

The Chanter



Newsletter

September 2020



The Nottingham Scottish Association

Honorary Patron Sir Andrew Buchanan Bt. KCVO KStJ

President's Page



I hope that you are all well. It will be very interesting to hear all your stories when we eventually get back to holding some functions.

Edwina has resigned from the Council - sad news for us but good news for her in that she is so busy at work. Her input to Council was much appreciated, as was the help she gave before events held at Goldsmith Street. We wish

her well and hope that we will continue to see her in the future.

Seems funny to say it but the only thing that is certain at the moment is uncertainty. This is not because nothing is being done or thought about in our current everyday lives. It's because things change quickly and we are all learning and hearing different facts daily. As a local Councillor I follow the Government updates, I have seen 3,254 so far - no wonder many people find it difficult to understand what is going on.

The current position for The Association has not changed much since our Council meeting last month (on Zoom) when we made some decisions:

1. **Subscriptions** As we are unable to hold or organise any functions, subscriptions are frozen for this year. If members have paid, their payment will be carried forward to 2021. Sylvia will introduce a bank transfer system to make the payment process easier. Paying in cheques became difficult when the lockdown happened.
2. **AGM** None this year. Next planned for the 3rd Thursday of April 2021.
3. **Council** All willing current Council members will remain in post until the April 2021 AGM.
4. **Walks** Sadly no walks will be organised under The Association name until the current restrictions are lifted/modified.
5. **St Andrew's Dinner Dance** will not now take place. If restrictions ease, we will endeavour to put on something low key nearer the time.
6. **Burns' Dinner Dance** We believe that it was too early to consider this function, but will make a decision in October.

Our plan, when restrictions are lifted, is to arrange some functions. But, sadly, that is not as easy as it sounds. We have to wait until the venues, we use are able to operate. I remain hopeful, but as I'm writing this, I'm listening to news reports of increasing cases in Europe.

Looking forward to seeing everyone soon.

Kind regards

Don

From the Editor

So, The Chanter has become not so much a *Newsletter*, but more of a *Magazine* as we are short of 'proper' events which would need to be reported. But, so far as I know, and hope, all our members are still alive and kicking – so I'll keep The Chanter going - to provide some entertainment.



Most of you are retired and may not have experienced a *huge* change in lifestyle. But you'll know from family, friends and neighbours, whose lives may have changed dramatically from March onwards, that it has been quite hard for the younger generations. Yes, we've all complained about young folk not respecting social distancing, and lots of them don't. But others do act responsibly and are very caring towards each other and the 'older folk'. Andy Roberts, at almost 34, is one of NSA's young members. He usually calls himself a *Railway Safety Engineer* but his job title at present is *Principal Consultant*. In this issue he tells the harrowing tale of what work was like for him during lockdown. Have your tissues ready!

I can't offer the usual information about a St Andrew's Night celebration. But, instead, there is another tale – from Steve Sinclair, (an older member!) who describes, in amusing detail, all the shenanigans involved in Baxter's production and exploitation of a large – very large! – haggis.

And there **is** a bit of 'news'. Remember Dave's quiz? Well, we can report that, after the nine weeks, the **winners** were **1st** Lyndsey & Graham Lyas, **2nd** Ann & Arthur Widdowson and **3rd** Margaret Barnes. Well done all.

I am grateful to Andy and Steve for their substantial contributions. Without them, the magazine might have been a wee bit thin this quarter!

If **you** have a tale to tell or would just like to share something with other members, I would be grateful for any offerings, even of just a couple of sentences, for the next Chanter. They need to reach me by mid-November and can be sent by post to The Chanter, 13 Haileybury Crescent, West Bridgford, NG2 7BH, or to chanter@nottinghamscottish.org



It was Sarah Vance, one of our dancers, who is at present locked up (sorry down) again in Leicester, who came up with the idea of tartan masks. Thanks Sarah. How many others have one?

