

# Thistle Epistle

## November 2020

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### **Editor's Message**

Well, I have been persuaded to take up the trusty tripewriter again and resume the editorial duties for the St. Andrews Society's Thistle Epistle.

This is not an easy time for someone writing about what is happening in the Scottish community in Spokane and area. Normally there would be reports on National Tartan Day (in April), the Society's picnic in July or August, the Highland Games in August, upcoming events, and what is going on in the Scottish community outside the immediate auspices of the Society. With COVID, it might seem there is nothing to talk about. I am happy to report, however, that things are still happening, although in a more muted fashion than heretofore, and plans are being set in hand for future events: albeit requiring a lot more ingenuity than they used to. Hopefully sometime in the new year we will be able to get back to holding events in person. Virtual scotch tasting may be very educational, but it hardly rivals the real thing!

### **Annual General Meeting**

The Society's Annual General Meeting was held on Sunday, November 1. Normally the AGM takes place in April, but it was postponed in the hope of being able to meet in person later in the year. When this was obviously not going to happen, it was decided that the meeting had to take place sometime during the year, so it would have to be a Zoom meeting.

Seventeen members were in virtual attendance, which is a good turnout even in a normal year, and easily constituted a quorum. Thanks to all those who joined in.

The meeting decided to change the requirements for a quorum - the number of members needed to attend to make the meeting official. Previously the quorum was based on a percentage of active members. We have over 200 members on our lists, but not all are active, i.e., coming to meetings, or otherwise active in the Scottish community. The usual method of determining a society's membership is to count all those who have paid their dues: however, since we don't charge any dues, this doesn't work. Previously we have made as good an estimate of active members as we could, based on the knowledge of the Board, and taken a percentage of this number - not very scientific! The eventual solution chosen was that the quorum would be twelve members, including the executive board of four officers. This gives the "ordinary" members a majority of 8 to 4. We hope that, even with a fairly small quorum requirement, members will attend meetings, particularly the AGM.

The Treasurer, Kathy Wiebers, gave a report on the financial situation of the Society based on the period April 1, 2019 to March 31, 2020. The major source of income was Burns Night in January 2020, held before the pandemic hit. The major expenditures were advertising, and insurance. Each year our advertising is directed to a particular event the Society hosts, although the idea is that it

benefits the Society as a whole to put our name out there and attract interest and possibly new members to the region's Scottish community. In prior years we have often advertised Burns Night, but since for the last couple of years this has been sold out even without any advertising, we decided to switch to a different event. This year, the event highlighted was National Tartan Day in April 2019.

Expenses exceeded income, leading to a small loss. Despite the loss, the Society has a good reserve of cash on hand.

The 2020-2021 budget was discussed. Since we do not expect to be able to hold any events in person during the period, the budgeted income and expenses are very low, and any costs which are incurred will be covered through our cash reserve.

Officers serve for two-year terms. Each year two of the four come up for election, which allows for continuity since the other two are part way through their terms. This year the President and Secretary positions were up for election. Marie Darling was re-elected as president, and Gillian Sayers was re-elected as Secretary.

As noted elsewhere in this Thistle, Peter Guthrie agreed to take on the editorship of the Thistle.

The rest of the meeting was concerned with the status of the affiliates, and plans for the upcoming year, which are discussed in separate articles.

We certainly missed the camaraderie (and beer) of our O'Doherty's in-person meetings, but were happy with how the meeting went under the circumstances.

### **What's Going On?**

#### **Angus Scott Pipe Band**

The band stopped their weekly practices back in March. They have also lost the use of the church in Millwood in which they practiced. Some members have been getting together in open parks during the summer, but with the colder weather that will not be possible. However, the band did get together with the Highland dancers to produce a video for Fall Folk Festival - see below.

#### **Highland Dancers**

Marie's dance studio was shuttered in March, and has recently reopened with strict limits on the number of dancers allowed. Marie has seven dancers taking class. She reports that dancers struggle with motivation to learn new things and to excel, when the usual opportunities to show off their talents - competitions and performances - are absent.

Lake City Highland Dance, based in Coeur d'Alene, are still holding classes.

