



the reel

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MAY TO AUGUST 2003

OUR LADIES WON THE CUP! Demonstration team in Newcastle

The Newcastle Festival of Scottish Country Dancing is held traditionally in February. This year the 19th Festival, organised by the Newcastle-Upon-Tyne and District Branch, was held on Saturday 8th February 2003 at the usual venue, Emmanuel College, Gateshead.

The Festival attracts mixed, ladies and children's teams from all over the country and members of the demonstration team represented London Branch.

Most of the team drove up on Friday to a Travel Lodge just north of Catterick and gathered at the Travellers Rest, a delightful country pub in Skeeby where we enjoyed a traditional meal in pleasant surroundings. We returned in the morning for a wholesome breakfast, as we had last year, a very civilised start to the day. It was reassuring to see the Angel of the North monitor our progress en route to Gateshead. We arrived at Emmanuel College in good time and settled into our dressing room which we remember from previous years.

For several weeks we had been preparing under the eagle eye of Dave Hall who managed to engender a team spirit whilst tempering individuality.

The practice areas were all in use so our rehearsal took place in the main entrance foyer where we had to negotiate a column. This proved quite useful as our medley included an extract from "Honour the Piper".

The proceedings commenced at noon with a general warm up dance, The Montgomeries' Rant. Not only did this serve to co-ordinate our minds and feet but also gave us the opportunity to meet and renew acquaintances from previous years on the dance floor.

The first item was the Ladies Open and our ladies' team danced The College Hornpipe,



followed by The Golden Wedding Strathspey to the music of Dave Hall. Their dancing was inspirational and they were duly awarded first place by the adjudicator, Mrs Helen Frame from Irvine.

Our Mixed and Medley teams also did extremely well but were not rewarded with silverware. Angela Young accompanied the mixed team, while Neil Esslemont on pipes and Dave Hall on piano and accordion provided the music for the medley section. The Team were delighted to have their ranks supplemented by the lovely Highland Dancing of Neil's girlfriend Amanda in our medley. The winning teams were Alba from Glasgow for the mixed team and the Dunedin Dancers from Edinburgh for the

medley.

The afternoon was a blend of animated dancing and lively music and it was a delight to see the junior teams, so keen and full of enthusiasm, particularly as they represent the future of SCD. The winning team was the Aireyhall Dancers from Aberdeen.

After the final prize giving and concluding remarks from Helen Frame we repaired to the pub across the road for a quick meal before returning to the evening dance.

The hall is a vast unwelcoming space with few redeeming features. However it had been pleasingly decorated by the local committee and the combination of the Colin Dewar SCD Band and the eager and indefatigable dancers made it a wonderful evening and a suitable end to a most enjoyable day. It is hard to believe that it all took place in only one day.

Making our way to yet another Travel Lodge, this time near Newcastle, we prepared for the celebration party and lengthy discussion session. Rising at the crack of lunch, we enjoyed a hearty breakfast and then made our various ways home, some via Scotland.

Congratulations to Dave Hall and the members of the Demonstration Class and thanks to Catriona Stewart for the arrangements and to the many who helped make the event such a success.

Jeff Robertson

ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING

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 20th June 2003**. The agenda appeared in the last issue of *The Reel*. Tea will be served at 6 p.m. and the meeting will commence at 7 p.m. There will be dancing after the meeting.

DEM TEAM'S FAREWELL TO DAVE AND JUDY



The Team, including almost all present members and some faces from the past, bade farewell to Dave and Judy Hall on 11th February. For his last class, Dave led a typically varied and vigorous programme of complex dances in rapid succession, reluctantly conceding to end a few minutes early so that the team secretary, Catriona Stewart, could say a few words and a presentation be made.

Dave and Judy served the team for some 19 years between them. Judy was always a regular

attender at class, a willing volunteer for dems and also took up numerous other duties ranging from serving on the sub-committee to sewing hems on other folks' white dresses! More than one man in the team had cause to be grateful for her reliable memory and thank her for a timely, lady-like but firm push in the right direction, or a polite, "It's left hand, actually," in the course of a dem. Her quiet but significant contributions will be missed greatly.

