



Scottish Traditions of Dance Trust

NEWSLETTER WINTER 1996

DANCING HAS BEEN A SCOTTISH TRADITION FOR CENTURIES - BUT WHAT EXACTLY DO WE MEAN BY SCOTTISH DANCING?

Country Dancing? Of Course! **Highland Dancing?** Naturally! **Step Dancing?** Often graceful, often intricate, often exciting - and some of it finding its way back from the other side of the Atlantic. **Ceilidh Dancing?** Vigorous, rollicking at times, sometimes a bit suspect in its music modes to the purist ear, but nonetheless essentially Scottish in its exuberance and sheer sociability. **Shetland Dancing?** The vibrant, vital outcome of a blend

of cultures - likewise **Hebridean Dance**. **Military Dancing?** Well, so far as we know Scottish soldiers have been dancing since at least the 12th century - and to this day dancing is part of the training of a Scottish soldier.

There is, then, no **ONE** Scottish Dance Tradition. There is, instead, one of the richest diversities of dance traditions to be found anywhere.

Thus, the **SCOTTISH TRADITIONS OF DANCE TRUST** has been created as the

ONLY organisation with the express aim of fostering ALL of Scotland's traditions of dance - *wherever and however they are enjoyed*.

With Scottish Arts Council help we have already begun our national programme of dance research, cataloguing the changes and variations in dance and dance practice the length and breadth of the land.



IN THE BEGINNING

Dance in Scotland is Alive and Well - Official!

On October 25th and 26th 1994 the Scottish Arts Council and Stirling District Council hosted a Conference on Scotland's Dance Traditions. One hundred and five delegates representing dancers, dance and teaching organisations, local and national government, academic and research interests, saw demonstrations of most of the native dance forms and discussed the present state of dance in Scotland.

This was pronounced healthy, indeed thriving. But the future of dance is another matter.

There was a full and wide-ranging discussion on the development needs of the Scottish traditions of dance. Conference identified a need for greater publicity for and awareness of the varied dance traditions through the media and local authorities. There was a demand for increased educational opportunities in our dance tradition, and an outstanding need for an organised research programme and the establishment of a National Dance Archive.

As a direct result of the Conference, Scottish Arts Council Dance and Mime Officer, Patricia Eckersley, brought together a working party to study how these aims could be furthered.

The working party comprised, Bob Blair - *ceilidh dance caller*; Dr. Peter Cooke - *dance anthropologist and former lecturer at the School of Scottish Studies*, Billy Forsyth - *Chairman, Scottish Official Board of Highland Dancing*; Joan R. Henderson - *former lecturer in dance at*

Moray House, choreographer and dance ethnologist; Evelyn M. Hood, - *dance researcher and writer*; Dr. Alastair McFadyen - *retired lecturer at Jordanhill College of Education and former Chairman of the Royal Scottish Country Dance Society*; Alex McGuire - *Chairman, Scottish Official Highland Dance Association*; Maggie Moore - *step dancer and dance teacher*.

The Working Group first met on November 10th, 1994, and set to work drawing up the aims and objectives of an organisation that could fulfil the needs identified by the Stirling Conference. In the early Summer 1995 the first dance research project was launched in Fife and Angus.

A few days over one year after that initial meeting, the Working Party, on November 21st, 1995, officially became The Scottish Traditions of Dance Trust.

SCOTTISH COUNTRY DANCING AND THE SCOTTISH TRADITIONS OF DANCE TRUST *Dr. Alastair McFadyen*

A dictionary definition of "tradition" reads as follows: *Anything bound up with or continuing in the life of a family or community.*

With a continuous history of at least 300 years, and having contributed so much to the social and musical life of the Scots, the Country Dance is one of Scotland's foremost traditions of dance.

Originally imported into Scotland and at times in danger of being displaced by other forms of social dancing, the Country Dance has survived successfully to the present day, and,

with its music, is recognised throughout the world as an essential part of Scotland's cultural heritage.

One possible reason for its successful survival is that its appeal was never limited to one section or group of people. It has always been a dance form enjoyed by everyone regardless of age, profession, social status or nationality.

