



the reel

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OWEN MEYER: FORTY YEARS ON – ALMOST!

In June, our Vice-Chairman Owen Meyer retires from teaching after thirty years. How opportune to review Owen's Scottish Dance career -

IN THE early 1960s a tall, slim, young man in grey flannels and white plimsolls was a familiar figure at many dances in the London area. It was Owen Meyer at the beginning of his career as a Scottish dancer; a course of action that he has since professed to be the one thing that has made the biggest difference to his life.

He began to dance in a local institute class in North London in September 1963 and from the very first night became 'hooked' so much so, that when he learned about the RSCDS and the London Branch in November, he joined as a life member immediately. At that time the Branch organised monthly Members' Dances at the Royal Scottish Corporation Hall in Fetter Lane, for which tickets had to be obtained by post in advance, as they were otherwise heavily oversubscribed. As a member, Owen was now eligible to attend and wasted no time in applying for a ticket and went to his first dance there in December. He made sure that he kept to the bottom end of the hall as all the 'good' dancers were at the stage end.

After Easter 1964 he decided to join the London Branch classes and found Nan Summers' class with Mrs Langstone at the piano 'heaven' after a mixed ability class with scratchy records. By the end of that term he felt ready to cope with a Day School in Croydon and after that he became a popular and ever-present figure at numerous Dances, Day Schools and Weekend Schools up and down the country. At any event worth attending, Owen was sure to be there; in fact one could almost judge how prestigious a function was likely to be, by whether Owen would choose to attend. At that time he was adamant that he was not going to learn to drive, so to reach all of these venues by public transport, he must have been one of London Transport/British Rail's best customers.

In the summer of 1965 he made his first visit to Summer School at St. Andrews and when he saw the overall standard of the candidates presenting themselves for the certificate exams he thought he could do as well. He attended the certificate class in London, taught by Frances Stamp, taking the Preliminary Test in 1967 and the Full Certificate at Easter 1968. (It was while he was a member of the certificate class that he first met Christine, but the romance blossomed during a dancing trip to Holland in the summer of 1967, when they both had to travel on the same tram route to reach their host families). As a fully qualified teacher he substituted on a number of occasions for Alison Ferguson and Moyna Gilbertson and eventually took over the elementary class in January 1971. Since then he has taught continuously for the Branch mainly at the Beginners level, with forays from time to time into Intermediate, Advanced, Very Advanced and the Demonstration Class.

As a teacher of beginners his enthusiasm was infectious and he created a special, inclusive atmosphere, so that at least one group of beginners have remained friends for more

than twenty years even though they are now scattered up and down the country. His class was always *fun* and participants used to emerge with sides aching (not a part of the anatomy usually affected by Scottish Country Dancing) from two hours of hilarity and giggles brought on by reels collapsing and people searching in vain for second corners. To say that they did not learn and aspire to greater things would give quite the wrong impression, but those early days remain indelibly printed on some dancers' memories.

By the time I met Owen in the autumn of 1965, the flannels and plimsolls had been discarded and he was 'properly dressed'. The following summer he was invited to join the Demonstration class and took part in his first performance at a medieval fair at Abinger Hammer in Surrey in June 1966. For the next twenty three years he was a dedicated member of this class and performed regularly at all types of function from the modest to the very grand, both in this country and abroad. During his time in the class he attended every foreign trip to which they were invited.



My lasting memories of him as a member of this class are twofold. Firstly, he always liked to know everything that was happening. On the few occasions when he was not able to take part in an important demonstration one could be sure he would be on the telephone the next day, wanting to know all the details.

Secondly I remember his pleasure at being part of 'the grand occasion'. The grander it was, the more he enjoyed it. Which of us who saw him dressed as Bonnie Prince Charlie in the 1973 Jubilee Concert, or dancing in the Queen Victoria's Visit Quadrilles will forget the expression on his face as all eyes were upon him? His setting steps had to be seen to be believed, but that may not have been to his advantage as a teacher, for one of his beginners thought that Owen's elegant, unfrenetic version of high cuts, let the class off the hook.

Perhaps the grandest of all these

occasions was the Prix de Diane at Chantilly in June 1986. Princess Anne was the guest of honour and so the sponsors, Hermès de Paris, wanted a British theme to the day and had chosen a display of Scottish Country Dancing (which the Branch demonstration team were invited to perform) for part of the parade which follows the race. As we strolled around the enclosure, Owen, in his Highland dress, was almost as popular a photographic subject as Princess Anne, judging by the number of elegant French ladies who asked to be photographed with him. So regal was his bearing that we almost expected the Princess to curtsy as she passed.

In addition to his role as performer, either as dancer or as teacher, he also served the Branch as Treasurer from 1969 until 1976; something he would never have done had he not made that first decision to take up Scottish Country Dancing and so have his life irrevocably changed, for he once told me that the thought of standing up and presenting a report in front of a group of people would previously have filled him with dread. It was during his period of office that Britain changed to decimal currency so Owen had the responsibility of steering the Branch finances through that period of confusion.

After thirty years of teaching Owen has now decided to retire and we greatly appreciate all that he has done for the Branch in the time in which he has been a member. Although he will not be teaching next year he will of course continue to serve the Branch in his present office as Vice-Chairman and will be very much in evidence at future Branch events. Numerous people have reason to be grateful to him for being an ambassador for Scottish Country Dancing and for opening the door to immense enjoyment.

Iris Anderson

(with additional information from Angela Vince and Barbara Wallace.)

[On behalf of all those you have taught, congratulations, Owen, on your thirty year achievement. Ed.]

ROUND AND ABOUT

WINDMILLS OF SPAIN, OLÉ!

Iberian Gathering, 9th-11th March 2001



The walled city of Avila

THIS year the weekend Iberian Gathering was held in Avila and hosted by the Schiehallion Group of Madrid. Some 90kms west of Madrid via a 3km tunnel through the Sierra de Guadarrama, Avila is famous as the birthplace of the mystic St. Teresa, and is perhaps the finest example of a European walled city, with 12th century walls enclosing the historic centre over a distance of more than two kilometres.

How many readers have danced on the summit of a respectable Munro? Avila at 3,700ft is the highest provincial capital in Spain, but neither the 140 or so dancers, nor the Dalriada Band of Hugh Ferguson, seemed to be affected. Both evening programmes featured 18 dances, the mere thought of which left one person short of breath even before my pumped foot met tiled floor.

It being Spain, things started later—the interval was around midnight with dancing finishing at 1.30 a.m.! Local flavour was provided by the reel ‘Windmills of Spain’ incorporating an innovative ‘Olé!’ step.

With the sun emerging at last to bid us farewell, those of us from Alicante province (the largest group) proceeded back to sea level, and on our journey saw on a hilltop horizon a cluster of windmills. How fitting... except that they were of the new-fangled, eyesore variety! Don Quixote must ride again!

P.S. Jim, how does 3,700ft rate in your altitude stakes?

