



# The Reel

Published by the LONDON BRANCH of the ROYAL SCOTTISH COUNTRY DANCE SOCIETY  
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No 257

SEPTEMBER TO NOVEMBER 2006

## THE 27TH GARDEN DANCE OF THE LONDON BRANCH Polesden Lacey, 11th June 2006



Stephen Webb

Emergency gas repairs in Epsom High Street are not the ideal prelude to an afternoon's dancing at Polesden Lacey. Struggling with picnic baskets, we finally reached our group who were reclining in the shade of a coolabah (or was it a walnut?) tree. The buzz of conversation as we ate our lunch (sumptuous salads, quality quiches, succulent strawberries, choice cherries) testified to our eager anticipation at the prospect of a pleasant afternoon's dancing on the green sward of the Walnut Tree Lawn (perhaps falling giant walnuts had created the hollows we occasionally encountered?). Up in the blue sky an aviator performed a daring loop the loop, mirroring the butterflies in my stomach.

The sun shone brightly on this, my first time at this gathering. My expectations were high as those who had attended in previous years had extolled the virtues of this event. I was not disappointed: the ambience and conviviality were wonderful. Music was from Ian Muir's Craigellachie band. The selection of tunes soon had us (we numbered about 150) cavorting with delight on the grass. Between the dances it was pleasant to sit beneath a shady bower and rest. The lawn was not as hard on the feet as I had feared; it was springy, probably due to the rain earlier in the week.

The dances on the programme were agreeably undemanding and were ably recapped by Simon Wales in the first half and by Owen Meyer after the interval; some of the onlookers were persuaded to take part in the ceilidh-type dances like The Dashing White Sergeant and Virginia Reel. During the break our party partook of delicious fruit cake, a splendid "tarte aux pommes" and Earl Grey Tea.

We were privileged to see the London Branch demonstration team perform an elegant programme of dances in honour of the Queen's 80th birthday celebrations. They all had a royal connection and included Holyrood House and The Duke and Duchess of Edinburgh.

All in all, the occasion was a feast for our senses – the touch of hands in the dances, the sound of the music, the fragrance of the trees and the lawn, the sight of the flowing dancers and the exquisite taste of our picnics.

Ian MacGillivray



Ann Dix and Anna Crawford, guests of Vancouver Branch.

See article on page 11.

Issue No 258 will be with UK based members by 2nd December 2006 unless delayed in the post. Contributions for that issue should be sent to the Editor, Wilson Nicol, 14 Great Woodcote Park, Purley, Surrey CR8 3QS or preferably by email to editor@rscdslondon.org.uk, to arrive by 28th October. (Issue No 259 will arrive by 17th February 2007).

The opinions expressed in *The Reel* are the opinions of the contributors and do not necessarily represent the official position of the RSCDS, nor of the Branch.

## CHAIRMAN'S COMMENTS

The AGM has passed, Summer Tuesdays have nearly finished and we are ready for a new season of dancing.

At the AGM we thanked Lindsay Merriman and Cherry West for their work for the Branch and welcomed two new members – Stewart Murray and Rosalind Zuridis. The Treasurer's Report (details on Page 5) and the Annual Report sent to members in the last issue of *The Reel*, were both accepted, including the section on 'plans for the coming year'. The Vice Presidents provided a delicious tea, and the evening ended with dancing to the excellent music of Angela Young. We were also privileged to view the photographs taken during last season by Stephen Webb and put together by Jeff Robertson as a recursive slide show. These will be shown at other Branch occasions and are interesting to see – everyone likes to see a photo of themselves!

Our final 75th event, Celebrating Musicians, postponed from the previous year, was an outstanding success. 22 musicians worked hard all day and provided a tremendous sound for the evening's dance, led by David Cunningham. We were also extremely fortunate with the weather at Polesden Lacey – did we ever think it might be too *hot*?! The Craiggellachie Band did us proud under difficult conditions with heat and wind, and those present enjoyed the company, the music and the dancing.

We have two more outdoor events in Kensington Gardens in September – see page 1 – an ideal opportunity for friends and family to dance with a caller and a band.

Our plans for the autumn include a celebration of 'The New Alliance' when we shall welcome visitors from France to our dance in September. October brings the Day School which this year will be providing for all levels of dancer, and a children's class too, a workshop for musicians and one for MCs, and a final coming together of everyone for a Ceilidh in the evening – put the date in your diary (details page 4). In November – one of our 'plans for the coming year' – we shall welcome less experienced/new dancers at a St Andrew's Dance where all dances will be walked through and called. Andrew Kellett will MC and all dancers can be sure of a good evening's dancing whatever their level – Andrew has many interesting dances up his sleeve!

Then comes 'The Christmas Cracker', dancing to the music of Ian Muir (Prestwick), a pre-Christmas dance, a chance to wear your evening dress and put yourself into seasonal mode.

Don't forget to look at the enclosed Dance Diary and Classes List to find out what is on in the London area, and don't forget to look at the ever developing website – there is something for everyone,

See you on the dance floor!

Rachel Wilton

## HELP!

You don't have to be a Committee member to help!

There are many jobs to do at a Branch Dance and at the Day School – pouring drinks, clearing and washing glasses, helping with refreshments – preparing, laying out, clearing up, helping at the door, putting up decorations, moving furniture – the list goes on! If you would be prepared to do just ONE of those jobs ONCE you would be welcomed with enthusiasm!

Please contact the Secretary, Pam Ellam

(Address column 3)

## EDITORIAL

We managed to arrange the annual editorial meeting with John Reeve, our designer and printer, at Wisley Gardens in June. Both of us are enthusiastic gardeners as well as dancers. Working together over the last year has developed into an easy partnership. Sharing the workload has facilitated a smoother running organisation, the result of which is that we predict for next year we will be able to shorten appreciably the time between the copy deadline and the distribution of *The Reel* to readers. The Editor merely collects the copy, edits appropriately and sends it all off to John electronically: the post plays little part in the modern communication system. By a masterful juggling with the layout, John manages to squeeze a quart into a pint pot – I'm sorry if the issues appear crowded but we have an obligation as a charity to provide maximum information and interest at a minimum of cost. One of the dividends of John receiving all the copy electronically is that his cost reduction has been turned into an advantage for our readers: we can now afford within the budget four colour pages in each issue. We hope you all enjoy the upgrade.

Our grateful thanks to John!

Wilson Nicol

## NEWS FROM HEADQUARTERS

**Marketing Officer:** Membership Services are preparing a job specification for the post of Marketing Officer and it has been emphasised that the person appointed would be promoting the Society worldwide, not just in Scotland.

**Strategic Plan:** The Board and Committees are progressing the Strategic Plan update. Completion before AGM.

**The Technique Sub-Committee:** There will be an article in the next edition of the Scottish Country Dancer to keep the membership informed of the sub committee and its work.

**Society Website:** The new site will have a completely different look.

**The Scottish Country Dancer:** The Society Magazine continues to attract positive feedback. The next issue will include dances, but in future these may only be included in the spring edition.

**Society Logo:** The Board have approved the final recommendation for the revised Society logo.

**Gift Aid:** GP&F are reviewing the possibility of claiming Gift Aid on Society subscriptions.

**Youth Director:** Jayne Brown has been appointed Youth Director.

**Revised Society Constitution:** Following consultation, the final version will be available for distribution to Branches with the draft agenda in August.