Referring to Country Dances, the renowned Glasgow dance teachers, Robert and Joseph Lowe wrote in 1822: *In them all are alike partakers of the pleasure... there are no silent, envious gazers... joyous gaiety animates every countenance, and, while pleasure beams in every eye, the young and old are equally employed, informing the mazy circlets of the dance.*

And, recalling the dancing at the beginning of the 19th century, Mrs. Elizabeth Grant of Rothiemurchus wrote of dancing in the countryside: *A few candles lighted up bare walls at short warning, fiddles and whisky punch were always at hand, and the gentles and simples reeled away in company...*

CHANGING WITH THE TIMES

Adaptability is another notable feature of the development of the Country Dance. By absorbing elements from other dance while retaining its own essential characteristics, country dancing has survived all the challenges of changing fashion. The result is that in its form, style and technique, it now, at the end of the 20th century, reflects the influences of classical ballet, Scotch Reels, solo step dancing, quadrilles, the waltz and other circle dances.

This isn't really surprising when one remembers that until fairly recent times, instruction in all these dance forms was given by the same teacher. An exchange of influences was inevitable.

Evolution is an essential ingredient of tradition. Any tradition which fails to meet the challenges presented to each generation of its practitioners is doomed to ossification and almost certain extinction.

The RSCDS welcomes the STDT

Any assessment of Scottish country dancing's response to the challenges of this century must acknowledge the achievements of the Royal Scottish Country Dance Society which, by its efforts since 1923, has gained a worldwide following for this dance form.

As the 21st century approaches, Scottish country dancing now has another ally in the Scottish Traditions of Dance Trust.

Recognising that the richness of traditional dance in Scotland stems from its variety, the STDT aims, through the projects it initiates, to promote the interests of all of the Scottish traditions of dance, and to gain recognition and respect for the achievements and distinctive qualities of each of them.

Anyone interested in traditional dance, regardless of particular loyalties, can readily identify with the aims of the Trust, and by supporting it, assist the Trust in achieving its ultimate aim of ensuring the continuation in the next century of the vital and varied Scottish traditions of dance.

STEPPING IT OUT WITH THE STDT

Maggie Moore

Just as the 1960s are remembered for the revival of traditional song and the 1970s for the resurgence of Scottish instrumental music, I believe that the 1990's will be recognised as the decade of the renaissance of Scotland's traditions of dance.

Not that dance has ever disappeared from Scottish culture. Worldwide participation in the celebrations of our two most prominent dance forms - Highland dancing and Scottish country dancing - bear testimony to that. But in the last few years their have been two distinct and important developments.

The first of these is the great upsurge of interest in ceilidh dancing among the younger generation in our major cities. For instance 400 and more enthusiastic dancers flock regularly to dance in Edinburgh's Assembly Rooms.

The second is the reawakening of interest in the dance traditions of some of the far-flung corners of Scotland - the Outer Hebrides, Shetland and that most westerly of all Scottish islands, Cape Breton Island in Nova Scotia! Anyone who has ever visited Cape Breton knows just how overwhelmed one can be by the Scottishness or Galeicness of the people, the place-names, the music, song, language and humour.

RESEARCH AND THE RENAISSANCE

The Scottish Traditions of Dance Trust has been formed to reflect and support the entire panoply of Scottish dance heritage for the benefit of our own and future generations.

If we look at three of our lesser-known traditions we can see what can be achieved by way of proper research and the rejuvenation of local dance styles even in the later part of the 20th century. (See also *Project Co-ordinator Joan Henderson's Report*)

The Shetland Folkdance Society has done some marvellous research by visiting older members of the community and learning from them old setting steps, polkas, and versions of Shetland Reels which had fallen out of common currency. The Society then spread the newly-gathered knowledge through schools, performances and community events.

Maria Leask and James Balfour enchanted the 1994 Scottish Arts Council Stirling Conference with descriptions and demonstrations. If you ever have the opportunity to participate in a Shetland Dance workshop, I would highly recommend it!