Peter Fyfe

[Referring back to issue 233, the world altitude record for Scottish Dancing appears to be nearly 15,000ft (4,570m) on Mt. Whitney. But what about just Europe? Can readers better a record of 3,700ft (1,128m) for dancing in a European city such as Avila? Outside of cities, do readers know of any high altitude dancing in Europe that could be an overall European record? For example, would our Swiss readers (in and around Bern, Geneva, Lucerne and Zurich) like to set the pace? Perhaps I might even join you myself. Ed.]

LONDON HIGHLAND CLUB ANNUAL BALL 2001

Saturday 3rd February 2001

DUE to the unavailability of St. Columba's, this was held at a very nice new venue this year, namely the Hurlingham and Chelsea School. We welcomed Sandy Nixon to play for us, and everyone had a really good night which seemed to pass far too quickly.

Frank Bennett

NEWS FROM FELTHAM SCOTTISH

CYRIL REDDING, of Feltham & District Scottish Association retired as Association President in March. Cyril joined Feltham Scottish in 1971 serving as a committee member for 20 years, and for the last nine years as President. He said “I have had many years of pleasure in serving on the Committee, and have enjoyed many good times with this very friendly society” Cyril's wife Alma has been a great support in latter years—they are looking forward to a rest, while still keeping in contact.



Alma and Cyril Redding

The Association presented Cyril with Life membership and some crystal as a memento. Everyone from Feltham Scottish wishes them well.

Michael Nolan

‘AFTER THE BALL’ RSCDS WINTER SCHOOL Pitlochry, 22nd-27th February 2001

OUR arrival at Edinburgh/Pitlochry, courtesy of ‘GNER’ from London, was a near master-piece of railway timekeeping by English standards—if a little too good to be true. Suspicions of a possible ‘comeuppance’ at a later date were to prove unbelievably correct, involving not just us, but affecting the entire countryside and public transport.

Pitlochry, famous for hunting, shooting, fishing and tartans, fulfilled our expectations for Scottish Country Dancing. We checked into the stately Atholl Palace Hotel, and after a reviving dinner enjoyed the informal dance that evening.

Enjoyable classes took place every morning, our varied abilities were suitably catered for, and high standards maintained, by the skilful tuition of Linda Gaul, Bruce Frazer, Jean Martin and Ian Hall. (This was straightforward compared to the rumba and tango *passa doblès* at the afternoon ballroom dancing class.)

Each evening there was enthusiastic social dancing to the vigorous playing of Keith (the fiddle) Smith, Angela Young, Jennifer Wilson and Doreen McKerron.

The grand finale was the Ball at Blair Atholl Castle on Monday evening accompanied by Neil Copeland's band. The imposing baronial hall added much to the evening's event!

Tuesday dawned with heavy snow, throwing everyone into confusion concerning their homeward journeys. A skiing holiday in Pitlochry would have been perfect with the timely snows.

There was no public transport whatsoever. Eventually, some of us travelled by private bus to Perth. Later in the day a small local train took us on to Edinburgh. That was it for Tuesday; we found a warm hotel for the night.

Wednesday morning, many futile 'phone calls were made to find transport to London. The weather situation was aggravated by a freak railway accident near Selby, where nothing was moving. Long queues of stranded snowbound lorries were pictured in “The Scotsman” that morning. Feeling very brave, in a cavalier fashion we optimistically hired a car, and were wished good luck. My friend was the only driver as I did not have my licence with me.

To our great surprise we drove via Glasgow to the M74 under sunny blue skies. The weather conditions were quite good and the hills glistened in brilliant white. Unfortunately we arrived at Birmingham during the worst possible peak rush hour, eventually reaching London at 10.00 p.m.

We are still awaiting our Apex fare refund. Will we go again? Only in the summer, perhaps.

Cherry West

DEM TEAM AT NEWCASTLE FESTIVAL



THE class has been busy again this term. The highlight has been our annual trip to the Newcastle Festival on Saturday 10th February. The competitive element in the afternoon provides a good focus for preparing some dances and an eight minute ‘show’ routine to as good a standard as possible, but it is the rest of the weekend that makes it such a fun time. The evening dance was, once again, excellent with the great music of Gordon Shand and his band. Nearly twenty members of the class made the journey, ensuring that it was truly a team day away!

There have also been a number of other regular activities this term. The demonstrations at Phyllis Court, Henley and RAF Alconbury around Burns' Night are always enjoyed by the team and we have danced at a number of other smaller functions around London, almost invariably well-received.

We are always pleased to hear from anyone of an advanced standard who might like to join the team.

David Hall

NEW RECORDINGS

Country Dance, Ceilidh Dance – Rob Gordon and his Band (HRMCD 557, CD only). Ellwyn's Fairy Glen, Welcome to Queen's Cross, Off She Goes in The North, Seann Truibhas Willichan (4x32 only), The Reel of Five, Maxwell's Rant, Waltz Country Dance, Tribute to the Borders, Garry Strathspey, Teviot Brig, The Gay Gordons, Hesitation Waltz, The Maxina, Dinkie One-step.

This CD is a very welcome re-release of the late Rob Gordon's "Fourth Caledonian Ball" and "Dance with Rob, Volume I" originally, issued on LP in 1982. We said then that it was his best recording yet (and I think his last) and it stands the test of time. There is a lot of lift in the reels and jigs and a very exciting set of tunes for Tribute to the Borders. It is worth mentioning that for 8x32 reels and jigs Rob used a sequence—as did Jim MacLeod and Jimmy Shand—not much heard nowadays: 64 bars of the Original, 64 each of two alternative tunes and another 64 of the Original to finish with. My only criticism is that the strathspeys are on the slow side.

Now, as promised, I turn to a few of the many CDs issued over the last year or so which are not specifically, indeed not at all in most cases, aimed at the country dancer:

The Colliston Inn is the regular meeting place of the Colliston Sound. Hence the title of their CD **Another Round** (SMR 112CD). Liner notes are minimal but I guess we are in the village of Colliston in Angus. It is a pity that some of the tracks are *not* aimed at dancers because the band make a very acceptable and fulsome sound. On the plus side they play, albeit a whisker on the fast side, 8x32 of The Marrit Man's Favourite and The Inverness Country Dance, but on the debit side 8 times through Blooms of Bon Accord and 8x32 of Miss Mary Douglas. The other tracks are suitable for old time dancing. Hopefully they can be persuaded to do a country dance CD in due course.

About three miles north of Colliston we reach the village of Friockheim, home of Steven Carcary, whose latest CD (SMR 105CD) from the same studio as the Colliston Sound has, again, rather minimal liner notes. There is, however, nothing lacking in his playing of a varied selection of mostly Scottish Tunes.

When the Kinlochard Ceilidh Band's first CD came out several years ago a well known local band leader told me I would not like it. "It's not your style" he said. I have, however, been given a copy of their second CD, **Strip the Willow** (CD ITV656), and, sorry Frank, I do like it. Indeed I like it a lot. Perhaps I am a little bit biased because most of the players live in the area where I went to school!

