

The Chanter

Nottingham Scottish Association Newsletter
April 2009

A Saving (Thassos)

"Gratis!" he cried
(in his foreign fashion),
and lit his fag from the focus
that glassed the magnified blaze
Of the vertical sun.

The Aberdonians aren't quite all
In Scotland's Dallas-on-Dee

9th July, 1974
Alexander Scott

FROM OUR PRESIDENT

It is customary at this time to say “Has it really been two years?”

Isobel and I have been looking back at the highlights of our time in office with great pleasure and satisfaction at the many events we have been privileged to attend in the Association and, on your behalf, at other Associations. We have made many new friends at these occasions.

The 250th Anniversary of the birth of Robert Burns certainly rounded off a memorable term of office. Indeed our Patron, Sir Andrew Buchanan enjoyed it so much that he arranged for Isobel and myself to attend a Garden Party at Buckingham Palace on 14th July representing the “Scottish”.

All our functions are organised by your Council, members who freely give their time to ensure that things run smoothly on the night. My heartfelt thanks to them all for their support and for their efforts on behalf of the Association.

Our longer serving members will be saddened to hear of the deaths of three former members; Donald Campbell, Collin Westland-Garnett (Past President) and Bob Williamson former Hon. Secretary, who with Jim Wilson started the “Chanter” in the 70’s.

We look forward to the Burns Trip and Edinburgh Tattoo coming up in August and the Social dance on Saturday 18th April in the Church hall.

Bob

Aosta 2009

This is going to be a pretty short report on our return trip to ski in the Aosta Valley, Italy. The weather was beautiful and the skiing conditions were perfect – apparently the best for twenty years. There was the usual kitting-out with skis, boots, helmets, etc., on the Sunday afternoon and on Monday morning we set off with great excitement, some trepidation and a genuine wish to get going again on the slopes. The first lesson went really well; we were gaining confidence and were generally really pleased with the morning's efforts. We had our lunch and with enthusiasm got the skis on again for the afternoon's exertions.

However, that was the end of my week's skiing. About 2.30 p.m. I came a cropper and managed to break my arm. At least I got a ride down to the Medical Centre on a skidoo, but unfortunately I was in too much pain to enjoy it. I spent the rest of the week with my arm strapped to my body (very uncomfortable), doing a lot of reading, crosswords, sudoku and so on, although I did take a trip up on the gondola for lunch on the slopes every day with David who was only skiing in the mornings. Occasionally one or two of the others joined us, but they were, in the main, too busy enjoying themselves further up the mountain.

The rest of my time during the day I spent exploring the old Roman town, but I have to admit that it wasn't much fun on my own. For me, the best time was the evening when we all got together for dinner and, afterwards, for daft games and quizzes in the room Doreen and I shared, which was bigger than everyone else's. Before our departure we had elected Alan as Entertainments Manager and he did a grand job – we had a lot of fun. Sue, Andrew, Alan and Una did really well on the slopes and their certificates from the instructor at the end of the week reflected this. My congratulations to them all.

Marie, as ever, did a great job in organising the trip, and I would like to say 'thank you' to everyone for their support in what, for me, was not the best week of my life, but at least the scenery and the weather were wonderful. Will I go skiing again? I will have to think seriously about that one. My family might just tie me down if I even consider it!

Margaret Barnes

Strictly Come Soldiering

'Further to whether dancing is better than physical education at promoting fitness, in the Fifties, young men doing their National Service in Scottish regiments did Highland and Scottish Country Dancing instead of PE every weekday morning. As a result, Scottish soldiers were considered the fittest in the British Army. It appears that what goes around comes around!'

(A recent letter to the Daily Mail).

St Andrews Dinner & Dance

The annual Nottingham Scottish Association's St Andrews Dinner and Dance was held on Saturday 29th November. Nearly 60 members and friends enjoyed an excellent meal at the Nottingham Masonic Hall. Dennis Willey carried out the Master of Ceremonies role with his usual aplomb and Bill Dall called the dances in his own inimitable way.