## **Country Dancers**

Scottish country dancing by its nature requires holding hands and close contact, so our Thursday night dance classes have not been possible. However, our members have been staying in contact with each other during the summer, via Zoom, and sometimes in person when it was possible to socially distance outside in the warm weather.

The Royal Scottish Country Dance Society (RSCDS) is doing sterling work in maintaining a connection between dancers around the world. Each Wednesday they organize a Zoom dance class with a surprise teacher from somewhere in the world, at 7:00 pm GMT (11:00 am in Spokane). Most classes are live, unless the teacher is in Australia or New Zealand, when the class is prerecorded because of the time difference. Well over 1,000 dancers have been logging in each week, enjoying the class and connecting with each other via Chat. The teacher usually does a warm-up, then teaches a dance, which usually requires a virtual partner. You do get used to it! One teacher devised a dance for one dancer and two chairs. The chairs were always in the right place at the right time! The classes are recorded, and are available the following Friday, to be viewed at leisure. Separately from the classes, the Lyon branch of the RSCDS, early in the pandemic, devised The Toilet Roll Reel: two couples and four individual dancers danced in their separate homes with toilet rolls marking where the other dancers would normally stand, seven for the couples and six for the couples involved.

Through the magic of technology, the dancers would be combined into sets at various points. Just Google "Toilet Roll Reel dance" and enjoy a three-minute escape from the world!

*Anna Guthrie*

## **Highland Games**

A new year is right around the corner and we are excited to be planning the 2021 Spokane Scottish Highland Games. To say this past year has been difficult is putting it mildly. The Spokane Highland Games Association is currently planning to bring you a fun-filled day, either in person or virtually.

There is nothing like the sound of massed pipe bands at opening ceremonies, or watching our graceful highland dancers perform and compete. The sounds that come from the field when an athlete tosses the caber or throws the hammer during the heavy athletic competition is thrilling. The Spokane Highland Games can offer you this and so much more, such as the Scottish clan tents, a wonderful selection of Celtic-oriented vendors, a shortbread contest, Celtic bands that make you want to sing and dance, kids' games brought to you by the Padilla family, sheep-herding demonstration, Clydesdale horse exhibit, highland cattle exhibit, pipe and drum competitions, and maybe a few surprises! We would love for you to bring your family and join us for a day full of adventures. Who knows - maybe you'll discover you're Scottish as well!

If you are interested in volunteering at the Games, joining the Spokane Highland Games Association, or becoming a personal or corporate sponsor for the Games, please visit our website [spokanehighlandgames.net](http://spokanehighlandgames.net). Please feel free to contact us with any questions you may have.

See you on Saturday, August 7th, 2021.

*Cheryl McLean - Games Committee chair.*

## **Burns Night 2021**

We will not be able, of course, to hold our traditional Burns Night celebrations of a dinner dance at Mukogawa, but at the AGM everyone felt strongly that we should try and recognize Burns somehow, even if it has to be by Zoom. So, we are putting together a program, which should be fun, for the evening of Saturday, January 23, starting at 7.00pm. So far, we are in the early planning stages, so it's a bit premature to give many details, but we do intend to follow the traditional Burns Night traditions of the haggis ceremony, the toasts, etc. Look out for further details in your email in the coming weeks.

## **National Tartan Day**

National Tartan Day falls on April 6th, the date on which the Declaration of Arbroath was signed. This was a declaration by Scotland, under Robert the Bruce, of independence from England after thirty years of war. In 2020 it was not possible to hold the Society's annual National Tartan Day event, due to COVID. As yet, we are not sure if an in-person 2021 event will be possible, or if we will have to do it via Zoom.

## **Fall Folk Festival**

Spokane's Fall Folk Festival is held every year in November at Spokane Community College, and lasts a full weekend, with acts representing all parts of the globe taking place in several venues around the campus.

This year, the Festival has had to go virtual. Thirty-two acts have participated by making videos of their performances. The Festival opened on Saturday, 14th November. Luckily it will not end on the Sunday night, but will continue all the way to the end of the year, with all the performances available at any time through the Festival's website - [spokanefolkfestival.org](http://spokanefolkfestival.org). Just go to the website, click on "Performances" at the top of the home page, then click on the particular performance you would like to view.