Catriona recalled the first time Dave came to class and that his feet caught her eye and that she was impressed that 'a man can actually dance as well as us women'! The acme of praise, all our readers will agree (dancing women are only interested in men from the knees down). One of the "hall"marks of Dave's tenure as teacher, which began in September 1998, was the great confidence he exuded over the ability of the team to dance whatever it was he thought they should be doing, even if certain members harboured

private doubts on their own abilities. These were overcome by his, apparently effortless, accurate demonstrations of what was required and encouraging comments of the "There, that's quite easy really" variety. And it worked, for the most part (though the Celtic Reel remains a mystery to at least one member).

Dave encourages people to have confidence in themselves and to dance beyond their own perception of their ability. Inspirational teaching comes naturally to him. That combined with his serious work ethic, deep knowledge of and passion for the dance and his own musical abilities, meant that his dem class worked constructively together and the successes at the Newcastle Festival in 2001 and 2002 are a testament to that. Our European cousins will no doubt soon be the happy beneficiaries of his particular brand of enthusiastic and rigorous teaching once he is established in Brussels.

Jeff Robertson and James Fairbairn

BRANCH MATTERS

We have just had one of the major events of the season, the South East Branches Jubilee Ball to celebrate the 80th anniversary of the Society. Just under 200 dancers attended a very enjoyable dance to music by an augmented Sound Company. Our members on the Management Board together with Jean Martin, Chairman of the Society, left a meeting in Edinburgh to attend.

Plans are starting to be made for next season's events – the day school, classes, Branch dances, etc. We are planning to keep the number of Branch dances to the same as this past season. The format of having the Burns' supper and ceilidh dancing on the same night was very successful.

Any member of the committee would be grateful to hear of any ideas and suggestions of events we can run or perhaps a way to improve existing events. How about helping on the Branch committee as we may have a couple of vacancies to fill?

We will again be out in force at the London Squares Day on Sunday 8th June – there will be dancing in Edwardes Square in the morning and Queen's Gate Gardens in the afternoon. Come along and support the dancing and at the same time see some of the London Squares which are not generally open to the public. You can get a ticket which covers all the squares which are open and there is a wide variety of entertainment.

There are a number of candidates preparing for the Preliminary and Full Certificate Exams in the summer and we wish them well.

We are considering a change to the format of the children's events next year and would appreciate any suggestions how improvements may be made. We feel that this is a vital part in the life of Scottish Country Dancing and feel sad about the dwindling numbers attending the dances.

Owen Meyer

BRANCH 75th ANNIVERSARY

The exact date on which London Branch was founded is not known, but according to *The Reel* no 145 (1978) 'we are fairly certain that the date is some time during the latter part of 1929 and we are absolutely certain that the Branch was in existence by the spring of 1930'. It would therefore be appropriate to celebrate our 75th Anniversary during the 2004-05 season.

We would welcome suggestions from members on how best to celebrate. Please bring your ideas to the AGM on 20th June or send them to Owen Meyer (address etc on page 2) before that date.

MEMBERSHIP WORKING GROUP

This group was set up by the Society's Management Board to consider all aspects of membership structure. Although the official deadline for submissions has passed, members are still invited to send their views to HQ or to Keith Oughton, Convenor of the Group, on oughton@clara.net

JEAN MILLIGAN MEMORIAL FUND

Headquarters have copies of a new guidance leaflet regarding the Jean Milligan Memorial Fund. The leaflet gives clear guidelines regarding how to apply, and although it is not in itself an application form, it gives clear suggestions as to how a budget should be presented and the information that is required.

RSCDS MANAGEMENT BOARD

The Society's new management structure has been running for six months. During that time the Management Board has met on three occasions and the three Management Committees have been getting down to business.

The members of the Management Board have given a good deal of attention to their role as charity trustees. On Friday 4th April they had a half day briefing from the Society's solicitors, Lindsay WS. This covered existing and proposed legislation concerning the way Scottish charities should operate. As you would expect, the RSCDS has always been careful to comply with the law, and the Board has introduced internal controls and procedures to keep the Society up to date with best practice for the governance of a charity.

The Board has also begun to address some of the key issues affecting the Society. The anomalous position of Headquarters members, the decline in membership (membership is likely to fall by 7% this year) and the perception, especially among some overseas Branches, that membership does not give good value for money. The Society's website is being redesigned and improved to include a password protected page for members. Inconsistencies in the constitution are being ironed out in draft. Thought is being given to the AGM so that members can get the most out of the weekend. A review of membership structure is underway, and a more streamlined strategic plan is being produced. Improvements are being planned to our Headquarters building so that better use can be made of the basement. The Management Committees, too, are beginning to make headway.