A similar research success story can be related from Barra where Katie-Ann MacKinnon and Fearchar MacNeill have re-introduced some of the solo dances popular in the Outer Hebrides in the 19th century. These include Tulloch Gorm, First of August, Highland Laddie and Blue Bonnets. These dances incorporate both Highland movements and percussive step work and perhaps reflect the varied influences of Ewen MacLachlan, the itinerant dancing master who is credited as their source.

The re-introduction of many step dances to Scotland has come about in a different way thanks to the vibrant and unbroken tradition existing in Cape Breton. We are fortunate in our role models and teachers - Harvey Beaton, Rodney MacDonald and Jean MacNeill. And in Cape Breton we can visit such luminaries as Willie Fraser and Margaret Gillis who can trace their Highland ancestry as recently as three generations back.

One factor in the step-dance revival is the acknowledgement that it has a very accessible social aspect in the old Scotch Reels which can be enjoyed with the minimum of complicated footwork while retaining the essence of the style - using the feet as a drum to complement the exciting rhythms of the old strathspeys and reels.

HELP US TO DOCUMENT AND CONSERVE

This is an exciting time to be involved in Scottish dance - wherever your main interest lies.

The different styles complement each other and reflect the social and cultural developments of the past three centuries and more... and I haven't even touched on all the other strands in our dance tapestry such as the quadrilles, the early court dancing, the military dancing, the round-the-room dances.

And then there is the all-important local colour and variation in dance styles that can be seen at dances and weddings and other occasions throughout the length and breadth of the country.

Are any unusual dances done in your area - or any local variation of well-known dances? If so, please let us know. With your help the Scottish Traditions of Dance Trust can document, conserve and pass on to new and coming generations these important facts and nuances of our infinitely rich dance heritage.

BEGINNING THE WORK OF RESEARCH

Joan R. Henderson,

(Scottish Traditions of Dance Trust Research Project Co-ordinator)

One of the most important outcomes of the 1994 Stirling Conference on Scotland's Dances was the resolution that something be done - and quickly - to set up a programme of research into traditional dance along with the establishment of a National Dance Archive.

With this in mind, the working party created to establish the Scottish Traditions of Dance Trust successfully sought Scottish Arts Council funding for a Pilot Research Project in Angus and Fife using volunteer researchers in the first instance. The grant was awarded provided the information be fed back in to the communities whence they came... a very important aspect of the future work of the Scottish Traditions of Dance Trust.

THE TARGET GROUP

Particular attention was paid to oral and practical evidence. A secondary aim was to establish the whereabouts and availability of other sources of dance information such as photographs, films, newspaper articles, diaries and other memorabilia. By the end of the pilot project we hoped to have extended our knowledge of dances and dancing in Fife and Angus, and to have gathered a useful archive of dance data.

The main objective of the project was to target the 70-100 year olds, to collect information on the types of dancing done on all sorts of dance occasions from both evenings to games competitions to formal balls, all within their description of the social context of the given time and place.

The volunteer researchers were armed with state-of-the-art recording equipment and received an intensive training in research techniques. Actually research work began in May 1995 and covered the following towns, villages and areas - Kirkcaldy, Leslie, Leven, Buckhaven, Dunbeath, Dunfermline, Cupar, Balmullo, Crossgates and Kelty in Fife. Glenesk, Glen Clova, Glen Prosen, Glenisla, Airlie, Kirriemuir, Collieston, Tarfside, Memrose, Menmuir, Edzell, Brechin, Forfar, Montrose, Newtyle, Monifieth, Glamis, in Angus.

We also, by chance, received excellent information on dance practices in Crianlarich, Perthshire.

Research is continuing in Angus and Fife and we have received further Scottish Arts Council financial aid to proceed with this work in South Aberdeenshire. We are currently also seeking funding to allow us to begin research in Perth and Perthshire.

GENERAL FINDINGS IN FIFE AND ANGUS

As dance is known to reflect the social situation in which it exists, the importance of placing the traditional dances in their own local social context is of prime importance. From this angle we can report that the details of lifestyle - e.g. the effect of occupations, transport considerations, the local economic situation and social structure, the intervention of wars on the dances of locality - emerged in amazing detail from the informants.