Still in the Ceilidh dance mode, Gordon Pattullo's **Ceilidh Dance Party** (GRCD 88) has 17 dances and a great selection of tunes. **Scott Harvey's Ceilidh Band** (SCBCD 1) has a unique and lively sound. In addition to the usual line up, Scott himself plays banjo to very good effect. For the Canadian Barn Dance they play two of my all time favourite 2/4 pipe marches. Three Shetland waltz tunes by the late Ronnie Cooper are exceedingly well played.

Lots of good ceilidh dance and listening music can be heard on **Lasting Impressions** by Graeme Mitchell's Band (SHIEL CD009). Through his music and style of playing Graeme pays tribute to other (perhaps older) musicians who have made a 'lasting impression' on him over the years.

Not Before Time is the catchy title of a first

recording by James Coutts and his Band (TRCD 9907). This one is for listening to rather than dancing with tunes from a wider range than strictly Scottish. Without detracting from the playing of James himself and the other members of the band, one cannot fail to mention the fact that the pianist is Graham Berry who has been applauded in these columns on previous occasions.

Again, moving right away from the dance floor, let me introduce Atlantic Crossing from Vermont, USA, who play music from both sides of the Atlantic and sing a few songs. They now have two CDs: **Wind Against the Tide** (MR002) and **Full and Away** (MR003). They are in the broadest sense a folk band but have a mellow sound which is fiddle orientated with guitar, banjo, etc., in the rhythm section. Peter Macfarlane, who is known to many of our readers, does not actually commute between Oxfordshire and USA but he contrives to go to Vermont as often as he can and plays with the group on both these CDs. I must add that the liner notes give the background and origins of most of the tunes and songs. Can any reader tell me why the pipe tune 'The 42nd Highlander's Farewell to Aberdeen' is also called 'The Boy's Lament for his Dragon'?

As I survey the last three CDs in this review, I am in nostalgic mode. **Caerketton** is a five-piece band named after a hill in the Pentlands (Caer CD020). The players include Iain Fraser and Stewart Musk who were on one LP by The Ochil Players in 1978. I do not think I have heard Stewart play since then. Hope I do not have to wait over 20 years for his next recording!

Highly Strung is a fine fiddle CD (FEC2 154) by Alistair McCulloch. Alistair is perhaps best known as a soloist with the Scottish Fiddle Orchestra where he is accompanied by Douglas Whyte on piano. Douglas is on this recording and they let it rip when playing some North American reels. There are, of course, some classic fiddle tunes (slow airs, marches, strathspeys and reels) and on these tracks the piano is in the very capable hands of Morag Macaskill of Milngavie. Morag is one of Scotland's most outstanding pianists and it is unfortunate to say the least that she has not been recorded more often. The Daily Record fiddle awards of 1982/83, when she accompanied twice champion Donald Montgomery, seem a long way away. (Donald was also in the Ochil Players).

The 1977 National Fiddle Championship recorded on LP was won by Douglas Lawrence. The aforementioned Donald Montgomery is also on this LP. Since 1977 Douglas Lawrence has studied at the Royal Scottish Academy of Music and Drama and spent 18 years with the Scottish National Orchestra. At last he has gone back to his roots and recorded a CD of entirely Scottish music mostly by the great fiddle composers of yesteryear. The title of the CD is **As You'd Expect** (CHAMP CD01) and yes, as you'd expect, the musicianship is of the highest standard. Piano accompaniment is again by Morag McAskill—sympathetic but never obtrusive (sorry, Morag, your surname is spelt differently on the two CDs!). Other accompanists are Dennis Morrison, an up and coming star of the keyboard, and Lex Keith. There are a couple of tunes by Douglas himself. I am attracted to the slow air 'Munloch Bay' but admit to a certain affinity with that area.

I should mention that both Alistair and Douglas give us some interesting background

details of tunes and composers.

As we are about to go to press I have received a CD by Muriel Johnstone's Band with music for 15 dances devised by Mary S. Brandon; also a couple of recordings from K. B. Smith's Kylin studio. More about all three in the next issue.

I am asked from time to time where one can obtain the CDs reviewed in "The Reel". Those strictly for country dancing are available from the Branch bookstall, see page 8. Also Stuart Forbes at Shielburn (see page 5) is very helpful and can seek out most CDs either from Highlander Music or other suppliers in Scotland. Exceptionally, the Atlantic Crossing CDs are obtainable in UK only from Peter Macfarlane, 99 Southend, Garsington, Oxford OX44 9DL, £13 each including P&P. If all else fails, contact me on 020 7286 1923.

John Laurie

LP Records

The Branch still has a number of LP records donated by a member who no longer dances. The musicians include the late Sir Jimmy Shand, Stan Hamilton, Rob Gordon, Jim MacLeod and many others. The records can be seen and bought for a small donation (50p each) at St. Columba's dances. If no one wants them they will be disposed of at the end of August 2001. Enquiries to John Laurie on 020 7286 1923.

MUSIC BOOKS

IN issue 234 of "The Reel" I recommended strongly a new publication by Muriel Johnstone; this provides a selection of traditional music that is suitable for class pianists. I am regularly asked about sources of music for alternative tunes, particularly by those new to playing for classes. Recently there has been an explosion in the number of publications of Scottish dance music, led principally by Doug Adamson at Deeay Music but also including Muriel herself and Christine Martin with her Taigh Na Teud Publications. London Branch published a popular selection of music featuring local composers in 1998 to celebrate the 75th Anniversary of the Society and, of course, the Newcastle Collection published by the Branch there in 1971 contains a host of widely used tunes.

Band leaders, class pianists and other musicians who play regularly often feel motivated to write some of their own tunes, and this ensures that the idiom of Scottish dance music lives on and develops. While Deeay have assisted several musicians in getting their music into print, their efforts have tended to be predominantly restricted to those already established and well-known.

I recently received a draft copy of tunes composed by Beryl McGuire (this is yet to be published), who has played regularly for classes in Edinburgh for many years. I believe that Beryl and others are to be encouraged in publishing their work and giving the wider community the opportunity to play their music. While computer production of music has improved legibility and ease of reading in recent years, careful attention still needs to be paid to layout and presentation, ensuring for example that 8-bar phrases are clear and rhythms easily sight read. Publishers and composers need also to ensure that harmonies are carefully and accurately prepared and not over complicated.

So Beryl and others, keep up the good work and do publish your work but also take care with the accuracy and presentation of the finished products.

David Hall

BOOK REVIEW

The Swinging Sporrán

by Andrew Campbell and Roddy Martine.
Published by St. Andrews Ball, Garden House,
Cheriton, Alresford, Hants. £16.

THIS is a revised edition of the book which was first issued in 1973. Although it is subtitled as a lighthearted guide, it does give very detailed instructions on how to perform the 20 dances contained therein. Much of the terminology is different from that used by the RSCDS, as is the style of dancing. In bars 1-2 of Petronella one "twirls". For the "swing", there are six different types of grip. In some reels, travel step is used for a circle round and back while in the Eightsome pas-de-basque is the norm.

As an example of how precise the instructions are, here are bars 9-16 of the Inverness Country Dance:

"The male takes the female's right hand in his right hand and leads her down the middle between the two lines of the set (four travel steps). The couple then turn inwards and, still holding hands, the male leads the female back up to the top of the set and presents her to her first corner (man No. 2), while himself facing his first corner (woman No. 3)".

