



POTTED HISTORY OF THE CLUB – ADAPTED FROM “WESTBURY SCOTTISH CLUB, THE FIRST 50 YEARS” WRITTEN BY ALBERT TAYLOR

The first event having taken place on 23rd January 1946, the inaugural AGM of the Westbury Dance and Social Club was held on 6th September 1946 in Westbury Village Hall. The club secretary, Mr C Napier commented that it had been a remarkably successful season. No doubt the war years of austerity, anxiety and gloom were partly responsible for this resurgence of spirit. He further commented that the new ‘hot’ dances such as the jive and jitterbug were alien to our national character and temperament (!) while the old dances would never die and that their dignity gives a wealth of enjoyment and creates a grand team spirit and sincere friendship. We hope that this continues to be the case.

A total of 116 people had attended the first dance event. Class numbers averaged just over 100 with a Miss Heaven teaching. A limited repertoire was listed consisting of only 6 dances: Eightsome Reel, Circassian Circle, Waltz Country Dance, Lancers, Dashing White Sergeant and Schottische.

At that first AGM, the bank balance stood at £17.14s.0d. Other assets included a programme mascot named ‘Jock’, 4x18 yards of bunting and 5 dozen tumblers. The charge per class was to be fixed at 2 shillings with a nominal charge for dance nights on alternate Fridays. Two special dances were planned to be held at St Peter’s Church Hall which is where we now dance. On these nights there was to be ‘no instruction’ so presumably no walk-through.

The following year’s AGM reported a surplus of over £24. It was suggested that this be used for a club outing and/or given to charity. Both were rejected as was the proposal that a fund be started to build a hall for the club. Wishful

thinking. A president's badge was purchased and the club name was changed to Westbury Scottish Club. The first president was Mr J M Meighan. Visitors were to be permitted to dance only by prior arrangement.

By 1948-9, there were two teachers, Mr Hugh Thurston in the main class and Miss Yacomeni for the beginners. Visitors had to be formally invited by a club member and notified to the committee three days in advance. Club nights attracted 96-98 dancers. The men on the committee were the executive with the ladies just responsible for catering.

At that time, members expressed a feeling that the club was learning new dances too fast and they should stick to a familiar repertoire and learn those thoroughly. Two new dances per season was thought to be sufficient. The following year 'Duke of Perth' and 'La Russe' were the additions.

By the end of the 1950-51 season, membership stood at 145 and there were so many non-members "gatecrashing" that stricter measures to control numbers were required with only 6 permitted each evening. Money worries included the increased cost of refreshments meaning that there would need to be a charge for a second cup of coffee. However, 6 new tea cloths and a gross of plastic teaspoons were purchased as well as a tin of biscuits.

A Hogmanay Ball was held in 1951 at the Corn Exchange incorporating the inauguration of the new president. Haggis was piped in and served with all the trimmings. Most of the dances we would recognise today as ballroom or ceilidh dances but Scottish Reform, Duke and Duchess of Edinburgh, Petronella and Broun's Reel (Duke of Perth) were on the programme. Two commissionaires were to be on duty as a "precautionary measure". Against what we don't know. According to the club there were around 170 attending although the caterers disagreed, stating at least 20 more. It ran at a loss.

At the AGM in September 1951, one of the teachers warned that there were little cliques being formed and called for more mixing in the new season. There was a waiting list for membership in spite of the fact that members would have to bring their own sugar for the tea and coffee! The dispute over numbers at the Hogmanay dance continued the following year – club saying 229 and caterers 251. Maybe some gatecrashers?

In 1953 at the AGM, it was again requested that the club concentrated on learning their standard dances instead of constantly introducing new dances. The instructors did not comment. New dances that season were Machine without Horses, Montgomerie's Rant and New Rigged Ship. The Demonstration team was mentioned in 1952-53 with preparations for events around the coronation. In 1954-55, they performed 57 times including two appearances in Italy. An 'overflow class' was started and by 1955 that was overflowing and an overflow to the overflow class was begun. No new dances were to be introduced in the new season. At that point a decision was taken to apply for affiliate membership of the RSCDS which happened in 1956.