**Society Tartan:** A new tartan has been designed for the Society and kilt weight fabric in the new tartan should be ready in time for the Society AGM in November 2006.

**Management Board Vacancies:** There are still several vacancies on the Management Board and Committees and anyone who is interested in contributing to how the Society works is urged to consider applying for a place. Application forms, available on the website, must be returned with a proposer, seconder, ten signatories, a recent photograph and a brief CV by 8th September 2006.

Jeff Robertson

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Patron - H.M. The Queen



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### SUB-COMMITTEES

**Youth:** ..... Andrew Kellett, Malcolm Ferris-Lay,  
Angela Young

**Classes:** ..... Moira Strutt, Lena Robinson,  
Malcolm Ferris Lay, Stewart Murray

**Day School:** Margaret Catchick,

**Dances:** ..... Rachel Wilton, Margaret Catchick,  
Angela Young, Stewart Murray

**Demonstrations:** James Fairbairn, Angela Young,

**Publicity:** ..... Jeff Robertson, Rita Marlow\*,  
Wilson Nicol, Meryl Thomson, Rosalind Zuridis

**Open-air Dances:**.. Simon Wales, Jeff Robertson.

**Membership:** ..... Owen Meyer\*

**Bookstall:** ..... Ian Anderson\*

**Central Council of Physical Recreation:** .....  
Marie Jamieson\*, Simon Wales

**Hon. Archivist:** ..... Iris Anderson\*

**S E Branches:** ..... Andrew Kellett, Simon Wales

**Combined Societies:** ..... Rachel Wilton

**Branch Website** ..... Meryl and Ian\* Thomson

\*Indicates a non-Executive Committee member.

#### Website

www.rscdslondon.org.uk

### Objects of London Branch

To advance the education of the public in the London area in traditional Scottish Country Dancing, in particular by:

a) preserving and furthering the practice of traditional Scottish Country Dances;

b) providing or assisting in providing instruction in the dancing of Scottish Country Dances;

c) promoting the enjoyment and appreciation of Scottish Country Dancing and Music by any suitable means.

## NEW BRANCH COMMITTEE MEMBERS



### STEWART MURRAY

As a long-time, though occasional, ceilidh dancer, I discovered the Real McCoy of SCD only recently. But I have developed the passion of a convert for “these joyous Scottish reels” as a young Italian fellow student at Sloane Avenue described this wonderful mix of social dancing, physical exercise and mental stimulation.

It was thanks to the warm reception and encouragement of the members of the Surbiton and District Caledonian Society that I finally succumbed to the charms of SCDs. But without the inspirational teaching of Rachel Wilton and Lindsey Rousseau, my progress up the learning curve would have been a lot slower.

The Internet and the World Wide Web are tremendous resources for dancers everywhere and have also been a major help in learning about dancing and dances. Of course, we must always remember that many of us are not “connected” but I hope to be able to make a contribution to the spread of SCDs by helping the London Branch to exploit the electronic media in its recruitment of new dancers: perhaps some of these younger people who participate so energetically in ceilidh dancing in London.

Having rediscovered my former enthusiasm for playing the bagpipes, my other SCD ambition is to be able to play – probably on the small pipes – for one or two of the dances which feature on our programmes.

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### ROSALIND ZURIDIS

I am delighted to have been invited to become a member of London Branch Committee and have every intention of contributing to their sterling work. I am a graduate in Modern Languages, but, apart from teaching, my career path has covered interior design and, latterly, writing on design and botanical history. Some are kind enough to call this a “portfolio career” but I am sure there are less flattering names!

I fell in love with Scottish Country Dancing on the very first evening I tried it (on an April evening with the Chelsea Reel Club) and hurried up to Summer School at St Andrews, where I encountered wonderful teaching.

Since then, my intoxication with this activity has never flagged and has been enriched by my discovery of SCD’s traditions and history.

I hope to contribute to the committee’s efforts to publicise SCD to a much wider audience.

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## DEMONSTRATION TEAM



Well done! RSCDS London team at Slough Arts Festival

Jeff Robertson demitted office as an able convenor of the demonstration team at the AGM in June. As convenor, Jeff committed a great deal of time and thoughtful effort to dem team matters. In particular, he put on a more systematic basis our promotional efforts with public, private and commercial organisations in and around London. As a dancer, he was a stalwart of team performances and turned out for many dems, even when the location or timing was manifestly far from convenient. You would not, for example, start from Worthing if you were dancing in Leytonstone on a Saturday afternoon in May; but Jeff did. We record our heartfelt thanks to him; and also to his wife Mary who was often present in support or uncomplainingly tholing his absences at home.

Joan Desborough, who has been a dem team member for longer than she probably cares to remember, retired in July. We will miss her for her good humour as well as her dancing. We are especially grateful to her for taking on the administration of the team in the last few months, a task which will now be shared among Jan Rudge, Marian Morris and Elaine Wilde.

We returned to the Slough Arts Festival in May where our two teams retained the cups won last year. In June, on the grass at Polesden Lacey, we showed that simple dances can be combined into an attractive display. Other events have included the charity fair at the Brompton Oratory on 24th June, our second, much appreciated, appearance, and our usual participation in the Leeds White Rose Festival on 8th July.

We have also become involved in The Big Dance, an initiative of Ken Livingstone, Mayor of London, (see page 6).

The team calendar continues to be busy and we have had to turn down a few opportunities owing to lack of personnel. To try to redress this we held auditions in May, with an outside panel of three led by Owen Meyer together with Angela Young assessing the candidates.

The ranks of our musicians have been swelled this year by Roger Huth, an ex-Scots Guard and professional piper, who has played for several dems. Our regular pipers, Sandy Walker and Neil Esslemont, continue to play for us, but Neil has been busy getting married and Sandy has been taking it a little bit easier, so having Roger able to fill in has been a boon. Our class pianist Sandra Smith continues to play with verve and to tackle anything (musical) thrown at her with her usual aplomb. Without music we would be nowhere and we thank them all sincerely.

Angela Young has continued to teach the class and combine strict attention to technique with building new repertoire that is enjoyable to dance and attractive to view. It is a demanding job given the number of experienced and opinionated members of the team but Angela manages it very well. Our thanks are due to her.

James Fairbairn

## ACCOUNTS 2005 - 6

As promised at the recent AGM, here are my comments on the accounts, with apologies once again that the tight timescales and *The Reel* publication dates make it impossible to circulate these to all members before the AGM.

The accounts show an operating surplus of £141 – very close to the break even budget we set. We did, however, have an unrealised gain on our investments of £6,282 thanks to the better performance of the stock market in the earlier part of the year. This is not even real money, as we have no intention of cashing in our shares, but all adds up to the overall surplus of £6,423 for the year.

The accounts are now constructed in such a way as to make it easier to work out how each area of Branch activity has done – classes, young dancers, dances, publicity, bookstall and demonstration team – you just have to subtract the costs from the income!

### Classes

Fees, less hire of halls, less teachers and musicians expenses: £7,211 - £3,842 - £5,746 = (£2,377)

This is comfortably less than the budget set – largely as a result of the technique class taking place in a cheaper hall and being better attended.

