

# SCOTCH CIRCLE

Vol 34 No 4

November 2014

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## MESSAGE FROM THE CHAIR

The Canberra Winter School has come and gone and, suddenly, the end of the dancing year looms large on the horizon.

At the risk of being repetitive, I should like to mention one more time the fine contributions made by local dancers to the success of the Winter School. Thirty-six dancers from Canberra and its environs registered as dancers; some of them teamed up with a further 20 locals to assist in numerous ways as volunteers during the lead up to and during the School. Thus, fifty-six local dancers helped in one way or another – a tremendous effort! We wish the organisers of next year's School in Brisbane every success. To download a form for that event visit [www.rscds-canberra.org](http://www.rscds-canberra.org)

Programs and recaps for the Burns SCD Group St Andrews Night Social on 29 November and the Combined (Tuesday and Thursday Groups) Christmas Social on 13 December may be downloaded from the Branch website [www.rscds-canberra.com](http://www.rscds-canberra.com)

In this issue you will find:

- Summary: RSCDS Canberra & District Branch AGM
- Impressions of the Canberra Winter School, from Jenny Atton and Kira Dowling;
- Review: *Scottish Country Dancing – the Great Post-War Transformation*
- On a light-hearted note, a “gender-free” dance description;
- A short history of the Burns SCD Group, *The End of an Era*, by Sandra Carroll;
- Highlights: RSCDS AGM/ Conference weekend;
- Final classes and events for 2014 in Canberra and the district.

The Committee extends Season's Greetings to you all and looks forward to seeing you in the New Year.

Jack Arthur

## **Brief Summary of the Canberra & District Branch AGM, 15 October, 2014**

Reports, indicating that Branch activities, membership and finances are in a healthy state, were presented and approved. An interim report of the Winter School, indicating a successful outcome, was also presented and noted. The final Winter School accounts will be available early in the New Year. Copies of all reports are available on request to members who were not present at the meeting. Elected to the Branch committee were: Jack Arthur (Chair); Alan McCulloch (Secretary); Mary Gellatly (Treasurer); David Ayre, Tonyia Watson and Antonella Salpietro (Members).

### **Impressions of the 2014 Winter School – Jenny Atton**

We were melting during Doug Mill's Dundee City Police Jig to Iain Mckenzie's accordion, but what a joy to finish our first set of classes with this satisfying dance. The anticipation had started months before for me as my last and only Winter School was 18 years ago in Adelaide and I could recall the exhilaration, exhaustion and enjoyment but not much else. For the Canberra organisers it had started years before and what a brilliant week they created complemented by pleasant warm weather. It's a huge task planning, managing and delivering a Winter School involving hundreds of people and resources, and my hearty thanks go to everyone involved. In the month beforehand I had tried to build up my stamina by dancing several times a week, and got involved making and hanging decorations in St Edmunds Hall, registering participants and supporting the teachers and musicians of my class. Our class venue at Kingston Baptist Hall was light and airy with a well-sprung floor; perfect for the 20 dancers who gathered from around the Pacific with Joan even travelling from Singapore. The class tea breaks were provided by Angela and her team who baked delicious cakes every day and even shared their special recipes with us. Doug's excellent teaching, witty quips and sensitive feedback were supported by Iain's insights into his lively music.

My afternoons were spent enjoying chatting, resting, participating in the extra classes and walk-throughs, and looking forward to the evening dances. I was not disappointed. The dances were terrific; full of excitement with thoughtfully chosen and well-recapped dances, superb music and often the special pleasure of shared achievement when the set, dancers and band all came together as one.

Our last class started with a rousing rendition of 'Happy Birthday to You' for Cathy ably accompanied by Kate Scott and Mark Jenner on fiddles and Eric Finley's lusty singing. Eric's Scottish warm-up aerobics and how NOT to dance put a smile on everyone's face. His teaching was excellent; full of memorable tips and sound advice. Kate and Mark's patient playing made the repeated steps, figures and transitions under Eric's critical gaze a pleasure to dance to.

All too soon the week, complete with formal dinner and impromptu chats, was over. For example, I rekindled my acquaintance with Alex Gray who had taught me at the Winter School in Adelaide and we discovered that we lived in the same city of Cardiff, UK for many years and have an academic colleague and friend in common. I recalled my over-riding impression of my last Winter School all those years ago was of the friendliness of all involved. Once again my Winter School was filled with fun and laughter with the extra pleasure of helping a little and being part of the something bigger. Mind you, I slept long and soundly for the next few nights!