General Purposes and Finance

There is a projected surplus for the year of about £20,000. Consideration is being given to moving the end of the Society's financial year from 30th June to 31st March. This would make it easier to prepare the accounts for circulation to members, as at present this work clashes with Summer School.

Education and Training

A revised examination structure and the appointment of new examiners are priorities for this Committee. Sadly the Easter School for young dancers had to be cancelled, but another is being planned for 2004, possibly in Cambridge. The article in the last issue of *The Reel* on the Hill Family's experiences at St. Andrews created much interest and it has been reproduced on the website. (Invariably *The Reel* is mentioned at Management Board meetings, not always favourably, but it certainly has impact.)

Membership Services

The need to improve communications between Headquarters and Branches and between Headquarters and members is a recurring theme. Branches are being advised to produce at least a one-page newsletter for their members.

There are many more ongoing projects, such as the children's medal tests and video recording the MacNab dances. Hopefully there will soon be some results to show for all this effort, but what impact is it likely to have on the dance floor? Well, it is being suggested that with effect from the recording for Book 43 (the 2003 subscription book) dances requiring 3rd and 4th couples to begin on the opposite side of the set should start with only one chord. Now that is something controversial.

Andrew Kellett

80th ANNIVERSARY BALL



Our President Mary Stoker with RSCDA Chairman Jean Martin and her husband Iain

The Southeast Branches celebrated the 80th Anniversary of the RSCDS in fine style with a Ball at the Watford Colosseum on Saturday 5th April. The event was supported by Borders, Bournemouth, Brighton, Cambridge, Croydon, London, Milton Keynes, Oxfordshire, Tunbridge Wells and Winchester Branches. Members enjoyed a wonderful evening dancing to superb music from Sound Company, who were joined by guest musicians Sandy Legget and Ian Adamson from Scotland for the occasion.

Mary Stoker proposed a toast to the Society and Jean Martin, RSCDS Chairman, responded

and wished the Southeast Branches continued success. We were delighted that Jean and her husband, Ian, together with the Chairman Elect, Stewart Adam with his wife, Chris, could be with us, especially as they had flown down from Edinburgh that afternoon immediately after a four-hour Management Board meeting.

Whether dancers had come from near or far, everyone at the Ball agreed that it had been a magnificent evening and a fitting tribute to the generations of members in the Southeast who had served the Society so well.

Andrew Kellett

BORDERS DAY SCHOOL

Memories are made of this

The Berks/Hants/Surrey Border Branch held its Day School on 8th March. There were classes in the morning and afternoon with excellent teaching from Jean Martin, Graham Donald and Gaynor Curtis. For the third session there was a choice of more Country Dancing or Ceilidh Dancing. I opted for the latter out of consideration for my knees, as this was my first of five consecutive days' dancing. One of the dances we did was The Pride of Erin which I had last danced while at school: it was one of the staples of that excruciating adolescent occasion, the Christmas Dance. As I flitted round the gym in Court Moor School in Fleet it brought back memories of the practices we did for the Christmas Dance in the gym at my school. The girls had to wear their normal gym kit of voluminous navy blue knickers and white aertex blouses. And it was a co-ed school... It was a good few years later before I was able to view dancing as a potentially enjoyable activity.

A very enjoyable day was topped off by a memorable evening of dancing to a 20-piece band provided by Nicol McLaren and the musicians who attended the Musicians' Day School. A well organised, well attended day school such as this does much to support and promote Scottish Country Dancing and to highlight the fun and pleasure it brings to so many people.

Margret Talbot

Music and Dancing at Fleet

The Border Branch Day School at Fleet was outstandingly good. This year there was a class for Musicians *and* they played for the evening's dance.

Let me explain for those who do not know the system. Musicians pay for the classes in the morning and afternoon. Their payment covers playing for the evening's dance, so there is no cost for hiring a band. Musicians are happy to pay to play all day because they love playing for dancers to dance.

The organisers asked Nicol McLaren to teach the musicians and lead for the dance. This choice of musical teacher could not have been better. Nicol demands high standards of group playing. He has a lovely sense of humour. We laughed as we worked. By the evening we were playing together well as a band should.