The Toast to Scotland, enlivened by a rich mix of anecdotes, was given by the President of the Nottingham and District Scottish Golfers' Association, Ian Gray. As our official guests, we welcomed back the President of Chesterfield Caledonian Society, Tim Cobb, and his wife Judith.

This was, again, a highly enjoyable evening.

Andrew Morrison

President's Night: An Evening of Burns

40 members were present at Bob Logan's President's Night at St Andrews with Castle Gate on Saturday 25th October. For this occasion, Bob prepared for us a feast of Burns – poetry, read with gusto and style; music and singing of the highest quality; and a medley of popular dances.

The poetry, chosen by Bob, was read by himself with support from Bill and Jeanne Dall, David Page and Bob himself. Isla Keys, accompanied at the keyboard by David Page, sang a number of the best known songs of Robert Burns, ending with a fine rendition of “A Man's a Man for A' That”.. A terrific performance that left us all hugely impressed at the talent on show. Our thanks to Bob for laying on such a great evening.

Andrew Morrison

Under One Sky

“Under One Sky” is a folk music project created by Scottish fiddler John McCusker, to celebrate the diversity of the UK folk scene and including a number of well-known Scottish performers. They visited the Albert Hall in Nottingham, where nine of our members went to watch them perform. The highlights were some wonderful fiddle music from John McCusker and his colleagues and the Gaelic songs of Julie Fowlis.

If you weren't there and would like a taste of what you missed then the magic of the Internet can bring it to you! See <http://tinyurl.com/cvc23l> , <http://tinyurl.com/d2fffl> and <http://tinyurl.com/cfn3gc> .

Andrew Morrison

Dysart

'As auld as the Three Trees of Dysart' runs the local saying, and certainly since the days of that formidable teacher of Saint Mungo, Saint Serf, whose lonely monastic cell or 'desert' it was, there have been changes. It was over forty years ago that I paid my first visit to Dysart, and then it was not to the town itself but to a level crossing at its east end where a gang of the faithful stood with cameras and tape recorders at the ready because at any moment a decrepit survivor of the North British Railway would be taking a race at the tremendous climb out of the sidings at 'The Dubbie' – Frances Colliery to you – and up to the main line. How they got up there with that engine in that state is anybody's guess, but I have the tape to prove it; we conscientiously stamped out the lineside fires and removed the cinders from our persons before leaving.

I first encountered the name, believe it or not, in a Sunday School prize which was Robert Louis Stevenson's 'Kidnapped' when the hero, you will remember, became an unwilling passenger in the brig 'Covenant' of Dysart – which, a century and a half later, would appear briefly in a short story... Small wonder that RLS should remember the place – it was his father who surveyed improvements to the harbour in 1819. Approaching from the main road it looked incapable of sheltering much more than a wee oarie-boat but closer inspection, and a look at the display of photographs in the recently-restored Harbourmaster's House, revealed room enough for a brig or even three or four, for time was when one could walk across that harbour dry-shod when it was packed with vessels trading between Scotland and the Continent with salt and coal - a road along the foreshore, Pan Ha', with its restored and replica group of sixteenth-century houses, bears witness to the former, as well as does the local reference to the pointless activity of 'takin' saut tae Dysart'.

Deliciously-named Hot Pot Wynd, leading up to the town centre, may have been the local version of 'Het Pat' - the Path – for Dutch sailors were frequent visitors. Coal was brought down to the harbour by horse and cart from the Lady Blanche pit, a ton at a time – and a collier brig might load three hundred tons – or, at one time, direct from the coal face to the harbour through a drift. Another horse-tunnel at the outer end of the harbour, now part of the Fife Coastal path, was laid with rails for wagons which took ballast from incoming vessels and dumped it on the shore close by.

And it was coal that lost Dysart its independence...in 1924 the Earl of Rosslyn's Coal Co. pushed the Town Council into deepening the harbour, at a cost of £5,000, to take larger ships. A century before, it had been the first harbour on Scotland's East Coast to be designed specifically for the coal trade. Of course it had to be closed for the work to take place; the ships went to Methil or Burntisland and never came back, and with the closure of the worked-out Lady Blanche pit the town lost the trade which had brought its revenue. It was amalgamated with its neighbour Kirkcaldy five years later.

