

Early History of the Royal Scottish Country Dance Society and the Glasgow Branch

This article was written by Alastair MacFadyen, a former Chairman of the Glasgow Branch. He was Honorary President of RSCDS and Honorary Vice President of Glasgow Branch, and was well known throughout the dancing world. He died in July 2015.

"The Glasgow Branch is the Royal Scottish Country Dance Society", was an assertion often made by Miss Jean Milligan, who, with Mrs Ysobel Stewart founded the Scottish Country Dance Society ("Royal" since 1951) in 1923. She was making a valid historical point because it was from the first instructional class for Scottish Country Dancing, organized in Glasgow a few years later, by the fledgling Society, that the Glasgow Branch emerged, though both the Society and Glasgow Branch have the same founding date of 1923. Other branches were soon established elsewhere, following the Glasgow example.



Glasgow played a significant role in the early stages of the formation of the Society. It was an announcement in the Glasgow Herald which invited persons interested in "Scots Country Dances" to attend a meeting in Glasgow and at that inaugural meeting, held on 26 November 1923, there was a strong representation from the city

Present, of course, was Miss Jean Milligan, whose devotion to the city of Glasgow, where she lived all her 92 years, was as passionate as her dedication to the cause of Scottish Country Dancing. Also attending was Mr J Michael Diack of Glasgow then in charge of the Publication Department of the music publishers, Paterson and Sons. It was to the great credit of Mr Diack that he recognized the merit of the proposal, first put his way by Mrs Ysobel Stewart, to publish a book of Scottish Country Dances, and to form a Scottish Country Dance Society, and that he, on behalf of Patersons was willing to underwrite the cost of printing the book (SCDS Book 1). Mr Diack was also responsible for bringing together Miss Milligan and Mrs Stewart, thus creating a partnership which ensured a successful beginning to the new Society.

Miss Lilian Ross MA from Glasgow was also amongst those present on 26 November 1923. Miss Ross is still fondly remembered in the Glasgow Branch and at the annual RSCDS Summer School at St. Andrews where for many years she was the 'Tea Lady', organizing a regular provision of liquid refreshment for thirsty dancers. Although presenting a rather formidable and stern appearance, Miss Ross had a quick and pawky sense of humour which was greatly appreciated by those who knew her well. She was rarely seen without a cigarette and without her knitting "pins" from which she produced an unending supply of white kilt stockings, destined to adorn the "pins" of many Scottish Country Dancers. It was very appropriate that Miss Ross, as a founder member of the Society, was Chairman of the Glasgow Branch in 1973, the 50th Anniversary year. In her own inimitable style she presided over the Jubilee celebrations of the Branch and also of the Society which were held in Glasgow in November 1973.

The certification of teachers, a very important initiative by the Society in pursuit of its aim to restore and sustain good standards of Scottish Country dancing, first occurred in Glasgow. Over the past many years the Glasgow Branch has continued to supply qualified teachers who have not only given loyal service locally but have also become well known as teachers out with the Branch at the RSCDS Summer School and at day and Weekend Schools in Britain and overseas

Glasgow Branch Members have taken a leading role in the workings of the RSCDS. In the early years, Mr Percy Thomson and Miss Marguerite Kenyon the first two secretaries of the Glasgow Branch, were prominent members of the Society's executive council, and during the past three quarters of a century many other Branch Members School in St. Andrews, four have come from the Glasgow Branch. Miss Jean Milligan, Mr Duncan MacLeod, Dr Alastair MacFadyen and Mrs Johan MacLean.

It is pleasing to note that an acknowledgement of the debt owed to three of those mentioned above for their outstanding service to Scottish Country dancing has been recorded for posterity. Dances composed in their honour have been published by the RSCDS, namely "Miss Milligan's Strathspey" (Jubilee leaflet 1973), "MacLeod's Fancy" (Book 33 1985), and "Miss Florence Adams" (book 38 1994)

As the first Branch of the RSCDS, it is a long established tradition that the Glasgow Branch hosts the major celebratory events of the Society. Thus, the 25th (1948) and 50th (1973) anniversaries were celebrated in Glasgow and likewise the weekend of celebrations to commemorate the 100th anniversary of the birth of Jean Milligan in 1986. No exception was the 75th anniversary of the Society in November 1998 when 800 members from all over the world gathered in the Kelvin Hall, Glasgow. What better tribute, a large and splendid assembly of dancers, could there have been to the many members of the Glasgow Branch past and present, who by their loyal support of Branch and Society have ensured that Scottish Country Dancing continues into the third millennium.

Further information about the history and work of the Royal Scottish Country Dance Society may be obtained from the following, all available from the Glasgow Branch of the RSCDS.

- A. MacFadyen and F. H. Adams, Dance with your soul. A biography of Jean Callander Milligan. 1982.
- A. MacFadyen and F. H. Adams, Dance with your soul. A biography of Jean Callander Milligan. 1982.
- P. Knight (Editor), Scottish Country Dancing. Collins Pocket Reference 1996

Glasgow Branch Recipients of RSCDS Scroll of Honour

Miss Florence Adams	1985	Miss Margaret Prentice	1986	Miss Winifred Carnie
Miss Edith Watson	1988	Mr Duncan MacLeod	1992	Mrs Joyce McArthur
Dr Alastair MacFadyen	1998	Mr George Lawson	1998	Mrs Nan Lawson
Mrs Muriel More	2003	Mr Duncan MacLean	2004	Miss Christine Traynor
Mrs Johan MacLean	2009	Miss Dorothy Hamilton	2013	Mrs Ruth Beattie