The description of Teapots and the Wheel is amusing to say the least:

"Teapots is the name given to a particular movement used in the Duke and Duchess of Edinburgh (so called because of the correct posture which should be taken up by the dancer to resemble a teapot. The left or right hand should be placed on the hip so that the arm represents a handle, and the other arm should be elevated to form a spout. The left hand is rarely placed on the hip when dancing nowadays). The popularity of this dance has meant that the name 'teapots' is used for a similar movement in some other reels, namely the wheel (Teapot of four).

A teapot is a movement where three dancers, two of one sex and one of the other, raise and

join either their right hands or their left hands in a type of policeman's halt grip, and turn once round using the travel step."

There are three recently devised reels in the book; The Queen Mother's Reel, The Highland Millennium Reel and Roskill Millennium Reel.

The book also includes chapters on History and Dress and ends with "The guide to the Scottish Season", clearly aimed at a specific sector of society. Here is an extract from the paragraph headed "The people one meets":

"There are two types of highland laird. There are those who live in decaying castles and stalk deer and tourists. Then there are those who live in London and visit Scotland covered in tartan for two weeks every year. A large number of Scots became very wealthy in the 1920s by manufacturing alcohol or selling groceries. They promptly married their sons off well and bought highland estates, but prefer not to live on them."

So it is perhaps lighthearted after all!

The book is an essential guide for anyone who wishes to take up Reeling.

The publication of this book and the upsurge in Reeling and Ceilidh Dancing are a timely reminder to anyone who still thinks that there is only one way to perform and to enjoy Scottish Dancing.

This edition is published by Harry Verney who started the St. Andrew's Ball in 1975. Harry also founded the Wandsworth Reels, now LONDON REELS who dance about once a month on a Tuesday at St. Columba's Church Hall, Pont Street. For information and dates look at the website www.dosolutions.org or phone Toby Trustram Eve on 07092 040571.

John Laurie

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Regarding the future of the Society...

Hartley Wintney, Hants

Dear Jim

Letters from Wilson Nicol and Ron Taylor in issue 235 of "The Reel" reflect a widespread concern amongst members of the RSCDS as to the future of the Society. More and more I am being asked "What is to happen to the Society?". The various options and their presentation is making a confused picture for members and the long drawn out deliberations and slow decision making process is resulting in frustration, loss of interest and a loss of potential members. It is disturbing to note the negative assumption that inevitably membership will continue to drop.

Costs continue to escalate beyond our means. Despite a move some years ago to reduce the cost of Executive Council meetings, their overall cost has increased beyond the rate of inflation. Are the sizeable sub-committees and services on offer cost effective? We expect to see results from the Strategic Plan drawn up in March 1999 and yet we are no nearer adopting the proposed new standing committees and many of the proposed actions fall between existing committees.

At their meeting in May, the Executive Council *must* agree on a sound plan which can be adopted at the AGM in November. The plan must improve the decision making process, control costs, be simple to implement and above all show a positive approach to attracting new members. Andrew Kellett's proposal in "The Reel" may not satisfy everyone, but it offers a practical way forward. For the Society's sake I hope the Council reps will see fit to move the situation forward and adopt a proposal which can be implemented at an early date (preferably before the 2002 AGM) and reverse the downward trend in membership.

Yours sincerely,

Bruce Frazer
Examinations Convener

Worcester Park, Surrey

Dear Jim,

Having read the various items about the RSCDS constitution in issue 235, I agree with Andrew Kellett that we need a Management Board as soon as possible and that it should be voted for by Branch Delegates at an AGM.

As regards a two-tier system of membership, this sounds attractive at first, but needs much more consideration. I would be strongly tempted to take out Branch membership only as, due to domestic circumstances (my husband's health) and the fact that with poor eyesight I cannot drive, I can usually only attend local activities, but the Head Office publications are useful. I am on the committees of two clubs and find the Directory of Secretaries invaluable for answering enquiries about dancing in other areas. I agree with Ronald Taylor that it is unnecessary to have music in the subscription copies, as most local clubs, and even Croydon & District Branch RSCDS, dance to recorded music.

The other argument against two-tier membership is: Why should the people who do the hard work on Head Office committees, and often travel long distances to do so, have to pay a much higher subscription for doing this?

Yours sincerely,

Elizabeth Bennett

On the subject of tempi...

Stowmarket

Dear Jim,

I was very interested to read John Laurie's comments concerning tempi in current dancing

circles in issue 229 of "The Reel".

I started dancing in 1953 and danced three or four times a week until 1965 when work and family commitments took over. When I resumed dancing ten years ago I was annoyed at how slow the dances were. I took out my Jimmy Shand records and timed various dances:

Duke of Atholl's Reel	4mins 4 secs
Hamilton House	4 7
Duke of Perth	4 10
Road to the Isles	3 50
Glasgow Highlanders (9x32)	8 5

These were recorded at the Fifth Festival at the Leeds SCD Club in 1958.

I can only agree with the thoughts expressed that we are not attracting the younger people who prefer the quicker tempi offered by the reelers and Ceilidh dancers, with the sense of urgency and the feeling of the pulse racing.

Yours sincerely,

Fred Scott

And referring to a number of matters raised in issue 234...

Reading

Dear Jim,

The letters in issue No 234 of "The Reel" raised many aspects of SCD near to my heart.

Over 53 years ago, when I started dancing, it was a light hearted, social pursuit with plenty of friendly communication. I would not have continued had I not been made to feel welcome. Being welcomed included the other dancers making it easier for me to dance, giving hands, moving out of the way, minimising my path length and helping me to phrase the dances by letting me, at the earliest opportunity, see where I was intended to go and also looking at me. SCD was social first and foremost with everyone helping everybody else.

Dances were danced as a social whole, and instructions were used as guides with a limited flexibility, such as in 'New Rigged'. The aim of change was to make a dance flow, as Stephen Webb says in his letter "if it feels right it is right." If a dance feels right beginners will get more pleasure and be more likely to continue. Let us dance whole dances and not a string of four or eight bar individual bits and, while we are at it, let us dance a dance with seven other people. A set is a set and not an individual or a couple and is made up of people with varying capability and knowledge. A dance is an experience for every member of the set to enjoy whatever their standard.

Instructions were not set in stone and as I will show later it was common for dances to be changed, sometimes in their performance and less commonly in print. Many changes came about because of attempts at St. Andrew's to make dances feel right.

In a following illustration, it took over 20 years of the danced change before the printed change came about. Most changes occurred because part of the rank and file recognised that a given change would improve the flow of the dance, the change becoming established because the vast bulk of dancers, and not the official body, recognised that the dance had been improved. The new Poussette came in because the last movement had two bars and allowed some catching up. The five and six couple sets, advised in book 4, became the four couple set because the halls in Youth Hostels limited the size of the sets. Miss Milligan did not initiate these changes, but recognised the sense behind them. However I also believe we should not change dances for fashion but only to improve the flow.

