



# The Chanter

## Newsletter



*The Five Sisters of Kintail*

**June 2024**



**The Nottingham Scottish Association**

[www.nottinghamscottish.org](http://www.nottinghamscottish.org)

# Ailsa Rock



*Ailsa Craig*

Hearken, thou craggy ocean pyramid!  
Give answer from thy voice - the sea-fowl's screams!  
When were thy shoulders mantled in huge streams?  
When from the sun was thy broad forehead hid?  
How long is't since the mighty Power bid  
Thee heave to airy sleep from fathom dreams -  
Sleep in the lap of thunder or sunbeams -  
Or when gray clouds are thy cold coverlid?  
Thou answerest not, for thou art dead asleep.  
Thy life is but two dead eternities -  
The last in air, the former in the deep!  
First with the whales, last with the eagle skies!  
Drown'd wast thou till an earthquake made thee steep,  
Another cannot wake thy giant size!

**John Keats (1819)**

## From the President



I would like to introduce myself to you as the new President of the Nottingham Scottish Association. I see it as a great privilege to hold the position and it is with some trepidation that I take on the role following so many illustrious past Presidents. I would like to pass on my and, I'm sure, our, grateful thanks to our most recent presidents, Dave Chapman and Sue Morrison. I am thankful that both continue on the Council and I will, therefore, have the opportunity to call on them for advice during the year.

A little bit about myself: I was born in New Zealand where I lived for only 3 years before moving abroad. My parents had emigrated to Christchurch in the South Island after the War and I have memories in my early childhood of celebrating Scottish events such as Burns and Hogmanay. I can believe that my mother picked up this interest in Scotland from her time in New Zealand.

The links between the two countries are very strong and it is estimated that somewhere between 1 and 2 million New Zealanders can claim Scottish ancestry. In a country with a population of 5 million, that's a lot! Dunedin, the second largest city in the South Island of New Zealand, is Gaelic for Edinburgh and is known as the Edinburgh of the south. Dunedin is twinned with the Scottish capital city. The city's main rugby team is the Otago Highlanders, reflecting the city's Scottish roots.

My reason for joining the Nottingham Scottish Association was the draw of the dancing. I had learnt some simple steps and dances at school but had never followed it up. On retirement, I heard about the NSA and the opportunity to dance and went along. I immediately loved it.

Bill and Jeanne had utmost patience with our little group of beginners and it was a great thrill to properly learn my first complete dance "Shiftn' Bobbins". As time went on, I improved and there came a time when I was able to have an often-successful attempt at more difficult dances such as "Nottingham Lace". It was Iris who asked me to be her

partner and whenever it was on the programme we would dance together. I miss her greatly.

Another strong memory is of early Dance Festivals. I loved, and still do, the whole business of preparing for the event each year. It feels such an achievement to work on a dance and get it to the best it can be. I often make mistakes but I also feel rather proud that I have completed a dance without mishap. We have just completed the 2024 Festival and what a successful one it was. It was lovely to have Carol with us who, like me all those years ago, was taking part for the first time. Many thanks to Andrew for his hard work on the organisation side and for cracking the whip with the team.

As well as the dancing, I also very much enjoy the other side of our calendar of events. I was surprised to find there are so many opportunities to enjoy oneself. However, I must say that failing miserably at the Scottish questions on the quiz cannot be considered very enjoyable! I am improving though year on year.

I am looking forward to another successful year for our Association although I must mention our need to attract new members. I hope you will all spread the word and pass on to the Council your ideas for activities that we can put on during the year.

Finally, so many thanks for all the good wishes and offers of support that you have given me in taking up the President position.

**Rosie Allen**

## **From the Editor**

One of the pleasures of editing the Chanter is the chance to look back at our activities. This edition features three walks, a President's Evening of Scottish Music, Poems and Scottish Stories as well as the annual Dance Festival. It brings home the amount of work that goes on behind the scenes for these things to happen!

Thank you to those who have contributed – please keep them coming! You can email me at [chanter@nottinghamscottish.org](mailto:chanter@nottinghamscottish.org).

