers. Eventually calm prevailed and the long day began. We need not have feared about English reputations, since the contingent of teachers from the U.K. – Owen Meyer and Grace Hill (Country Dancing) and Malcolm Ferris-Lay (Highland) – dazzled their Belgian students....and us! Our own class was very lucky to have the sparkling music of Lilian Linden and Peter Macfarlane, who also provided the music at the immaculately planned evening ball.

Exhausted, but exhilarated, we wandered home through the moon-lit streets. One of our party felt impelled to demonstrate the Strathspey setting step across the glistening cobbles....

On the Sunday morning there followed further outstanding classes, coffee and more conversation with our Belgian hosts. Farewells, promises to meet again, lunch in a canal-side restaurant and then home on the Eurostar. A stimulating and excellently organised weekend, we agreed. Somehow, we hadn't quite managed to fit in all of those extra activities....

**Rosalind Zuridis**

## SIR JIMMY SHAND MBE

**JIMMY** Shand died, aged 92, in Perth Royal Infirmary on the morning of Saturday 23rd December 2000. Such was the esteem in which he was held that by 6.30 p.m. that evening several of his friends had travelled from Edinburgh and Dundee to Aberdeen to take part in a programme in his memory, hosted by Robbie Shepherd. Tributes were paid by Freeland Barbour, Jim Johnstone and others. There was a telephone link-up with Ian Powrie in Australia.

Jimmy made his first two "78s" in 1934 and by the time EPs came in he had recorded over 200 78s. He went on to make over 30 LPs. Some of his earlier recordings are now available on a CD.

In his heyday he played for Scottish Country Dances throughout the United Kingdom, including London Branch Dances in the '50s and '60s. In November 1957, 578 dancers were at Seymour Hall; Jimmy's last dance at Seymour Hall was on 16th November 1962.

As well as playing for Scottish Country Dancing Jimmy was equally at home leading a "Show Band", joining up with Moira Anderson, Kenneth McKellar, Andy Stewart and many other Scottish artistes. Those of us over a certain age will never forget his appearances on television in "The White Heather Club" and "The Kilt is my Delight". He played to large audiences in theatres in Scotland and England. I last heard him in Fairfield Hall, Croydon. Thousands turned out to see and hear the great man when he toured Canada, USA, New Zealand and Australia.

In 1955 his recording of the Bluebell Polka, which was not in fact composed by him, hit the charts and he appeared in "Top of the Pops". In 1978 he was a subject on "This is your Life".

Jimmy was a prolific composer and many of his tunes are in the repertoire of present day bands. The Society chose one of his tunes as the original for Alyth Burn in Book 22.

It may be a cliché but it can surely be said that Sir Jimmy Shand was indeed a legend in his own lifetime.

Jimmy's most recent biography "The Jimmy Shand Story" by Ian Cameron was published by The Scottish Cultural Press as recently as 1998. It is full of anecdotes and not a few tributes by other Scottish artistes and musicians. There is an earlier biography by David Phillips written in 1976 but it is now out of print.

**John Laurie**

*[Thank you, John. John's next "New Recordings" article will appear in the next issue. Ed.]*

## ROSELATH CROSS

Recorded in 'Stone Crosses in Mid Cornwall' by Andrew Langdon and 'Ancient Crosses of Cornwall' by Mary Henderson as the

### TRETHEW CROSS, LANLIVERY

Circa 11th C. Map reference SX 07345880

WHAT is The Roselath Cross, the inspiration for the dance of that name that appears in the Millennium Book 41?

These Ancient Granite Crosses were placed as markers or prayer stops at hilltops, track junctions, etc., by early Celtic Christian Pilgrims from Ireland and Wales who crossed the Bristol Channel to the North Cornish Coast, and then walked South to Fowey where they embarked on ships for France and thence over the Pyrenees to Spain. This ancient 26 mile track across Cornwall now known as 'THE SAINT'S WAY' was used by Bronze and Iron Age Traders who preferred the land route from Padstow to Fowey rather than risk the dangerous waters off Lands End.

Roselath or Trethew was on Church Path between the main church at Lanlivery via the

farms of Roselath and Gready to the Priory of Tywardreath a few miles from Fowey. This hilltop cross stands on the public footpath ½ mile South West of Roselath Farm.

