

# In Step

## Dublin Scottish Country Dance Society

### Summer 2013

#### St. Andrew's Night 2012

On the evening of Saturday, November 24<sup>th</sup> several members of the Dance Club and their friends joined members of the Dublin Scottish Benevolent Society of St. Andrew for their annual St. Andrew's Night celebration at the National Yacht Club in Dun Laoghaire.

The attendance of 60 enjoyed an excellent dinner followed by a ceilidh with the dances being called by Hazel to the music of John and Judy.

A notable feature was the number of non Dance Club members who joined in and kept the momentum going right up to *Auld Lang Syne*. To facilitate more comfortable dancing, it is understood that a possible rearrangement of venue is being considered for 2013.

#### Joint Ceilidh

February 14<sup>th</sup> (St. Valentine's Night) saw an experimental joint Scottish-Irish Ceilidh being held in Dublin city centre venue Grand Social, courtesy of the management, in aid of charities supported by the Dublin Scottish Benevolent Society of St. Andrew.

As this venue was unfamiliar to most Dance Club members and participation would mean foregoing the usual Thursday night session at York Road, there were some initial misgivings about attending. These soon evaporated in the company of a large (and orderly) attendance of enthusiastic young folk including many foreign students. Apart from taking part in several of the Irish céilí dances, called by compere Gerry O'Reilly, to the music of TAC, Dance Club members demonstrated *The Dashing White Sergeant* and *Postie's Jig* which were well received by the gathering.

A significant sum was raised for the charities from the event (including raffle proceeds). The Dance Club has received a letter of thanks from the Committee of the Benevolent Society and the personal thanks of its President.

*Pat McCullen*

## A Weekend Away

On a Friday and a Saturday in February, while other Club members were celebrating Robert Burns at the southern end of the country, Judy and I attended a “musicians’ master class event” on the outskirts of Belfast, at La Mon Hotel, Castlereagh. It was hosted by the Ulster-Scots Community Network in partnership with the Ulster-Scots Agency and the Belfast Branch of the RSCDS. Thanks to support from the Ulster-Scots Agency it was heavily subsidized. Although the objective was “to develop the knowledge and skills base of local Ulster-Scots musicians”, we received an invitation and accepted it with alacrity; as we were (I think) the only participants from the Republic, the organizers may have been pleased that we constituted a cross-border dimension.

The event was led by the superb accordeonist Ian Muir of Prestwick and his well-known band, consisting on this occasion of Marie Fielding (fiddle), Neil MacMillan (keyboard) and Nicky McMeechan (percussion). I say “on this occasion” because half-way through the Saturday, after we’d heard plenty of their music, Ian and Marie revealed that they’d never played together before! Needless to say, you wouldn’t have known: all four of that weekend’s band members are amazing musicians (Neil and Nicky on the accordeon as well as their ostensible instruments).

There were about twenty other participants—the band’s students—, I think eleven accordeonists, five fiddlers, a recorder-player, a bass guitarist and three percussionists. In our small way Judy and I were among the most experienced SCD musicians. Many (all?) of the participants were fine instrumentalists but had different backgrounds: several of the accordeonists I spoke to were primarily members of marching bands, and two young ladies aged about twenty were violinists in a music college looking for something different. Photocopies of thirty tunes had been sent for preliminary familiarization to all these participants as the “prescribed texts” for the master class.

On the Friday evening Ian’s band played us a few sets, pausing after each to make comments on such matters as the background and development of Scottish dance music, the composition of modern bands, tune selection and the construction of sets of tunes for dancing.

For the first half of the Saturday morning we were divided into groups according to the instruments we play, each group tutored by a member of Ian’s band. As an alternative to my comfort zone I went to Neil’s session on second accordeon (a standard role in real bands), and became a second-box-player for the rest of the day; I learned plenty, not least that I don’t want to do it again! Judy tells me her session with Marie was informative and stimulating if frustrating because of the absence of follow-up meetings. Marie was very kind\*, and is a beautiful player whom Judy says she could have watched and listened to indefinitely.

For the second half of the morning all the disciples re-assembled, not as an audience but as a massed band. Both this session and the afternoon session were devoted to working on our thirty prescribed tunes, which had been chosen as the music for ten contrasting dances, including some types that Judy and I rarely encounter, such as a Gaelic waltz and a polka. Ian talked about such matters as tempi, phrasing, balance and subtlety, and focused our attention on details such as the initial chord and its rhythmic relationship to the beginning of the dance. When the massed band played its first set the professionals were left speechless—we’d played it so well that they wondered what they were doing there! (And they weren’t just kidding us.) Nonetheless, there were imperfections to address, and more revealed themselves as the day unfolded.