**Andrew**

## Joan Lamb

We are sad to report the death of Joan Lamb, a long-standing member of the Association. We send our condolences to her family and friends.

Margaret Barnes has contributed this tribute to Joan:

“It was with great sorrow that I learned of the passing of Joan Lamb.

I have known Joan for many years, having met her when I joined the Nottingham Scottish Association. We danced many times together and had many a laugh when things went wrong. We both also danced with the Tollerton Dance Group. Joan had a great sense of humour and unbelievable energy.

She did a great deal of work helping others, including putting in many hours at the Cheshire Homes. She used to make me laugh when she said she was taking some of the “old folks” out for a run in her car – many of them were younger than Joan herself! She also kept the gardens of the Church to which she belonged neat and tidy and never expected any thanks. We had a lovely celebration at the Thursday dancing to mark Joan’s 90<sup>th</sup> Birthday and she continued to dance for a few years after that.

She also took part in the monthly walks, and I remember one occasion when, after we had lunch at Bernice’s house, we had a game of “hockey” in the adjoining field with plastic hockey sticks and a large plastic ball. Joan was lethal with that stick and a few of us had the bruises to show for it! She was always full of fun and my husband Chris and I spent many enjoyable evenings at Joan’s home on Hogmanay.

Sadly, Joan’s final years were not happy ones for her as she was very ill and spent a long time bedridden in hospital and in a nursing home. However, I want to remember her as she was, full of life and fun and always willing to help where it was needed. I hope you are at peace now Joan. You will not be forgotten by your many friends.”

# Nottingham Scottish Activities 2024-25

## Dates for Your Diary:

**Thursday 11th July:** Garden Dance.

**Saturday 10th August:** Walk and Lunch. To be confirmed.

**Thursday 5th September:** Scottish Country Dancing re-starts.

**Saturday 30th November:** St. Andrew's Night. Details to follow.

**Saturday 25th January:** Burns Night. Details to follow

The full programme for the year ahead is currently being planned by the Council. As well as those listed above, it is likely to include the following:

## Social Events

August: River Trent Cruise

September: Crazy Golf – (the 'Nottingham Scottish Open'!)

October: Skittles Evening

December: Christmas Lunch & Walk

February: Quiz Night.

March: Social Entertainment Evening

April: AGM

May: ASCDS Scottish Dance Festival

## Walks

We would like to have one walk a month and would be grateful if you would come forward to lead a walk at some point in the year.

**Dates and details for all events will be confirmed by email and an updated Programme of Events is available on the website at [www.nottinghamscottish.org/programme](http://www.nottinghamscottish.org/programme)**

## **Brackenhurst Walk**

### **Wednesday 13th March**



Our March Walk started from the Leisure Centre in Southwell. Typically for this year, the weather had been wet and Rosie warned us of the need for waterproof footwear! The walk took us from Southwell into the Brackenhurst Estate passing the gardens of Brackenhurst Hall.

The Hall was originally built by Reverend Thomas Coats Cane of Halloughton, who bought three fields at the top of the hill in 1827, completing the house in 1828. As well as his clergy duties, he was a farmer and landowner and bred cattle and pigs on the estate. During the First World War the hall was used as a military hospital for servicemen recovering from injury. Finally, after World War II, it became the base for an Agricultural College and is now part of Nottingham Trent University.

On our route, we passed the Student Union Café and found the call for coffee irresistible, so we paused for a rest and a chat before completing our walk.

The route back took us through the interesting little village of Halloughton, which is recorded as existing before the Norman Conquest.





Its most striking building is the old Manor House, a listed farmhouse incorporating a tower said to be from the 15th century but possibly earlier.



*Seen in Halloughton: A Victorian Post Box and a Site of Absolutely No Interest!*

After the walk we moved to the Southwell Garden Centre for lunch and more conversation.

With thanks to Rosie for organising and leading the walk.



## President's Evening: Scottish Entertainment Evening

### Saturday 20th April



Dave and Jan Chapman devised an evening of Scottish entertainment for us as his President's Evening. This included a rich mix of music, poetry and stories. Jan accompanied us on the piano and Dave led us as we sang several familiar Scottish Songs.

