



- 1 The Mayor and Mayoress of the Royal Borough of Kensington and Chelsea pose with the children.
- 2 The Mayoress, The Pearly King and The Mayor
- 3 Angela Young talks to Radio London's Jim Whebie who later tried some dancing himself whilst still on the air.
- 4 The Class hard at work on their footwork
- 5 The Pearly King demonstrates what can be done with a balloon.
- 6 The Mayor and Mayoress join in the childrens' dancing.
- 7 Australian duo Catherine Fraser and Duncan Smith play for the Watford Caledonian Ball in March (Story on page 13)

This picture taken by Andy Wiener; all others by Michael Nolan



FAMILY DAY

Story on page 7



THE CELTIC DIASPORA PLAYS AT THE WATFORD CALEDONIAN BALL (picture on page 18)

This year Watford invited the Australia fiddle/piano duo, Catherine Fraser and Duncan Smith, to be the band. We had purchased their album "Old Favourites And Odd Couples" and enjoyed it so much that we had asked them if they were ever in the UK. They replied that if we wanted them to come over they would, and would do some other work while they were here. The event was a great success, but I think there is a story to be told about the stresses of trying something new, that may be of interest to other clubs and societies.

There was some debate in committee about inviting a band that was something of an unknown quantity but we decided to take the plunge and try something different. Later, doubts started to set in: could a fiddle and piano fill a hall with enough sound for a ball? Wasn't fiddle music more difficult to dance to than accordion? Asking around, we discovered that rather a lot of people love the sound of the accordion so much that anything else seems to them a bit thin, and that others seemed uncertain about dancing to an unknown band. We started to think that we had made a misjudgement and that the event would not be supported. However some musicians and dancers did encourage us to hold firm, and this support really did sustain us. We also exchanged our previous venue (a local school hall) for the Allum Hall in Elstree, which has a sprung floor and a large lofty feel. However as the event drew near it seemed as if our fears were going to be realised as our ticket sales were low, partly due to a clash with another very popular event. However over the last two weeks our numbers doubled, and on the night we were very happy to welcome 116 dancers. Many people had come along out of curiosity to see this new band.

On the night of the dance the hall was opened up to its full length and looked lovely, thanks to the exceptional hard work of our President, Rose Krelhoff, and the rest of the Committee. At 7.30pm sets were made up, and the band started to play. What happened next was that we were hit with a driving rhythm, exuberant energy and lift, and hundreds of notes tumbling over each other. The rhythm was coming not only from the piano, but, exceptionally, from the violin, and the beat was steady as a rock. The hall was full of music. I had no idea that a two-piece could make so much sound. After the first dance ended, the hall erupted with vigorous and sustained applause.

Personally, at times I felt as if the music was dancing me. Dancing strathspeys with a powerful downward urge was self-evident. The reels were full of wild notes and syncopation. In *Mrs Macpherson*, I felt physically pulled along by the music, and for the grand chain the set seemed to be locked into the timing, which is often so hard to achieve.

Interestingly, the tempo of the jigs was slower than we are used to, but in jig time I felt that the three beats were far more distinct than I normally experience.

So why should this two-piece from Australia have startled us so? Duncan grew up in Boston USA in a dancing family. His parents were founding members of the RSCDS Boston Branch and Miss Milligan was a house guest on more than one occasion. He was President of the Branch for four years in the 1980s. He later moved to Australia. He is a qualified SCD teacher and when he plays he is looking at the dancers and observing and responding to the dance floor. He says his aim is to be the kind of band he would want to dance to. Catherine is of Scottish descent and is trained in classical and

Scottish music. She founded the Southern Hemisphere International School of Scottish Fiddle in New Zealand, and so is immersed in the Celtic (Scottish) Diaspora. It takes an exceptional fiddle player to bring out the rhythmic accents that make the music dance – and give the dancers lift and momentum – without the need for bass and drums. Throughout the performance, Catherine moves with the music and puts a monumental amount of energy into her playing. She also has her eye on the dance floor most of the time with a smile for dancers when they catch her eye. Their playing has expanded our understanding of traditional Scottish music, whilst providing a tremendous amount of enjoyment.

I am pleased to report that the risk the band took with us paid off for them too, and resulted in a substantial tour, including dates in Somerset, Germany and Scotland. We very much look forward to welcoming them back to the UK again soon.

Andy Wiener

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WHERE DO DIPLOMATS DANCE?

The answer is that diplomats dance wherever they can, whatever the conditions. I should know, having been a member of HM Diplomatic Service for 42 years with overseas postings in 10 countries.