Of particular interest to St. Andrews members may be the Angus Scott and Highland Dancers, Arvid Lundin and Deep Roots, Crooked Kilt, and Hunter Koss.

Angus Scott and two Highland Dancers performed in a great setting, on the lawn in front of St. John's Cathedral. The band perform a variety of tunes, with many favorites from past years' performances, including a drum salute. The two dancers joined in for three of the pieces.

Arvid Lundin and Deep Roots are well-known throughout the area, and have performed at several Spokane Scottish Highland Games. For this video, they play on a back-porch stage. Their repertoire is drawn from Celtic, Scandinavian, and American, and included for this performance a ballad "Fair Helen of Kirkconnel", from a sixteenth century story of a lass who died to prevent her lover being killed in ambush by his enemies; and "Farewell to Nova Scotia", about leaving that province to go to sea.

Crooked Kilt will also be familiar to members, both from playing at our Highland Games, and for providing the social dance music at Burns Night. They provided a delightful performance, including a lovely performance of "Caledonia", The "Island Spinning Song" featuring voices and drums, and several lively instrumental jigs and reels. The performance was much appreciated by an audience spread out on an adjoining park lawn.

Hunter Koss is a teenage harpist who plays Celtic and traditional tunes, many of which will be familiar such as "Danny Boy", "The Skye Boat Song" and a song from Burns "The Lea Rig". Less well-known probably are "The Kings of Laois" from Ireland, and "The Arran Boat Song" from the west coast of Scotland.

We hope you enjoy these excellent performances, and the many others available on the website.

Kudos to Sylvia Goebel and the Fall Folk Festival Committee for providing us with a bright spot in this challenging year. Kudos too to Clint Hill, webmaster for the Festival, and for St. Andrews Society and the Spokane Scottish Highland Games. Out thanks to them all for the countless hours they have put in to make this year's Festival such a success.

### **Sean Connery**

One of Scotland more famous sons has passed away aged 90. Sir Sean Connery, who hailed from Edinburgh, rose to fame as the first James Bond - and is often regarded as the best of the seven who have assumed the role. He played in five of the series from 1962 to 1967, and then two more in 1971 and 1983. After finally leaving the James Bond character for good, Connery continued with a distinguished career encompassing 45 films in total, and won an Oscar for his portrayal of a tough Chicago cop in "The Untouchables", about Eliot Ness and Al Capone. He also won two BAFTA awards and three Golden Globes. He was knighted in 2000 for services to film drama.

### **COVID in Scotland**

We hear enough about the US and its COVID woes. So how are they doing in Scotland?

The population of Scotland is 5.5 million, and to date (as of November 19th - it changes fast), they have had 74,400 cases and 3,400 deaths. This gives a case rate of 1.35%. The UK in total (England, Scotland, Wales, Northern Ireland) has a population of 66.7 million and the number of cases to date is over 1.4 million, a rate of 2.1%, with deaths totaling 53,400. So, Scotland is doing considerably better than the UK as a whole. (The population of the US is around 330 million and the number of cases is 11.5 million, a rate of 3.5%, with 250,000 deaths).

However, the outlook in Scotland is not all rosy. Along with the rest of Europe, starting in October Scotland is experiencing a spike in the number of cases. In August there were generally less than 100 new cases per day, currently there are around 1,400. The major concentration is around the Glasgow conurbation, with less in the Edinburgh region and not that many in the Highlands and Islands.

In response to the spike, the Scottish government is imposing more restrictions, just as are many other countries in Europe.

The framework has been set up for five levels of restrictions, similar to phases in the US. At this point no area is in the top level 4. The main population belt from Glasgow to Edinburgh is in level 3, the Borders and Lowlands in level 2, and the Highlands and Islands in level 1. The other 2 levels are 0, free of restrictions; and 4, full lockdown.

Pubs and restaurants are allowed to open at all levels except 4. However, capacity is limited, customers have to provide contact details in case contact tracing is required, masks must be worn when moving around or not eating or drinking, and only table service is allowed. In addition, in

level 2 alcohol can only be served with a meal, and only until 8:00 pm; and in level 3 no alcohol may be served and establishments can only open until 6 pm.

