

Introduction

This report, prepared by the Branch Committee of Management, will be presented at the AGM on Friday 13th. June under agenda item 4. The report reviews last year's activities and suggests ways forward for the coming year. The meeting will have the opportunity to comment on the Committee's plans and spending priorities.

Summary

Last year has been a busy and successful one, thanks to the hard work and commitment of many members who have contributed time, energy, enthusiasm and ideas to help the Branch to continue to provide education in Scottish Country dancing to people of a range of age and ability and also bring it to the attention of a wider public. A range of dances have also been enjoyed by many dancers.

The Committee of Management have met six times, subcommittees have reported to the main committee; the officers and convenors have met once.

The Branch has also continued to contribute to the work of the Society: Andrew Kellett is Editor of 'The Scottish Country Dancer', Jeff Robertson is a member of the Management Board and Ann Dix is a co-opted member of the Education and Training Committee .

Progress from last year's Report

- The November dance attracted a good number of less experienced/new dancers with a programme of simple set dances as well as some ceilidh dances, it was also enjoyed by dancers from the beginners' class.
- Colin Dewar's Band was very well received; and our local bands have done us proud, including a new band.
- Gordon Simpson from Glasgow led an excellent musicians' day followed by a dance, much enjoyed by musicians and dancers.
- The all day class for beginners at the Day School was very successful and will be repeated.
- A six week block of Highland Classes was appreciated by dancers and the teacher and will be repeated.
- The new way of running classes at Marlborough has made welcoming new dancers much more effective; thank you to the people who do that work. Consideration is still being given to providing opportunity for less experienced dancers to develop technically.
- The Branch children's class is increasing in numbers; the Family Days have been very much enjoyed and plans are in hand for a Youth Workshop in September 2008.

Membership

Branch annual membership has increased slightly as Long Term members reach the end of their 15 years. Second Branch membership has also increased but we have also had some new members who have taken advantage of the lower class rate for members. The total from March 2008 is: Annual members 536. Long term members 30. Life members 189. Total 755. Second Branch members 94. The membership form is available on the website. We are very grateful to Gaynor Curtis who manages the membership section and updates the Society central data base regularly

Bookstall

The bookstall is still doing a steady trade with mail order requests and the annual visits to the Argyll Day School and Weekend where Ian and his wares are greeted with enthusiasm. He updates the list of his goods regularly on the Branch website. We all appreciate the amount of work Ian and Iris Anderson do for the Branch.

Dances

As you will see from the chart, average attendance at dances has risen. The mix we provide of a dance for non-dancers, one to act as a bridge for those who enjoy ceilidh, reeling or other dancing to venture into something more structured; a dance for those in our beginners' class to experience the joy of the dance floor and a band, and then the rest for experienced dancers has proved successful this year, and we have been pleased to welcome dancers from all parts in the lovely hall we are able to use at St. Columba's. We have had different bands; the wonderful sound of a 5-piece in September where we were delighted to welcome David Hall back to London; Frank Reid provided some splendidly lively tunes for those trying out Scottish country dancing for the first time, and Colin Dewar played for a packed hall before Christmas. We enjoyed Strathallan's first visit to London Branch for the Burns Supper/Ceilidh Dance and so did the many people who came with friends and family. In March the beginners and Popular Scottish Country Dance class catered for the evening AND danced the dances they had been learning in class to excellent music from Kafoozalum; they enjoyed what was for some of them their first trip to St. Columba's and appreciated the help and encouragement they received from the dancers.

The ceilidh after the Day School, with

Season	Average Attendance
2002/3	118
2003/4	130
2004/5	127
2005/6	125
2006/7	134
2007/8	144

Dance average attendance to March

numbers higher than before, once again provided opportunity for all those who attended, no matter how inexperienced, to join together to dance and to enjoy the expertise of others. Our garden dance, at a new home in the grounds of Harrow School, experienced a complete day of rain plus appalling traffic jams because of a local fire but, as usual, where there are dancers and good music a very good time was had by those who attended.

As always, none of these events would take place without a lot of hard work in the background; many thanks to MCs, door keepers, refreshment providers, the people who wash up, the programme devisors, those who transport and accommodate visiting bands and everyone else who sees something that needs to be done and just does it! The commitment of Committee members and volunteers is much appreciated by the dances subcommittee.

Classes Report

The Branch's charitable status rests on its educational role and throughout the year Committee members, teachers and musicians have worked hard to ensure that dancers have had a range of rewarding classes to attend

This year the big innovation has been establishing the three Wednesday evening classes at the same venue and taking the arrangements for these from Kensington and Chelsea College into our own hands. There was initial concern about losing the College publicity but the website is being used more and more and the new arrangement seems to be working well, enabling us for the first time to offer Branch members a discount on the term rate. We have had a few hiccups with the fees which will be sorted out and clearly published before next year's season starts. All three classes have a regular nucleus of dancers and having the classes in the same building has allowed greater flexibility so some dancers who attend the Popular Dances session come early and join the Beginners to brush up footwork and formations, some of the Technique class round the evening off with a couple of popular dances. At the end of each term the classes come together for a party, an arrangement that seems to be greatly enjoyed by all. The musicians have combined too so we have had a 3-piece band to provide the music!

As suggested at last year's AGM, evaluation forms were circulated to the dancers at Marlborough School during the Spring term; the results will be taken into account when planning next year's classes.

During the Spring term a course has been held for music students preparing to be class musicians and two have played for a couple of classes each. We hope this will continue so that we have more experienced musicians available.

The Wednesday afternoon class continues with enthusiasm and has on occasion had a musician for the first time, and the Summer

classes, held after term ends, using a different teacher and musician each time, were once again well supported.

As an experiment this year a block of six highland classes was offered and this does seem to work better than the 'once a month' system used in the past. Ladies' step dancing was again catered for with two six-monthly day courses.