There was one element of luck. The balance of box and fiddle was right. We had a good number of musicians, twenty – no, *nineteen* and a learner, me.

We had a wonderful time. In the morning the class got very stropy. We did not like one set of tunes for one of the dances. Nicol just laughed. Let the dancers be the judge in the evening, he said. The only encore was that dance. More laughter.

Surprise, surprise! The dancers must have picked up our enthusiasm. They were very complimentary. We all had a lot of fun.

The evening's success was due in no small measure to Nicol McLaren. Thank you, Nicol.

Now we want to organise our own day school with a dance in the evening to cover costs. Watch this space.

Thank you, Border Branch, for a lovely day.

John Nicolson

THE GREAT

STRETCHING DEBATE

Our dance classes typically begin with some warming-up movement followed by gentle stretching of the muscles used in dancing. Inventive teachers warm us up in many ways, exploring all the variations on marching round the room, or practising dance patterns with a walking or running step. Stretches are done after the warm-up has increased the blood flow to the muscles; they are held for about 30 seconds and avoid any bouncing movements which might damage the muscles.

Two benefits have been thought to result from stretching during warm-up and also during a cool-down period at the end of class: a reduced risk of injury and reduced muscle spasm and soreness after the class. However, the *Strathspey* internet list has recently carried reports of medical studies questioning whether these benefits actually occur.

These negative findings seem to be strongest in relation to muscle soreness, with a review article in the *British Medical Journal* citing five studies which show that "stretching before or after exercising has no effect on delayed onset muscle soreness." Two further studies are said to suggest that "muscle stretching before exercising does not produce meaningful reduction in the risk of injury." The evidence does not absolutely disprove the protective effects of stretching on muscles, but neither does it confirm them.

However, it seems that we should not be too hasty in applying these findings to our own practice in dance classes. During the discussion on *Strathspey*, Keith Eric Grant (a Scottish Country Dance instructor who is also a massage therapist) pointed out that the studies reviewed in the BMJ were all carried out on healthy young adults, including students and army recruits. This population, as he writes, is "fairly elastic and less likely to show the effects of cumulative minor injuries and posture dysfunctions. Stretching will not be much of a boon to those who are sufficiently flexible for the range of motion they will need to engage in customary activities." For the rest of us, of course, stretching may still improve flexibility.

Grant's comments also include recommendations on the best way to avoid muscle soreness after exercise. This soreness, he claims, occurs when people exceed their level of conditioning. It results "from micro-damage to the muscle fibres and a subsequent inflammatory response. Conditioning and a gradual build-up of exercise helps, but stretching does not. Prior to exercising, warming up of tissues through gentle movement and slow extension of the movements to full customary range is helpful. This extension of movement could be thought of as gentle stretching."

Aside from the question of how far one can stretch the definition of stretching, we should be clear that stretching and warming up are not the same thing. In fact, one study involving Australian army recruits had all 1,538 subjects do active warm-up exercises, but only half do stretching as well. So the findings are only applicable to the benefits of stretching; the benefits of warming up are not in question. And stretching can still help us by heightening our awareness of our bodies and alerting us to any potential trouble spot if we feel a twinge of discomfort. The RSCDS is apparently working on a warm-up booklet, and we await it with interest.

Rosemary Coupe

From 'The White Cockade' December 2002, with thanks to RSCDS Vancouver Branch

ISLE OF WIGHT WEEKEND SCHOOL

It is an extraordinary thing about weekend schools in the early spring that they always have bright cold weather with at least some sunshine and a taste of things to come; crocuses and daffodils beginning to show, and plenty of mud for the walker to navigate around.

This year in the Isle of Wight was no exception. Crossing the water on the ferry adds to the feeling of change and expectancy, and having a self contained chalet to which to retreat adds to the pleasure.

We had two very good and very contrasting teachers in Marjorie MacRae and Alex Gray, and excellent music provided by Robert Mackay and Peter Russell.

Being away from ones local haunts, always means that some unexpected and interesting dances will appear in the evening programmes. It keeps one on ones toes, so to speak.

I am not going to say too much more, because this weekend school is always over-subscribed, and if I generate too much additional enthusiasm for it, I might never get off the waiting list and thereby miss out on this enjoyable and well planned experience. Heartiest congratulations to the organisers, Frances Packwood's daughters, Aline Napper and Catherine Packwood Bluett.

