

“ IN STEP ”

Newsletter of the Dublin Scottish Country Dance Club.

March 2008

Message from the Chairman

This newsletter has been “resting” in recent months, so it’s very good to see it reinvigorated. On the Club’s behalf, I warmly thank Pam for the work and good judgment she puts into it as editor.

Not a lot changes in our weekly/monthly/annual routine, though we’re glad that new members continue to materialize every so often—not to mention the occasional welcome return of old friends who live elsewhere, and visits by members of other dance clubs.

One small change you will have observed: the fact that at our Thursday classes washing-up is now done at the end of the evening instead of at the end of the break. This “brainwave” resulted from a feeling that the break was too long and should be limited to fifteen minutes.

The committee has discussed more substantial changes to our routine, such as the possibility of a weekend away or a summer “fun” event; but by and large the calendar already seems too crowded to accommodate such ventures. One innovation has been decided on, however: an autumn ceilidh with the proceeds to be donated to charity. The first such event will take place on **Saturday 11 October 2008**, with Hazel as MC and live music from the usual suspects, in our regular meeting-place, the York Road Presbyterian Church Hall; its profits will go to our host, the Church itself.

Another date for your diary:

The AGM of the Dublin Scottish Country Dance will be held on Thursday 22 May.

Happy dancing and a trauma-free anatomy!

John Barnes

Editor’s Notes

Hello to all. Another year of dancing is almost at an end and I am only now getting down to giving you the usual record of our dance club’s activities. Please accept my apologies. Up until recently I was highly committed to another charitable organization and time ran out on me. This has been another enjoyable year as over the winter months we try to learn some new dances and improve others. We are extremely lucky having three such enthusiastic and dedicated teachers and we thank them most sincerely for the time and energy they put into their work. Also many thanks to our devoted and loyal musicians – as has been said so many times before, live music is so much better than tapes. Thursday nights are always a happy time – great music, great teachers and “pupils” trying hard to learn – although some of the geriatrics in the class don’t always give this impression!!!

In May 2007, Helen prepared a questionnaire as a means of obtaining ideas to improve our classes. This was circulated to all members of the club and a summary of the findings is presented on the next page.

Summary of "Questionnaire".

1. Of the 21 dances people mentioned as being one of their favourites, 7 have been included in this year's April programme and the list has been kept for future reference. The dance mentioned most often (by 5 people) was the Irish Rover, so apologies to the person who listed it amongst their least favourite – although she did say that she might get to like it once she had mastered it. Only 6 dances were listed as not liked and the other 5 have not been used.

2. Nobody felt there was too much step or formation practice in class and a small number would like a little more, so this will be worked on – whilst trying not to put off those who don't want it. The formation most requested for extra practice was the strathspey pousette, so the Lea Rig has been included in the April programme. 10 people said they would be interested in occasional technique classes so the Committee is discussing the possibility of bringing a teacher over from Scotland, maybe for a joint workshop with the Cork Club.

3 Several people said that the classes would be more fun if there was less walking through each dance and this is trying to be achieved – but the only way to learn some dances is to walk them through from each place. A verbal comment from someone who didn't fill in the questionnaire, was, that having one dance a week with just a recap and no walk through was good for the brain, especially a dance we had danced the previous week!! We haven't done this as regularly as once a week, but we are certainly doing it more often than we used to. Repeating a dance from one week to the next also helps people remember and I think all three teachers are trying not to have a completely new set of dances each week. Since Hazel and I first took over the teaching from Aad, we have had a policy of carrying about one third of the dances on each April programme on to the next year.

4 There were several suggestions as to how to cater for the beginners – some more practical than others. For example, we generally do not have enough people to separate into two groups, but all of us can make more of an effort to ensure that beginners don't dance together all the time and it is up to the teacher on the night to ask them to sit out if the dance is really too advanced and also to try to make sure this doesn't happen more than necessary.

5 Thank you very much to the 12 people who replied. If anyone else wants to do so, or has any other comments or suggestions, please talk to Hazel, John or me.

6 Finally, thank you to the dancers for your positive comments both on the questionnaire and in class and thanks to our wonderful musicians for all their hard work. This makes the teacher's task so much easier.

Helen Beaney

MR GEORGE GRAY AND HIS REEL

I have two younger brothers, Andy and Paul, and thence two sisters-in-law, respectively Barbara and Jan. Jan, who played at centre forward for England in the 1971 women's World Cup finals in Mexico City, is the mother of Gail Emms, the current Olympic silver medallist in mixed doubles badminton. This story, however, has nothing to do with sport as it centres on my other sister-in-law.