It seems that live music was used for classes as there is an agreement in 1957 that the overflow class is to have a band in place of recorded ('tinned') music. An appeal from a local scout troop for money to buy pipes and drums was turned down, the rules apparently saying that no money could be given away to charity. Miss Jean Milligan, one of the founders of the SCDS (later RSCDS) visited in March 1958 and was treated to lunch. Another 'celebrity' contact was the Queen Mother who wrote of her appreciation of the demonstration team when they performed before her.

However, there were rumblings of discontent in the demonstration team and it was agreed that there would be separate instructors for the ladies and gentlemen. Because of further turbulence in the club, a constitution was to be drawn up in the 1958-59 season, members to be charged sixpence for a copy.

Attendances at the Spring and Autumn dances was falling so invitations went out to RSCDS affiliates within a 50 mile radius with discounts offered for parties of 12 or more coming from over 12 miles. In spite of this, those dances ran at a loss but Hogmanay made a profit to offset that.

As many as six new dances were introduced in 1959-60. In addition, the teaching of steps and technique was to be started. RSCDS teaching exams were taken in Bristol in 1960, a number of WSC members obtaining the intermediate certificate. Hogmanay seems to have been a premier event in the social calendar. As well as dancing, haggis and drinking there was a cabaret performed by members. The dance officially finished at 2am but it is reported that dancing sometimes continued in the street. The overflow class was at that time invited to attend the last club night of the season.

The demonstration team continued to be a success with 35 performances in spite of some difficulties retaining a coach. There was a Caledonian Society in Bristol and attempts had been made to run joint events without success. Another was suggested in 1961 but did not take place.

By 1962, membership was falling and there were vacancies resulting in financial strain. Applicants were vetted to ensure their dancing was of a high enough standard and not all were accepted. The main source of new members was from the overflow classes.

That year, the Bristol branch of the RSCDS was formed. WSC agreed to support it as long as it did not interfere with the club and its activities. WSC had a representative on the RSCDS committee.

WSC had a habit of re-organising the committee and setting up various sub-committees. Separate ladies' and men's committees had different spending powers, the men choosing the new president's emblem in 1962.

Although the demonstration team was active and obviously of a high standard, performing at national events including one at the Royal Festival Hall, there was a crisis in 1963 and activity was suspended due to shortage of dancers as well as money to support the team. That year a blizzard on New Year's Eve reduced the numbers at the Ball and some refunds were given. However, a profit of £30 was made. Average attendance at club nights at that time was 77 in spite of severe winter weather.

An amusing incident was recorded in 1963-64 season when a dance was held at Severn Beach. Twenty dancers slipped off for a swim in the nearby Blue Lagoon pool. Another big event was St Andrew's Night when for the princely sum of 2 shillings (10p) haggis, potatoes and cakes were served. Happily during that season, the demonstration team (known then as a class) was resurrected with the offer of a hall to practise in free of charge, courtesy of the president, Dr Binks. Money was spent on equipment for the club, namely two second-hand record players and £3 worth of records. A junior class (ages 8-15) was begun, running for 45 minutes on Friday evenings prior to the club night. Membership was running at 134 and it was noted that there was more friendly and social spirit. To maintain this, men were encouraged to make a point of dancing with a lady they had not previously danced with. A Mr Nicholls who was unable to attend due to illness was made the first Honorary member.

The 1964-5 season saw two fresh sub-committees, one consisting of the ladies from the main committee, charged with spending £20 on tartans to decorate the Corn Exchange for Hogmanay. A weekend course, held in May 1965 was a huge success. There was a substantial bank balance and £100 was invested in a Development Bond. TV cameras attended the Hogmanay Dance but focussed on the catering rather than the dancing. An accordionist, Sam McDonald played at Hogmanay and the Summer Dance. He later became the regular musician. Another social event was a picnic with the Shepton Mallett dancers complete with dancing and games. A repeat was planned to be known as the "Wookey Hole Highland Games". Sadly this event was rained off. Membership was holding up with a ratio of two women to every man.

In the season 1965-66, a joint dance with the Caledonian Society and RSCDS looked like finally happening but a date could not be agreed. The club splashed out on its first amplifier and the regular band, led by Tom Jones (no, not that one) announced an increase in their fee to come into line with union rates. A member (Captain Orr) was awarded an OBE and membership reached the sky-high total of 148.