In the early 1900s the Vicar of Lanlivery, the Rev'd W.E. Wynne discovered the head of the granite cross lying near the original base, and this was illustrated by Langdon in 1906. Despite searches in the area by various historians the shaft of the cross could not be found and was probably 'recycled' as a gatepost or lintel. It was considered that a new shaft would detract from the character of such an ancient cross, and therefore when it was re-erected on 11th October 1941 the Head was cemented onto the Base.

Father Wynne, who had also been responsible for the restoration of another cross in the area, visited the Trethew Cross the following day and on his return wrote:- 'The view from the stile at Trethew repaid me for climbing the hill. The distant hills in the evening sunshine looked very beautiful, so that I was glad and elevated – in every meaning of the word'.



Access: The easiest route is to follow the signs from the A30 or A39 to the 'EDEN PROJECT'. This is about 2 miles west of Luxulyan. Follow signs to Luxulyan and Lanlivery. One mile after Luxulyan Church the road bends sharp left, and facing you is a track, the entrance to Trethew farm, and a footpath sign 'Lanlivery ¾ mile'. (Limited parking available at this point). Follow the waymarked footpath alongside the hedge to a stile over the Cornish bank (overgrown, secateurs useful), then cross the next field alongside the hedge, to 'The Roselath Cross'. Continuing on towards Lanlivery the stile in the immediate area of the cross is very overgrown, and there are many brambles on the path side of the wire field fence. The stile at Roselath Farm is also somewhat overgrown, but the path improves soon after passing the Farm and the last section is well used and clear of obstructions, terminating at the road next to the pub in Lanlivery.

Roselath is the name of Henrietta Vosper's home near Saltash (the dance deviser), but she does not know its origin.

**Val and John Thorne**

## EMAIL-A-PROGRAMME SERVICE

A NEW free service is now available allowing details of forthcoming Scottish dances in the South-East of England to be sent direct to your desktop via e-mail. This form of communication has become the most convenient way to contact people quickly and easily and the concept of e-mailing dance details was pioneered at the Summer Tuesday dances at Pont St. The mailing list from the Summer Tuesdays, which forms the basis of the new general functions list, now numbers some 70 addresses and more names are being added all the time.

By subscribing to the list you will receive

notification of events across the region, including details of the date, venue, band, ticket price, contact and the dance programme. Covering such a large area, not every dance will interest everyone on the list, but deleting distant functions is as simple as one click of the delete key.

By submitting the details of your dance you will very quickly reach hundreds of people who might otherwise never hear about it. Even if you only get a few extra people along, after hearing about it from the e-mail, it will have been worthwhile, especially as it is a completely free service!

If you wish to have your name added to the list, or have details of your function distributed, e-mail: me on [tuesday@craigellachie.demon.co.uk](mailto:tuesday@craigellachie.demon.co.uk). Dance details may be altered so that they go out in a standard format – e-mail me for further information. If you would like to have your dance advertised, but have not got access to e-mail, I will accept details by post to: Graham Hamilton 31 Boundary Road, Eastcote, Pinner, Middlesex HA5 1PW, but as this means I would need to re-type the details I would much prefer them sent by e-mail wherever possible.

**Graham Hamilton**

## READY...AND!

IN managing without a live musician, a teacher wishing to teach the details of steps and formations has always had to compromise, but neither counting bars nor the use of one track, cueing in the dancers as necessary, is entirely satisfactory. This recording by Muriel Johnstone contains those short bursts of music for which a live musician is so useful, and in 78 tracks features a comprehensive range of rhythms (from reel to Highland etc.), speeds and barrings. There are also combinations, some of which might even start you thinking of new exercises. The last three tracks feature Music for Movement and Dancing in Recreation Classes and Schools – I am curious to find out more.

The fact that there are 78 tracks might in itself present a problem, unless either you plan carefully and programme your CD player, use a remote control, have a handy assistant, or are very nifty with the forward and back keys. The layout does help with, for example, 8 bars slow reel followed by 16 bars reel (speeding up), then bursts of reel at full speed. The range of speeds gives everything you might wish for, although the "normal" speed strathspey, whilst fine for more advanced dancers, may be a little slow for less experienced dancers.

The playing is beautiful, almost without exception. It is odd therefore to find one or two tracks that might have been re-taken. Tune selection cannot be faulted and in itself provides a lesson to aspiring musicians wanting to know what to play for step practice. Muriel gets to let her hair down with one set of her own jigs (8 x 32) and some sets of waltzes.