Five years ago all the above, Judy, I and many others gathered in a Cheltenham hotel for my father's eightieth birthday. In the course of a conversation after the aged parents had withdrawn, it emerged that Barbara's maternal grandfather, the late George Gray, had been a leading light in Scottish country dancing circles in Sussex—so much so that someone had devised a dance in his honour and had called it Mr George Gray's Reel.

Well, back in Dublin I undertook a bit of research (in cyber-space) and contacted a few likely individuals in Sussex (by electronic mail), and without too much difficulty got hold of the notation of the dance in question. It didn't have its own tune (I think the stated requirement was, as so often, "any good reel"), so in 2004 I wrote a tune for it and named it Barbara Sutherland's Reel after my sister-in-law. At the same time I showed the notation to our own teachers, who expressed polite interest, but, although it was occasionally mentioned again, nothing more happened... until last year, when our teachers selected Mr George Gray's Reel for the programme of our 2008 annual ball.

I thought Barbara would be interested to know this, so a few months ago I told her so by e-mail, to which she replied that she might bring her parents to see the "performance". Naturally, I quickly explained that "performance" wasn't exactly the word, and that in principle the idea was that all those present should participate, though she and her parents would be welcome if they still wanted to come and watch. Meanwhile, the exchange had evidently triggered a great deal of excitement in the family, and an outpouring of memories, reminiscences and anecdotes in Barbara's mother, Jessie, and Jessie's brother Colin.

The upshot is that all three couples (Jessie and Alec, Colin and Joyce, Barbara and Andy) are coming to the ball on 26 April. It seems that Barbara and Jessie both know quite a number of Scottish country dances (though—surprisingly perhaps—*not* Mr George Gray's Reel), while Colin and Joyce attended Scottish country dancing clubs very regularly for many years after they were married, until about twenty-five years ago, mainly during the time when Colin's father was the MC of the Sussex Scottish Country Dance Association; so although in their seventies they may well feel inclined to join in. Both Colin and Joyce still have their full Highland dress in their wardrobes—a choice of Sutherland and Black Watch tartans, since Colin and his late brothers all served in that regiment—, though that's not necessarily what we'll see at the ball.

It was because of these connections that Barbara adopted the surname Sutherland by deed poll.

Lastly and perhaps uncannily, the day of our ball, 26 April 2008, would have been the ninetieth wedding anniversary of Mr George Gray and his wife, another Jessie.

John Barnes

Ten Commandments for Balls and Socials (King James version)

These may not have been carried down from Mount Schiehallion on shortbread tablets, but anyway, you will not make a mistake by trying to adhere to them:

1. Thou shalt not overestimate thyself when asking people to dance, lest thou beest embarrassed if the set breaks down six times out of eight because of thee.
2. Thou shalt dance now and then with other people than thy spouse and immediate tribe – possibly even with someone from the other table or yon wallflower from the outer reaches of the hall.
3. Thou shalt not walk on the dance floor too early, neither shalt thou do thus alone, for lo! the MC will announce the dance when it is time, and even in Scotland it takes at least two to dance.
4. Thou shalt join a set at the bottom and not in the middle (especially if it may already have been counted), lest thou not cause much wailing and gnashing of teeth before the dance has even started.
5. Thou shalt count the lines if thou art the top man, for the knowledge of one's station in the set produces good will in all men (and women!) (If thou art a woman on the men's side, this commandment may apply to the next man down the line.)
6. Thou shalt look at thy partner during the dance and not at thy »Pilling«, so that she (or he) may remain friendly towards thee and thou mayest ask her (or him) to dance again.
7. Thou shalt not hinder thy neighbour's dance by returning from thy Down-the-middle-and-up on bar 9, blocking forever the centre of the set with extra twiddles and hand-clapping during a half diagonal reel of four, or otherwise not acting as a team player.
8. Thou shalt honour thy musicians, that thy dance may be long into the night and they might even repeat a dance that thou hast liked. But similarly shalt thou help your MC; clap both loudly and long, but remain on the dance floor if thou wilt do that dance again or clear it speedily if not.
9. Thou shalt not chide, lest thou be chided – for verily, nobody hath appointed thee (of all people!) judge of thy neighbour's dancing ability or outlook on what is enjoyable. If thou must chide people, become a dance teacher and chide them in thy class; at balls and socials it is an abomination.
10. Thou shalt enjoy thyself – in spite of these tedious commandments – and help others enjoy themselves, too.