In 1966-67, the Dem team and club members took part in celebrations of the 1250th anniversary of Westbury-on-Trym (that is the correct number) Another notable entry is that the Gents' cloakroom was unavailable at St Andrew's Night! Tom Jones' band withdrew and Sam McDonald stepped in to play. The Autumn Dance was held in the University Common Room, ticket holders being made temporary members of the Common Room. There was however some irregularity with some names not being recorded so sales of alcohol to them put the university union licence in jeopardy with the police becoming involved. It is not recorded who grassed. Happily all was sorted out and the Spring Dance was able to be held in the same venue. The Summer Dance moved to Pen Park School, perhaps to avoid losing dancers to the Blue Lagoon?

Hogmanay 1966/67 marked the 21st anniversary of the club, birthday cake and sherry being consumed at midnight.

Club finances were supported by the junior and overflow class (known as the Westmoreland Class) but a decision was made to dispense with the services of paid kitchen help at club nights, the ladies of the club "volunteering" to

take over. However, it is recorded that a proposal at the AGM that there could be a lady as president was “not really practical or desirable”. New Year’s Day was not a bank holiday until 1974. Hogmanay 1967 was a Sunday so Monday was a working day. This may account for the fact that the Ball was not as well attended as usual. A Young People’s Ball was held in January 1968 with over 100 people (including parents) attending. The club continued to be sociable on the day of the Summer dance, entertaining visiting dancers to tea in their own homes between a half-day course and the evening event.

The current presidential insignia contains small silver plates bearing the names of past presidents. This was initiated in the 1967-68 season, courtesy of the president Dr Anderson. Incidentally, a dance “Anderson of Rutherglen” was written and dedicated to him. There were two complaints at the AGM – one regarding the quality of music and the other, more importantly about the coffee.

The 1968-69 season saw a weekend course at Cowley Manor in the Cotswolds which was over-subscribed and a great success. The Demonstration team appeared on TV dancing at Temple Meads Station. However, class and dance attendances were falling, the Westmoreland class ceased, there was dissatisfaction with the band and the state of the floor in Westbury Hall. The future of the club was thought to be in jeopardy. However, the following season, changes to the committee structure and changes of venues went some way to resolving the issues. It was decided in 1970 to discontinue the Autumn dance and combine the Spring and Summer dances as “End of Season Dance”.

By November 1970, membership had fallen to 74 and to save money, the junior class was disbanded. The Demonstration Team wanted to become independent of the club but was eventually affiliated in the constitution. The chairman (now a separate role from president) complained of slipshod administration and promised reform. More social events were held including a car rally, wine and cheese party and production of regular newsletters. A publicity campaign to recruit members was launched with an open recruiting dance to be held in Ashton Court in the summer. However, there were very few new members.

Numbers attending dances and the AGM continued to fall in spite of the Spring Dance celebrating the 25th Anniversary. However, numbers later picked up, a Beginners class was reported to be doing well and the club invested in a new thermos flask but cut out Kenyan coffee at Hogmanay! The Hogmanay Ball was the first of a series of successful combined events with the Caledonian Society. On the other hand, a film night followed by dancing in February 1971 was scuppered by a power cut.

Moving on to 1972-73, the club had its first lady president elect, Ziska Burgess-Parker, widow of a past president. Subs were raised a bit and membership was increasing again, resulting in a small surplus in spite of the fact that whisky and sherry were provided for the president’s guests at the Spring Dance, a long-standing arrangement which no longer applies.

The 1970s saw political turmoil with the “three day week” and strikes resulting in frequent, planned and unplanned power cuts. It is recorded that at least one social event had to be cancelled in 1974. There were complaints from the membership about the music being too loud at Hogmanay but to make matters worse, the bar service was very slow. An experimental change to club nights was trialled with instruction from 7-8.30pm followed by dancing for the experienced dancers. This did not last and a separate class for Beginners began on club nights the following season. More spending took place – on another record player, a portable typewriter, a duplicator and cups and saucers. Membership was up to 99 with average attendance at club nights of 58 with 6.3 visitors!

It seems that in time for the AGM in 1974 there was a lot of difficulty recruiting a secretary (nothing changes). The club was still using caterers for dances (not the ubiquitous American Supper in those days), causing some financial strain at the Spring Dance. Members were required to book in advance for club nights so no ‘doorman’ would be needed. An ‘Under 30s’ class got under way. This was the first year that one club night was designated a Beginners Night – a tradition which survives.