Forgotten dances have been remembered and these must not only be noted but re-learned and passed on in workshops. Among these dances are "Lees Royal" "Baden Powell Schottische", "Scottische Country Dance" and the other long since out of favour "Polka Mazurka", "Jackie Tar" and "Waltz Cotillion".

Local ways of dancing different sections of some known dances have been described and can be re-learned, e.g. in "Broun's Reel" and "Eightsome Reel".

The styles of dance used at different occasions have been exemplified and **difference in performance** of steps, turns and holds spelt out.

The occasions for dance and the formality/formality made clear.

The places where dances occurred were detailed as were the organisation and the procedure and order of dances at functions and the **etiquette and dress code**.

In some areas we were able to hear from local celebrity musicians about the partnership between musicians and dancers, and the changing and lasting effect of new instrumental accompaniment on a dance's performance. We are also learning much about how the dances were learned and transmitted.

GETTING "STUCK IN ABOUT IT"!

Just to give you a flavour of some of the material we have gathered in Fife and Angus, here are some extracts from tape transcriptions.

From BM – a musician:

If you took the 6/8 Barn Dance to the Highlanders Club in Glasgow, they rejected it; in Glasgow in the 1960's they preserved a series of dances you never saw anywhere else in Scotland e.g. a 2-step called Bonnie Dundee and a whole breed of dances only known to Glasgow Gaels.

If you tried to do the dances you'd done in Glasgow when you played in Fife, you'd never get started. Obviously there are localised methods of dancing and each area has stuck to their own.....

At St. Andrews University students enjoy dancing, there's a freedom there in the students, they're not restricted, there's no tension about how to do it, they just do it.

In another style, the proper way, all the hand holds are accurate and the steps are accurate and everybody has to make the move at the right time – that's that style; then, in the big houses, they call them Reel Parties, the hands are often behind the back and instead of doing the accepted RSCDS sort of movements, you get a swing of the body and a sort of flap of the feet, and they don't dance any other way than that. But the way the rurals have always done it has been pretty enjoyable – no eloquent footwork, but they get stuck in about it; they can swing at amazing speeds but with controlled body movements.

JC – *"Tae learn, older women would drag ye on tae the floor and they'd put you through yer paces: you had tae do it right, you had to pay attention and do as ye were told. They'd tell you – "Watch the top couple, laddie"*

DM – musician – *"Bobby McLeod in the late fifties made the Barn Dance have a short bouncy sort of step, probably by sing 2/4 pipe marches for a Schottische step; it took a long time for that sort of bouncy style to arrive in the East of Scotland".*

AD – *In Broun's Reel there were 5 couples in a set: on encore, we'd do it all again with two and finish with a reel of four. Each area, each dance hall had distinctive ways they did some of the dances. Some would set all the time and some would swing all the time.*

EVALUATION

The project has already undoubtedly extended knowledge of the dancing and dances in the areas concerned.

There is proof positive of the richness of the heritage of local traditional dance in the words of the senior citizens who have given us clear

information about what dances were done and how they were done. Their information shows a living but continually changing picture, covering all classes of society and each with its own style of performance.

Despite today's homogenisation of culture, the project has proved that the number of very local variations within our dances are worth noting for future generations who could lose these rich nuances of their heritage.

Although Scotland is renowned for its traditional dancing, the quality and variation therein must not be lost.

The information that has been gathered in Fife and Angus is being indexed in a way compatible to other research findings in dance. But the main way of feeding back the information into the community is planned as follows:

1. We will bring together the informants with local dance teachers and enthusiasts and Trust representatives to learn the forgotten dances, and the local variations of known dances. Cameras will record this workshop.

2. Following this event it is hoped to arrange a dance event in Forfar, in the first instance, bringing together children and young people with the informants and other older interested people and local musicians to share the locally practised dances and relearn the re-discovered dances.

3. A publication and a video will be prepared of each area's dances, to be distributed locally, and especially to schools.