The climax (technically an optional extra, though I think everyone stayed on for it) came on the Saturday evening: Ian's band, together with their newly formed massed band, played for a dance in Knockbreda Parish Church Hall, where Lucy Mulholland's group meets regularly on Saturday evenings. On this occasion the company of dancers was greatly enlarged by enthusiasts from elsewhere, and we noticed at least six sets dancing simultaneously. The programme included the ten dances which had underpinned the work of the master class, while for other dances Ian's band played alone. It was a wonderful evening, and there was fulsome praise from the dancers for the music that had been provided.

In so far as such things can be judged, the event seems to have been a great success. It was certainly a very friendly affair: I wasn't aware of a single sour note of the non-musical variety. Ian and his colleagues proved to be very affable individuals: in one spare moment Ian played a tango on my new accordeon and complimented me on having picked up a bargain! I daresay we all learned a lot; the hotel was a delight; we hardly seemed to stop eating and drinking (tea/coffee, that is); and compliments are due (and were extended) to Iain Carlisle of the Ulster-Scots Community Network—and also a participant with his accordeon—, who organized the whole thing with complete professionalism.

*John Barnes*

\* I recently bought two of her CDs (not knowing that John and Judy had met her) and she sent me a third one free. If anyone would like to borrow them you are welcome. *HMcG*

### **Cork Burns Supper Dance 2013**

On 23/2/2013 a total of 16 dancers and friends from the Dublin Group made their way to Carrigaline for the 39<sup>th</sup> Annual Burns Night dance of the Cork SCD Society, thus contributing approximately 30% of the attendance.

While the emphasis was to be on dancing rather than speeches, Margaret Brown addressed and speedily dispatched the Haggis, John Scott-Baird proposed the Immortal Memory and Patrick O'Hara demolished the mistaken notion that Robert Burns might be from Scotland rather than from West Cork and related to his own forebears. (If only one had known!) Helen Hegarty was moved to provide a choral response to all of this.

It was then time for the excellent Shandon Céilí Band to swing into action and, of 17 dances listed, only 2 had to be omitted by the time proceedings (officially) ended after 1am on Sunday morning.

John Scott-Baird thanked the Dublin group for their support then Helen McGinley thanked the Cork Society for its warm welcome and drew attention to the forthcoming visit of the International Branch to Killarney in May.

## **Annual Dance 2013**

The Club's Annual Dance took place at Taney Parish Centre, Dundrum, on April 13<sup>th</sup>.

Unfortunately, for a variety of reasons, bookings had been unusually slack this year but eventual numbers settled around 28 including reduced but welcome contingents from Portadown and Cork (including John and Margaret Brown who had travelled from Scotland). Helen's Mum and Dad had also travelled from the UK to be present.

The 23 dances on the programme (including extras) comprised a well-balanced selection of eight jigs, eight reels and seven strathspeys which, with other dances, had been worked through by club members under the tutelage of Hazel, Helen and John over the preceding eight months.

The whole evening was carried off smoothly by the organising teamwork of Florrie and Blair, Hazel, Helen and John, who called the dances and occasionally galloped down from the stage to make up that elusive "one more couple"!

Everything was underwritten by the sheer professionalism of John and Judy Barnes (music for 23 dances, catering for the evening and the logistics of getting food supplies and weighty electronic equipment to and from the hall!)

Several dancers commented that the reduced numbers had meant more enjoyable dancing due to the additional space available.

John Scott-Baird (Cork) spoke for all the dancers when he thanked the Dublin Club for the way in which the event had been organised and run.

John Barnes, Chairman, (complaining that others had stolen his thunder!) concluded the evening with a few well-chosen words and then it was time for "Auld Lang Syne".

*Pat McCullen*

## **Dance Programmes**

Leafing through the latest issue of *The Reel* (the quarterly newsletter of RSCDS London Branch), it was noted that of three dance programmes (62 dances) published for events at London venues in May and June 2013, 71% have been danced by the Dublin Club in recent years. This provides a measure of how well dances selected for Dublin coincide with current trends elsewhere.