At the 1975 -76 AGM, it was decided that Hogmanay would no longer be a joint event with the Caledonian Society. The president’s term of office had increased to three years and the first lady president was installed. Application forms were sent to selected members of the Beginners class who were considered to be proficient enough to join the main class. Finding suitable venues for events continued to be a problem at that time. Tragedy struck with failure to obtain a bar licence for Hogmanay. A special dance was held to celebrate the Queen’s Silver Jubilee.

1977-78 saw a loss at Hogmanay but membership climbing to over 100 again. The Spring Dance on 1st April was a bit of a flop blamed on it being too close to Easter and on the quality of the music. The Westbury Strathspey was written which allowed a long-standing member, Mary Russell to take part even though she was confined to a wheelchair following an illness. Mary later became the second lady president.

September 1977 saw the beginning of a new intermediate class in addition to the beginners class taught by Jean Crepin who had just obtained her teaching certificate. Hogmanay was a shorter affair as it fell on a Saturday so had to finish before midnight. Club nights were attracting up to 84 dancers.

The Spring Ball in 1979 saw the first appearance of Jimmy Coleman as musician. Jimmy became a 'resident' musician until 2014. The dance was declared a success even though the food ran out. President's Night (which continues to this day) was a new event at which members were asked to wear 'party dresses'. It is not clear if this included the men. Interestingly there were complaints that the record player was too fast. Various fixes were suggested but ultimately (according to Albert Taylor) everyone just had to dance faster. A deficit in the funds required members to pay an additional levy of £2 to ensure the club continued.

In the season 1980-81, the first Charity Dance was held. This remains a feature of the current club. Following another successful Spring Dance the following year, the club invested in 10 dozen sets of cutlery place settings. For some reason, plastic forks were used at President's Night (maybe the whisky and sherry caused concern). Henbury School was by now the regular venue for dances. Nothing changes on committee as the secretary had to step down and the temporary replacement, Arthur Tellam, continued to serve for 5½ years. This was not a record. P Lucas served for 8 years and R Aburrow for 6.

In the 1982-83 season, a joint recruitment poster campaign was launched with RSCDS and the Caledonian Society. This happened again in 2019, albeit without the defunct Caledonian Society. Henbury School became the venue for all WSC functions for a number of years. Attendance at classes and club nights had fallen a bit although the Monday Class (run by the demonstration team) continued.

Notable events from the following season included the disappearance of 12 vases, substitution of an accordion for piano as part of Jimmy Coleman's ensemble and sadly the death of Jean Crepin who had taught both beginners and intermediate classes as well as instructing at club nights. Malcolm Read devised a dance in her honour 'Jean Crepin's Jig'. Although ticket sales were down, the Spring Dance was reported to be a success with more room to dance. The proceeds of the Charity dance went to Jean Crepin's favourite charities. Following that, the club began to nominate a local charity and raise money throughout the year. This is still very much a feature of the club.

As was now common, recruitment was an important topic in the next season which ended with a surplus and another successful charity dance. Plans were afoot for a Ruby Anniversary Ball in October 1986 when 184 club members and guests attended, including 12 past presidents and one remaining founder member, Miss Yacomeni who taught the beginners class way back at the start. Two members gained teaching qualifications that year when a further course was run in Bristol, some WSC members acting as 'stooges'. A club tie was produced and a few members continue to wear them. There was insufficient interest from the ladies for a club headscarf.

It is reported that punch was no longer to be served at Hogmanay 1987 after 'last year's disaster', the nature of which is not on record – it must have been the alcoholic version. A magnificent turnout for Beginners Night was pleasing. The 42nd AGM attracted 37 members of the 92 on the books.

Spring Dance in 1989 was memorable as the food ran out again and there was no coffee. Club nights were problematic. Sometimes there were no musicians available so recorded music was used. A 'Ladies' Invitation' dance was introduced on club nights to be at the discretion of the MC. Dancing standards of new members were criticised as was the behaviour of one T Urn. This could not have been too bad as the urn in question was still in use in later years. There were complaints that the time for recaps was taking too long so only one walk through was to be done. Two additional paying evenings were held to reduce the year's loss.

Interestingly the programme at the Charity Dance in the 1989-90 season was reported to have no Scottish dances. Attendance was down. Cause and effect? The subscription by this time had risen to £12.50. WSC took part in a world-wide event in August 1989 when dancers were sponsored to raise money for charity, dancing a programme

pre-arranged by RSCDS. Over £700 was raised. Consequently the WSC organisers of this event became the Charity committee.