But let me start at the beginning in Oban at the Youth Hostel in the early 1960s. With two ex-school pals I had been on an expedition to "climb" Ben Nevis and the YHA in Oban was only a step on the way. When we saw the Warden's sign "Dancing tonight" we were easily diverted into the front room expecting something like the Lyceum Ballroom in London. Our shock at realising that we were being introduced to Scottish Country Dancing was soon overcome as we trampled our way through *Strip the Willow* and the evening was over before we could even sit down for a rest.

A little knowledge is a dangerous thing, they say. But equipped with my limited experience of Scottish Country Dancing I was easy prey for the organiser of the dancing at the Commonwealth Embassies' Club at my first posting in Berne. Later, I was sent to Lesotho in southern Africa where I introduced my newly acquired wife, Diane, to a form of dancing at the Maseru Club. A group of expatriates found someone with some records of dance music and we muddled our way through a few of the more popular dances. One full set was all that we could muster and most of our fun came from watching a Swedish aid official throw his legs high in the air in his attempt at a pas de basque!

Overseas again, this time in hot and humid Bangladesh, you would expect us to have taken up cards or chess, but it was on with the shorts and tee shirt to dance at someone's home. On hard, concrete floors it was quite punishing on feet and ankles and the style left a lot to be desired, but it was primarily a social event put together by Scots in the tight-knit British community. It acted as a morale-booster in a difficult environment, with a military government operating under martial law for the two years that we were there.

In Ireland, which immediately followed Bangladesh, there were many distractions and Scottish Country Dancing was not one of them. But it was in Canada that we really reached the

pinnacle of our dancing career when we joined the Ellerslie (Edmonton) Branch of the RSCDS. My predecessor as British Consul-General was a non-dancing Scot so the arrival of an English successor was not greeted with much enthusiasm. That is, until we paid our subscription and signed up for the weekly dance evenings, And, of course, it being a branch of the RSCDS we were helped to improve the quality of our dancing!

On our departure from Edmonton the Branch charmed us both by introducing a 4x40 bar jig which was especially written to commemorate the event. Entitled *Diane and Peter Johnstone's Farewell to Ellerslie or The Consul-General's Goodbye*, it was fun to dance but I do not think it ever reached the status of an RSCDS-approved dance.

Surprisingly, the standard of dancing was also very high in Jakarta, where we lived for 3 years in the late 90s. But it is the venue for the largest Scottish Highland Gathering outside Scotland so perhaps that explains it. And the highlight of the social year was the Saint Andrew's Ball which attracted hundreds of expatriates who attended dancing classes in the weeks before. Such was the infectious enthusiasm in Jakarta that I volunteered to be a competitor in the Reel of the 51st competition at the Gathering. With no kilt of my own, I was forced to borrow one from a dancer in an earlier set: not the most comfortable thing to do in a hot and humid atmosphere! Six all male sets competed and as our group did not gain 1st, 2nd or 3rd place we assumed we had come 4th! None of us was upset though and this was probably explained by the fact that we were already celebrating at the Whisky Su-su tent. (This is a whisky and cream cool drink – with a kick!)

And so to the finale! Four years as Governor of the Caribbean island of Anguilla (population 12,000) was a good place to finish my DS career. But you can imagine my surprise when the Deputy Governor told me, before we arrived, that he and his wife ran a small country dancing class every week in the high season! Our generous hosts for these occasions were a Canadian couple who had a wonderful wooden floor at their house so it was a pleasure to dance there. However, the cosmopolitan participants from the Caribbean and North America had some difficulty with memorising the dances and many of the finer points were omitted from our repertoire. This could explain why I still have some difficulty, for example, with the poussette! Imagine our surprise, or was it shock, when we received a visit from a "teacher from England" who was visiting her daughter on the island. It was none other than Irene Edgar from Reigate. Whatever were her impressions of our disparate (or should that be desperate?) group? She has always been too polite to comment. But we found that she took charge quite effortlessly and our evenings were much more orderly and productive as well as being a lot more fun as we learnt some different dances and how to do them properly!

Once during my term of office our group was invited to perform at an amateur variety show in aid of funds for the Soroptomists in Anguilla. My current dancing partners at the Sanderstead URC Scottish Dancers will be surprised to hear that I was one of the better male dancers which meant that I was chosen to be in the show. Our local audience was delighted to see His Excellency the Governor cavorting in this very strange British folk dance so we were given a very warm reception.

Over the years, Scottish Country Dancing, mainly overseas, has given me hours of pleasure, exercise and, particularly, fun. Long may it continue!

Peter Johnstone

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