4. We hope to arrange, with the help of Angus Council, another public event in 1996 to promote and publicise the local dance traditions.

5. We hope to liaise with the new Fife Council on the continual developments of dance within the area and with their Traditional Dance Artist-in-Residence.

It is very gratifying to the Trust and to our volunteer workers that the project has been successful in uncovering dances in Fife and Angus. We have also begun to uncover the whereabouts of many other sources of dance information especially in photographs, newspaper articles, dance programmes, posters and so on.

The knowledge of dances and dancing in the two areas has begun to make locally detailed picture. It is clear there is much more evidence to be gathered, and more almost-lost dances to be re-learned and made available to the next generations.

A very valuable archive of dance data is being created.

BUT WE DO NEED HELP

As a correspondent wrote lately,

"I recently came across a Dance (Hebridean) "MacNeill of Barra" taught by a recently deceased Scot – a great dancer. To the best of my knowledge this lovely dance is not recorded – perhaps it is – I don't know where. I am an active RSCDS dancer but I wish to find out about Hebridean/Shetland Dances.

"I know things cost a lot of money but please, please, please collect both the Dances and their Music before others are deceased. Time is running out"

Very soon we shall be beginning our research work in South Aberdeenshire. WE ARE LOOKING NOW FOR VOLUNTEERS TO HELP US WITH OUR WORK THERE.

If you are interested then I would be delighted to hear from you please write to me, Joan Henderson, STDT Project Co-Ordinator, Inshes, 23 Croft Street, Penicuik, EH26 9DH.

SCOTTISH TRADITIONS OF DANCE TRUST LTD.

We define **SCOTTISH TRADITIONS OF DANCE** as the **CUSTOMS, REPERTOIRES** and **STYLES** of dance which belong to the culture, past and present, of the people of Scotland.

The Aim of the Scottish Traditions of Dance Trust Ltd. is to Promote, and Support, the customs, Repertoires, and Styles of dance which belong to the culture, past and present, of the people of Scotland.

OBJECTIVES

The Scottish Traditions of Dance Trust Ltd. proposes:

- A. To take every opportunity to further and foster Scotland's dance traditions;
- B. To promote greater awareness of the rich heritage of Scottish dance and dance music;
- C. To extend opportunities for more people to experience a variety of Scottish dance forms and styles;
- D. To offer opportunities to teachers and students in all areas of education to acquire further knowledge and understanding of the Scottish traditions of dance;
- E. To ensure that all Scottish school children have the opportunity to participate in the greatest possible variety of forms and styles of Scottish dance and are made aware of their local dance traditions;
- F. To train researchers in contemporary fieldwork methods;
- G. To collect historical Scottish dance material from literature, newspapers, art, photograph and film;
- H. To establish a Scottish Dance Archive to collect, protect and co-ordinate the Scottish dance heritage and to appoint a suitably qualified archivist;
- I. To use contemporary information technology both to collate and disseminate Scottish dance data;
- J. To encourage and support the development of new dance compositions of a different yet distinctly Scottish idiom;
- K. To collaborate with international cultural organisations in the cultivation, conservation and promotion of dance, customs, music and other traditional art forms;
- L. In pursuit of the foregoing objectives to seek funding from grant-making bodies, organisations and commercial sponsors.

HELP!

We appeal to you to help us in any way you can to realise these aims and objectives. Would you like to be involved in our research programme either as a volunteer or researcher? Or do you have information and/or archive material you think we ought to know about.

Then please do write to: Joan R. Henderson, Inshes, 23 Croft Street, Penicuik, EH26 9DH.

If you would like information on dance contacts in your area - or are interested in setting up a branch of the Trust in your area then please write to: The Membership Secretary, St. Mary's Road, Birnam, Dunkeld, Perthshire PH8 0BJ.

Contributions and comments for inclusion in the next Newsletter should be sent to Evelyn M. Hood, Kirkhowe of Ruthven, Blairgowrie, Perthshire PH12 8RQ before April 30th, 1996.