Among the stories told, was Dave's account of how he became a star on prime-time Mongolian TV. This led on to an explanation of how his version of 'Mairi's Wedding' led to it being taught to children in Mongolian schools. A story you couldn't make up!

Dieter described his introduction to things Scottish in Germany and then in Yarm. Fortunately for us in NSA it didn't put him off and here he is as the new Vice President of the Association!

Teresa gave us a poem which would have rung a bell for female Scottish Dancers everywhere about the problems of dancing as either a man or a lady. Clearly gender confusion has long been a problem in Scottish Country Dance!

Bill and Jeanne added to the enjoyment with their amusing contributions. Sue introduced us to a Gaelic Song from Runrig which included 'vocables' – meaningless words which are characteristic of some Gaelic Songs. She also gave us a haunting piece of music - *Bha là eile ann* (*There was a different day*) – written during lock down. Andrew gave us a reminiscence of a walk of the West Highland Way with music and slides.

Thanks to all for their contributions – formal and informal – and to Dave and Jan for organising such an enjoyable evening.

## Woodborough Walk

### Saturday 27th April



Our April walk was organised and led by Emma Bradley, and was a circular route starting and finishing in Woodborough. It would be understating it to say that April has been a wet month, so Emma had to pick her route to avoid the worst of the mud.



Leaving Woodborough we entered Ploughman Wood . This was once part of a much larger area of ancient woodland – mostly of Oak and Ash. It is now a Nature Reserve.

*Ploughman Wood*

From Ploughman Wood, we walked past HMP Lowdham Grange – not a place you'd wish to stay! Our path then looped up to and through the attractive village of Epperstone and back into Woodborough where lunch awaited us in the Nag's Head.



The walkers were joined by Emma's mother and we then relaxed into a very pleasant and chatty meal.



*Pudding definitely off the menu!*

Many thanks to Emma for her organisation and leadership.

## ASCDS Dance Festival

### Saturday 11th May



The Nottingham Scottish Association dancers took part in the annual ASCDS Dance Festival in Retford. As in last year's Festival we collaborated with our friends in the Nottingham RSCDS Branch for practice and joint participation.

The account below is from Carol Mee, who was attending her first Festival:

"When I started dancing in January last year, I was intrigued to hear that there were other groups out there and that they all got together each year for a Scottish dancing festival. I decided that, although there was no way I would be ready for it that year, I was going to be on the team the following year. So, with a mixture of trepidation and anticipation, I signed up this year.

When we arrived in Retford on 11 May, it was a very warm day and I was greeted by the sight of swirling kilts and lots of white dresses. The latter did confuse me somewhat once we started dancing as everyone looked the same and I almost ended up dancing into another group at more than one point.



There were 12 groups there from areas including Newark, Doncaster and Leicester, some of whom were also doing demonstration dances, so it was a packed hall. It was great to see so many people, including some young ones, who clearly enjoy this kind of dancing and want to see it thrive.

Jeanne made sure our outfits were spot-on and we were off. The first couple of dances, not involving me, went well and then it was my turn. Of the eight dances I did, some went better than others. I managed one perfectly and my performance in the rest was variable, although Andrew kindly said he was very pleased with us all and then dropped into the conversation that this was the hardest set of festival dances we'd ever been asked to do. The demonstration dances were beautiful to watch and, afterwards, we all sat outside in the sun for a wind-down and debrief.

Overall, the festival was a nerve-wracking, exciting, frustrating, fun, addictive experience. I'll be back!"

*(Carol acquitted herself very well! Ed)*





*Photographs by Dave Chapman*

## **River Trent Walk**

### **Wednesday 22nd May**

For some reason (well, we are in England!), almost every walk this year has either followed heavy rain or coincided with heavy rain. This was yet another! The forecast said 'rain all day' and rain all day is what we got.

The upshot was that Dieter wisely decided to truncate the walk and to replace the first part with an extended coffee break in the Ferry Inn. Fortified by coffee, we donned our waterproofs and headed off into the rain.