For travel, those in level 3 may not leave home except for essential reasons, and those in levels 2 cannot travel to level 3 destinations except for essential reasons. All Scots are asked not to travel between Scotland and England except for essential reasons. Travelers from abroad, including the USA, will generally have to quarantine for 14 days on arrival.

The Scottish government is cautiously optimistic that these rules are reducing the number of cases, but are not optimistic that the country can return to normal anytime soon.

### **Brexit and Scotland**

The UK formally left the European Union on January 31, 2020. However, the rules for the new UK-EU relationship have not yet been settled, and remain contentious. These negotiations cover how to deal with the border between the Republic of Ireland and Northern Ireland, the financial arrangements between the two entities, trading arrangements, fishing access, regulation of medicine, and security arrangements. A transition period of 11 months was allowed to sort all these things out - until December 31, 2020 - during which there would be no change to the rules which were in force while the UK was a member of the EU. If no agreement is reached, each entity could start imposing tariffs and trading restrictions on the other, UK service industries including finance and banking would lose access to the EU, and border checks between the two could impact travel and the flow of trading goods. As yet, not much progress has been made on many of these issues.

The Brexit issue has reignited the issue of Scottish independence. The independence referendum in 2014 resulted in a narrow win for Scots wishing to remain within the UK. However, in 2016 Scots had a majority in favor of remaining within the EU, but the UK as a whole voted to leave it. The Scots are now saying that when they voted to remain in 2014, they were voting for a UK still within the EU, which is now no longer the case. So now the feeling is that Scotland should become independent of England and maybe rejoin the EU as a separate entity.

In the news the COVID crisis has to a certain extent taken center stage over the problems of Brexit, but the relations of Scotland to the UK, and the UK to the EU are still very much up in the air.

### **Books on Scottish History Available**

Greg Roth, Past-president and longtime member of the Society, has several books on Scottish history he no longer requires. If anyone would like some, contact Greg at [Headghillie@gmail.com](mailto:Headghillie@gmail.com)

## Hogmanay and Christmas

Since 'tis the season, it seemed appropriate to reprint an article from the winter 2013 Thistle addressing Christmas and Hogmanay for those who were not members back then or otherwise did not get a chance to read it.

It is well known Hogmanay is widely celebrated in Scotland, more so even than Christmas. In the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries strict Presbyterianism became the dominant religion, and celebrations such as Christmas - known as Yule - and other church holidays were abolished. In 1640 an Act of the Parliament of Scotland states: "... the kirke within this kingdome is now purged of all superstitious observation of dayes ... thairfor the saidis estatis have dischairged and simply dischairges the forsaid Yule vacance and all observation thairof". However, the Scots do like a good party, so the coming of the New Year became the main midwinter celebration. Although New Year's Eve is the date associated with Hogmanay, the party continues well beyond: through New Year's Day and the 2nd of January, both of which are bank holidays in Scotland.

So where does the name Hogmanay come from? There is no clear answer, but there are several theories; take your pick:

- Old French, through the Auld Alliance and connection of Mary Queen of Scots with France. The North French dialect word hoguiane, was a gift given at New Year, particularly to children.
- Celtic. Manx is the version of Celtic used on the Isle of Man in the Irish Sea. Hogunnaa or Hob dy naa is associated with the New year. Another possible Celtic origin is "oge maidne" or new morning.
- Norse. Haugmenn are elves who banish trolls into the sea. Hoggo-nott was the feast held before Yule. Note that the Northern French province Normandy is named for the Norse Vikings who established their rule there in the 10th century, so the Norse derivation could also underlie the French version.

The best-known tradition connected with Hogmanay is first-footing. The first person to cross the threshold of the house after midnight bears gifts, such as coal, whisky, or shortbread, intended to bring warmth, luck and prosperity to the household. The preferred first-foot is a tall dark man. In my younger days, coal was the most common gift brought, and a dram of scotch was presented to the bringer. Nowadays, though, in the age of natural gas and electricity, finding a lump of coal could prove difficult.

Another tradition is the singing of Auld Lang Syne as midnight turns into the new year.

We wish you all a happy Hogmanay.  
(and a Merry Christmas too!)