SCOTTISH TRADITIONS OF DANCE TRUST FOUNDING BOARD OF DIRECTORS

Bob Blair – Ceilidh dance instructor and caller for over 20 years and prime motivator of the ceilidh dance revival.

Dr. Peter Cooke – Ethnomusicologist and dance ethnologist, Honorary Fellow of the School of Scottish Studies.

Billy Forsyth – Former world champion Highland dancer and Chairman of the Official Board of Highland Dance.

Joan R. Henderson – Dance lecturer and researcher with a master's degree in Anthropology and Ethnomusicology.

Evelyn M. Hood (Chair) – Writer, researcher and broadcaster, author of TV and radio series on Scottish dance and of a history of dancing in Scotland.

Dr. Alistair MacFadyen – Retired from a lifetime in education is a former Chairman, Archivist and Director of Summer School for the Royal Scottish Country Dance Association.

Alex McGuire – Expert Highland dancer and dance teacher for over 24 years and President of the Scottish Official Highland Dance Association.

Maggie Moore (Membership Secretary) – Performer and teacher of Cape Breton step dance and an enthusiast for all forms of Scottish dance.

Jimmy Spankie – TV presenter and interviewer, former manager of TVam in Scotland, compere of Fiddle Rallies, former Black Watch Piper.

Bruce Wood (Company Secretary) – International lawyer based in Edinburgh, medieval historian, country dancer and country dance teacher.

THE SCOTTISH ARTS COUNCIL

WE HAVE A DREAM

A National Resource Centre for Scotland's Traditions of Dance

By Billy Forsyth

If the Scottish Traditions of Dance Trust are to acquire a building as a National Dance Resource Centre then it can probably only come about through a major input of funds from sources such as the National Lottery and with support from Local Authorities and the local and national Enterprise Companies.

Can the Trust justify this funding? In artistic terms without a doubt, for Scotland needs such a Centre. But this Centre could be so much more than just a building to house the research, interpretation and conservation of Scottish music and dance.

The project must capture the imagination not only of lovers of Scottish dance but that of the planners, the local Authorities and the local and national Enterprise Companies.

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The project must capture the imagination not only of lovers of Scottish dance but that of the planners, the local authorities, the tourist chiefs and the accountants!

The concept, we have agreed, must be not only practical and functional but breathtaking – and perhaps a little “out of this world” to make the desired impact.

WE CAN DO IT!

Picture Sydney, Australia and you see the Opera House. Think of Paris and you imagine the Eiffel Tower. San Francisco – the Golden Gate Bridge.

So, for Scotland, why not a building that is at once in image unmistakably traditional and associated with Scotland and is also a structure that is both dramatic and innovative... and the shape that has been suggested is a Scottish Thistle.

Preparatory work has confirmed that the project is practical. In engineering terms it is

not a major problem and a leading firm of Civil Engineering Consultants are currently checking and confirming that the space required for all aspects of a Resource Centre can be incorporated into such a building.

The building would accommodate:

- A major new performance and dance venue.
- Teaching and rehearsal rooms.
- A library and research area.
- Archives and an interpretation centre.
- An audio-visual theatre.
- An exhibition area.
- Multi-media facilities.
- A cafe and retail area.
- Administration facilities for the Trust and the operation of the building, including resident staff accommodation.

One idea is that the cafe/restaurant be built into the crown of the “thistle” to provide panoramic views of the surrounding area.

The stage facilities for the main ballroom might be opened out (giant hydraulic doors?) from the rear of the stage to provide a platform for a major outdoor arena using the normal car park facilities as a seating area for an audience of thousands. Our National Dance Centre could be a combination of Los Angeles Hollywood Bowl, Edinburgh's Ross's Bandstand and London's Royal Albert Hall - but with a character all of its own.

WHERE WILL IT BE?

Where will such a facility be located? Well, there ARE a number of sites in central Scotland which might provide the right and easily accessible surroundings for this project. The Trust are seeking talks with any of the Tourist and Enterprise companies who might view such a centre as giving a major boost to their area.

So, this is our dream. With your help and foresight and all the talent in Scotland, a National Resource Centre for all our traditions of dance could become a reality.