*Pat McCullen*

When Hazel, John and I get together to discuss the programme for the next Annual Dance, we take into account dances that we have enjoyed elsewhere, but we always try to keep a third of the previous programme so that there is a measure of familiarity. So, if you especially like, or especially dislike, a particular dance, please do tell us. If we get no feedback, we will continue to follow our own preferences. (The programme for the Canadian visitors is slightly different as their teacher has submitted some dances that none of us knew.)

*Helen Mc Ginley*

## Looking Back, Moving Forward



A series of celebrations is underway to mark the 150<sup>th</sup> anniversary in 2013 of the founding of Dun Laoghaire Presbyterian Church. The first was the creation of a cross-stitched banner representing the Church itself and the organisations which use the premises; Helen's contribution on behalf of the SCD Club is shown above. The banner was completed, framed and hung in time for the first event: a concert by Dun Laoghaire Choral Society and featuring the soprano soloist Claudia Boyle. The Church was full and the concert was excellent – as were the tray bakes and tea/coffee provided downstairs afterwards. The flower festival and art exhibition in May were also a great success, with the Club sponsoring the flower arrangement representing the hymn *Lord of the Dance* (below). Future plans include two services and a broadcast on RTÉ TV over the anniversary weekend 21<sup>st</sup>-23<sup>rd</sup> June as well as a Songs of Praise service in October, a Christmas Social and the publication of a history of the Church and its congregation, to which John has contributed as a writer and editor.



## Dancing Holiday in Lagos in the Algarve, Portugal

On Wednesday 24<sup>th</sup> April, Ruth Hughes and myself set off for a dancing holiday in the Algarve. The journey was uneventful until we got to Faro Airport where we discovered the travel company had only booked half of the party into the hotel in Lagos. Places had been found in another hotel but sorting this out caused a delay of nearly 2 hours in the airport. As we had had a very early start, even with the delay we got to our hotel not long after lunch. My friend Betty, from previous dancing holidays, was travelling on her own this year and she was given a magnificent suite with a balcony overlooking the swimming pools and then the beach and sea. Unfortunately, we had a rather dark room overlooking the car park at the end of an even darker long corridor. However, we were able to spend most of the time on Betty's balcony with its beautiful views. The hotel was some distance from the old town of Lagos but the half hour walk was mostly along a beautiful sandy beach.

The holiday could be divided into three parts. Relaxing time, tourist time and dancing time.

During relaxing time we managed to have two swims on the beautiful if rather chilly beach, read several books and drank tea and coffee sitting on Betty's balcony, although there wasn't enough sun to get much of a tan!

We had quite a varied tourist time. We walked around the town, shopped, had lunches and watched a medieval parade with lots of people in very elaborate costumes. Finding information about possible tours was very difficult - the tourist season didn't start till 1<sup>st</sup> May when we were going home! However, we managed to book a 4wheeled drive trip to the nearby Monique mountains which we were assured wouldn't be off road! It turned out to be a great trip with plenty of rough going. We visited a small local bakery, a honey-producing small business, an orange orchard where we could pick our own oranges and a "poitin"-type manufacturing establishment. The scenery was great, the road side flowers being absolutely incredible - all shapes and colours. We also had a trip in a small boat up river to see birds and wildlife. The storks with their nests on top of old chimneys were amazing. We also saw weaver bird nests but no weaver birds. The stream was quite narrow so we had to keep alert to avoid being lassoed by the tall vegetation that overhung the water. Our guide also kept us going with lots of local yarns and even a glass of port. Our third trip was again by boat along the coast where there are amazing eroded cliffs. We had a personal guide who even managed to catch a sea bass during the trip. The one disadvantage was that it was freezing cold.

So now to the dancing. Every day at 4pm there was a walk-through of the dances that were in the evening's programme. These are done with no music and everybody doesn't go to them! Sometimes you left this somewhat befuddled with 8 or 9 dances all mixed up in your head but overall it did make a difference in the evening. One day after the walk through we had to reconstruct the movements using our shampoo bottles labelled with lipstick! There were 15 dances on the programme each evening which were recapped and occasionally walked. There were about 7 or 8 sets up dancing and Colin Dewar, Alasdair MacLeod and Gus Wilson gave us brilliant music. On two nights, we had actually done 10 of the dances at some time in Dublin. But every night there were some really challenging dances from *The Startled Rabbits* to *Jennifer's Itchy Fingers*.

All in all, a very enjoyable weeks holiday.