And I decided not to put this photo of "Covid hair" on his President's Page – as I had threatened Don that I would. But I couldn't resist posting it here!

Christine Oldfield

COVID-19 – Keeping Britain Booming!

How can it be September 2020 already? I think it was April 2019 where work reached a high level of intensity and my presence at our Thursday night dancing sessions reduced. I'd like to start this article by apologising for this. It has not been through choice and whether I've been in Glasgow or working at home during COVID-19 I have very much longed for an evening of stopping on time and having that 'down time'.

I will forever remember the days that preceded the lockdown on 23 March 2020. Office numbers reduced to the last souls who were determined to keep the doors open as long as possible. Strangely, it felt like Christmas Eve when you were one of the few working. We saw desks stripped bare as IT equipment and office chairs were removed to people's homes. In a flash home became work and your commute was measured in paces instead of miles. Abruptly you are faced with new challenges. Hardest, by a long way, is knowing when to switch off. You can literally work until the oven timer goes off or the News at Ten bongs sound. You can return to work when you've eaten or send that last email before you go to bed. The boundary between home and work has disappeared.

Lockdown has caused us all to become more inventive. Homes have had to become offices; the desk might be a sheet of plywood on the spare bed; the breakfast bar becomes a standing desk; the garden shed is converted into the office. Sadly now, one of the growing challenges is remaining employed. When the office emptied on 23rd March, we did not think it may be the last time we would see some of our colleagues. They now face finding new work in difficult circumstances. In many ways they are the silent victims of COVID-19, and they may well find themselves unemployed after going above and beyond. They will be applying for jobs against a backdrop of fatigue which is unprecedented in my time working. This fatigue has been induced by months of relentless twelve-hour days, trying to keep customers satisfied whilst battling fragile IT connections and trying to accede to the impossible demands placed upon you.

We now must rally to the call of these people and, in doing so, little things matter; a simple knowing smile is priceless. When you have done your best but still not been able to deliver, we must remember people often have no colleague to turn to and no commute home to 'decompress'. One night I left a teleconference which had run from 17:00 and, at 19.58, I wandered downstairs, just in time for the clap for carers. I had been battered by criticism of my failings but when my neighbour shouted "keep going Andy" as I made a makeshift drum out of a garden bin, it really mattered and mattered deeply.

I'll share my lockdown office with you - my world of the last 3 months. It



was from the screens in this photo that I attended one of the virtual Thursday Scottish Dancing sessions on Zoom. It brought me enormous pleasure to see some light-hearted comradeship as Christine's arm and Andrew's shorts spanned the two monitors. Quite a new perspective on Two Grey Cats! From these screens I also read Dave Potter's weekly interjection. Let us not lose this spirit of togetherness.

We have celebrated the NHS and our key workers but, in truth, everybody in this country has been a key worker. As a combined team we have pulled together and shown just how important everybody's role is. Teachers can't teach without the engineers supporting the infrastructure, doctors can't function without laundry departments keeping a supply of clean linen. With that in mind it is only right to thank every person for their contribution to keeping Britain moving.

Life is slowly returning to normal now. It may be more constrained than it was, but please go out there with the confidence that everybody whose job it is to make things safe, has done so to the best of their ability. I have recently worked 'outside of the office' for a few days. To do so took three different risk assessments, two safe working procedures and a fashionable outfit which, whilst preventing the spread of COVID-19, left me unbearably hot, like two days in a tin can at 32°C. Rest assured that this is being done nationwide, by so many different sectors, to keep you safe.



Go and safely embrace the new-found freedom and stimulate our country back to healthier times. However, in doing so, let us remember that we have all been deeply affected in different ways. *It is okay to not be okay...* You may have lost a friend or your job through COVID-19; you may just long to go back to 'normal'. We can all help each other. Sometimes all it needs is a look, or a smile or 'it will be alright you know'.