### Children's Activities

Income less expenditure: £482 – £1,538 = (£1,056), but we subsidised the children's class by £319 from the Telfer bequest.

### Dances

Income less expenditure: £7,329 - £5,975 = £1,354 profit thanks to good turnout at the Christmas and Burns Night dances.

### Publicity

This cost the Branch £1,597 this year, covered from the Westwood fund to cover the cost of the open air dancing in Kensington Gardens, the flyers and the car stickers. *The Reel* made a small surplus of about £150.

### Bookstall and other trading

£3,977 - £3,010 = £ 967 surplus on bookstall and branded garments.

### Demonstration team

This appears as "fundraising activities" ie £2,965 - £4,128 = (£1,163), a cost to the Branch which reflects their publicity function. This is higher than budget, but we are pleased to report that marketing initiatives have resulted in the team's best opening quarter for some years with income of £750 in April and May.

### Administration Costs

The only other figure to comment on is the admin costs – up on last year at £631.

The meeting expenses reflect the small subsidy to travel paid to delegates attending the Society AGM (£25 per head) and meeting rooms at St Columba's. This last figure has risen as we will have to hold more meetings at St Columba's since we have lost the free accommodation at Peter Knight's flat!

Next year's budget is along much the same lines as this year's, but we will have all the costs and income for the Anniversary CD. The costs incurred in 2005-6 (slightly over £5,000) are reflected in work in progress in the balance sheet.

We are very fortunate to have the various bequests which enable us to tackle projects in the knowledge that we have sufficient funds to back them up. We made our first grant from the Bill Ireland fund for a young dancer attending Summer School, but have had no requests for this year as yet.

I would like to thank my fellow officers and convenors for their co-operation and particularly to Robert Elliott whose guidance has been invaluable.

Simon Wales

Branch Treasurer, June 2006

## TEACHER'S SUCCESS

Mrs Maureen Parker from Marchwood, Southampton recently passed her Teacher's Certificate at Bournemouth. Our apologies for the late intimation of this success. We wish Maureen every success and hope that she will spread the enjoyment of Scottish Country Dancing wherever she goes.

## SCOTTISH DANCERS SMASH WORLD RECORD

Anyone tuning in to BBC One television around 9.30 p.m. on 22nd July would have caught a glimpse of RSCDS dancers taking part in a multi-cultural dance extravaganza in Trafalgar Square. The climax of The Big Dance was an attempt to break the world record for the number of different dance genres dancing their own iconic movements simultaneously to the same music. We were there with ballet, jazz, street, Irish, Slovaks, and the rest – there were even synchronised swimmers in the fountains! Happily everyone just about managed to keep their feet after a torrential downpour created a treacherous dancing surface and the record was broken. Congratulations to our dancers who spent hours perfecting the Scottish to pop music routine as well as all the other dance moves, and especially to Angela Young who taught our team how to clap flamenco style, sway in bhangra and avoid decapitation in a particularly vicious movement known as the “combine harvester”. A full report will appear in the next issue

### LUCY CLARK

In the mid 1940s Lucy Clark was a popular figure in Amersham and surrounding areas playing for and teaching Scottish Country Dancing. She set up her own class in 1954 with such success that it outgrew two venues before settling in the Royal British Legion Hall in Amersham Old Town. There Lucy Clark ran her class and organised monthly Saturday dances to the live music of McBains. These dances were extremely popular with tickets hard to come by!

Lucy died in June 1966. Her class then founded the Club that bears her name, with the aim of carrying on her work. This it has done for the last 40 years – although they can now run only three Saturday dances a year. The Club is still in a very healthy state with about 50 members and some of Lucy’s pupils are still dancing with us!

To celebrate the Club’s 40th Anniversary the Lucy Clark SCD Club are holding a Ball on Saturday 16th December 2006, at Davenies School, Beaconsfield, dancing to the Karl Sandeman Band, so do make a note of this date, and register your interest with Dick Field on 01494 562231.

**Archie McNair**



Me with my wonderful guide dog Zola

### Anne O’Connell

There are always challenges being a teacher in the London Branch as Lindsey Rousseau found out this past season. Anne O’Connell turned up for Lindsey’s class with her guide dog, Zola. If any of you remember at a ceilidh some time ago a team from the Demonstration Class were blindfolded, put into a set and asked to dance Petronella, you will realise the challenge.

Lindsey had to revise her teaching techniques – and quickly – and the class had to have confidence in their own abilities as well as in helping her. Zola was a star attraction and always well behaved, although often it meant people were happy to sit out so that they could pat her! Anne came to class after a day at Birkbeck (studying criminology) and then went home, alone with Zola, on the tube back to East Ham. She is an amazing lady and dances as well as many of the Wednesday class!

But that is not the only achievement of this noble lady: she walked the London Marathon in 9 hours 40 minutes and hopes to have raised £3000 for Guide Dogs so that someone else can have their lives changed by a Zola (her words). Anne thanked the sponsorship of the class to the tune of £300 with a delicious cake.

An amazing lady!

# NEW RECORDINGS

RSCDS Book 14 – James Coutts and his Band (CD055)

RSCDS Book 35 – Neil Copland and his Band (CD054)

Favourite Scottish Country Dances – Volumes 1 and 2 – The Irvine Valley Band (S22A004 and 007)

The Blackwater Collection – Ian Muir and the Craigellachie Band (Shiel CD024)

RSCDS Birmingham Diamond Jubilee Book – George Meikle and the Lothian Band (BBD0601)

A' the best fae Banffshire – Colin Dewar and his Band (BCDS 0601)

Phew! Quite a marathon; 85 full length dances on seven CDs and no duplicates. Where do we start?

Let's start with James Coutts' first recording for the Society and say right away that we hope it is not his last. James leads a very good six piece band including Lynda Jordan on fiddle and Graham Berry on piano. I particularly enjoy his driving strathspeys. Having said that, his sets for *The De'il amang the Tailors* and *Lamb Skinnit* also take a bit of beating.

Neil Copland's six piece includes his brother on second accordion, his wife on the fiddle and his sister in law on piano. Yet another tight sounding CD from the Copland/Rutherford stable. Well done Neil *et al.*

The Irvine Valley recordings were arranged, produced and engineered by Derek Hamilton but there is no indication as to the musicians. My guess is that Derek himself multi-tracked accordion, piano and drums. No fiddle! There are 25 popular dances on the two CDs and they make an excellent starter pack for a new teacher who has to rely on recorded music. Please, anyone, call me if you wish to have the list of dances.

There are no doubts about the members of the Craigellachie Band! Ian Muir and John Browne on accordions, Brenda de Souza and Keith Anderson on the fiddle, Judith Robertson (Mrs Muir) piano and bass with Graham Hamilton on drums. There are ten dances by Alan Davis in the Blackwater Collection and three old time dances.

Craigellachie are, of course, well known here in the Southeast and this recording will not disappoint their fans. Having two fiddles AND two accordions lends itself to some interesting harmonies. There are also some great changes. Listen to the track which begins with Ian Muir's Compliments to Ann Dix and you will hear what I am trying to say.