*Hazel Convery*

## International Branch Weekend 2013



“Make Merry in Kerry” was the theme of this year’s biannual gathering of the RSCDS International Branch which brought over 120 dancers, musicians and friends from 18 countries to Killarney for the weekend of May 17-20. The weekend was dedicated to the memory of Susi Mayr, founder of the Vienna Branch and a driving force in the foundation of the International Branch. (Two of her dances, *The Ambassadors’ Reel* and *Nothing in Common*, featured on the programme.)

The event was the culmination of two years’ work by an organising committee of five including our own Helen McGinley. Visitors came from as far afield as Australia, USA and Canada in addition to a large contingent from across Europe. Music for classes and evening dances was provided by the punchy Glencraig Scottish Country Dance Band which has recently released its fourth CD.

Morning classes at low impact, intermediate and advanced levels were taken by well-known teachers Malcolm Brown (*Links with St. Petersburg* and *Chasing the Wild Goose*), Tim Wilson (*Linnea’s Strathspey*) and newcomer Raphaëlle Orgeret of France. It is a policy of IB to give new teachers an opportunity to develop their skills in such surroundings.

There were numerous favourable comments on the dance programme selected for the opening night (Friday), which included numerous dances familiar to the Dublin Club. (Coincidence?) Saturday was ceilidh night featuring a mixture of dance, music and song, together with a sketch demonstrating the hazards of mixing yachting, fishing, golfing and tennis too closely via a series of swinging rods, clubs and racquets in ‘near miss’ mode which brought the house down.

Sunday afternoon brought an opportunity for the visitors to sample the head-spinning exuberance of Irish set dancing under the guidance of local teachers. As the Grand Ball that evening was to usher in some less familiar dances, an unscheduled walk-through was arranged to follow the Irish dance session. Demand outstripped the available capacity in the hotel’s Innisfallen Suite (the main ballroom was being set up for the Ball) but in the event several key dances on the evening programme were walked and this was appreciated by participants.

Following the Gala Banquet the thanks of the participants was conveyed to the hotel staff for the quality of service rendered and to the band for its role in classes and throughout. A raffle was also held to raise scholarship funds\* in support of some who might otherwise lack the resources to develop their SCD interest.

It was then 'on with the Ball'. A visitor from the country of origin of each dance made the introduction and recap. Three dances were deleted from the original programme as a consequence of three repeats of dances that had proved to be particularly popular. As usual, most of the experienced dancers were only too willing to 'straighten out' anyone unfamiliar with some of the dances. On completion of the dance programme, the inevitable party room beckoned!

All groups came together for a final class on Monday morning followed by a question/answer session on issues relating to the future development of the International Branch. Monday lunchtime saw a parting of the ways: Homeward bound participants 'loaded up and shipped out' while those seeking to make the most of their visit to Ireland could look forward to a week of tours to places of interest in the South and West culminating in a final ceilidh in Cork on May 25<sup>th</sup>.

Bearing in mind the extraordinary distances that many participants had travelled to get here and the sometimes tortuous travel arrangements that had to be made (with a potential bus strike lurking in the background) one could only wish the visitors 'fair weather and a safe journey home'.

*Pat McCullen*

\* A fund has been set up by the Branch in memory of Susi and discussion is ongoing as to exactly how it will operate. *HMcG*

#### Personal impressions:

About 50% of participants had opted for the advanced level classes (suggesting the presence of a fair number of teachers or aspiring teachers) while 25% took each of the low impact and intermediate classes.

It would have been helpful if more of the Sunday (Ball) dances had formed part of the morning class material as was the case with *Linnea's Strathspey*. There may, of course, have been a reason why this was not so.

It was good to renew acquaintance with persons previously encountered at St. Andrew's over the years.

The Gleneagle Hotel was a well-chosen venue with all the facilities required and excellent staff.

*Pat McCullen*

Sarah and I enjoyed the weekend in Killarney. There were workshops in the mornings and a dance each evening, and on Saturday afternoon they organised tours so that we could see the local scenery. We opted for the boat trip on the lake.

The workshops were set at three levels – Sarah and I went to the intermediate level. The instructors included names that we have encountered as writers of dances. Some of the work was a preparation for the evening dances; for example we rehearsed *Linnea's Strathspey*, which was on Sunday night's programme. It includes the "chaperoned chain progression", which I would not have grasped if we hadn't practised it at the workshop. We also learned things like how to dance an allemande properly.