Well done Nottingham Scottish for being there for each other and for those associated with you. Let us raise a dram to coming out from the other side of this stronger.

Andy Roberts

Strathspey

One of the many railway journey programmes on TV recently featured the old Highland Line and made a brief mention of The Strathspey Railway. Knowing nothing about this, I decided to check out whether my romantic notion of dancing in the aisles of a railway carriage was well founded.

First, the name. **Strathspey** has two definitions - the area round the strath of the River Spey and, named after it, a type of dance to music in 4/4 time.

A **strath** is a river valley which is wide and shallow. The **Spey** is the third longest, and fastest flowing, river in Scotland. Situated in the north east, it is well known for salmon fishing and whisky production.

Back to The Strathspey Railway. Formerly part of the Inverness and Perth Junction Railway (later part of Highland Railway) which linked Aviemore with Forres, this ten-mile stretch was, according to their website, restored in 1978 by “a dedicated group of volunteers” and celebrated “40 years of Steam Rail Travel in the Highlands” in 2018. They advertise that “A journey on this steam train enables you to travel back in time to an era when steam whistles blew, carriage doors slammed shut and there was a familiar click-clack, rhythm of the rails, as the train travels along the track.”

The train journeys between Aviemore and Broomhill, with a short stop in Boat of Garten. If they are lucky, passengers may spot an osprey soaring



above the loch as this species has been breeding there since 1958. (More about that later)

Journeys ceased in March, but the railway is now back in action once more and hoping to attract visitors again.

But what of the dance? A strathspey can be thought of as a reel played at a slightly slower tempo, with a bit more emphasis on certain beats. I like to think of it representing a river meandering elegantly through a valley. But others obviously have different ideas. In an article on Scottish Dance Terms which has done the rounds of various groups' Newsletters, it was claimed that Robert Mole, of the Washington (US) Branch, “allegedly found a manuscript with the following definitions in, of all places, an empty bottle of Scotch! Look and learn!

“Strathspey - The valley through which the river Spey flows, famed for its distilleries. A restful dance, particularly soporific for those in second or third places.

Strathspey travelling step – invented by a native of the region travelling home after closing time on a Saturday night. Note the cautious extension of the toe to prevent falling from the edge of the road into the Spey.

Strathspey Setting Step – invented by two natives of the region travelling in opposite directions on a Saturday night and having met on a narrow bridge over the Spey

Reel time and Jig time – not to be confused with Strathspey time, but may safely be confused with each other.

Reel – a figure involving three or four people and done either up or down or across the set but sometimes diagonally and always passing right shoulders first except when it is left shoulders but never both except in the rondel, when they go in between as well as over and under.

Pas de basque – a rather confusing step wherein you hop up and down then put the other foot where the other foot was, do ye ken, and hop up and down again. Don’t forget to kick at the proper time or some other time, keeping the knees straight and toes extended at right angles.”

I have heard some people say they can’t tell the difference between jigs and reels. So, put on some Scottish Dance music and try singing this to it:

Humpty Dumpty sat on a wall. Humpty Dumpty had a great fall.

If you succeeded, your music was a jig! Not got any dance music? Go to <https://www.scottish-country-dancing-dictionary.com/> and click ‘YouTube Videos’ in the scroll bar on the right. Try Kiss for Nothing and Glayva – just select by first letter. I’m sure you will be able to spot the difference between a jig and a reel. The first of the videos shows the Graziani family from Bologna dancing at home between their sofa and sideboard – just as some of our NSA dancers have been doing throughout the summer.

Belated VJ Day Commemoration



The Red Arrows fly past over Edinburgh on August 15th, to commemorate the 75 years after VJ Day, was cancelled



because of cloud cover. But it was rescheduled for 24th August when, at 7pm, the residents of the Capital were treated to a stunning display.