Questions and points of detail arise from the letters in issue 234 that I, using my background, would like to comment on and expand.

Stephen Webb finished his letter asking "What is the difference between *move up* and *step up*? And can *move up* be *dance up*?" Taking the books 1 to 14 up until the 1950s the expression in the books for moving up was almost universally *move up*; by 1986 in revised versions the words used for the same movement were *step up*. In the late 40s I was taught to move up exactly as stepping up was later described by Miss Milligan in the first edition of 'Won't You Join the Dance' (4 General Appearance of the Dance - Team work). Hence, I believe that in SCD *move up* and *step up* are synonymous. For the most part I cannot remember the expression *dance up* being used until books 14 and 15. Except for 'She's Ower Young to Marry Yet', it was always used following four hands across when the 2nd couple retained hands and danced up to the top of the set while the dancing couple cast to 2nd place. 'She's Ower Young' was different but the movement was taken to symbolise the end of the wedding breakfast and the start of the dancing.

In the early days the bars for moving up were loosely defined but one was taught to move up according to helpful criteria. The 2nd couple waited until the dancing couple had cleared the area then they moved up in a manner that most assisted the dancing couple. Where possible they would move up on 3-4 so that it was clear to the dancing couple where they had to phrase their path to finish. It was also important to assist the dancing couple by ensuring their path was not extended. In the 'Birks of Invermay' moving up on 3-4 or 7-8 results in the same path length but only moving on 3-4 gives the dancing couple a clear finish point. With 'The New Rigged Ship' moving up on 33-34 will extend the path of the dancing couple in an already tight figure. Hence the moving up on 35-36.

The criterion of assisting the dancing couple has now been discarded by the RSCDS. In the first eight bars of Mrs Stewart's Jig, Book 35, the 1st couple set, the lady casts off two places followed by her partner, she then crosses the set and casts up one place behind the men to 2nd man's place, 2nd couple having stepped up. Everybody I know sees the advantage of the 2nd couple stepping up on bars 5-6, once the 1st man is out of the way, and thus giving a clear target for the 1st couple. This includes those who criticise if you do not wait until bars 7-8 to step up as the book says. Stepping up on bars 7-8 leaves the dancing couple wondering will you or won't you. Stepping up on 5-6 does no one any harm and is good manners as it is of advantage to the 1st couple and hence improves the dance.

Many of the letters quote that the instructions say this or that for bars such and such. Dance instructions cannot include the fine detail of the dance and must leave a lot to the experience and knowledge of the dancers. By example and explanation the experienced should pass on their feel for the dance to the less experienced.

Exceptionally, the instructions have sometimes also been changed to match the improved dance. For example:

Miss Milligan, in the 1st Edition of 'Won't You Join the Dance' changed the phrasing of the tight figure in bars 33-36 in 'The New Rigged Ship' by taking two bars from the crossing figure in bars 25-32. i.e. she changed: "Cross and cast for four bars twice" to: "Cross and cast (three bars), cross again and cast (three bars) and be leading up the centre (two

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

bars)” thus giving two extra bars to the leading up, casting and crossing figure previously only having four bars.

She went on to say that ‘The flow (*too*) is much smoother and pleasant if the formation is thus phrased. The book instructions have never changed!

Another example of change is ‘The Birks of Invermay’. In Book 16 (1951, 1956 and the 1961 editions), Miss Milligan’s 101 (October 1957 and the 1970 editions) and my version of Pilling (2nd Edition 1958) the instructions for bars 1 to 8 are: 1-4 1st man and 2nd woman turn each other with both hands and return to places.

5-8 1st woman and 2nd man do the same. However right from 1951 the Birks was always danced with the 1st lady and 2nd man turning for three bars back to place and then all three couples coming in together on bar 8 for the promenade yet that is not how it was in any of the above books. Almost the whole dancing community has been ignoring the book in favour of the gentle flow into the promenade. Recently I have found that the instructions in the more recent revisions are the same as I was originally taught. I have not seen any publicity regarding the revision to the form of the dance that most dancers have been using. I do not know any dancer who throws away their pocket edition and buys a new one with every new revision.

Amongst the questions that arise are “Should I, and most others, have been criticised in the past for not dancing the dance as per the instructions when the RSCDS now recognise the coming in for the promenade on bar 8?” Also “How does the argument that ‘It is not what it says in the book and will confuse the universality of Scottish Dancing’ now stand up with such unpublicised changes?”

Roy Clowes changed Postie’s Jig, which originally was turn instead of set for the first two bars. The original turn made the less than agile late at the end of the half figure of eight.

In 1954 Hugh Foss published J B Milne. In bars 17-32, the 2nd and 3rd couples were required to set first and then cross the first three times and to cross and set the fourth time. Soon after, this changed to four lots of crossing first and then setting, which allowed dancing on automatic pilot and less chaos. In 1969 ‘Pilling’s’ successors consolidated the change. Because of Pilling’s popularity, tacitly supported by Paul Bond, the change has stuck. Some are now trying to revert to the original but let’s stick with the Pilling version rather than confuse.

In the 1930 edition of Book 4 with music, the Poussette is illustrated after each 2 bars.

At the start:- Both couples holding both hands as now except in the centre.

After 2 bars:- Both couples are as now on the appropriate sides of the dance, but opposite each other having got there by turning for two bars.

After 4 bars:- Both couples having turned into a line across the dance all facing their own sides of the dance. The 1st lady and the other man are outside the lines of the dance.

After 6 bars:- Both couples are in the same position as after 2 bars but having changed places with their partner, ladies now above the men.

After 8 Bars:- Back in the centre, on own side, but having progressed.

When I started dancing, depending on where you were dancing, you had to expect both this form and the modern form, which flows better into other figures and gives a spare bar at the end to catch up. However I have never seen an announcement by the RSCDS that the original is the wrong way to dance the Poussette,

so presumably it is still acceptable.

There were also several letters in issue 234 on the subject of warming up. In all my years of dancing without warming up I have never suffered an injury until after at least four dances and more generally towards the end of the evening. Warming up would have had no effect. The important thing for me has been muscle specific exercises to strengthen the damaged areas. I often do these, unnoticed towards the end of an evening’s dancing. I have never experienced a warm up session that addresses my particular damaged muscles. Because of damaged knees and feet I now intersperse my steps with a few walking steps.

Yours in dancing,

Douglas Dean

Moving on to the pre-booking of dances...

Hemel Hempstead

Dear Jim,

In the last issue I was pleased to see Michael Copeman being brave—or foolhardy—enough to tackle the tricky question of pre-booking of dances, a practice seemingly to be on the increase.