So now the harbour caters for pleasure craft – and the Sailing Club has for its headquarters a building put up by the Town Council in 1835 to extract lamp-oil from whale blubber. The Earl of Rosslyn, disturbed at the prospect of such a smelly neighbour for his seat of Dysart House, took his case to the House of Lords – and won. Ironically Kirkcaldy would soon be boiling oil of a different kind, and its proceeds would elevate the Nairn family to become the local nabobs....dimly recalled is a fragment of a poem from a primary-school reader:

*'He's chackit the tickets an' gi'en them back,
So gi'e me ma ain wan, Daddy,
For I ken mysel' by the queer-like smell
That the next stop's Kirkcaddy!'*

In our case the next stop was the Fife Coastal Path to Ravenscraig Castle on the eastern edge of the Lang Toun itself; passing through the tunnel under the cliff, the path wound attractively through the woods and along the shore to the ruins, largely fifteenth-century, of James II's castle, among the first built to withstand artillery fire. There is a certain unfortunate irony here, too, for James's preoccupation with castles and cannonry would be ended fatally by a bursting cannon during one of the many sieges of Roxburgh Castle.

Below the castle ruins stands a beehive doocot of what seems to have been almost a standard pattern – that at Dunure Castle in Ayrshire is almost identical. Oh – and remember the Three Trees? Well, they used to be in Ravenscraig Park, still known to some as Three Trees Park, and marked the spot where three brothers of the St. Clair family met on a dark night; each believing the others to be robbers, they fought and all died. Others, however, maintain that this was the traditional gathering point for local regiments before skirmishes - a likely story, for from the sixteenth century or possibly before, Dysart was a walled town complete with gun emplacements overlooking the harbour as a defence against bombardment from the sea.

Now salt, coal and linoleum are history, and the Dutchmen who gave the place the reputation of 'Little Holland' are more likely to be found in a motor-caravan doing 35 mph on the A91 than in a collier brig tied up by the Harbourmaster's House!

David Page

Burns Dinner and Dance 2009

On the 31st January 123 members and guests (the largest number for many years) attended the Masonic Club in Nottingham to celebrate the 250th Anniversary of the birth of Robert Burns. We were pleased to have as our guest Sir Andrew Buchanan, the Association Patron. The guest speaker to deliver the Immortal Memory was John Haining who has spoken at Burns Associations throughout the world. The toast to the Haggis, piped in by Piper Bruce Liddle, was given by our president Bob Logan and there followed an evening of entertainment with beautiful Scottish songs from Isla Keys and Derek Graham accompanied at the piano by David Page.

John Haining, a retired Police Inspector, delivered in his own inimitable style a very humorous speech reflecting on certain anecdotal incidents from his career - although I'm sure some were a little tongue-in-cheek - followed by a more formal toast reflecting on the life and influences of Robert Burns. He was bravely followed by Alan Logan taking on the onerous and often thankless task of proposing the toast to the Lassies, and he was quickly brought down to earth by the reply from the Lassies given by his wife Fiona! To finish off the evening Bernice Young organised a short programme of dancing which was thoroughly enjoyed by all. Thanks also to Bill Dall as the Master of Ceremonies for ensuring that everything ran smoothly during the evening.

David Potter

Colin Westland-Garnett

Our President of 1982-83, Colin Westland-Garnett, died on 1st April, a few days short of his 89th birthday. He was intensely proud of his Scottish ancestry; although born in Liverpool and educated at Kings Norton, Birmingham, he loved Scotland and all things Scottish. His career included ambulance driving, car hire and cutlery handle manufacture in Sheffield, finishing in Nottingham as manager of the Victoria Centre car park. On retirement he and his wife Phyl spent a year travelling all over Scotland by caravan seeking the ideal spot to make their home. Living in the shadow of Ben Nevis with almost daily rain proved too much despite the many friends they made in Corpach. Aberdeenshire was a disappointment and they moved to a converted farm-steading in a remote and beautiful part of the Ettrick Valley in the Borders. Life was grand with participation in the local accordion and fiddle clubs but with advancing years and illness they realised that they should live nearer to a town. Their move was accelerated after they were snowbound and without electricity for lengthy periods. Eyemouth, the fishing port in Berwickshire, proved to be the ideal spot. Colin had been a lifelong helper of charities, particularly the Royal National Lifeboat Institution and King George's Fund for Sailors. The large number at his funeral included many from the R.N.L.I. which is so important to the town.