## **Impressions of the 39<sup>th</sup> Australian Winter School 2014, Canberra, Australia – Kira Dowling**

Put simply, I had a fantastic time at Winter School. Great music, dance, teaching and company, coupled with a friendly atmosphere made the school such a wonderful experience.

The morning classes comprised step practice and learning new dances. Every morning we had the pleasure of dancing to live music from local and international musicians, which really lifted the feet on about the third day when all the dancing made muscles I never knew I had suddenly known to me (sore calves, knees, feet, anyone?).

Though tiring work, the classes were so rewarding. We focussed on new steps (which was something I really enjoyed and will take with me throughout another year of dancing) and formations (the tourbillon was a new one for me), revised old ones, and generally just had a great time as we learnt. We were taught by talented teachers from Australia, Norway, Scotland, New Zealand and Canada.

Extra classes ran in the afternoons, which would sometimes introduce a new dance style. I went along to the Cape Breton Step Dancing class, which was challenging, very high energy, but most of all a lot of fun!

The evening socials were a highlight. The “Dance in Blue” social was awesome fun, and it was great to see everyone decked out in hues of blue to swirl around the floor. At the welcome and farewell socials there were at least half a dozen musicians on stage, which sounded amazing and really inspired us to dance.

Winter school allowed me to meet up with old friends and make new ones. I even met some fellow dancers I had danced with in the children’s class, in that very same hall, seven years ago.

I’d like to publicly thank all the organisers and volunteers for their tireless efforts, without which the school would not have been possible. The success of the school is a testament to their hard work and enthusiasm. Thanks also to the teachers and musicians for their efforts, and of course all the dancers for your company and for the dancing throughout the week.

Every winter school my dancing improves, which is great. But for me, the most important thing was that at the Winter School in Canberra, we had an absolute ball!

### **Review: Scottish Country Dancing: the Great Post-War Transformation**

Rosalind Zuridis, in *The Reel* (No. 288), RSCDS London Branch

By “post-war” in the title of her article, Ms Zuridis is referring to the period after World War II. It is well known that prior to then - during the period between the two world wars - the efforts of the RSCDS led by Jean Milligan and Ysobel Stewart had saved Scottish country dancing from possible extinction and restored its popularity in the UK. But, she argues, what is not so well known, especially among young and newer country dancers, is the story of what happened after that early period, to propel country dancing forward into a new phase of its development (the great post-war transformation).

Ms Zuridis is not the first person to tell this story, but she does provide some fresh insights into it. She notes firstly that the Society's rescue efforts during the 1920s and 1930s, and into the 1950s, had been directed primarily towards preserving country dances pretty much in the way their figures and progressions had been danced in the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries. (How the steps had actually been danced back then is a topic for another discussion.) She made an examination of the books published by the Society during that period, and of other sources. This led her to conclude that many of these early dances have very simple figures and progressions, and left her with the impression that they "were rather sedate and circumscribed, lacking in flow and rarely challenging the confines of the set." Part of the problem, she thinks, is the relatively large number of two-couple dances.

She continues the story. "The dancing scene was considerably altered in the 1950s when a new breed of dancer appeared. For the first time we see the seeds of a desire to create new country dances." Hugh Foss and Hugh Thurston were the "intellectual standard bearers of this new movement and in the 1950s and 1960s they influenced other aspiring dance devisers such as James Cosh, Bob Campbell, Derek Haynes, Roy Clowes, John Drewry, Douglas Henderson and Roy Goldring. What a creative time this was!" She illustrates this with engaging summaries of the new formations in Cosh's *Mairi's Wedding* (1959), Haynes's *My Heather Hills* (1966), Foss's *Polharrow Burn* (1967), and Drewry's *Bratach Bana* (1968). Other formations created in this period include the tournée (Campbell), the spurtle (Henderson), the rondel (Drewry), set and link, and the snowball chain (Haynes).

"Miss Milligan and her colleagues clearly felt the impact of this new wave. In RSCDS Books 22 and 23 we see, for the first time, a move away from collecting the past towards the appreciation of new dances. Book 22 (1963) contains 12 modern dances. Book 23 (1967), with a further 12, shows a similar bending to the new era. From then onwards, RSCDS books would contain an ever increasing number of new dances."

Interestingly, Ms Zuridis says that these devisers were neither dancing teachers nor primarily dancers, but "of a mathematical bent, interested in creating patterns and exploiting spatial possibilities". Yet, she continues, both Foss and Thurston "were well acquainted with the traditions of country dancing". Foss "praised the Society's achievements" she says, and she quotes Thurston as admiring "the ... elegant and artistic manner taught in the RSCDS".