Like him, I dislike it. Why do people do it? Is it mainly a fear of being left out or of having to do a favourite dance with a partner of last resort? It is easy for those like myself who are male and reasonably competent dancers (those who know me well may quarrel with the second assertion though I hope not with the first) but for women who are usually in the majority and may be shrinking violets (though I haven’t met many of those) pre-booking offers at least some dances with a partner of choice. The same consideration can of course apply to men, but usually less frequently. A free-for-all will tend to result in the more attractive, experienced and—dare I say—aggressive dancers doing best and a newcomer arriving without a partner, or not having pre-booked dances with a partner, will be at a disadvantage. It is partly a question of expectations. Someone tempted into Scottish Country Dancing by one of the ceilidhs run so successfully by the London RSCDS will probably be surprised at the relative formality of a Branch annual ball; conversely, anyone accustomed to the Caledonian Ball circuit where dance cards are filled up over cocktails or during dinner will find the lack of pre-booking unusual.

What is the answer? I suggest a good British compromise. Let us book some dances, perhaps a third or a quarter but certainly no more than half, with favoured partners but keep some free to allow for spontaneity. One of the most enjoyable aspects of dancing in my experience is what I might call the serendipity factor: someone arrives whom one had not expected to see but would very much like to dance with. What a shame if there are no free dances—and attempting to ‘re-negotiate’ with pre-booked partners is hardly acceptable behaviour.

I think it comes down to a trade-off. If one does not pre-book every dance there is always some risk of having to sit out. But I think this is a worthwhile price to pay for the element of spontaneity which I find one of the attractive things about SCD. One occasionally comes across dance events where nearly everyone sits with, and only dances in, their own group and has no interaction with ‘outsiders’. I find this very sad; and, dare I say, so would have Miss Milligan?

Yours sincerely,

Julian Mason

Can you read this?...

Worcester Park, Surrey

Dear Jim,

I received “The Reel” today, nice and early, but I have difficulty with the small print. The front page is nice and clear, so I was very disappointed when I opened the magazine and found it as densely printed as ever. Simon Wales asks on page 2 that members read various articles on the structure of the Society and give the Committee their views. This is likely to take me some time.

I have developed presbyopia in recent years (the condition that causes most people to need reading glasses after about the age of 45). Given the average age of the Branch membership I cannot be the only sufferer!

I receive journals from other organisations but “The Reel” is optically the worst. If it has to be printed in this way I may have to photocopy and enlarge it myself.

Yours sincerely,

Elizabeth Bennett

[“The Reel” should contain 12 pages but recently, due to the amount of material available, the Branch has absorbed the extra costs of producing and posting 16 page issues. Even so, on pages 10-11 some material has been delayed. Technically, the print size could be increased but at the expense of the amount of material. Please send me your views about these conflicting aspects. Ed.]

Would you like some tapes?...

Dunstable

Dear Jim,

For over thirty years I have recorded bands at dances and, in the early days, used reel-to-reel machines, which I am now pensioning off! I am reluctant to put the many reels of tape in the local skip and wonder if any reader would like them? The recordings are generally in stereo on 7” spools, but a very early one of Andrew Rankine is in mono. If anyone is interested, they can phone me on 01525 220830 to arrange collection.

Yours sincerely,

John Purcell

A thank you...

Hildesheim, Germany

Dear Jim,

I read “The Reel” with a lot of interest and I would be pleased if you would include the following.

After settling down in a new town, and finding a new job, it is now time to say thank you to the London Branch.

It is one and a half years ago that I danced in the demonstration class of the London Branch for the six months I was staying in London. I never thanked them all, especially Dave Hall, for allowing me to dance in his class.

Fourteen years ago I started SCD in Germany with Almut Groenke, to whom I owe a lot because she encouraged me to go to several St. Andrews Summer Schools and to many weekend schools on the continent. So I have seen many people dancing, but never before a team like that in London with such a homogenous style. I very much enjoyed dancing with the team.

I even had the honour to dance in a demonstration set at Polesden Lacey in 1999.

So now I hereby thank the demonstration class and all my friends for my nice time in London.

Yours sincerely,

Paula Rodenacker

[Paula, I shall make sure Almut receives a copy of this issue. Ed.]

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Finally, can you help?

Pinner, Middlesex

Dear Jim,

We are all familiar with two left feet. However since the Branch dance at Wandsworth on Saturday 24th February I have had two left hands (black leather gloves). Has anyone discovered they have two right hands?

Mary Stoker
Tel: 020 8866 2207

Barking, Essex

Dear Jim,

I was interested to read the article in the last issue of "The Reel" regarding the Monday evening socials at St. Columba's.

On the subject of this Church of Scotland can anyone recall Jean, wife of Robert Evans (better known as Jane Shaw, children's author) who would have attended St. Columba's from the late 1930s to the early 1950s? Sadly Jean died in November but enthusiasts are preparing a book about her work and many of her loyal readers would be interested to hear anyone's memories. My own first "encounter" with St. Columba's was reading of it as a child in the first of the *Susan* series.

Yours sincerely,

Ruth Redfern

[If anyone can help please contact Ruth at 107 Greenslade Road, Barking, Essex IG11 9XF. Tel: 020 8594 1375. Ed.]

DANCERS ON THE SILVER SCREEN

FIFTY of us gathered on the morning of July 25th 2000 in the somewhat dilapidated buildings of a once august college in Kensington. Some had travelled gallantly from afar. [*But I thought you lived up the road in Maida Vale, Rosalind? Ed.*] Others had abandoned work for the day. All of us had risen at the crack of dawn, laden with kilts, sporrans, sashes and glamorous dresses. We nervously awaited the day ahead.

We were to dance in a film. A follow-up to 'Four Weddings and a Funeral', called 'Crush'. Andie MacDowell, Imelda Staunton and Anna Chancellor are a trio of women living in a dull provincial town who spend much of their mental energy mulling over their unsuccessful love lives. Searching for entertainment, they attend a Rotary Club Scottish Country Dance which the director's notes describe as full of 'late middle-aged and older people'. (Yes, dear readers, we were they!). Whilst tiny scenes were played out by the stars, we were to dance the 'St. Bernard's Waltz' and 'Strip The Willow' and the 'Canadian Barn Dance' at a later, more rustic scene.

Officially classified as 'the background' (our amour propre was certainly taking a hammering!), we were to attend from 7.30 a.m. to 7.30 p.m. For this we would receive the princely sum of £50. But we agreed; participation was all that mattered. They needed our skills! Nearly all of us, concealed the glitter of ambition in our eyes.

Fortified by breakfast (one mounted an Olympic style podium in front of a trailer and shouted one's order into its dark depths) we were hurried along to our changing rooms by Gus, the 'Third Assistant Director'. There ensued a controlled frenzy of sash and buckle swapping and battles with evening gowns which had mysteriously shrunk over the summer. (I cannot report on the tribulations endured in the men's changing room) and then we were off to the make-up room to wait in long queues for the ministrations of the beauticians. A pleasant enough experience, but it was a little disconcerting that they did not seem to think it necessary to make us look older! Now in full and glittering regalia (surely more than just 'background' now?), we were eventually admitted to the set—a tartan bedecked ballroom 'some-where in Chipping Campden in the Cotswolds'. Giant light-filled balloons hovered above, metal camera tracks littered the floor, and the film crew wove amongst us on endless mysterious missions. How would we find room to dance?

