



## BRANCH NEWS AUGUST 2021

Registered charity No. 1069188

**Please note that our Branch AGM is now scheduled to take place on Saturday 25 September, 5:00 pm at Carmel Welsh Presbyterian Church Hall, Port Talbot SA13 1PQ, followed by a short social get-together. Further details to follow by e-mail.**

### GREEN SHOOTS OF DANCING

#### PORT TALBOT

Port Talbot Dancers met last summer and have resumed this year. We met by invitation of June Beech, her gardener and her dog Deilo. By the time we finished for the lockdown in September 2020 Deilo was quite accustomed to us - but he took time to accept us again this year.



*Photo courtesy of Dave & Val Bird*

**Deilo joins the chase round!**

In the photos we are dancing "Dragonflies", a five-person strathspey which we found in the Scottish Country Dance Dictionary, The website also contains a video of the dance, albeit performed as a reel.

We dance it to track 10 of "Opus Dance" by James Gray. Dave uses his MP3 player and a waist amplifier for the music. We bought the CD through Fran, originally in

order to dance Alex Gray's dance "The Mathematicians", which we used to do in the Hall in Port Talbot. At present we do not have sufficient people to try it, but when we can return to the Hall that will again be on the programme.

#### Val Bird



*Photo courtesy of Dave & Val Bird*

#### PEMBROKESHIRE

In Pembrokeshire a group of us have been dancing outside and in an open barn when lockdown restrictions have allowed and, despite limitations, this has provided fun, socialization and exercise - and a welcome break from the gloom of the global pandemic. This activity has also provided opportunities for considering what SCD can be done whilst maintaining social distancing as, clearly, this latter precludes some formations.

#### Heather Davies

(See also Heather's article on pages 4 & 5.)

## CARDIFF



*Photo by Christine Davies*

As soon as the lockdown restrictions eased a bit, I planned to have dancing in my garden, which I have done for a number of years. It coincides with Isabel's birthday, which adds to the occasion. Given the size of my garden, we are limited to one set of dancers, plus a couple who only come for the cake!

We were blessed with a lovely sunny day. Conor did the music and mowed the lawn, and the grass was dry! We managed seven dances, and then had tea & cake in the back garden, recently designed by my daughter Jenny. It was a lovely afternoon and I hope to do it again next year.

### **Carol Walton**



*Photo by Christine Davies*

### **TRIBUTE TO KEITH MARSHALL (27 July 1933 – 23 February 2021)**

Sadly, earlier this year Covid claimed the life of another of our longstanding members of the Branch. I'm afraid I learned of this loss only when I heard from Norah in response to my recent appeal for membership renewals. Hence the delay in this notice, for which I'm very sorry.

For a considerable number of years Keith and his wife Norah had been active members of the Vale of Glamorgan class run by Lyn Wilson on a Wednesday evening. They had also been members of the Cardiff Caledonian Society, and they regularly supported Cal Soc Saturday dances in Whitchurch. They also enjoyed many Burns Suppers, as well as a succession of Hogmanay dances in Caerleon. Fellow Branch members may also remember them for their loyal commitment to Branch events such as our Annual Ball and St Andrew's Night Suppers. They were good friends with Beryl and Bernard Richards, often travelling to events together.

Norah has very kindly made available to me the text of the eulogy delivered at Keith's funeral by the couple's son David on behalf of his mum, his sister Shelagh, and himself. This Newsletter tribute is based on extracts from those remarks, supplemented by Norah's own account of how she and Keith came to Scottish Country Dancing.

David began by describing his father's early life. Keith's father died when Keith was only two, and he and his mother then moved to Bournemouth. His working life comprised initial years at the National Assistance Board, followed by National Service in the RAF in the early '50s. His Civil Service career then continued at the Ministry of Pensions and National Insurance, where he met Norah in 1966, marrying in 1967. Their two children were born while they lived in North London.

Keith and Norah moved to Cardiff in 1979 as the result of a job transfer for Keith, now with the Export Credits Guarantee Department, where he remained until retirement in 1991.

In his eulogy David also shared fond memories of Keith's utter devotion to Norah, and of his huge enjoyment of their time with their six grandchildren.

Here are some of David's own words about other aspects of his father's life:

*When Mum developed diabetes, they both became involved with Diabetes UK as active supporters, with Dad becoming Treasurer and then Chairman of the Cardiff group. Free time and weekends involved fundraising, promotion and roadshows. Dad and Mum received an award for 24 years of service to Diabetes UK. They made many friends through this group – self-named the Diabolicals – and they went on a number of holidays as a group.*



*Photo courtesy of Norah Marshall*

*Dad and Mum took advantage of being fit and able to travel as far and wide as possible, visiting Japan, China, Thailand, Australia, New Zealand, the Cook Islands, Mauritius, the United States, Canada, Guyana, Trinidad & Tobago, St Lucia, and many countries in Europe. They also enjoyed a number of holidays within the United Kingdom with their friends from the rambling group.*

*[...] If circumstances had been different, Dad could no doubt have gone to, and done extremely well at, university. He had a very obvious ability with mathematics, but would also pick up languages on holiday very quickly. Often to the amazement or frustration of those playing with him or against him at board games, he had an encyclopaedic general knowledge, except on questions involving popular culture. For example he (and Mum) claimed to have never heard of Bob Marley! Dad completed The Times crossword daily, and he would enjoy trying to work out the “Where Am I?” puzzle in The Sunday Times, which he often got*

*correct. Indeed, he won a weekend in Brussels. (Extracts from eulogy by David)*

Towards the end of his life, Keith developed serious heart and lung problems, succumbing to Covid during his final month in hospital.

