

### Summer School Fifty Years On...

Last summer it was 50 years since TAS member Marjorie MacRae attended her first RSCDS Summer School. I asked her how it had changed over the years.

When I first went to Summer School it was two two-week courses. Nowadays it is four one-week courses.

In the 'old days' Summer School in St Andrews was 'the' destination for Scottish Country Dancers – people attended from all over the world as there was no alternative. It was very popular – if you hadn't booked your place by the first of March you would not be able to attend.

Members from overseas who wanted a teaching qualification had to go to Summer School – now there are examiners who travel and other countries have their own examiners eg TAC. Numbers attending Summer School have reduced as Branches around the world now organise their own schools and dancing weekends. There is a greater element of choice, though many members still regard St Andrews as their Mecca. The number of overseas members attending is also affected by currency fluctuations – it is more attractive to come here when Sterling is low.

In the old days you had to take your own towel; now holiday lettings and summer schools are a business opportunity for the University and consequently the 'offer' is more sophisticated. Services have changed and people have different expectations but this is reflected in the cost.

Meal times in the early years were an opportunity for everyone to sit down together: everyone dressed for dinner and the meals were served at the table. I enjoyed the feeling of being part of a special 'family.' Now it is much more informal. Meals are self-service so people come and go at different times and they don't feel the need to dress for dinner as they used to do. It's a reflection of change in society as a whole.

*Ed: Has dancing changed?*

Standards have changed, as has the dress code. All the men used to wear kilts; women would never have worn trousers in class or at a dance. Softer techniques have evolved that are less stressful for older dancers.

*Ed: As well as being a member of a class you have fulfilled the roles of tutor, Depute Director and Director – how do they compare?*

While I enjoyed teaching and being involved in the organisation of events, it is nice to be back where I started as a student and to enjoy the dancing and the social side of Summer School. The Seniors' class is very social and relaxed but we still learn.

*Ed: What took you there year after year?*

I originally went because I wanted to improve my own standard of dancing. My first teacher at Summer School was Florence Adams. Over the years I have been fortunate to have many excellent teachers, including Johan MacLean, Duncan McLeod, Bill Ireland and Miss Milligan.

I enjoyed making new friends and renewing acquaintances. There was a real feeling of comradeship and a shared interest in Scottish Country Dancing. May Dick and I were good companions over many years.

I first met Anne McArthur in the early 1970s and we still keep in touch. She is currently doing a great job as Convenor of Youth Services. The Junior Summer School which was piloted in 2016 proved very popular and will feature again in the programme for 2017.

*Ed: What would Miss Milligan think about how Summer School has evolved?*

Miss Milligan was a pioneer. She was very far-sighted, I think she would embrace the changes as "society" has changed. I'm sure things changed event in her day.

*Ed: What is your favourite dance?*

*John of Bon Accord*

*Ed: What is your favourite dance to teach?*

For intermediates *Miss Mary Douglas* because of all the different reels and formations involved.

For very advanced dancers, I like *The Maid of the Mill* and *The Glens of Angus* because there is so much in them: basic formations, different types of turn and changes of pace.

*Ed: Would you recommend Summer School to members of TAS?*

Yes, it's a great experience and I'd recommend it to anyone who teaches as a way of brushing up their own technique.

March 2017