The first stage of the walk took us past the Nottingham Emmanuel and Becket Schools and through a (very wet) forested area, leading back to the Trent and then alongside the river.



*Photos: Ann Widdowson*

Even in the wet, it is always a pleasure to stroll along the riverbank. The route then took us across the pedestrian bridge and on to the embankment.

The original plan had been to head on to Trent Bridge and to loop round using a section of the Robin Hood Way. We took the short cut and turned back along the embankment to the Wilford Bridge.

From there it was a short stroll back to the welcoming Ferry Inn where we were able to strip off our sopping waterproofs. Lunch had been pre-ordered before we set off, so we were promptly and efficiently served and could relax and enjoy a leisurely and sociable lunch.

Thanks to Dieter for organising the walk – and modifying it appropriately for the conditions.

## **The Inner Hebrides**

Some time ago I wrote about a holiday Chris and I had to the Outer Hebrides. I hope you found it interesting. The Inner Hebridean Islands also have a fascinating history, so I have decided to do a piece on some of these islands which are accessible from Oban.

### **Kerrera**

If any of you know Oban, you will be aware that the Island of Kerrera shelters Oban Bay from the worst of the winter storms. Chris and I always made sure we did a walk on Kerrera when we were in Oban. The Island is about seven miles long and to get there, unless you have your own boat, you have to go over on a small ferry, which goes from a few miles out of the town. To contact the ferryman, you turn over a board to let him know you are waiting. A few minutes later, he sails over from Kerrera to pick you up. It only takes a very short time to cross, as obviously the ferry crosses on the narrowest stretch. Chris and I would usually turn left and head down towards Gylen Castle which lies at the south end of the island overlooking the Firth of Lorn. The castle belongs to the MacDougals of Lorn and although it is a ruin nowadays it was an ideal situation to warn the mainland of marauders coming up the Sound of Lorn.





*Gylen Castle*

After walking around the castle which we have done so many times and then doing a bit of beachcombing, we would go to a little café nearby which served really tasty home-made soup along with the usual tea, coffee, scones etc. They also have a doss house for walkers and students who decide to stay on the island for a few days.



*The Kerrera Tea Garden*

We then take a different route to return to the ferry, which takes us on to the other side of Kerrera which faces Mull. It's quite a steep climb and the terrain is very rocky and on a hot day we always arrived at the ferry with scarlet faces. It can be hot in Scotland you know! Sometimes Chris and I would walk in the other direction from the ferry to Hutcheson's monument which looks out over the Sound of Mull.

The monument commemorates the first steamship service which was brought to Oban in 1883 by ship owner David Hutcheson who ran ferries to the islands and was the forerunner to David MacBrayne, which later became Caledonian MacBrayne.

Kerrera has another claim to fame. It was there that King Alexander the Second of Scotland died in 1249, possibly of typhoid, while he was preparing to take the Hebrides back from the Norwegians. He is buried at Melrose Abbey in Roxburghshire.

### **Easdale Island**



The next Island which is fairly close to Oban is Easdale Island. Again, a ferry takes you across from the village of Ellenabeich on the Island of Seil and takes all of five minutes. To get to the Isle of Seil you have to cross the Atlantic Ocean! In other words, you go over Clachan Bridge, a steep humped bridge which crosses an inlet of the Atlantic Ocean. And is known as the "Only Bridge across the Atlantic."



Easdale Island was famous for its slate quarries and the Easdale Slate was highly rated around the world, but in the 1920's a huge storm flooded the quarries and put an end to the livelihood of the islanders. Many of the islanders were forced to leave and most of the cottages fell into disrepair. By the 1950's only four people lived on the island.

Easdale slate can still be seen in such far-flung places as Melbourne, Dunedin and Nova Scotia. Happily, the island had a resurgence and now has a permanent population of about 60 and the cottages have all been renovated. It is the smallest permanently populated island in the Inner Hebrides.