The main value of this CD has to be to encourage the class to listen to the music and understand how and when to start and stop. So many dancers, when asked to dance 8 or 16 bars, will over-shoot. Here you can even give them only 6 bars of music for their reels of three. If you have the wherewithal to programme your machine and can get used to somebody else saying "Ready...and" then you will find this a valuable and unique addition to your teaching armoury.

**Jeremy and Grace Hill**

# LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

*On the subject of the future of the Society...*

Caversham, Reading

Dear Jim,

Regarding the proposals to reorganise the RSCDS, as a member of the RSCDS General Purposes Committee, I would like to make a few background observations which are germane to the issues on the table.

Critical decisions regarding the future of the Society have to be made in the very near future. The financial state of the organisation is such that for the last few years costs have exceeded income and it has thus been necessary to dip into the Society's capital resources to balance the books. At this rate the Society will be bankrupt in about ten years. Unfortunately, subscriptions are the major source of income for the Society and income from other sources is unlikely to increase, so to ensure the future of the Society there is little option but to increase subscriptions dramatically OR reduce services. The Executive Council quite recently voted overwhelmingly to retain current levels of service, but that could be put to the vote again if necessary. Whereas Branches are run by voluntary staff, Headquarters has permanent paid staff which imposes a large 'overhead' burden on Society finances. For the services they provide, the current staff work very hard and efficiently. It is unrealistic to expect this work to be done by volunteers. On this basis, the Finance Committee has proposed that the subscription should be raised as quickly as possible to £15 or higher. The effect on membership, from past experience, will be dramatic, and the resultant fall in membership could lead to a spiral of increased subscriptions and falling membership. **Proposing the increase was delayed pending the discussions on reorganisation in case a better scheme to secure the Society's finances could be devised.**

There is a continuing cry from the membership asking what they get for their subscription. They enjoy Scottish Country Dancing almost entirely due to the efforts of the Society since 1923. The vast collection of enjoyable dances has stemmed from the establishment of standards and the promotion of SCD around the world. Being a member of the Society is a commitment to maintain those standards and the promotion of this form of dance. The Society also offers tangible benefits of membership such as publications and education (schools and teacher training). But these benefits have to be administered and maintenance of the system costs money. The Society being a registered charity has some tax advantages but not VAT exemption. A membership subscription is the sum of three elements: maintenance of standards and promotion of SCD, tangible membership benefits, and the cost of administering those benefits. The first is a charitable contribution the last two are membership services. With the changes in the Charities Law, Branches are now independent bodies operating under licence from the RSCDS. One of the terms is that anyone wishing to join a Branch must first become a member of the RSCDS.

A few years ago the Strategic Working Party identified areas where the Society should improve its performance including a more streamlined management structure, better communication with members, more promotion of SCD particularly to younger members of the population.

The implementation of the first is proving controversial. There are three areas where change is being considered: management, elections, and membership. There are strong reasons why they should be tackled simultaneously. If they are implemented piecemeal, there will have to be a major rewrite of the Constitution at each stage.

This is costly in money and voluntary and professional time. The issues are linked so the changes should be integrated. Lastly, it is more logical and democratic that the existing management, the Executive Council, should agree the total package. Time is also of the essence as mentioned above because of the critical financial state of the Society.

On the management issue, there has been favourable feedback from the Branches over the restructuring of the Executive and Standing Committees. That should be a step forward in streamlining the management structure enabling the Society to make decisions more efficiently. In themselves though, these changes will not reduce costs markedly, and unless other changes are made the annual subscription must rise appreciably.

**Membership** is a critical issue – the Society needs members to maintain its credibility and to provide income to support its charitable objectives. The trouble is that many members question what they 'get' for their money and some even consider the Society has done its work by publishing all of the old dances and is now struggling to find a role. Communication of the facts as outlined above is essential to put the Society in proper perspective. There are two main ways to look at membership: (1) treat all members the same, and (2) tailor membership to needs and desires.

(1) This option is ostensibly the fair one but it does mean that the subscription level will be much higher than at present and the likelihood is that membership will plummet reducing the influence of the Society and still not solving the financial problem. The cost of direct communication with each member, many of them overseas, would be very high. Each member would in some way be eligible to vote at the RSCDS AGM either by post or through a Branch.

