

The End of an Era

The final Social of the Burns Scottish Country Dancing Group will be held at St Andrew's Church Hall, Forrest, on the 29th of November. Sadly our numbers no longer make it viable for us to continue.

The origins of the group date back to 1964 when a number of enthusiasts began meeting at the home of Sheila Barritt-Eyles and later to the dance studio of Mal Strachan before becoming established at the Canberra Highland Society and Burns Club in Forrest, becoming one of only two groups in the ACT at that time.

Many years of enjoyment were to follow with the *White Heather Ball* being the event of the year. Sprigs of White Heather were imported from Scotland for these occasions and presented to the ladies on arrival. The Burns Club always provided a wonderful atmosphere for the event until the Burns Club itself relocated to Kambah where the floor was not compatible with dancing in sets and the dancers moved to St Andrew's Church Hall.

Over the years we have been privileged to be taught by and dance with some well known personalities, some no longer with us but fondly remembered – Dave Ross, Stewart McKenzie, Mac McLaren and Helen McLaren who introduced us to the unique style of Scottish Country Dancing. I shall always be grateful to Sheila Barritt-Eyles for bringing us the wonderful dances of John Drewry. We have also learned much from teachers like Les Cumming, Jean Conway and others such as David Currie who, if not qualified, still allowed us many years of enjoyment.

Classes have also been enhanced by the introduction of 'Live Music' a wonderful improvement from the old vinyl records and equipment which often had us losing a bar or more as they jumped when the floor vibrated. Accordionist Hugh McKenna helped many of us through our stressful attempts at gaining our Preliminary and Teacher's certificates and gave us an insight and appreciation of the link between the music and dance. Socials became wonderful nights to the music of others like Bob McInnes, Kate Scott, Mike Heaney and, even earlier, Bob Morrow.

Perhaps the greatest event was the visit by Miss Jean Miligan in 1974 when examinations were run and several dancers obtained their Prelim or Teachers certificate. I can remember doing my own course and how much hard work it was in the 80s. Our examiners then were Les Cumming and Kevin Connelly. At that time we were in awe of both these gentlemen and called them "God and his Offsider", quietly of course.

Time moves on and we all get older and less able to keep the flight in our steps or maintain balance in a flowing strathspey, memory lapses leave us slightly lost on occasions and the aches and pains creep in causing problems. Attracting younger dancers and keeping them is also problematic. I have had the privilege of teaching children's classes for several years which was a rewarding experience but when they reach High School age the pressures it entails means only a few will continue. The problems are the same for all classes and the numbers dwindle to a few diehards to whom it would be unfair to depend on to keep going. So after a long and wonderful fifty years the Burns Scottish Country Dance Group has decided that we can no longer continue. We hope that you will come along on the 29th November and help us go with a smile and also celebrate the genius of John Drewry who has given us so much enjoyment over the years.

Our thanks to all who have attended our functions over the last fifty years; we wish you many years of dancing pleasure in the future.

Sandra Carroll
For the Burns Scottish Country Dancing Group