Denise Hora

THE END OF AN ERA AT ST COLUMBA'S

Many of you will have been to the Monday dancing at Pont Street. John Laurie will have been the MC up on the stage leading the evening. If you were a newcomer he would have found time to welcome you and introduce you to others at the interval. Week in week out, John has led the dancing with a very rare 'week off'. As John is approaching his 70th birthday he has decided to retire in May at the end of this season. John will have been MC for these social events for an amazing 35 years.

To give them their proper name, the St Columba's Church of Scotland Church Monday Evening Socials go back to during the 1939 war. Originally they were a mixed evening of recitations, songs and dancing but during the 1950s evolved to the current format – an evening of friendly social dancing. And 'social' is the key word. The church started these evenings as a social event for their members. Many of those attending were Scots recently arrived in London who came to church to find friendly souls in the vast city of London. John was one of those, moving to London in 1954, and joining the Monday Evening Socials. Although in later years fewer regulars were members of St Columba's, the Epilogue has always been retained, traditionally being taken by the Assistant Minister when one was available. For these young ministers this was an unexpected aspect of their pastoral care.

As the structure of an informal evening changed to a pure dance evening the shared MC role changed with John being appointed as sole MC. John introduced occasional evenings with a live band and a short beginners class before the dancing got under way. For the band nights, John has been able to persuade many excellent bands to leave work early on a Monday to perform. And many of us will remember the tuition from Hilary Rendle who gently introduced newcomers to the intricacies of change and setting steps and a structured programme to cover all the basic shapes over the season. After Hilary's untimely



death in 1989, Jenifer Rutherford took the early evening half hour session for several years. In the last few years, the format has changed somewhat with a 'new' or previously 'not done' dance being taught to everyone each week, and monthly step practices being taken by various teachers.

The balance of the programmes is one aspect that has made these evenings so successful. There are always dances for the beginner as well as more challenging dances for the experienced dancer. What surprised me when I came to write programmes as an occasional stand-in MC was the huge range of dances that were in the Monday Dancer's repertoire.

Of course the music has also always been important. Over the years records have given way to tapes and then finally CDs. With his very wide knowledge of Scottish Country Dance music (to say nothing of hymn tunes, vital for the Epilogue Hymn), John has always ensured that Monday Evenings enjoyed the best available recordings. Several dances were 'off limits' because there was not a suitable recording. The

close relationship with the church has helped here with various improvements to the sound system over the years.

But above all, the aspect that keeps many coming back to Monday Evenings is the fellowship. Newcomers are made to feel welcome. Beginners are encouraged to join in without fear of penalty for making mistakes. Experienced dancers are introduced to the wider London dancing scene.

So, congratulations are in order to John for leading an institution of the London dancing scene for 35 years. His final evening will be the band night with Craigellachie Band on 19th May. Of course Monday Evenings will continue, perhaps with a few changes as new people bring new ideas; but the tradition of fellowship will, I am sure, remain central to its existence.

Andrew Brown

John Laurie remains one of the Branch Vice-Presidents. He will continue to be our contact listed in the London telephone book and answers a wide range of enquiries about the Society and Scottish country dancing in London. He has also kindly agreed to continue reviewing new recordings for The Reel.

NEW RECORDINGS

The Colin Dewar Scottish Dance Band Special Requests. Volume 5. (SRCD 005)

Cadgers in the Canongate, Inverneill House, Culla Bay, The Irish Rover, EH3 7AF, Pelorus Jack, Hamilton Welcome, Welcome to Dufftown, The Recumbent Stone, Airie Bennan, The Secret Garden, Lady Peak's Strathspey, Reel of the Gordon Highlanders.
(Dance instructions are included for the last seven named.)

As always Colin's band are on top form; they never disappoint. Indeed we have come to expect a well played, well recorded CD. On this occasion we hear a full six-piece band playing a good mix of traditional and modern tunes. Tempo is just right. I particularly like the selection of eight tunes for the Irish Rover but I wonder why they do not play the suggested original (Cock of the North) for this Irish Rover? Nevertheless, I do like the tune, previously unknown to me, which they do play – The Lumley Jig by J. Cameron!