(2) This option typified by the proposals in the General Purposes paper to the last Executive Council removes the need to join the Society before becoming a Branch member, replacing it with a capitation (estimated to be about £3) to the Society for every Branch member. In return, all Branch members would be automatically members of the RSCDS, enjoying all the benefits (but no publications: these would be available for purchase at preferential rates). Dancers could be members of as many Branches as they like as at present but a capitation fee would be due on their behalf from each of their Branches. In addition any dancer could join the RSCDS HQ 'Branch' at a subscription which will include membership services as outlined above. That is likely to be in the region of £20.

**Election** procedure depends on which membership option is followed.

(1) With all members being equal there is a choice of direct (postal) voting or through the current Branch structure. Direct voting means increased administration at HQ in having to have a list of all members (which they don't have at present) and arranging the postal ballot. It is the more democratic but a very expensive route to take. It would be possible for Branches to vote as at present at the RSCDS AGM but is it ethical that Branches being legally independent bodies should intervene between members and their voting rights? It doesn't make sense to ask individuals to join the Society and then give their vote to another autonomous body.

(2) With the differentiated membership basis, HQ members would be eligible to vote by post

or by some other method at the RSCDS AGM. It is suggested that Branches would have votes at the RSCDS AGM on the basis of one vote for every x members of the Branch. The advantage of this option is that it is likely to maintain or even increase the Society membership by offering reduced rate membership, and involve the Branches directly in the activities of the RSCDS. It would be expected that HQ members would be a core of members interested in the objectives and operation of the Society.

Whichever reorganisation choice is made it is impossible to assess with any precision the likely effects on membership or on the finances of the Society. While there has been surprising opposition to 'two-tier' membership, is it not the logical way ahead? How many members at present are more interested in just enjoying the dances than getting involved with the Society?

**Positive thinking on the future of the Society and its structure is urgently required. Failure to reach an agreement on a comprehensive package will trigger a rise in membership subscription to around £15 IF THE SOCIETY IS TO SURVIVE. This will also be necessary if only the Management Board and Standing Committee changes are made.**

Yours sincerely,

**Wilson M Nicol**

Liverpool

Dear Jim,

I always look forward to receiving "The Reel" and wish a similar publication was produced by the RSCDS so that all members could have an opportunity to air their views on all and any topics.

As a member of the Finance Committee I am very concerned about the future prospects of the Society. The proposals for a Management Board are very similar to proposals which I submitted to the Society 18 months ago. I know that my proposals were considered. I also believe that the majority of Branches and their representatives on the Executive Council would like to see this revised management structure in place a.s.a.p. A number of people have asked why it could not be put in place without a restructuring of the membership system which could be dealt with later. Why not indeed?

My wife and I joined the Society 40 years ago and in our first year we each received a Bulletin packed with adverts and also received a subscription copy. There was one full time member of staff (the Secretary) and three part time members, one of whom was a cleaner! Full minutes of all meetings were produced, stencils having to be cut on typewriters. There were 28,000 members.

We now receive one copy of the Bulletin which in recent years has been an expensive magazine printed on glossy paper and with a reduced number of adverts, and we also receive one subscription copy, again produced in an expensive manner and containing music which the majority of members do not want.

The Society now has five full time members of staff equipped with computers, printers, photo copiers, scanners and fax machines, minutes are produced in an abbreviated form – and the membership has fallen to a little over 20,000. This service requires a large increase in Subscriptions if it is to continue, or unless other drastic action is taken. Computers generate work and paper.

From a survey of my Branch Members – and the view has been given by other Branches – I believe that very few people indeed would wish to take out a high cost "Headquarters Membership", even if it did then entitle them to vote and to serve on the Management Board. My personal opinion

is that no more than 10% of the membership would be interested in being "Headquarters Members"; therefore how would the Society survive with, say, only 2000 full members, with the remainder wishing to be Branch Members only?

With regard to an electoral college surely someone can put forward constructive proposals.

As an example in the first instance why not ask all Branches to nominate persons within the Branch who are interested and willing to serve on the Management Board, irrespective of their class of membership. This might produce a sufficient number of people and if there are too many then draw their names out of a hat.

With regard to voting for motions at an AGM why not introduce a card voting system. Each Branch would have a "yes" or "no" vote with the Branch membership numbers being counted. The current system of Branch voting is unfair in that it gives the large Branches with a higher number of delegates an advantage over the small Branches.

Finally from Branch experience I believe that very few people are interested in voting for anything and if every Society member were asked to vote on an issue very few voting papers would be returned.

In order to survive the Society has got to act fast, reach decisions and put them into effect.