George Meikle's Band gives a solid performance on the Birmingham Branch CD. Some of the tracks are on the fast side e.g. an 8x32 strathspey in 7 mins 50 seconds. There are 15 dances and some have nice new original tunes. I do like *The Dixon Quads* by George himself in the same style as his great masterpiece for *John of Bon Accord*.

Now to this month's best buy – indeed the best CD for some time. I have lost count of the number of excellent recordings by Colin Dewar over the years (I guess about 12). This one for the Banffshire Branch is *crème de la crème*. Words fail me. Just go and buy it and you will be thrilled by the sound. There are 12 dances from the Banffshire Book and three bonus sets – a 4x40 reel, a 4x40 strathspey and a 5x48 reel.

Thanks to those who have sent me review copies of old time/ceilidh dance CDs. I will round them up and let you have details in the December *Reel* in time for Christmas.

John Laurie

Tel: 020 7286 1923.

## FOLK VIRGINS FIDDLE IN LONDON



All budding musicians sometimes need to play outside their comfort zone and try new things, and it was in this spirit that we got up early one fine Saturday morning to attend the Musicians' Workshop run by the RSCDS. Coming from sleepy suburbs and negotiating the London Underground at this time in the morning was something of a shocker. Our anxiety was compounded by a growing fear that we would find ourselves way out of our depth, amongst unyielding, uncompromising virtuoso fiddle players.

The welcoming smiles of the other musicians and friendly biscuits on arrival alleviated this, although the alarming tempo set by workshop leader David Cunningham whipped us up into a renewed frenzy. Apparently our rehearsal tempos had been somewhat under speed...

The morning passed in a foot-tapping, grin-inducing blur of bows and fingers, and lunchtime was spent further bonding with our fellow folkers. The easygoing friendliness of the musicians made us feel as though we had been playing with them for years. Restored by a first-rate home-cooked lunch (and one or two sips of

wine), we took up our instruments for the afternoon's marathon.

At 4 p.m. we broke to gather our strength for the evening. So far so good – we had made it this far! But the greatest excitement was yet to come!

The final celebration of the RSCDS 75th anniversary in St.

Columba's Church was a most memorable occasion. The MCs and Angela Young ensured that the dancing continued ceaselessly, and with such enthusiastic displays of appreciation from the dancers it was more than a pleasure to play the numerous encores that were requested. We were astounded by the dancers' stamina, and their understanding of completely incomprehensible steps! If there was one disappointment, it was that despite our front row seats, our need to concentrate on playing meant that we could not watch the dancers. Next time, maybe, when we know it all off by heart...

More delicious food fuelled our fingers and the dancers' legs at half time, and all too soon the fantastic evening had come to an end. Our thanks and gratitude go to Rachel Wilton, David Cunningham, Angela Young, the friendly musicians, appreciative dancers and everyone else involved in the organisation of the event for enabling us to take part in such an exhilarating day and for making it so enjoyable.

See you next time!

Alison Ashburner

Jo Turton

## JAMES SCOTT SKINNER 1843-1927, DANCING MASTER, FIDDLER & COMPOSER

Towards the end of his life James Scott Skinner wrote an autobiography entitled "My Life and Adventures" which he concludes by saying that after a tempestuous life he has finally dropped anchor in harbour. "That harbour" he says, "...is in the hearts of the Scottish people." This espousal of 'Scottishness' in all its somewhat romantic 19th century manifestations: dancing, composing and musicmaking, proud wearing of the kilt and devotion to Scotland's musical heritage, is the great key to our understanding of Skinner. Born to a poor family in Aberdeenshire, he imbibed Scottish music from his earliest days, becoming an outstanding dancer and fiddle player. Having absorbed the music of his great fiddler predecessors such as the Gow family and William Marshall, he went on to compose hundreds of tunes. He became particularly renowned for haunting pastoral airs and strathspeys and is often remembered as "The Strathspey King".

Born in the village of Banchory, Scott Skinner started learning music when he was six and by the age of eight, was already playing the 'cello at dances to accompany the gifted blind fiddler, Peter Milne: he was paid five shillings a month. His father had been a fiddler and dance teacher but had died young: however, James's musical education was advanced by rigorous lessons from his brother, Sandy, and by a long apprenticeship in a band of touring boys "Dr Mark's Little Men" (40 youngsters, fed and clothed by Dr Mark, playing in venues at 600 towns accompanied by a private tutor and a menagerie of pet animals!) During all this time Skinner played by ear, but then had the luck to be tutored by a classical violinist, Charles Rougier and thus to learn musical theory and classical delivery. This brief outline of his musical upbringing brings home to us how deeply Scottish life at that time was imbued with musicmaking, even for youngsters.

However, dancing was also a huge part of Scott Skinner's life and he was clearly highly gifted. At the age of 18 in front of a huge gathering in Dublin, he won various first prizes and danced the Sword Dance and the Highland Fling to great acclaim. He decided to train as a dancing master, adding ballroom quadrilles and polkas to his Scottish repertoire. In 1863, at the age of 20, he established his teaching practice, first in Aberlour and later in Elgin, achieving considerable success. He relates in his autobiography: "I had the patronage of all the big private families in Ross-shire, Inverness-shire, Elginshire and Banffshire ... I was making about £750 a year and was able to drive to and from the residences of my pupils in my own private trap, drawn by a beautiful pony." Eventually he was even appointed dancing master at Balmoral, by request of Queen Victoria. There, in the "Iron Ballroom" and apparently with iron discipline, he taught 125 pupils from the estate and he writes that he enjoyed this era greatly. Every time he taught there he was given "a lovely salmon to my tae ... the rale Mackay, fresh from the river!" Like other dancing masters, he organised balls to show off the skills of his pupils. Thus in 1880 his ball at Forres included: "German Schottische and Hungarian Polka; Long Live the Queen with Flags, the French Quadrille 'Polo', Scottish Steps, Sword Dance, The Graces, Highland Fling, Cane Hornpipes, Jack Tar, Mazurka, Valse, Gorlitz, Valse Country Dance, Galop,

(Continued on page 7)



(Continued from page 6)

Reel of Tulloch” – and others!

From his teenage years Scott Skinner had started composing his own tunes and using them for his classes. His “Ettrick Vale Quadrilles” were published during his first year of teaching and these tunes plus music for waltzes and polkas would have been used for his ballroom dancing pupils. At the same time he was writing strathspeys and reels for his country dancing classes. During these early years, during which he married and had two children, he was also playing solo pieces at local concerts. Here in typically dramatic fashion he describes performing in Banff. As the music reaches “a tremendous climax” his audience work themselves into a frenzy “watching my bow skidding up and down the strings and the pianist’s fingers flying helter-skelter over the keys...”

However around 1885 Skinner’s professional and private life seems to have fallen apart. He was left “roofless, wifeless and penniless.” These are almost the only details he discloses about this period, although later research revealed that his wife was admitted to the Elgin Lunatic Asylum in 1885. He retreated to an Aberdeen hotel and seems to have supported himself by selling sheets of his own music. Gradually he recovered and embarked on more solo performing, touring, and appearances at Highland Gatherings. In 1893 he made the bold decision to abandon dance-teaching and to devote himself to a career as a solo fiddler and “make a bold bid for national laurels”.