There is also an interesting little museum which tells Easdale's story and is worth a visit. When you cross Clachan Bridge on to the Island of Seil you come to the Tigh an Truisk Hotel which translates as 'The House of the Trousers' and it was here that the local farmers would change from their kilts into trousers to go to Oban for the Auction Mart. After Culloden wearing the tartan was forbidden by the English King and anyone found wearing it by the English Soldiers would be severely punished or even hanged.

## Mull

Looking out from Oban again, behind Kerrera lies the much larger Island of Mull, which probably most of you have heard of. Mull is home to the seat of the Clan MacLean at Duart Castle. Duart is still inhabited and has often been used in films. When I lived in Oban the Chief of the MacLeans of Duart was Sir Charles MacLean who was at one time the Chief Scout and the Lord Lieutenant of Argyll.



*Tobermory: What's the Story in Balamory?*

The main town of Tobermory (or Balamory to a generation of children who watched it on T.V.) is worth a visit.

From there you can cross to the peninsula of Morvern where many of the residents who were evacuated from St. Kilda were re-homed.

When the ferry from Oban lands at Craignure, you can catch a bus to the other end of Mull and cross on another little ferry on the beautiful clear blue water of the Sound of Iona to Scotland's Holy Island of Iona (another five-minute trip).

It was here that St. Columba settled when he was banished from Ireland in 563 and built a monastery. St. Columba and his monks Christianised large parts of Scotland long before Christianity came to England. This beautiful island was the burial ground of many Scottish Kings.

The renovation of Iona Abbey was undertaken in 1938, led by the Reverend George MacLeod, who founded the Iona Community. Iona has an amazing history for an island only three miles long and over the



centuries the Monks of Iona produced many beautiful manuscripts, including the Book of Kells, now housed in Dublin.

The views from the island are stunning and a visit to Iona is one never to be forgotten.



*Fingal's Cave, Staffa*

If you ever visit Iona, the Island of Staffa is another must see. The water around Staffa is emerald green and very choppy, so landing is not always possible, but visiting Fingal's Cave is an amazing experience. This massive cave inspired Mendelsson to write one of his most famous pieces of music. The acoustics are unbelievable and will remain in your memory for a very long time.

The rock is the same basalt rock you find on the Giant's Causeway in Ireland and legend tells us that the Celtic Giant Fingal could walk across the rocks to Staffa.

To be continued...

## **Margaret Barnes**

### **Footnote from the Editor:**

Margaret's description of the Isle of Kerrera brought back some memories for me.

As a boy of 11, I went with 5 of my cousins and other friends – all roughly of the same age – to spend a week on Kerrera in an old farmhouse just over the hill from the Kerrera Tea Room and near to Gylen Castle. We were looked after by my 19-year-old sister and her university room-mate. They must have thought this was a good idea – in retrospect, I think they must have been mad!

Food had to be brought from Oban which involved the ferry trip and and a walk of a good few miles along the road. This had to be done several times during the week – you know how much growing kids can eat!

As it turned out the weather was kind to us and we spent a wonderful week playing games in the heather and splashing around in the sea. It was all very ‘Famous 5’ - minus the dog and mysterious foreign criminals!

It was a memorable week, and I am very grateful to my sister and her friend for their lunacy in taking it on!

## **A Highland Croft in South Africa?**

When Sue and I visited South Africa, we didn’t expect to see much that reminded us of Scotland – after all the early European settlers were the Dutch and the English!

So, it was something of a surprise to reach the small town of Arniston on the Indian Ocean coast and find what looked like a village of thatched Croft Houses overlooking what looked like a Hebridean beach!



Our hostess at the hotel explained that the first five settlers in the area had been Scots and they naturally built houses to the same pattern as they were used to. They were followed by emancipated slaves who were looking to build a new life as fishermen. They, in turn, followed the example of those who were already there.

I’m not sure about the accuracy of this explanation, but there is no doubt that it is strongly reminiscent of the Western Highlands and Islands!

**Andrew Morrison**

**Office holders**

<b>President</b>	<b>Rosie Allen</b> <a href="mailto:president@nottinghamscottish.org">president@nottinghamscottish.org</a>
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