CDs culled from earlier recordings are coming thick and fast. Ross Records have issued *Accordion Magic* Volumes 1 - 4 with 73 tracks and about 3½ hours listening time (CD Ross 8001 - 8004). There are too many players to list but Jimmy Shand predominates. I am not too sure that "Accordion Magic" is the most appropriate title as most of the tracks are by bands with fiddles, pianos, *et al.* Even the 'solo' accordions have some accompaniment. I recognise a number of the tracks including some from the delightful series of Scottish dance EPs issued by EMI in the 1960s. There are two from an Ian Holmes EP, one of which is a fantastic 8x32 New Ashludie Rant. If they had included the third track I could have ditched my EP. Maybe it will come on Volume 5 or 6. There are three of the 15 tracks from Max Houliston's LP 'Come Home to Scotland' issued in 1968. Personally I would have preferred the re-issue of the complete record. If, however, you are looking for a host of Scottish musicians playing in their individual styles there is variety in abundance in these four excellently produced CDs.

Volume 2 of Bobby MacLeod's vintage 78s (KR CD032) is as good as Vol 1 reviewed in *The Reel* 239. It will be much in demand by lovers of his distinctive West Coast sound and is highly recommended listening for those of younger generations who are unfamiliar with it. Some of the tracks are from old reel-to-reel tapes made at impromptu sessions and transferred to this CD by the technical wizardry of the two Davids (Cunningham). As before there are extensive liner notes which give one a real feel for the band's popularity and Bobby's sense of humour.

Volume 3 of Jim Cameron's Dance Band (CDGR 185) has 20 tracks from his 78s and is, again, recommended listening for the old and not so old lovers of Scottish music.

Finally, away from the dance bands and to a CD of songs by Anne McHugh Culley, a native of Arisaig (CDGR 188). Some are in English including *The Dark Island* and *Dreaming of Home*. Others are in Gaelic and lovers of that genre will be thrilled to hear Anne's truly beautiful renderings of *An Ataireachd Ard* and *Fagaill Liosmor*, to name but two. Accompaniment is equally excellent with piano dominating as it should for this type of song. Pianist James Alexander also plays fiddle on some tracks with drums and guitar in the background.

For further details of any of the CDs feel free to call me on 020 7286 1923.

John Laurie

McBAIN'S REMEMBERED

1947 - 1980

Robbie Sargent who spent a number of years in the London area now lives in Inverness-shire. He is a self-confessed McBain's groupie and has compiled a most fascinating book about the band's life up to about 1980. It includes biographical details about all the musicians who were members of the band during these 33 years. Donnie McBain, the band's founder, retired to Scotland in 1958 but the name remained and does to this day.

There are contributions from Mary Stoker, Bill Ireland, David Thornton and Bill Farr, to name but four; lots of wee stories and anecdotes about the band and its members. Photographs in black and white as well as in colour abound. As I flick through the book every page shows something of interest – old dance programmes, photographs of record sleeves, the printed music for tunes composed by band members, a copy of a ticket for 'Take the Floor' recorded at St. Columba's by the BBC, and much more besides.

To accompany the book *Highlander Music* have issued a CD of the band recorded at Basingstoke Ball back in 1971. It is really great to hear again the magical touch of these quite superb musicians. On this recording Nan Fleming-Williams and David Thornton are on fiddle, Bill Farr on accordion. Alan Humberstone is the pianist with Jack Farr on drums. There are 15 tracks including some popular favourites – Bonnie Anne, Bonnie Lass of Bon Accord, Bratach Bana, J.B. Milne.

Read the book and listen again to McBain's in what was perhaps their heyday. You will enjoy.

The book costs £14.99 and the CD £11.99. Buy both for £24.99 direct from Robbie Sargent, Tullich, Dores, Inverness-shire IV2 6UA.

John Laurie

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

White dresses

Hove, East Sussex

Dear Sir,

The issue 243 of *The Reel* includes information about the World Day of Dance in June and the opportunity it provides for encouraging more people to dance with us, while on the front cover there is a picture of the Demonstration Team. I believe there is a significant image problem that this juxtaposition highlights. I would like to suggest that it is time that we moved into the 21st century and ditched white dresses for women.

No-one looks good in a white dress except a few brides and perhaps a seven-year-old going to first communion. Not even the young and graceful ladies step demonstration team at St. Andrews were able to look good in these nightgowns. They are individually unflattering, and collectively present a uniformity of dowdiness, being both dated and rather odd. Why would you want to take up an activity that is going to make you look bad?