Haggis in Lockdown

Steve Sinclair tells this tale, involving **William Hardie Sinclair** (his Faither, known as Bill Sinclair) and **Roderick** (a muckle haggis)

The tale begins in November 1961. I was ten and became aware of my Dad's promotion in the management structure of W.A. Baxter and Sons, the Speyside food manufacturer. As a young loon, being brought up and schooled in the heart of Morayshire farmland, I underwent a crash course in 'doric', (the local lingo) and, as an Aberdonian 'funny spikker', I had to learn awfy quick – not least because I'd unwittingly picked up the English overtones of my mother, a Lancashire lass from Ormskirk. I remember well, being laughed at and pilloried after suggesting, when the playground football burst, that it could be tied up with string so that the game could proceed. "*I think he means tow or binder twine*" countered the playground smart alec. Anyway, at home I really had no interest in my father's talk of



making a large haggis, bound for Chicago, to be the star of the St Andrew's Society of Illinois celebrations. The photo shows my dad and Mrs Ena Baxter holding the haggis in Baxter's experimental kitchen. Over the previous years, Baxters had supplied three hundredweight of haggis to Illinois - practically a whole herd! This one, sent to Hughston McBain, Chief of Clan McBain, was a mere six pounder and only later did I realise it would be the first of many for Baxter Banquets around the globe.

My father hailed from Stromness, Orkney, and was always involved in food production. He initially trained as a slaughterman, then a butcher, and then manager of the Stromness Egg Packing Station. He must have hatched a plan there and was promoted to be manager of Aberdeen Egg Packing Station. Further managerial posts led to him becoming factory manager for Baxter's where he played a major part developing Baxter's kitchen, working closely with Gordon Baxter's wife, Ena.

Anyway, back to the haggis. Chicago's six-pounder prompted a quantum leap in haggis making and an imaginative set of names. There was Wee Hamish, tipping the scales at 83lbs; then Angus who weighed in at 146 lbs; and Dougal at 33ins by 20 ins, scaling 170 lbs (photographed being admired by his new girlfriend at Baxter's stand at the Ideal Home Exhibition, 1965). For a spell, Dougal was the biggest haggis in the world, but lost that title to a challenger from Crosse & Blackwell I believe.



I have vivid memories of tales of exploding haggis as traditional sheep's stomachs burst under the pressure of size. And worse still, these great chieftains o' the puddin'-race had to be loaded onto giant sterilised pallets and then cooked in a factory's industrial retort, bursting, sometimes, in the process. Despite the mess the exploding haggis caused, it did not end there. Och no. In association with Johnny Walker's whisky, Baxter's launched the North of Scotland Haggis Eating Contest at The Institute,



Fochabers. The star of the show – Roderick – was transported the mile or so from Baxter's factory, delicately draped in white linen. In truth, there was very little delicacy about it. Weighing 232 lbs and measuring 44ins x 28ins x 17ins deep, Roderick was so big he made his entrance on a fork lift, driven by my father, with me riding shotgun! He was so big he could not be manhandled

onto the stage and, instead, was given a prominent position (best seat in the house), in front of the stage. Unfortunately, Roderick can't be seen in this photo, but he apparently did enjoy the show.

The haggis eaters were duly impressed and set about their task. No water was allowed - just Johnny Walker whisky. There were a lot of green faces. Disappointingly, I cannot remember the winner's name, only that he ate 2.5 lbs of haggis and didn't throw up – Yuck!

Even more disappointing was Roderick's ignominious end. Roderick was now redundant, finishing his days, still on a pallet, but almost a solid lump of ice and used as a massive doorstop in Baxter's giant cold store facility. Yes, a doorstop! Happily, I don't think Roderick felt or suffered the slightest embarrassment. It could have been so different! There was a plan to get Roderick airborne and drop him (no parachute) at a local disused airfield. Bets and predictions of Roderick's impact on the planet were a hot topic until the Civil Aviation Authority ruled the stunt to be too dangerous, so Roderick ended his days frozen out of society. Awwwww...