Dick Hutchinson

Wester Ross

As you leave the A9 at Tove, in the Black Isle, heading west on the A835, a choice of routes lies like the fingers on your hand – Ullapool, Poolewe, Glen Torridon, Loch Carron, Loch Alsh. Just make sure as you pass through that you have enough petrol and top up, even if the price verges upon the astronomical!

Pause at the Falls of Rogie for a quick reel, then stop again at Garve to make a decision – to Ullapool or Loch Broom or the Wester Ross tourist route; that's the way

the train goes from Dingwall to Kyle. Either way, you'll travel a splendid highway... almost alone.

On the tourist trail, at Achnasheen you have to make up your mind again; north-west to Loch Maree or south-west to Loch Carron. You can put it off by enjoying a meal at the Ledgowan Hotel. From here, in seventy minutes, the train will take you to Kyle of Lochalsh. Sit back and enjoy the scenery, but don't be too alarmed when the track runs perilously close to the high water mark along by Loch Carron...and puzzle out who owns all those boats at Plockton. Be thankful for the buffers at Kyle which stop the train plunging directly into the sea.

Only sixty years ago there was no road on the south side of Loch Carron – hence the redundant Strome Ferry. Then as now you would turn right at Loch Carron for Kishorn and Shieldaig. There was then no road onwards to Torridon – except for pack-horses. Now you can drive on to see the wonders of Beinn Alligin, Beinn Dearg and Liathach across the water before reaching snow-white Beinn Eighe.

A friendly bus driver at Achnasheen offered to take us to Poolewe and the gardens at Inverewe and bring us back – for free! There's no catch; you don't have to live in Scotland to enjoy some of the amenities for pensioners. But we wanted to spend a whole day at Inverewe, so we went by car.

It's a curious feature of the Wester Ross roads that they have been upgraded – with help from the E.U. – until you are almost within sight of the sea. Then they revert to their single-track state, twisting through narrow passes which even modern road engineers have not yet conquered.

Nature is not yet entirely under Man's control – and nowhere is this more evident than at Loch Maree. It's the largest unexploited body of fresh water in Britain. Centuries ago Irish saints used to baptise the natives here. Today its waters are still supposed to cure aching joints – that is, if you don't succumb to the chill! Viewed from one end, Loch Maree disappears over the horizon. Which recalls a simple calculation for determining how far off the horizon is. Simply multiply the height of your eyes above sea level, in feet, by $1\frac{1}{2}$, and find the square root of the answer. For example, if your eye level is six feet above sea level, $1\frac{1}{2} \times 6 = 9$ and the square root of 9 is three which means that the horizon is 3 miles away. (It's always useful to have a pocket calculator if your mental arithmetic is rusty!) An intriguing possibility is that if someone is standing beyond the horizon at the same height, you should be able to see each other! Try it for fun – use binoculars and talk to one another on mobile phones.

A last word...it is rarely possible to see the horizon from the top of Ben Nevis!

Dennis Willey

Donald Campbell

I am sad to report the death of our former member, Donald Campbell, whose funeral we attended on 20th February, he having died on 9th. Donald and his late wife, Jenny, were stalwarts of the Association for many years from the fifties to the nineties. They were part of a group of eight who were regulars at the dance classes and all the many functions we held in those days. The others in the ready-made set were the Ingles (Bob and Rita), the Chalmers (Bob and Annie) and the Husbands whose Christian names won't come to mind. All eight were delightful people of happy disposition and I never heard an unkind word from them - or about them, for that matter.