His performing career lasted almost until the end of his life and he toured all over Scotland, and to the Albert Hall and the Palladium in London, the last being masterminded by Harry Lauder. These were hugely successful tours which continued until 1925 and Scott Skinner was invariably at the top of the bill: according to his somewhat egocentric memoirs he had, for example, “gigantic success” and “uproariously flattering” receptions. A typical touring group would include Skinner, the fiddler – always in full Scottish regalia – a singer, a Highland dancer and a pianist. Their contributions were sometimes linked by a light sketch, often humorous in nature: thus the group appearing at the Palladium in 1911 were graced by the title of “The Caledonian Four” with our subject appearing as a Scottish laird. Scott Skinner’s reminiscences of these tours tell of a performing life full of incident and mishap, of back-to-back appointments and unorthodox venues such as a fish-shed, a tent or a commandeered barn!

Although these tours and performances do seem to contain a strong element of burlesque, Scott Skinner’s actual concert presentation was of a very high calibre. He was very much at home playing virtuosic pieces by composers such as Paganini, but his speciality was playing Scottish slow airs and strathspeys. He had a brilliant, showy style, using classical bowing techniques which distinguished him from the traditional country fiddlers of the day. Some commentators feel that his work was on the cusp between folk fiddle and classical violin but a harsher view is that his playing fell between two stools: he was too egocentric to be part of an orchestra and his over-showy technique cut him off from the traditional fiddle playing of his era. He was therefore something of an oddity and consequently highly reliant on the concert round, the adulation of his audiences and his own high self-esteem. Nevertheless he was very instrumental in freeing fiddle music from the restrictions previously imposed upon it by the dance and in introducing it to a wider public.

All his adult life Scott Skinner assiduously collected and composed tunes, including strathspeys, reels, slow airs, jigs, hornpipes, songs, pastoral airs and Highland Schottisches. He also, unusually for his time, loved composing for the bagpipes. He was deeply patriotic about Scottish traditional music and was part of the European movement of the time which was passionately concerned about preserving and recording folk music. Writing about his strathspeys, he says “while attempting to compose new strathspeys, I pledged myself to be a preserver of the best among the old ones.” Between 1861 and 1904 he published these tunes in a series of collections. Some of the collections, such as the 1881 “Miller o’Hirn “ (122 tunes) and the 1888 “Logie Collection” (190 tunes) are all his own work whereas his famous 1904 “Harp and Claymore Collection”, a result of collaboration with the great folk song collector Gavin Greig, contains tunes by Skinner, by earlier great composers and, furthermore, “many choice flowers of traditional melody.” Some of Scott Skinner’s most famous tunes such as “The Flower of the Quern” and “The Bonnie Lass of Bon Accord” are to be found in these collections.

Scott Skinner’s contribution as a dancing master is hard to judge. Although he was undoubtedly successful for many years, we gain very little significant detail about his attitude towards the teaching of dancing. He published several dance manuals which explained dances and stressed elegant etiquette, but he did not produce any theoretical works, as did Thomas Peacock. We gain little sense of his involvement with his pupils, but somewhat more of his enjoying the prestige his success brought him!

During all his dancing years Scott Skinner was deeply immersed in composing and playing music and it is plain that this was his great love. He does in fact say in his autobiography: “I bitterly regretted the many years I had wasted as a country dancing master”! In musical performance terms it is clear that his playing, full of virtuosity and infused with an almost Messianic belief that he was expressing the “soul” of the Scottish people, had a far-reaching influence. As far as his vast musical bequest of about 600 tunes is concerned, his contribution is universally acknowledged but modern-day opinion is somewhat divided, with some finding his slow airs over-romantic and others noting that his emphasis on virtuosity can be at the expense of musicality. Nevertheless his tunes, including his strong and vibrant strathspeys, are generally still much admired and of continuing influence. The Strathspey King spoke of his contribution with typical romanticism: “The great work of my life has been composing music for the people of Scotland.”

## Our President, Mary Stoker continues her reminiscences with Andrew Cockett, a former Chairman of the Branch

*Andrew Cockett: Bill Ireland was another great Branch teacher. He was a very prominent member of the Branch and people of my generation often thought of you and him as the giants of the Branch, both*



Stephen Webb

*nationally known through your teachings at St Andrews and work for Headquarters. Did you join the Branch at the same time?*

*Mary Stoker:* I think I was slightly prior to him being a wee bit older. We were both from Glasgow and discovered later on that we both lived in Pollokshields. I had a great regard for him, but I always felt he was his own worst enemy. Many people thought that he was a difficult man and in lots of ways he was: he didn’t know his friends from his enemies.

*He also showed tremendous dedication to Scottish Country dancing?*

Oh yes, and to his school where he taught. He was well regarded in rugby circles too and the Royal Ballet, where he taught the boys Scottish Country dancing sometimes doing demonstrations at Pont Street.

*I want to move on to Alec Westwood, who was an illustrious predecessor of yours as the President of London Branch. He, too, made his mark in every aspect of the running of the Branch. Do you have fond memories of him?*

Oh yes, he was a lovely person and I can see Alex in a team or in a dance with his double lens glasses on. At times he would flick the outer lenses up and gaze at people next to him, apparently looking at their feet. It was just one of his mannerisms. We used to have lovely parties at his flat. He was an architect with a strong artistic streak and with such charisma we miss him greatly. He worked tirelessly for the Branch, which has benefited enormously from his legacy. *You mentioned Miss Milligan earlier on. Miss Milligan made several visits to London Branch and I believe that you and she had a cordial relationship? Do you have any particular memories of her in London?*

I remember her particularly just weeks before her death, when she was staying with me after an exam and she was coping wonderfully because she must have been in considerable pain with her back and more or less went on her hands and knees up the stairs for she insisted on sleeping upstairs. She could even touch her toes in those days, quite amazing. Some time before that, at one of the ‘Women of the Year’ luncheons in Scotland, Miss Milligan met the broadcaster Molly Weir (Molly of course was a local friend of mine) and they hit it off. Miss Milligan thought Molly was quite wonderful and vice versa, so when she was staying with me Molly came along one morning to have coffee with us. It was a complete surprise to Miss Milligan, who was absolutely over the moon about it. We couldn’t stop either of them talking and, neither

(Continued on page 8)

(Continued from page 7)

really listened to the other, but they just went at it.

I remember once at St Andrews she went for me in one of her classes. She told me to 'go and sit down' because I had been laughing, I don't know what it was I'd done, but she made a great drama of it. Other members of the class didn't realise that this was an act. I thought nothing of it.

She came down lots of times to London and took day schools. Our great mutual friend was Margaret McLaren who was quite important in physical education. Margaret told me that when she told Miss Milligan she was coming down here to adjudicate and to examine my students, Miss Milligan insisted on coming with her. She was very fair, but I have to say, if you were a man you were all right. She had a bias that way. Her strength was that she understood movement because she'd been trained herself at the Dartford P.E. College. Subsequently she was on the staff at Jordanhill in Glasgow.