Footnote: The Guinness Book of Records showed interest in my father's achievement and were about to include him in their annals. However, because sheep gut (traditional haggis skin) was not up to the task of containing the innards of a massive haggis, Baxter's were forced to use a very strong muslin cloth that could be stitched and boiled... So according to the Guinness Book of Records Roderick was not a real haggis at all...

Not having that...I saw him - I even stroked his ears!

Steve Sinclair

Bird Blog

Edinburgh's second waterway is the Union Canal which runs from Falkirk (with its Millennium Wheel and The Kelpies statue) to Fountainbridge, just south of the city centre. It's a haven for wildlife and swans regularly nest on the banks. They are well known for being pretty aggressive towards unsuspecting walkers who approach too close. In Fountainbridge, on July



4th, this photo was captured by a wildlife lover, angry at the abusive slur scrawled across a refuse bin very close to the canal bank. The male swan looked anything but pleased, but his cygnets on the grass snoozed on obliviously.

And (note the coincidence of the dates), on 14th July, in a remote spot in North Derbyshire, William Bowell a bird spotter from Lincolnshire took this photograph of what media were calling a *bearded vulture*. It's also known as a *lammergeier*, one of the largest birds of prey and more likely to be spotted in high craggy mountainous areas. It feeds almost entirely on the bones of animal carcasses.

The species was re-introduced to the Alps from 1987 and by 2019 numbers were booming. It is thought this one might have strayed from there. It is only the second sighting of them in the UK, the last being in 2016.



Whilst tidying out my filing cabinet recently I came across a folder of cuttings of my regular Saturday birdwatching column in the Gulf Times, Qatar's daily newspaper. I penned this for almost three years and this one, from 1993, was after spending a summer's leave back in Scotland. In it I tell of "a peregrine falcon perched on a chimney pot just off Edinburgh's busy West End and staring piercingly across the trees into our lounge"; twitchers at the Aberlady Nature Reserve missing the "200-plus godwits, perversely gathered just a few miles away at Longniddy" – where **we** were; the infidelity of puffins on the tiny islands in the Firth of Forth; and also some tales of the famous ospreys at Loch Garten.

My eldest sister used to be manageress of the Nethybridge Hotel (close to the River Spey) and as a teenager I spent several springs and summers helping out. This was in the late 50s when these magnificent birds, recently introduced, first bred. Loch Garten is very close to the Hotel and my sister was on the round-the-clock rota of guardians of the nest – a necessary precaution as osprey eggs were eagerly sought after by unscrupulous collectors. The patrols were generally successful, and the species is still thriving there. [Ed]

The Future of Events

What about our NSA dancing going forward?

Andrew and I have contacted all our dancers saying “It will come as no surprise to you that, in the current circumstances, we are in no position to restart.” We have read the advice put out by the Government and also by the RSCDS, and have carried out an informal risk assessment. We have concluded that our Scottish Country Dancing cannot be carried out according to Covid-19 guidelines. No matter how much we all long to get jigging again, members’ health and safety must take precedence. If we’d been talking about *Highland Dancing*, things might have been different!

Christine

Our dancers are welcome to join Andrew and Sue’s Beeston U3A Zoom sessions on alternate Thursday mornings and even non-dancers will find interesting things to do with **RSCDS Dance Scottish at Home**:

<https://www.rscds.org/get-involved/dance-scottish-home>

There is also **Take the Floor** - live Scottish Dance Music & Scottish songs on Saturdays 7pm – 9pm and Sundays 5pm – 7pm. BBC Radio Scotland, 92-95 FM, 810 MW, via BBC Sounds, BBC iPlayer or listen on your TV - Virgin channel 930, Sky 116.

You will be kept informed about any other **NSA events** as an when they can be arranged safely. Meantime ca canny and stay safe.



**If you're not already a member, why don't you join
The Nottingham Scottish Association
Facebook group?**