Finally our stars appeared and action commenced. We were to circle round the ballroom in the 'St. Bernard's Waltz' with Imelda and Andie, and Anna and Peter Knight, dancing together, in our midst. We took our places (was it possible that some of us were concerned about proximity to the stars?) and, nervously, we began.

We soon learned that filming was more about stopping than starting dancing. Retakes echoed to cries of 'Cut' and 'Number Ones' (i.e. starting positions again). We sighed and shifted from foot to foot. Make-up artistes descended on the stars, tweaking, curling and powdering. Even we, the 'background', had jackets brushed and shining foreheads blotted into matt submission. Even our dancing came in for some diplomatic criticism, we were asked to let our lines 'flow around a little' ... anathema to our trained minds! But finally it was finished—It was pronounced a 'good gate'.

Our 'Strip The Willow' was an altogether more dramatic affair. The three stars were to be in a set, exchanging bitching and risqué confidences as the dance progressed. After a particularly dramatic revelation from Andie, a shocked Anna lets go of her birling partner, who spins away, crashing into the other sets, creating a domino effect of the falling bodies of cleverly interspersed stunt persons.

We other dancers, respectable Rotarians all, were called upon to start back, showing profound disapproval of such ungenteeled behaviour. As we surveyed the mayhem our faces were to show a blend of 'horrified from Cheltenham Spa' and 'shocked from Tunbridge Wells'. It was, dear reader, a tough assignment! This scene took even longer than the previous one, since it had to be shot from several angles. It was amazing to see how much time and effort were required to create just a few minutes of film. With no bones broken,



Stars take a break in the filming

but our faces aching from expressing Blimpish disapproval, we departed the set for tea and doughnuts (food was abundant throughout the day) before embarking on the final barn dance scene.

For the barn dance—at the same venue, attended by the same Rotarians—the ballroom was transformed by bales of hay, chequered tablecloths and strings of coloured paper lanterns. We dancers, metamorphosed into rustic beings, clad in jeans, check shirts and cowboy boots. Five minutes concentrated instruction from Peter Knight and off we cavorted whilst Imelda, adrift in a middle-aged sea, had the briefest of encounters with an estranged Anna.

At this point we proved our worth as dancers, for we had to move in time without music so that the dialogue could be heard. We succeeded but it is a curiously numbing experience. We also had a bitter lesson in the vagaries of fame. Some of our number were directed to sit unnoticed on bales of hay as we others whirled round past the camera. Poor unfortunates, we thought. Not at all! Kathleen and Brian Cresswell of the Shene SCD Group, suddenly assumed starring roles and were directed to mime silent chat with the lonely Imelda. Cameras homed in on their contented faces as we danced past unnoticed!

Suddenly it was over. The film crew relaxed and we realised what tension reigns during film-making. Thanked by one endlessly patient director, John Mackay, we were soon queuing up for our brown envelopes. Our brush with glory was over.

But this was not the end. Two days later we were recalled to redo the barn dance scene. A scratch had been found on the film! One hesitates to adopt a 'whodunnit' mentality, but the thought did occur—was it one of us? Was some dancer's thirst for fame so unquenchable that it was not slaked by 12 hours under the arc lights?

Who knows? Our faces revealed nothing as we reassembled amidst the hay bales. The producer did assure us that such accidents are not unknown. We sighed in relief and, boots a-flying, gave the cameras one last sparkling barn dance.

It is anticipated the film will be released in October. Hopefully our dancing will have given it what was wanted. Despite the long hours, it was an experience not to be missed, full of intriguing insights and fun.

Rosalind Zuridis

POETRY CORNER

REMINISCENCES OF THE LONDON BRANCH PRELIMINARY COURSE 2000

In "The Reel" we saw an advert for the Preliminary test,
To improve our teaching standard we considered was our quest.
But our confidence was shattered as we were pulled apart,
In lesson one we soon found out – it's not for faint of heart!
The first day there were ten of us who came to learn our fate,
But sadly two fell by the way, and now there's only eight.
Remembering twelve dances new was very hard we found,
Now is it 'allemande' to end or is it 'six hands round'?

And what comes after 'set and turn', when you dance The Isle,
Is it 'rights and lefts' or 'Now don't forget to smile'?

We slowly gained in confidence, our legs now ceased to shake,
As we got to know each other and friends began to make.
Each week we have some homework to help with the exam,
To try and find the answers the manual we must cram.
'For dancing is a joyous thing,' Miss Milligan once said,
'But rigid uniformity could kill the spirit dead.'

It's hard to reconcile these quotes which from the manual come,
After all it's 'social dancing' which started out as fun!
We once enjoyed The Duke of Perth but now we wonder why,
If you could see what we go through to reach a standard high.

We had to learn the history of the RSCDS,
And as you might imagine, this caused us some distress.
It started out in '23 with Ysobel and Jean
There were *no* collected dances till *they* came on the scene.
Interest grew throughout the world – it spread like anything,
In '51 a charter Royal was granted by the King.
There is a Secretariat to send out information,
Though when we sent an e-mail – did it reach it's destination?
We needed gen on branches and affiliated groups,
But pigeons would be quicker than these electronic routes.
'Dancing is a joyous thing' believe this if you may,
'But if *you* don't close in third my dear, you'll never pass', they say.
We crossed our t's and dotted i's – our heads were in a whirl,
'For when you do a reel of three, don't end it in a twirl!'
With rhythm, phrasing, and technique, we sweated through the day,
With travelling steps both fore and back, in reel and then strathspey.
'Now bend your knee and point your toe, give hands at shoulder height,'
We also learnt skip change of step – 'Now don't forget the flight.'
'Just teach a travelling step,' they said, 'And ladies chain formation,
Now walk it through, don't talk too much, just give a demonstration.'
To recap dances from the top we really found a bind,
Because despite our swotting, they'd go clean from our mind.
We really practised long and hard until we thought we knew it,
But when we stood before the class, we nearly always blew it.
We had a live musician, no CDs, tapes or band,
But we forgot to bring her in by saying, "Ready, and..."
And should we pass the Prelim test – after all this pain
Take the Full Certificate!?! – You'd better think again!

Mary Quinton

THE FOXHILL ALPHABET

[A good time was clearly had by all at last summer's annual Scottish Country Dance Week at Foxhill Court, Cheshire, taught by Eleanor Warburton. Thank you, Eleanor, for sending this poem composed by Elizabeth Opie of Devon. Eleanor tells me she is off to India this summer so there will not be a Dance Week at Foxhill Court this year. Perhaps in 2002? Ed.]

F stands for Fellowship, **F**ootwork and **F**un, **F**ood that is cooked to perfection.

O for the **O**pen-ness we **O**pies felt right from our first warm reception.

X is for **eX**ercise (good for us all) – and **eX**cellent service and care.

H stands for **H**elen's hard work in the house, **H**appiness, **H**umour we share.

I is for **I**an's importance and his friendly smile (he shops for our Ice-cream as well).

L Learning new dances and keeping straight lines ...

L ... and **L**istening for Eleanor's bell.

Eleanor's energy added to these, her endless enthusiasm too,

Give us a week we will never forget,

Dear Foxhill, we're grateful to you.