I hope that this letter gives rise to some constructive proposals.

Yours sincerely,

**Ronald Taylor**

*[Do write and let me know your views on this important topic. Ed.]*

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*More correspondence about warming up....*

Barking, Essex

Dear Jim,

When I was unfortunate enough to sustain a serious injury in my first dancing days, I was able to afford private physiotherapy at a Harley Street clinic (recommended by several others on the RSCDS scene). Many of the exercises I was given to do when gradually recovering were exactly the same as those taught as "warm-ups" by Jenny Greene in both her Country Dance classes and Ladies Step Classes. I can recall being in disgrace with classmates at Jenny's Intermediate Class Christmas party '88 for requesting the "Achilles Stretching" exercise instead of a favourite dance: I am happy for friends to laugh with me or indeed at me, but injuries are not amusing and I have always valued any advice that Jenny – or indeed many other Teachers – have given to classes as a free extra, particularly now the clinic has closed down and I couldn't afford it any more anyway!

By comparison I have also had the excellent fortune to be taught by another teacher who has given classes at the Royal Ballet School, no less. When the "warm-up" subject arose, he replied *inter alia* that those who wanted to warm up could do so *before* the commencement of class.

Regarding the use of unsuitable music for "warm-ups" Jenny's Ladies Step Class has had some smashing *non Scottish* stuff for our "unwinding" at the end of class. Thanks to Marion Walsh and the other musicians who have played for us.

Yours sincerely,

**Ruth Redfern**

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*Moving on to children dancing....*

Abbots Langley, Herts

Dear Jim,

I write further to Andrew Kellett's article YOUTH WORK in issue 232 and Elizabeth Bennett's letter about dancing children in issue 234 of "The Reel".

My husband and I are members of the Berkhamsted Strathspey & Reel Club which is

affiliated to the RSCDS and I am writing to convey my family's disappointment concerning the Weekend School held in Watford over the August Bank Holiday.

I had been informed by club members that both Mary Murray and Muriel Johnstone were excellent and I was delighted that they would be teaching "on my doorstep". It was confirmed that non-resident participants would be allowed on the course. We marked the weekend on the family calendar.

However, later, imagine our disappointment when we learnt that it had been decided not to allow children on the course.

My children are a boy aged 13 and a girl aged 11 who would both be classified as intermediates because of the considerable amount of Scottish Country Dancing they have done. Neither are primary school age nor beginners. In fact my daughter passed her ISTD Gold award last March. I would say that both are better dancers than my husband is and I understood that beginners were welcome on the course I should point out that I was not asking to bring my children to the evening dances but only to the lessons in the morning.

It is an acknowledged fact that most Scottish Country Dancers are getting older and one would expect that the RSCDS would be encouraging youngsters to dance. I am bitterly disappointed that this opportunity was lost especially as my son is perilously close to teenage apathy, and this should have been a fun family activity.

I implore you to change your rules for the future and think of the youngsters and families next time.

Yours sincerely,

**Jane Rose**

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*On the question of pre-booking partners for dancers....*

Crowborough, Sussex

Dear Jim,

It is possible to arrive a little late at a Dance and find your choice of dances is limited because so many dancers pre-booked their dance partners for the evening. I accept there can be no question of compulsion as everyone has a right to dance with whoever they wish and inexperienced dancers like to be with people they know. However this should be balanced with thoughts for dancers from another area or for anyone on their own. Sadly, it does happen and when it does you may not want to go back. You could have a situation where someone might ask for a refund because they had been invited to a Dance and had no one to dance with. It is not too frivolous to ask if pre-booking be a Restrictive Practice or a breach of the Trade Descriptions Act?

It has been discussed by the Sussex Association of Scottish Societies [SASS] which coordinates the Clubs in the County and raises money for Charity. It was agreed there can be no compulsion on the matter but hopes were expressed that individuals could refuse to pre book dances and explain why. There was no opposition from those present at the Annual General Meeting but I have experienced some since. No one is wishing to bring out a big stick and say you must not pre-book. Everyone should have an equal chance to enjoy each dance.

It is a delicate matter and I would be interested to know of other opinions on this issue.

Yours sincerely,

**Michael Copeman**

Joint Hon. Secretary - SASS

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Finally, Stephen Webb had asked that his letter in the last issue should not be published as it contained an error. However, it was accidentally printed due to an editorial oversight. *[Sorry Stephen. Ed.]*