In March 1990, the club had to find a new venue due to increased charges for the school hall. St Andrew's Church Hall in Avonmouth was the venue for club nights, classes being held at Filton Folk Centre and Hogmanay at Brunel Technical College. That year saw the introduction of Lady MCs. Malcolm Read was praised for being someone who 'led from the front' and helping the club navigate 'difficult waters'. There were on 70 paying members, the classes subsidising the club nights.

In the 1990-91 season, the Charity Dance moved to July where it continues. £530 was raised that year. The End of Season Dance became the Spring Dance, held near the end of the season. A number of missing items were reported including plastic glasses, the first aid kit and a tablecloth. Jimmy Coleman was also missing one club night after being stuck in traffic. He was apparently paid half his normal fee.

1991-92 saw controversy about dance programmes, conflict between the 'old' and 'new members, the latter wanting more new dances and the oldies wanting fewer. Eventually, the status quo was maintained. Hogmanay and Burns Night were great successes with visitors from up to 10 other groups being welcomed. A ceilidh was held in March which was enthusiastically enjoyed and there was a plan to repeat it. There were some equipment issues (nothing changes). There were three distinct classes running as well as the club nights – 'Starters' with Sue, 'Juniors' with Jenie and 'Betweeners' with Beryl. There was mention of a licence to dance being required and applied for and money allocated to buy a saltire for decoration. At the AGM, it was noted that membership was declining again.

1992-93 saw the beginning of planning for the 40th anniversary. It was noted that there was a shortage of volunteers to set up the hall for dances. The Charity dance was moved to Tickenham. Fire regulations there required a list of who attended. Sadly we don't have access to this in Albert's history. Of further interest, the President's car was stolen during a club night. Happily it was returned with a plant he had bought for another member, still in the boot. This, together with damage to other members' cars, led to the development of a security guard on club nights. At the time of Albert's writing that was still in place.

On the checklist for Hogmanay was 'ensure the piano is unlocked'. Good idea! Mr T Urn was pensioned off and the 'Monday Group' performed at a celebration of St Andrews Hall centenary.

A large number of changes of personnel took place. Committee chairman, John Fowler's death was announced at club night but dancing continued as his wife thought he would have wanted that. Secretary Pamela Crepin, Treasurer Jill Milsom, Ticket Secretary Craig Stewart and dance coaches Beryl and Malcolm Read all stepped down as did Jimmy's pianist. Membership stood at 84 with hopes of reaching 100 by Jubilee year.

The following season, Hogmanay was a Saturday but an extension to the drinks licence pleased the club. A profit of £1.94 was recorded. Planning began for celebrating the 50th Anniversary on 23rd January 1996. Alan Milsom became President, the Monday class was being run by Tony Martin and the social and fund-raising activities were praised at the AGM.

The final season recorded by Albert was 1994-95. The music at club nights was reported to be fine but lacking 'base' – maybe bass? Albert commented that the scribe was not a beer drinker. The anniversary Ball was to be held in Spring 1996 rather than January and a smaller event held for Burns Night. The PA system was declared beyond repair. In spite of this a temporary fix allowed events to continue while looking for a replacement.

Beginners' Night was held on the last club night before Christmas. There was apparently little room for dancing because of the numbers there. Meanwhile the problems at the Spring dance were – a slippery floor and the need to record names and addresses of everyone attending. However Peter and Edna Russell played and the music was uplifting.

At the AGM, the deaths of several members was reported including Ziska Burgess-Parker, the first lady president. The junior class performed at President's night, dancing 'The Saddler'. There was a surplus of £700 – due to the classes subsidising club nights. With unanimous support, Vera and Douglas Dando and author, Albert Taylor were made Honorary Life Members.

The Secretary, John Andrews add a postscript for 1995-96. Jimmy Coleman and Peter Russell had become excellent resident musicians for club nights. There was a celebratory club night on the anniversary in January and the 50th Anniversary Ball on 30th March 1996. The year ended with a dance on Saturday 30th December. This was marred by bad weather and hazardous driving conditions as well as lack of heating in the hall. The caretaker provided some gas heaters which prevented the 49 dancers who made it from freezing. All in all it was an enjoyable occasion.

To be continued.....