As indicated above, Norah described to me how she and Keith first became involved in Scottish Country Dancing. While on holiday in Scotland some thirty years ago they attended a Scottish Country Dancing evening, intending to remain spectators. Well, as we all know, that’s not something normally tolerated by devotees of SCD. Sure enough, Keith and Norah became inveigled into taking part, in the course of which they met Linda Gaul (whom many of you will have come across as a Summer School teacher, RSCDS Chair, etc.). Linda in turn passed on the phone number of Kate Gray in Cardiff, Keith and Norah started attending Kate’s Radyr class – and the rest, as they say, is history.

What a lovely story, Norah. As fellow dancers I’m sure we’re all touched by the pleasure that Scottish Country Dancing brought to you and Keith. We too have happy memories of the times we’ve shared with you, and we’re delighted that you want to remain a member of our Branch.

**Alison Jackson**



**BRANCH CONTACT DETAILS**

**Chair: Conor Farmer, tel 07812 569744**  
[conorfarmer52@googlemail.com](mailto:conorfarmer52@googlemail.com)

**Secretary: Alison Jackson, tel. 07811 082510**  
[jacksonaj@talktalk.net](mailto:jacksonaj@talktalk.net)

**Treasurer: Pat Rye, tel. 01646 698463**  
[ryedp@hotmail.com](mailto:ryedp@hotmail.com)

**Website Manager: Fran Smith**  
[fran@rscds-southwales.org.uk](mailto:fran@rscds-southwales.org.uk)  
[www.rscds-southwales.org.uk](http://www.rscds-southwales.org.uk)



**As a final item I'm printing an article sent to me by Heather Davies from Pembrokeshire, expressing some views about how Scottish Country Dancers may need to adapt to meet those strange times. If anyone else would like to respond in the next Newsletter, I'd be happy to hear from you.**

### **Reflections on SCD during a pandemic: moving to a new normal.**

Scottish Country Dancing has a history of adaptation, and over the years dancers have risen to the challenge of keeping SCD traditions alive whilst adjusting to changes in society that have led to different needs for socialization and exercise. Balancing the needs of those who advocate that proper technique is important with those who are not interested in dancing technique but want to move to lively music and engage in social dancing can be tricky. However, arguably, with imagination, collaboration and compromise, all requirements can be accommodated.

Crucially, as a team activity, the main requirement is for people. As such, SCD needs to be available for different levels of ability and interests and must be fun. Thus, there is a need for different approaches to ensure that SCD is available, do-able and interesting to all and, importantly, to address the big question of how people can be attracted to classes and dancing.

Across the world SCD groups have adjusted to attract and maintain SCD in their local areas:

- There have been successful initiatives where country dances with a caller are run, no experience required and no emphasis on technique, just on having a good

time. These have often resulted in some people deciding to join classes to learn technique.

- Teaching country dancing in schools, universities or to other groups of young people can lead to the continuation of dancing into later life.
- Groups and clubs collaborating so that beginners classes run alongside more experienced dancers with the beginners joining the group for part of the lesson, thereby allowing beginners to learn at their own pace and form a camaraderie.

It is worth noting that key factors in all these approaches are collaboration and acceptance that to continue SCD needs to adapt.

Discussion about how to attract people to SCD have been ongoing for some time, but the arrival of Covid 19 has changed the debate and stifled practical implementation of different ways of achieving the stated aim. So where are we now?

Over the past 18 months SCD has been largely 'on hold'. The question has been how can SCD be undertaken and can it take place at all rather than how do we attract new people! Some people have met in outside spaces to dance, keeping a distance and wearing masks but most have not been dancing, unless

alone to the RSCDS weekly ZOOM sessions. This latter has been welcomed and well attended but a poor substitute for the 'real thing'. Some of us have accepted that if social dancing is not possible, then ladies step or highland on line classes are a way of still dancing that does not invoke the nostalgia of full dances floors and social activity.

In recent years there have been comments about the increasing number of new and more complicated dances. Interestingly, lockdown restrictions have given the opportunity to consider this in more detail. Many less complicated dances lend themselves well to social distancing, and there are many dances that either do not require 'touching' or can be easily adapted to avoid contact. As we move forward into the autumn questions remain about the need for restrictions to activities. These may be worthy of further consideration.

Looking forward, classes and dancing activities are starting back at varying rates across the UK. At present few restrictions remain. However, most public places, which includes halls where dancing may take place, are still limiting numbers and requiring risk assessments which, inevitably, means adaptations are still required.

Additionally, there are many people who remain wary of wanting to be in a confined space with little social distancing, and this will also need to be considered as we move forward to a return to dancing indoors and through the winter.

And, of course, people are out of practice: many have lost their dancing

fitness, and some will not want/be able to return to dancing, so adjustments will need to be made as dancing starts again.

If we are to return to SCD we need to attract more people and for this, in my view, we need to adjust and adapt to accommodate the potential limitations of pandemic restrictions and to meet people's needs or wishes as they join/rejoin groups.

Many people need to be encouraged to venture back into an activity that previously involved close physical proximity to be reassured that it is 'safe'. A gradual return to physical fitness requires a gentle approach and an emphasis on fun and simplicity.

A temporary return to simpler dances and a concentration on formations that do not require touching may be a viable way forward, at least until we have a better idea of what the pandemic may still throw at us. A return to 'dancing as usual' may not be immediately possible or desirable. Some compromises may be worth accepting in the interests of enabling a continuation of an activity we enjoy. After the long months of lockdowns dancing is an attractive proposition to many people, who are now looking for new social activities that also promote fitness.

The future of SCD requires more discussion in respect of the question of 'the numbers game'.

In the meantime, beginners classes are planned to start in September in Pembrokeshire. Compromise, with an emphasis on fun, will be the keynote.

**Dr Heather M Davies**