*But presumably you knew her at Jordanhill ?*

Yes, I knew her when I was at Park School in Glasgow. Then when I was at PE College she used some of us to dance with her Jordanhill boys in a folk dance festival. Believe it or not, she brought her men to practise from Jordanhill into the sacred halls of Dunfermline College, which had never seen a male inside the doors. When we were rehearsing the Glasgow Highlanders she had a photographer there from the local paper. We were coming up the middle, as you know, in threes and she called out, "Come along Mr McClure", (my partner), "come on Mr McClure, give me everything you've got," and he was trying to do that. "No, no, no, that was no use, no, it was no use," and she kept on again, again, again, then at last she said, "That's it, that's it, take it, take it", waving her hands about as usual. The photographer said, "I will madam - if you will kindly remove your hand from the lens!"

*The Branches occasionally stray beyond the realms of dancing into other areas, one of which was the publication of a cookbook?*

Well, actually it was Miss Milligan who said that I should produce one; she thought that it was a good idea. We asked people to send in their favourite recipes and then chose the ones that we thought were suitable. Helen Brown was very good actually at trying out a lot of them and bringing them along for the dancers to sample.

*You mentioned Helen who's recently got a Branch Award.*

Yes, she richly deserves it, for she has worked very hard for the Branch and really likes being involved. She has done many years on the committee - been secretary and treasurer, and has run a Branch class. Helen is very dedicated and reliable.

*And your last word, Mary*

I would like to quote Jean Milligan: "Be apostles of friendship, goodwill and happiness".

## SO WHAT'S IN YOUR LOFT?



What have you done with all those old 78rpm records that you used to dance to? Were you a devotee of Jimmy Shand; or perhaps of Ian Powrie or Jim Cameron? Or perhaps you have some really old records going back to before the First World War?

Not only is Cecil Sharp House the headquarters of the English Folk Dance and Song Society, but more importantly its Vaughan Williams Memorial Library is "the most important concentration of material on traditional song, dance, and music in the country. VWML is a multi-media library. The collections include: books, manuscripts, off-prints, pamphlets, periodicals, serials, press cuttings, broadsides, prints, paintings, line drawings, photographs, slides, artefacts, ephemera, records, reel-to-reel tapes, phonograph cylinders, videos, cine films, compact discs, and audio cassettes. (Visit the web site [www.efdss.org/library.htm](http://www.efdss.org/library.htm)).

Scottish music is also prominent in the library collection. Now you could enhance that collection of music produced by commercial recording companies. I am a volunteer, working in the sound library to transcribe the collection of 78rpm commercial dance recordings onto CD in order to provide an improved archive and make the recordings more accessible to the listening public. I am a member of both EFDSS and RSCDS.

As you might expect, the collection of English dance recordings is almost complete from the first recordings supervised by Cecil Sharp in 1916 in the USA with the Victor Military Band and published by HMV in 1921, through to 1960 when 45 and 33 rpm recordings took over. Our collection of Scottish dance records is wide ranging but not nearly so complete. There is a much larger repertoire to start with.

You may have seen the article by Marilyn Healy, the RSCDS archivist, in the Spring 2006 issue of the Scottish Country Dancer. Reference was made there to early RSCDS recordings, initially not considered very successful. The Scottish Dance Orchestra recorded on the Columbia label in 1924, the Scottish Country Dance Orchestra on the HMV label in 1925 and 1929. The Sutherland Orchestra under J. Michael Diack must have been the orchestra used by the Society, as they recorded all the dances from Books 1 and 2 in 1924 and 1925 on the Beltona label, and then recorded them again in 1927 and 1928, together with Book 3 and 4. We have very few of these records although RSCDS HQ do have quite a number.

The era of the Scottish dance band appears to start around 1930 with the likes of Bob Smith. William Hannah was recording solo in the 1920's but his band recordings start in 1937. Both Jimmy Shand and Jim Cameron started recording in 1933, but both initially as solos or small ensembles. Their folk dance band era took off after World War 2. Coincidentally, this was the same for the EFDSS, where before WW2 recordings had been with principally with orchestras or small groups.

The post-war years saw great names that many will recall. Apart from the huge recording output of Jimmy Shand (over 300 recordings) there was Jim Cameron, Bobby McLeod, Jim McLeod, Ian

Powrie, Jimmy Blair, Tim Wright, Adam Rennie, Angus Fitchett, Andrew Rankine and many others.

There were, of course, also a number of solo artists. The earliest recordings of the great Scott Skinner go back to 1899 but his last recording session was in 1922. There were many others: apart from the well-known band leader names above, many of whom also performed solo; names such as Tony Capaldi, Daniel and Peter Wyper, William Starr come to mind, and my personal favourite, Hector MacAndrew. It's wrong in my view to call him a fiddler; the classical technique and the lilt is superb on two Parlophone recordings made in 1952.

I am greatly indebted for so much of the information I have gathered to Bill Dean-Myatt, who has a superb discography of all (well, it looks pretty complete to the average person!) Scottish vernacular music produced on 78s, phonograph cylinders and 45rpm singles. He also has a very extensive personal collection. Both of these he intends to leave to the National Library of Scotland. There are, however, still some gaps in his records. He is, for example, still seeking information on some of the less well-documented labels such as: Favorite, Beka, Pathe, Odeon, early Regals, Piccadilly, Hudson, Filmophone and others. You can read more about his work at [www.beltonaproject.co.uk](http://www.beltonaproject.co.uk) or contact him at [wdm@scottishdiscography.co.uk](mailto:wdm@scottishdiscography.co.uk)

The collection of Scottish dance 78rpm records in the Vaughan Williams library is quite extensive, but we would like to extend it further with your help. We believe our collection is already better than that in the British Library, and we would like the VWML to become the foremost repository of commercial folk dance music recordings south of the Border. Our aim is to transfer to CD everything that comes to us (I have just about completed that for what we already possess) so that it can become more accessible to everyone via the internet or other services.

How to go about the task? There is indeed a huge array of records, many of which we still do not have. I am sure there are many copies of Jimmy Shand from the Fifties out there, but we do not want to duplicate our collection. If you do have a collection of records that you are willing to part with, I really need you to list the Label and Catalogue numbers to start with so that I can check them against our collection. From there we can think about the logistics of getting them to London!

Unsurprisingly our collection has many gaps in the early recordings. If you have any records going back before the start of RSCDS in 1923, they would be particularly welcome. I am in touch with Marilyn Healy, the RSCDS archivist, about what is in the Headquarters collection, and we have agreed to exchange information on what we each have in our collection.

Although not strictly part of this project, we would also be interested in acquiring the range of 45rpm Singles and EPs produced in the Sixties.

**Mike Wilson-Jones**

c/o VWML, Cecil Sharp House, 2 Regent's Park Road, London NW1 7AY. or e-mail: [mwj@waitrose.com](mailto:mwj@waitrose.com)

## TRAVELS WITH AN RSCDS TEACHER

How do you fancy a weekend in Vancouver in the spring? That was the question I was asked back in the autumn of 2005. Well who could resist looking into this further?

It has in the past been my pleasure and privilege to travel with Ann Dix to New York and Toronto when Ann has been a teacher at their weekend schools. So when she asked about Vancouver I knew that it was RSCDS based, but this weekend was more than just a dancing weekend.

Vancouver Branch is a large and active organisation. Due to the generosity of a legacy from Pearl Holmberg, they run a teachers' and musicians' weekend school, and it was on this that Ann was asking me to join her. Ann had been asked to teach the teachers, with the emphasis on use of music to enhance classes. I was to join the musicians as a student.