Elizabeth Opie

A MISSED OPPORTUNITY

(A short story based on a real life incident)

TOM stood looking round the hall. He loved to be early for a Scottish Country Dance. To stand and watch the hall fill up with dancers, and to sense the rise of excitement and laughter was almost as good as the dance itself.

More and more dancers came in. Then the Band arrived and set up and at 7.20 the MC arrived – ready with notes for the recaps. By 7.25 everything was ready to go.

Tom looked down the list of dances and then around the hall, thinking of possible partners. As he did so his eye caught a middle aged couple. The man had his dancing shoes on but the lady was wearing her outdoor shoes. Her right leg was heavily bandaged and she carried a walking stick. He knew the couple slightly. They were helpful and knew most of the dances. He had danced with the lady before and found her a good partner.

Tonight, however, her injury would keep her from dancing. She would have to sit out and watch while others danced. Tom made up his mind to sit out at least one dance with her. It would give her company and enable him to get to know her better.

At that moment the band struck up for the first dance. Tom chose a partner and they stood in their lines. The first half passed quickly.

At half time Tom looked for the lady. She was sitting with her husband and they had other company. He looked again at the programme for the second half. There was one dance he did not know. That would be the one to sit out.

The dance duly arrived and he made his way to where the lady was sitting. She was on her own.

But the MC indicated a need for a fourth couple in a bottom set. One of Tom's friends came and asked if he would be her partner. Tom agreed to be fourth couple. They struggled through the dance.

The rest of the programme came and went and Tom's good intentions went unfulfilled.

After the last dance when the dancers were leaving, the lady hobbled to the door on her stick.

"I'm sorry you've hurt your leg" Tom said to her. "I really meant to sit out a dance with you".

"Don't worry" the lady said, "I won't be dancing for a while. Maybe next time!"

Tom went home, feeling sad that he had let the chance to show kindness pass by. He hoped that there *would* be a next time and that when it came he would carry out his good intentions

Anon

THE REEL/JIG POUSSETTE

WHY ARE men enjoined to start the poussette on the left foot? It is much easier to maintain the flow of steps by starting with the right foot. Many dancers have found it unnecessary to start with the left foot and now don't bother to change feet. The time is ripe to accept that there is no choreographic necessity to persist with a foot change which many men find difficult and even off-putting. This is not the first time that the need has been questioned. About ten years ago there was correspondence in "The Reel" in which it was argued that there was no valid reason for men to have to start on the left foot. The letter aroused considerable interest with replies from senior figures in the RSCDS. These replies are reproduced below:

"On inventing the rectangular poussette, or taking its essentials from J M Duthie, the Society was at pains to decry the 'waltz round' poussette then current. The new figure is surely much more in keeping with the spirit of Scottish country dancing; but we now know that the 'waltz round' has been the only form of the poussette since it was introduced from the cotillon, (The old lady who conveniently remembered the poussette danced with a two-handed hold is irrelevant, since the early waltz used this hold.)

"Duthie's poussette differed from the Society's version mainly in having all the dancers begin with the right foot *Vir Tutis*' (the earlier Reel correspondent) experience with skilled partners confirms that it is not really for the ladies' benefit that the men are enjoined to begin awkwardly with their left feet. The intention was clearly to keep the partners' feet extending in the same direction – a feature introduced by the waltz and continued by subsequent couple dances, but which is unfamiliar in country dancing.

"Thus the Society was equally determined to supersede the 'waltz round' poussette, and to preserve a conspicuously alien feature. Feet extending in the same direction seem appropriate to our dancing only where that is essential, when dancers face each other and move together with sideways or side-to-side steps – especially in strathspey poussettes. This also makes these figures neatly fit the steps, which is always pleasing. A rectangular poussette begun with the right foot does just

that, and there seems every reason to allow men that pleasure."

"John Duthie invented the modern figure in 1925 and originally he did not want the men to commence with their left foot. However, in the 'Complete Guide to Scottish Country Dancing' which he co-authored with Allie Anderson, the change of foot for the men is specifically mentioned. This book also included two different poussettes: the normal poussette, the way we dance it today, and the Border Poussette which has a quarter turn on bar 6, a quarter turn on bar 7 and fall back on bar 8. This of course is easier to dance, looks nicer and, I understand, is the way John Duthie originally intended the figure to end."

"By the time the Society was formed, the poussette was commonly danced using a ballroom hold. The men, therefore, started on their left foot as they would do in a waltz. The formation, like our modern poussettes, could either be all-round or progressive. Each took eight bars of music with the couples dancing round each other.

"Research showed, however, that this was not the traditional form of the poussette. A letter dated 25th January 1802 to William Watson a farmer at Blantyre from his dancing teacher throws light on this. It clearly states that the poussette was to be danced with a two-hand hold, (*no mention of feet?*). This letter is the earliest reference to a poussette in Scotland and can now be found in the Atholl Collection. The Society decided that it would revert to this original hold for the poussette but retained the man starting on his left foot which had by then become familiar and well established (*in the waltz hold*).

"It is interesting that the Society justifies the left footed poussette purely on the grounds of what it believes to be traditionally correct. The questions of whether it is easier to perform or more aesthetically pleasing than a right-footed poussette do not appear to concern the Society."

I have communicated this information to the Society's Archivist asking for any further information from the archives. His response was:

"I have searched thoroughly in the Society Archive and can find no additional information to that which you already have. There is, however, a letter from a Stirling

dancing master to Mrs Stewart in reply to a question from her regarding the form of the poussette. He replied that it was done with a two-handed hold (as we do now) but gave no details regarding phrasing or foot movements.

"'Poussette' is a quadrille term and I imagine that it was borrowed from the French Country Dance which in turn probably borrowed it from the English Country Dance where it was known as the 'draw'. In this movement two couples moved around one another in a regular (probably rectangular) pattern by pushing and pulling with both hands joined. In the quadrilles, the poussette would be danced probably by one couple in the manner of that in La Russe, and therefore would be a rectilinear shaped formation. Certainly pas de basque as we dance it in SCD would not have been the step used."

The poussette is a symmetric figure with first man and second lady tracing out the same pattern, just as second man and first lady do. If the men start on the left foot, the first man has an awkward quarter turn crossing right foot over left on bar four and similarly the second man on bar two. Starting on the right foot these quarter turns become natural and equate to the quarter turns by the women (first women on bar two and second women on bar four). Some may argue that it is untidy having the jeté stick out in different directions if all start on the right foot, but both dancers start on the right foot for four bar two handed turns. In any case if the jeté is so obvious, then the step is obtrusive, detracting from the dance's grace.

It is difficult enough for many men to dance continuously without having the added and unnecessary complication of changing feet. Such acrobatics are fine for good dancers to show off their prowess but Scottish Country Dancing is primarily social dancing, and the easier we can make it the better. It is clear that in the early days there was no established tradition regarding starting feet in the two-handed poussette, so to make the change is not breaking with tradition.

With one fewer hurdle to overcome might this not help to bring more men into Scottish Country Dancing. It seems a simple and sensible change for the Society to make.

Wilson Nicol