Ms Zuridis concludes:

"From the 1960s onwards we see these two cultures [the RSCDS and the new dance devisers] working together more and more. The RSCDS would power ahead, teaching and publicizing Scottish country dancing around the world. At the same time its publications helped popularize new formations and dances. The passion for devising dances, started by Foss and all the others, has been taken up everywhere. Great new dances may be broadcast via the RSCDS or, equally, in our internet age, can flash around the world and survive on their own merits. Those early devisers would surely approve!"

Footnote: A question – who devised set and link?

## Gender-free Dance Descriptions

The following was inspired by a reading of Chris Ronald's article on this topic in the latest *Scottish Country Dancer*. It is in recap form and the only new notation is as follows:

The ladies' side is now the A side. First lady is 1A; second lady 2A and so on.

The men's side is now the B side. First man is 1B and so on.

Dancers 1A and 1B together constitute 1C etc.

<b>A Weel Kent Dance</b>	(J8x32) 3C (4Cset)	Gender Free Aide Memoires
Bars 1-4	1C cross RH to opposite sides and cast off one place (2C step up on bars 3-4).	
Bars 5-8	1C cross RH back to own sides, and 1A casts off round 3A to finish between 3C all three facing up, as 1B casts up round 2B to finish between 2C all three facing down.	
Bars 9-16	2C+1C+3C circle six hands round and back to where they started (1B between 2C at the top, 1A between 3C in third place).	
Bars 17-24	1C change places RH and 1A dances a figure of eight around 2C as 1B dances likewise round 3C, to finish: 1A in second place on the B side facing 3B; 1B in second place on the A side facing 2A.	
Bars 25-30	Reels of three on the sides, beginning with 1A giving RSh to 3B, 1B RSh to 2A	
Bars 31-32	1C cross RH to second place own sides.	

Hint: The deviser is one of the "intellectual standard bearers" referred to in the previous article.

## The End of an Era – Sandra Carroll

The final Social of the Burns Scottish Country Dancing Group will be held at St Andrew's Church Hall, Forrest, on the 29<sup>th</sup> 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 Milligan 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.

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.

### **Highlights of the RSCDS AGM / Conference Weekend, 7-9 November 2014, Perth, Scotland**

#### Annual General Meeting

- Present were 215 delegates (representing 122 Branches and holding 320 votes), including Alan McCulloch (representing Canberra & District and holding two votes).
- John Wilkinson handed over the chain of office to Jim Healy who takes over as Chairman for the next two years.
- Helen Russell was voted in as Chairman Elect for two years, followed by two years as Chairman.
- The motion to change the legal form of the Society from a Charity to a Company Limited by Guarantee was approved. This will have the effect of ensuring that in the unlikely event the Society was ever to be unable to meet its debts; its officials would not become personally liable for them.
- The motion from the New Zealand Branch to provide RSCDS dance books free of charge to fully-certificated teachers was defeated.

#### Other Highlights

- At the Friday evening dance, 502 dancers enjoyed the music from Matthew McLennan's Band, with a program of dances prepared jointly by Carnoustie, East Angus and Forfar Branches.

- The Ball on Saturday had 524 dancers, who enjoyed the music of Nicol McLaren's Band, and a program prepared by Edinburgh Branch.

### **Final Classes and Events for 2014**

#### **Canberra:**

- Wednesday 26 November: Branch Wednesday Class, final for the year.
- Friday 28 November: Branch Gentle Dancers Class final event for the year; a picnic followed by dancing at Lennox Gardens, Yarralumla, from 12 noon.
- Saturday, 29 November: Burns SCD Group **farewell** St Andrews Night Social (Note: Admission now just \$5 + a small plate)
- Monday 1 December: Burns SCD Group, **farewell** class
- Tuesday 9 December: Belconnen SCD, final class for 2014.
- Thursday 11 December: SCDCC (Thursday), final class for 2014.
- Saturday 13 December: Combined Christmas Social

#### **And District (as notified):**

- Monday 1 December: Bateman's Bay Caledonian Society Combined St Andrews Celebration Lunch and Christmas Feast at the Community Centre, 12:30-4:30 pm. Comprises Haggis ceremony, Christmas meal with haggis and extras and an afternoon of relaxed dancing. Cost is \$5. RSVP by 25 November to Joy (44712315) or Carolyn (44712164)
- Tuesday 9 December: Nowra SCD Group will have its closing night for 2014, commencing at 7.30 pm. It will be an evening of easy, fun dances and supper will be provided. Visitors welcome, usual class charge of \$5.

*Scotch Circle is published by RSCDS (Canberra & District) and the Committee reserves rights of editorial control. Closing date for next Scotch Circle – Friday, 16 January 2015.*

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