A nine-hour flight is a long way for a weekend, so we were able to stretch this to a week. We flew out on the Thursday and were met after a long queue and altercation with the immigration officer, by Mary and Jim Murray, and from there until they dropped us off at the airport a week later we were treated right royally.

The weekend was tremendous; the musicians were divided into two sections, fiddles, and wind, with Elke Baker (fiddle), and keyboards and Guitars with Liz Donaldson (piano). We looked at the different styles of music, in all three tempos, the choosing of music to blend together, and the role of a musician in a class scenario. The sessions were enthralling and there was so much to take in, jet lag did not help the concentration. But by the final session on the Sunday morning where the teachers and musicians came together in a class environment, it was felt by all that it had been a very worthwhile weekend. The teaching was superb and I came away with many notes. I am very grateful that I was able to borrow an accordion, as travelling with one is not to be recommended.

Ann still had one class to teach on the Monday night, but we were able to spend two days looking round Vancouver. Three nights in a hotel and three with one of the course organisers, Wendy Swaine, meant that we had the best of both worlds. We could not have been better looked after. The flight home was uneventful, but I certainly have many happy memories, of a fulfilling weekend and a happy three days in the compact and delightful city of Vancouver.

Where next Ann??

**Anna Crawford**

*(picture on page 1)*

## LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

*There is one more letter on the next page*

### Musicians' Workshop

Twyford

Dear Wilson,

Thank you for encouraging me to come to the musicians' workshop in May. I had severe doubts about my ability to profit from the day because I thought the standard would be beyond me. Well I was probably the worst player there but David Cunningham created a fantastically positive atmosphere right from the very start.

I was also impressed by his understanding of a whole raft of issues around playing for dancing (as opposed to playing for people to listen to) and a number of other matters.

It was overall a very positive experience. My thanks to all who contributed to the smooth running of the event. I hope the Branch will continue to run such workshops.

**Colin McEwen**

*[See Alison Ashburner and Jo Turton's piece on page 7. Ed.]*

### Hugh Foss

Dingwall

Dear Wilson,

It is interesting to read Mary Stoker's comments on Hugh Foss: my impression of the man I knew in the 1930s was different. He was tall and slender but carried himself well. His shepherd plaid kilt was not old; he wore it because he was not Scottish and considered he was not entitled to wear any tartan. He was a good dancer and a good teacher. I learnt a lot from the advanced class he taught for a few years pre-war including steps needed for a foursome reel (4 Strathspeys and ½ Reel of Tulloch). The class I think was his idea: small but enjoyable. He danced in the Branch Demonstration Team such as it was in the 1930s as did his wife, Alison. He was a member of the first team representing the Society to go abroad to Brittany in 1938. All the dancers were from London but had to pass for ability as judged by Miss Milligan. His wife was a Scot, I think, and came from the Borders, hence his retreat to Dalry. He lived in Sevenoaks and worked in the Civil Service. Perhaps his kilt appeared old post-war but at that time replacement material was difficult to obtain.

**Ellen Garvie**

### Helen Townley

London SE9

Dear Wilson,

Seeing Helen's name in 'Echoes of the Past' reminded me that Keith Napier's 'Napier Index' was taken on from Helen. In the days of Steam Computers and Punch Cards Helen started to index all the dances and their contents. I believe, though I do not have the full story, that all her material was passed on to Keith and so we now have the Index and, latterly the DanceData website of Alan Paterson owes much to Keith Napier's lists. Both of these works are of great value in finding dances and their figures, books, tunes, music publications and so on.

Is Helen still dancing I wonder? Does any reader know?

**Ron Mackey**

### One of the Earliest Kilts

Guildford

Dear Wilson

The Petrie Museum in London houses about 90,000 objects making it one of the greatest collections of Egyptian and Sudanese archaeology in the world. It illustrates life in the Nile valley from prehistory through the time of the pharaohs, the Ptolemaic, Roman and Coptic times to the Islamic period. The collection is unique with some of the earliest metal, linen and important ancient clothing from Egypt.

The collection is important because so much of it is documented evidence from excavations, providing a unique insight into how people lived and died in the Nile valley.

Boys and men from the time of the New Kingdom, from BC1550 to 1000 wore kilts. They were made of natural linen or fine white linen in many amazing patterns and colours. They were sometimes pleated in common with the style of the women's dresses. The ordinary Egyptian wore short kilts to the knees or just below the knees. Longer ones were worn by those with a higher status. They were held up by a sash or belt.

A museum illustration shows a fringe down the left hand side. This is slightly more to the front than is customary today. Many sculptures and illustrations show the kilt front as a triangle. By the Middle Kingdom from BC2000 to 1750 kilts were longer, status being shown by layers of white linen clothing worn over the kilt.

Underwear was also worn in the form of a loin cloth. The material used was also a measure of status. Workers would strip to their loin clothes when working.

Women did not wear kilts but a piece of cloth wrapped around their body. They started at one shoulder with one wrap around the other shoulder, one around the waist and then tucked it in at the waist.

**Terry Gibbon**  
Guildford Branch

### New Dances

London, W9

Dear Wilson

The Society have decided not to issue any more books of dances – at least until there are a few changes on the Management Board and the decision is reversed. Let us wait and see.

There is, however, no shortage of new dances being published by Branches and individuals. Four are mentioned in New Recordings. At present I have got two of them: Birmingham's Diamond Jubilee Book and Banffshire's 75th Anniversary Book.

I have not yet had time to study them in detail. Birmingham seems to have more new, or adapted, figures e.g. Diagonal Chain Progression and Demi-Tournee. If you are one of those folk who cry 'not more new figures' try the Banffshire's book which has some easier dances.

Both books have a number of tunes clearly composed specifically for the dances. Banffshire has also taken some very popular tunes already played and recorded a lot and adopted them as originals – notably the strathspey *Margaret's Fancy* by Ian and Bill Powrie. Another 'original' in the same book is *Miss Jean Milligan* by Winifred Bird Matthew. Now, this tune was specifically composed for the dance the Angus Reel which was dedicated to Miss Milligan in 1948 in honour of her 25 years service to the Society. Was it acceptable for Banff to use it for another dance? The jury is out. Read more on this subject in the next issue of the Scottish Country Dancer.

**John Laurie.**

## OBITUARY

## LETTER TO THE EDITOR



### Patricia (Pat) Batt

Pat's initial introduction to the Country Dance scene was through an English country dancing class in Harrogate where she lived during the war.

In the early 1950s, when she had returned to London she began Scottish Country Dancing. Later she joined three groups, Tally Ho, Silver Cross and Hertsmere. From 1991 she ran a class in New Barnet. Here she especially enjoyed sharing the history or story behind a dance before teaching it. She also went on many Scottish dancing holidays where she made friends from all over the country.

She enjoyed writing topical poems for ceilidhs and was persuaded to publish her 'party pieces' in small volumes. Through their sale she raised over two and a half thousand pounds for the North London Hospice. She received requests for her poems from all over the world including New Zealand, Canada and Saudi Arabia. Indeed if you 'google' Pat Batt, Scottish dancing on the internet you get a number of 'hits' for her poems!