I appreciate the desire to complement the kilt, but almost any alternative is better. My preference would be for individually selected ball gowns, chosen with the appropriate fit and style to suit the person wearing them, so that the consistency comes from being so well dressed that you don't notice the particulars. Even if you prefer greater uniformity, this can be achieved with a standard coloured gown or the pseudo-historical costumes. There are plenty of dance forms that have sexy clothing for women: why not Scottish Dancing?

I have seen the London team perform at the Day School Ceilidh and their dancing is something I can only aspire to, so this letter is not intended to insult them in any way. I raise the matter here because the team is the main standard bearer for SCD to the public, and I don't want an outmoded image to deter potential participants.

Yours sincerely,

Susanna Hawkins

The Sir Jimmy Shand Sculpture Project

Cupar, Fife

Dear Editor,

The members of the Sir Jimmy Shand Sculpture Project Working Group would like to inform your readers of the current progress of the Project. As a result of many organised project fund-raising functions and individual donations, the magnificent sum of just over £41,000 was raised. This tremendous effort has allowed the Capital Project Working Group members to change David Annand's commission to creating a figure 110% size sculpture. The decision to change the commission was taken after obtaining advice and it is believed that Sir Jimmy's sculpture will look even more resplendent. A site in the form of a small garden with nearby car parking was chosen in Auchtermuchty by the Shand family, fully endorsed by the Project members and the local Community Association. It is hoped that planning consent for the site will be received and a builder has been engaged to landscape the site.

David Annand is at an advanced stage of the sculpture clay work, having received very helpful advice from Jimmy Shand jnr, and project chairman Dr Sandy Tulloch. It is hoped that Powderhall Bronze Foundry will commence their work when David Annand completes his work.

As obtaining planning consent and the completion of the sculpture could take some time yet, the Project Working Group has decided to plan for a sculpture unveiling ceremony sometime in September 2003. Talks are being held with Fife Council about the unveiling ceremony and maintaining the sculpture and site after the unveiling. Sir Jimmy was a Freeman of Fife and Fife Council wish to honour him as such. Your readers and those who kindly organised functions, provided the music for or took part in the functions will be informed of details of the unveiling ceremony when these are known.

Yours sincerely,

John Thomson
Secretary

Bill Ireland

Sutton, Surrey

Dear Daniel,

I would like to thank everyone who attended the Thanksgiving Service for Bill. There were people in the congregation representing all aspects of Bill's life. It was also an occasion for many people to renew old friendships and acquaintances.

As a result of the collection taken at the service we were able to send a cheque for £1,600 to the Royal Marsden Hospital. Many thanks to all who contributed.

The service was recorded, so if anyone would like a copy of the tape please let me know (020 8642 5008).

Bill is greatly missed by many people whose lives he touched, but his spirit will live on.

Yours sincerely,

Jenny Greene

BILL IRELAND

A service of thanksgiving for the life of William James Ireland (19th September 1924 - 21st October 2002) was held in St. Andrew's Church, Cheam, on Friday 14th February 2003. Over 300 people attended; they came frae a' the airts — Cornwall to the North of Scotland. The service was conducted by the Revd Ranald Macdonald, himself a country dancer known to many of us.

Ranald's tribute was about "Bill — the Man". There were further tributes from representatives of Wallington Grammar School, Surrey Schools Rugby Football Union, and the Royal Ballet School. The final one was by Alastair Aitkenhead, a former Chairman of the RSCDS. Green Ginger (who had played before the service with David Hall) played a selection of Scottish music immediately before and after Alastair's talk.

The pupils of the Royal Ballet School sang Psalm 23 to Brother James's Air and the lesson was read by Mr Andrew Macdonald.

The final hymn was, appropriately, Lord of the Dance.

Dr Iain Farrell was there with his pipes. After the service he stood at the front of the church and played "Mo Dhachaidh" (My Home), this being the name of Bill and Jenny's cottage in Sutherland.

The congregation adjourned to the church hall for light refreshments. There were a few tears in the eyes as we talked and reminisced but it was good to meet up with old friends. We were uplifted by more Scottish music from Green Ginger, Jennifer Wilson and David Hall.

John Laurie