The Sunday Technique classes have been held, with variable attendances. They are much appreciated by those who are able to attend and more publicity will be given to them in the coming year.

The Day School, with the added full day Beginners' Class, had increased numbers again and was thoroughly enjoyed by dancers from near and far.

The Teachers' Certificate Class culminated in an examination day of hard work for volunteers and candidates – many thanks to those who helped.

Taking on the administration of the Wednesday evening classes has involved the classes subcommittee in additional work and the Branch is fortunate to have people prepared to take this on. As always our thanks are due to the teachers and musicians for all the work they do.

Class	04/05	05/06	06/07	07/08
Beginners	20	24	32	27
Popular SCD	20	24	30	29
Technique	12	16	13	21
Wed, General	12	14	15	15
Highland	6	6	8	8
Ladies Step	12	8	9	9
Summer General	27	28	29	35
Sunday Technique	—	—	17	12
Day School	85	96	116	146

Publicity

Our publicity drive seems to have been very successful in bringing in the numbers for dances such as the St. Andrew's Dance and Burns Supper and Ceilidh Dance. The atmosphere at these evenings has been terrific, helped by the bands and by the outstanding contribution of our MCs. Quite a few of those attending were beginners and semi beginners, many of whom were very excited by what they found. We have been making great efforts to publicise classes at these dances in the hope of bringing more people into the fold. We would encourage members to be very welcoming to all novices.

The website is proving very successful; many people arrive at dances, some from other parts of the world, having used the website and existing members also benefit from its wealth of information. Flyers for all events, with an identifiable Branch style, are on the website available for downloading so that all members may advertise Branch events wherever they go; we would also

encourage dancers to carry some Branch business cards with them wherever they go – if you do not have some, ask, and everyone can take part in publicity! Many thanks to Meryl Thomson for all the work and creativity put into it.

In an effort to widen the appeal of the RSCDS we have signed up, for an experimental period, to the website Facebook (www.facebook.com) and also, in an effort to establish a profile on the general London dancing scene, we now have an excellent slot on the internet website www.londondance.com where our activities and classes can now be found. This site, which is linked to Sadlers Wells, covers many dancing styles and we hope to gain interest from other dancing disciplines.

The Reel goes from strength to strength in the capable hands of its editor, Wilson Nicol, working so well with John Reeve to produce a publication that is eagerly awaited in many homes, and not only in the South East. Their work is much appreciated.

The open air dancing in Kensington Gardens drew large numbers of people this year, part of our 'Dance Scottish Week' contribution, and publicity material was distributed there.

Caroline Hamilton has compiled a clear and informative South East Dance Diary while this year Stewart Murray took on the South East Classes List, invaluable to dancers when making plans at the beginning of the season.

Demonstration Class

The number of demonstrations and displays has increased slightly this year; notably we did a demonstration and participation for Annie Lennox and her guests at the launch of her latest album in July, and in September, with Amanda Bignell and Charlotte Trustram we put on a mixed highland and country dance performance at the Nehru Centre, Mayfair, alternating with an Indian dance troupe. Enquiries from outside parties, mainly through the Branch website, continue at a brisk pace but we have been disappointed not to convert more of them into actual engagements. However two new activities generated through the website have been organising ceilidh type entertainment for various groups, and working in schools.

Our activities allow us to proselytise for Scottish Country dancing and we now go to each function well equipped with business cards, flyers about classes and copies of *The Reel*.

We flew the flag for London Branch at the Leeds Festival in July when we fielded two display teams, and the Newcastle Festival in February with 4 competition teams, including 2 mixed teams for the first time. The women's team won their section and one of the mixed teams were placed 2nd equal. 21 dancers took part in the London contribution to the display section.

As a team we supported the Branch Family Day in March, helping less experienced dancers as well as doing a short demonstration. At the September Branch Dance the demonstration was a medley of

dances by the recently deceased Roy Goldring, recognising his talent as a dance deviator and his contribution to Scottish Country dancing in general.

The regular Tuesday class continues in Kensington and Chelsea College premises where the class enjoys the use of a proper dance studio with a good floor, practice barres and mirrors everywhere to encourage self criticism and improvement.

Angela Young completes her 4th year as class teacher in June and Sandra Smith has again been our stalwart class musician. Neil Esslemont and Roger Huth, both excellent pipers with a feel for the dance, have played for various displays and we have also enjoyed dancing to the music of David Hall, Peter Jenkins and Rod. Dorothy, Ian Robertson and Angela Young.

Season	Demonstrations	Team Size
2003/4	23	22
2004/5	27	27
2005/6	21	18
2006/7	25	19
2007/8	26	21

Young Dancers

The Branch continued to run a well supported children's class which met monthly on a Saturday morning. We also held two Family Days during the year; at the morning class adults were encouraged to join in and learn with their children and this was followed by a dance for everyone in the afternoon. Diary pressures meant that we did not host the RSCDS Medal Tests for Young Dancers during the financial year but the next Tests held in May 2008 will be the best attended for many years with 90 candidates entered from 6 different classes. The Branch again offered sponsorship to young dancers wanting to attend RSCDS schools but take up was disappointing.

Plans for the coming dancing year

- increase the number of open air dancing sessions which attracted so many people last summer.
- extend our participation in 'Dance Scottish Week' to include an open evening at St. Columba's leading from the open air dancing.
- run a youth workshop to bring together young dancers in the South East.
- continue highland classes in a block.
- plan an event for the Branch's 80th Anniversary in 2010.
- further publicise scholarships for young people to go to Spring Fling, Summer School, Winter School.
- continue arranging some dances which will be of interest to less experienced dancers.
- continue to seek ways of attracting new dancers using a variety of publicity strategies