Donald was a member of our local Probus Club in Radcliffe and I saw him regularly over the past few years. We used to confuse the natives by greeting each other in Gaelic and his happy face would light up whenever we did so. Audrey and I attended his ninetieth birthday in August and met his daughter Shona and her husband Michael on that occasion, little thinking that we would see them again so soon. I feel sure that some of the members will share our sadness at losing a fine old friend.

Bill Gabriel

Book Review

As an aficionada of the 'Murder Mystery' genre, I am constantly trawling through literary reviews and library shelves for new authors. Imagine my delight, then, on discovering one Aline Templeton and her DI Marjory Fleming. For the DI Fleming series is not only set in Scotland, it is set in Galloway, that south-western corner of Scotland which was the favourite holiday haunt of Bill's parents and ourselves.

'Cold in the Earth', the first in the series, held me spellbound from the start and had my heart racing towards the end. The various strands of the story were skilfully interwoven, the description of the countryside evocative and the characters convincing. Marjory Fleming is not a hard-boiled cop but a farmer's wife, trying to find a good work/life balance, caught between caring for children and caring for parents, and in the first of the series, which takes place during the foot and mouth outbreak of a few years back, caught between her loyalty to her farmer neighbours and the job of enforcing the cull of their cattle and sheep.

To me one of the great charms of the books is their Scottishness. It isn't so much things like the fact that one of the policemen is constantly quoting Burns (to the exasperation of his boss, who is not a fan), it is more the occasional use of words which are very much in character but are not used in standard English. A mention of a 'semmit', somebody 'trauchled' or accused of being a 'tumphy' takes me right back to childhood. And what Scot, with memories of energetic family weddings, doesn't forget dance class discipline and feel a thrill of recognition on reading the

description of 'a set of farmers for a Strip the Willow of such sustained ferocity that it made a fight after an Old Firm game look like a Sunday School picnic.'

Fellow Scots, read and enjoy.

Janette Hetherington

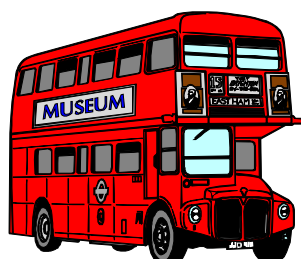
Hot Air in High Places

Audrey and I were delighted when our elder son, Neil, returned from France last Autumn having won the British National and the Pre-European Championships for hot air balloons. Neil has been a keen balloonist for nearly thirty years and has won many events but never two prestigious ones in the same meeting. Hot air ballooning has taken Neil and his family all over the world, including Japan (six times), the USA and Canada, Australia and South Africa – where he won the SA Championship) and, of course, all over Europe. He didn't travel by balloon, of course, although it would have been a lot cheaper to do so but somewhat slower!

Please forgive the proud parent bit,

Bill Gabriel

FROM THE DRIVER'S SEAT...DATES FOR DIARIES



Saturday 18th April

Members' & Friends' Annual Dance, St. Andrew's Church Hall.

Saturday, 25th April

Galloways' Annual Dance, Grange Hall, Radcliffe on Trent.

Thursday, 30th April

AGM – papers enclosed with this issue.

Saturday, 16th May, 7.30 p.m.

RSCDS Branch Social, West Park Pavilion, recorded music, £5/£3

13th June

RSCDS Nottingham 50th Anniversary Dance – **now sold out!!**

14th-16th August

Coach Tour to the Burns Country and the Edinburgh Tattoo now definitely ON.
Some places available.

Saturday 20 June

Summer ramble with pub lunch. Easy, short walk in morning, lunch in pub and optional extension in afternoon. Join for any or all of the day!. Venue to be confirmed but likely to be Bradgate Park and surrounding area.

See www.nottinghamscottish.org.uk for detail. Please contact Andrew Morrison (0115 9154691 or andrewmorrison@ntlworld.com).

Friday 10 July

Outing to see 'A Midsummer Night's Dream' at Newstead Abbey. Tickets £11. See www.nottinghamscottish.org.uk for detail. Please contact Andrew Morrison (0115 9154691 or andrewmorrison@ntlworld.com).

It would be appreciated if anyone seeking to comment upon the content of 'The Chanter' would have the courtesy to give the Editor the right to reply rather than resorting to anonymous letters.