Friday and Sunday night's dances were the big events, with the steps for all the dances available on the website in advance. We needed this, because all we had on the night was a recap! Friday night's programme was compiled by Helen, and included several familiar dances. Sunday night's was less familiar. It started with the *Waltz country dance* – familiar enough, except that there were unexpected variations. Hazel's usual instruction, "Ignore your partner to start", didn't apply; we started with couples advancing with nearer hands joined. During the evening I found myself deciding to miss some of the unfamiliar dances, only to find they were looking for a few more people to make up a set, and I had to give it a go!



The ceilidh on Saturday night was a mixture of simpler dances (that could easily be called) and other entertainments such as songs. But when I came back into the ballroom after a short break, they were dancing the *Eightsome Reel*, which needs a bit of advance knowledge! We finished with *Strip the willow*; usually, with less experienced dancers, this gets behind time. So it was a sign of the experience of the dancers that nearly everyone kept to doing two bars per turn, even though this is very fast.

They fed us well in the hotel – in fact that was part of the problem! With the logistics of feeding about 100 people each evening, it takes time to get round to serving everyone. Then, with more and richer food than we would be used to eating (others may disagree!), we could have done with a break after dinner. But of course we couldn't do that – our priority was to start dancing!

*Alan French*

When I agreed to be a member of the organising sub-committee – because I felt that there ought to be someone actually in the country where the weekend was to take place – I had no idea just how many emails it would generate! Having recommended the Gleneagle Hotel back in the summer of 2011 I left the choice of venue to George and Chris, and didn't really have much more involvement until the last six months or so before the event. Then it was 'all hands on deck'.

My brief for writing the Friday night programme was to choose 14 easy or well-known dances. I selected dances I enjoy, often with good tunes to match (so it's little wonder that we have danced them here in Dublin in recent years, given that I have a third of the instruction and an equal say in our dance programmes). However, when George asked me to write the programme, he didn't tell me that made me MC for the night! I managed to delegate two thirds of the evening to the Branch Chairman and his wife so that I could dance, insisting that under no circumstances was I going to miss *The Montgomeries' Rant*! For the last couple of weeks beforehand, I was getting more and more nervous, but it was alright on the night – at least, no-one has told me it was not ... .

The three teachers were given completely free rein, although they did consult each other to make sure there was no duplication. Tim chose to teach his own *Linnea's Strathspey* but other than that I am not surprised that they did not teach from the evening programmes. The programmes and crib sheets were available for months beforehand and dancers from different areas would be familiar with different dances; most folk attending a workshop want to learn unfamiliar formations and dances.

I wasn't able to attend any of the advanced classes as I was making up numbers where required, which, by coincidence, meant that unfortunately I didn't get to any of Raphaëlle's classes, but I enjoyed both Tim's intermediate and Malcolm's low impact. I think my teaching benefits from observing other teachers, as well as my dancing. There is always room for improvement – when I feel I have nothing left to learn, then it will be time to put away my dance pumps. I hope that never happens, though.

Planning is now beginning for the 2015 weekend, which looks as if it may be in Krakow – see you there? In the meantime, the Branch Committee is considering holding a one-day event in the even-numbered years and is looking for suggestions as to what and where, so if you have any bright ideas let me know and I'll pass them on.

*Helen Mc Ginley*

## Thank You

A big thank you, as always, to those of you who have supported individuals' charitable events this year.

Various people have sold raffle tickets for an assortment of charities.

Florrie held her annual Daffodil Day coffee morning and sold pins at dancing in March for the Irish Cancer Society, raising the fantastic sum of €1,300.

Helen took part in the Women's Mini-Marathon on the June bank holiday and has so far raised €300 for Aware, with more promised.

## Dates For Your Diary

Thursday 5 <sup>th</sup> September	Dancing recommences
Thursday 12 <sup>th</sup> September	Dublin SCD Club AGM – please aim for a prompt start: the earlier the meeting is over, the more dancing time we have!
Friday 27 <sup>th</sup> September	Joint dance with Toronto Petronella Dancers St. Thomas' Hall, Foster Avenue
Friday 29 <sup>th</sup> November	St. Andrew's Night Dinner and Ceilidh National Yacht Club Run by Dublin Scottish Benevolent Society of St. Andrew

*I wish you all a happy and healthy summer break (and I hope it really is summer!) and look forward to seeing you again in September.*

*Helen*

Should auld acquaintance be forgot,  
And never brought to mind?  
Should auld acquaintance be forgot,  
And auld lang syne?

~Robert Burns