Derek Haynes wrote a dance for her called 'Two up, two down'.

In her later years she ran Scottish dances to celebrate her 70th, 75th, 80th and most recently her 85th birthday at the end of January 2006.

Pat enjoyed life. She had a positive attitude to everything and had the ability to transmit her enthusiasm and zest for life to those she met. Young children especially were drawn to her as she had a curiosity and interest in things that matched their own.

She died peacefully at the Marie Curie Hospice in London. Her funeral at Hendon on May 2nd was a celebration of her life. Her daughter Jo read a poem and whilst nephew Stephen Lloyd read a tribute that truly captured that essential 'Pat Batt' spirit. To date friends and family have donated over £600 to Marie Curie Cancer care.

**Jo Chima** (Pat Batt's daughter)

### MCs

Worcester Park

Dear Wilson,

I am very pleased to find out that London Branch intends to run an MCs workshop at the Day School in October and I will do my best to attend. The Branch report presented at the AGM also mentions the possibility of an MCs course. I would like to give my thoughts on this subject.

A good MC needs three skills:-

- \* A thorough knowledge of dances and dancing.
- \* Good public speaking skills to put No.1 across.
- \* Leadership skills.

The MC will have to deal with any emergency that arises during the evening. In my oldest copy of *The Reel*, May-July 1976, it tells how the MC Harry Simpson, kept order and prevented panic when a parapet collapsed during a dance at Brent Town Hall causing part of the ceiling to fall in. I hope none of us has to cope with anything like that!

How can these skills be learnt? The obvious answer is by taking the RSCDS Teaching Certificate, which is presumably why so many MCs are teachers. Additionally it is an advantage to be skilled in public speaking. I discovered a local club, Epsom Speakers Club which is part of a larger organisation, Toastmasters International. They teach public speaking through a series of graded speeches (you can choose whatever subject you like to speak about) and participation in Table Topics, which are short, off-the-cuff, speeches. They also teach leadership skills by progression through various administrative tasks, from ballot counter to chairing a meeting and giving educational presentations. You can work at your own speed. I obtained my Competent Toastmaster certificate (public speaking) in 2004 and Competent Leader a few months ago. I now MC regularly for my local dance club in Wimbledon and occasionally for the London Highland Club, and have taken a speaking role at Burns' Night dinners.

The RSCDS and Toastmasters have much in common. Both were founded in the 1920s, and both have a Headquarters organisation and independent local groups (RSCDS branches = Toastmasters' clubs). Both can be found all over the world.

I would suggest therefore that a possible way to train MCs is for them to take the RSCDS written exam, which can now be taken by itself, and attend a local Toastmasters' club. You can find your nearest on [www.toastmasters.org](http://www.toastmasters.org) which lists them by country. I am one of two Scottish dancers at Epsom Speakers Club, out of a current membership of 39. I look forward to a collaboration between the two organisations.

**Elizabeth Bennett**

[We are pleased to print below one of Pat's most popular poems. Ed]

### THE LADIES MAN

I'm a two-sex Scottish Dancer, and may seem rather dim,  
But I never spend one evening as a full time her or him.  
I change my sex from dance to dance, my corners always alter –  
It's really not surprising I occasionally falter.

The old and simple dances I can manage very nicely,  
And I can learn a new dance and do it most precisely.  
But when it comes to next week I don't know if I can,  
For I learnt it as a woman and dance it as a man.

And so, you men who have the luck to stay always the same,  
When female gentlemen go wrong be sparing with your blame.  
I'll add a postscript to this tale – one comfort I have got:  
When both the women change their sex it doesn't show a lot.

## LITTLE SHIP SAILS ON

On a Thursday at the end of May the Little Ship Club celebrated 35 years of Peter Knight's teaching. He has been sailing through the canals of France this summer, returning to teach again in the autumn.

In 35 years Peter has only missed two nights of teaching, quite a record! The club (which has had several venues over the years since starting at the 'Little Ship Club' at Southwark Bridge: hence the name, celebrated the occasion and decided to set Peter off in style with a nautical themed evening. We had several captains and a lot of sailors in the crew. Our dances for the evening had a nautical theme: Pelorus Jack, Culla Bay, The Sailor and we had a p.p.party of



Stephen Webb

p.p.penguins who dropped in to dance the Piper and the Penguin. We were also treated to a Jacobean sword dance from Elaine Wilde and George Ferrier. Well done and many thanks Peter for a huge commitment to Scottish country dancing from your grateful clientele. Little Ship joins up with the Hurlingham Club (where Peter also teaches) three times a year to celebrate St Andrew's night, Burns night and an end of season dance. Each of these functions has 200+ in attendance. Dancing is alive and well.

**Davinia Miln**

## LUCKY HEATHER LUCKY HEATHER!

*The White Heather Jig*: a dance that has remained popular for nearly four decades, and over four decades ago there was the very popular Scottish TV show *The White Heather Club* where Andy Stewart made his name. But why *White Heather*? When you travel through Scotland and enjoy the scenery, more often than not in the summer months of August and September you will see a purple haze on every heath, hill and mountainside. Look closely and you are looking at blooming heather. Of course it is there the year round but in flower we see it, as we know it! Heather is a wonderful soft springy ground cover that quickly recovers after a picnic. Robert Burns, penning a poem about his love for Jean Armour, writes:

“At barn or byre thou shalt na drudge,  
Or naething else to trouble thee;  
But stray among the heather-bells,  
And tent the waving corn wi' me.”

It has other romantic connotations. When Charles Edward Stuart was routed 260 years ago by Cumberland at Culloden Moor and relentlessly pursued for five months across the Highlands of Scotland he was forced to hide or sleep in the open on occasions with heather as a friend for company.



The name heather is adopted as a girl's name. *Calluna vulgaris* (common brush) has large bells or small, double or single with the colour purple, lilac, red, pink, and white! Few varieties are white and white heather is seen rarely in the wild, but they all thrive in poor acidic soil. Mountain hare and pine marten alike enjoy heather. The Grouse lives in older heather but eats the young green shoots. It is popular with bees such that some beekeepers site their hives especially on heathland to capture that strong distinctive flavour of heather honey. And ale is made from it to a much-protected recipe!

And in song too it is not forgotten.

“We can all go together,  
Picking Wild Mountain Thyme,  
All around the blooming Heather,  
Will you go, lassie, go?”

Well, we know why the thistle is associated with Scotland but what is the significance of heather in this regard? Apparently, there wasn't always white heather; legend has it that one day in AD250 Oscar's betrothed Malvina awaited news with her father the great Bard Ossian of her beloved fighting in a distant war when a loyal messenger, weakened from hunger and dishevelled from battle, appeared and collapsing gave her the sad news that Oscar had died but as he died he had reached out pulling at the purple heather to give a bunch to his messenger for Malvina. She was greatly moved by this taking it to cry alone at her loss. The tears fell on the heather she was holding to her heart and also on that growing around turning it all in an instant to pure white. Malvina is said to have declared “Although it is the symbol of my sorrow, may the white heather bring good fortune to all those who find it.” And so white heather continues to this day to be a token of good luck and now we can add to our enjoyment with this knowledge when we next dance *The White Heather Jig!*

**Stephen Webb**