

Thistle Epistle

September 2021



Picnic

The St. Andrews Society picnic was held on August 28th. Thanks are due to Doug and Janet Malcolm who, as they have in past years, hosted the event at their home. As well as setting up tents, tables and chairs, they also provided the meats for the entree and a good selection of beers: a big effort and much appreciated. Members brought a wide selection of sides and desserts. Peter brought some of the Society's scotch left over from the last Burns Night celebration in January of 2020: particularly trying to finish those bottles with just a few drops left in them, and so make space for restocking.

Attendance was good, with 20 members, and everyone enjoyed getting together again after such a long time without any personal contact, and talking about all things Scottish.

Books on Scotland

Long-time St. Andrews Society member, John Wiess, has donated his library of books on all facets of Scottish life, history and culture to the Society.

It has always seemed a good idea to have a library of books on Scotland available to members. The Society has in the past been offered collections, but has not found a way to take them, and owners of such books who wish now to pass them on have few options. There is always Goodwill, but whether the books given to them will find an appreciative audience is somewhat doubtful. St. Andrews Society members are of course a ready-made appreciative audience.

It would be really nice for the Society to have its own library, gradually built up as donations of books are received, and available for members to borrow or reference. However, the custodianship of such a library would be onerous: there would be the need to keep the books readily available, keep track of who has them, etc. Even if a Society member was willing to take it on, there remains the problem of whether in the future someone would step up to carry it on.

One solution which sprang to mind was to see if a public library might be interested in having a special section for Scottish books and other materials, since public libraries have the required infrastructure and expertise already set up. The obvious choice of library in Spokane would be Spokane Public Libraries Shadle branch. Shadle school nearby is the home of the Highlanders, and the Shadle public library branch hosted the Society's National Tartan Day event in the years when it was possible to hold it.

I did approach the manager of the Shadle branch who had been so helpful and accommodating to us for National Tartan Day - although, of course, the Shadle branch was closed this year due to

renovations. He was interested, but his superiors were not in favor of special interest groups having their own sections, so the idea came to nought.

The other solution, which John proposed, was to offer the books to members at Society events, in return for a donation which would go to the Society.

At the picnic, this idea was put into practice, and there was considerable interest by those in attendance, leading to a sizeable addition to the Society's coffers.

At future Society events, the books will be made available under the same plan. Hopefully we will be able to continue holding events such as Burns Night in person again, to allow this to happen.

SAMS

The Scottish American Military Society (SAMS) was founded in 1981 by military veterans of Scottish or Scots-Irish descent. SAMS has posts and camps throughout the United States. Several years ago, a provisional post, with John Wiess as post commander, was established to represent Spokane and the Inland Empire. Members of the post regularly attended the Spokane Highland Games and were responsible for organizing the color guard at the opening and closing ceremonies. However, lack of membership caused the demise of the post. Recently there has been a movement to restart a camp or post for the Spokane area, with Ed Wattawa taking the lead. Ed says he has eight members, enough to start a camp, and has sent a petition to the SAMS National Vice Commander to establish SAMS Camp 1955 (Inland Empire). The ultimate goal is to gain enough members (minimum ten) to form a post. If you or anyone you know who qualifies is interested, contact Ed at 509-326-1125 or email SAMS epwattawa@yahoo.com.

Spokane Highland Games

The Spokane Highland Games Committee is going to start meeting again in October. It's time to begin planning the 2022 Scottish Highland Games. For the last two years the Covid 19 pandemic has shut us down. We are so ready to have our Games again. The committee will be looking for a lot of volunteers to help make the day go by smoothly and sponsors to help us make it a fabulous day. We are hoping for everyone's support as we navigate through covid 19 protocols and what they mean for our event. Stay tuned everyone, more to follow.

I went to the Bitterroot Celtic Games and Gathering in Hamilton, Montana in August. Hearing the bagpipes and drums made me so happy and reminded me of how much I've missed our Games. The honored clan was Clan Thompson. It was a great weekend. The turnout for the Games was tremendous. The Harp Twins and the Celtic group Swagger put on wonderful performances, as well as several other musical acts. The Heavy Athletics had over 80 male and female competitors. There were 33 clans that participated in the gathering. I can't say for sure if it was a record-breaking attendance, but the clan tents were busy, and the food lines were long. A few of us ladies from Spokane participated in the Skillet Toss and won. If you get a chance to go to the Bitterroot Games, do so, it does not disappoint.

See you all in 2022!

Cheryl A. McLean, Chairperson
Spokane Highland Games Association

Scottish Country Dancing

Scottish country dancing has resumed in Scotland; the country moved to Level 0 under the Scottish government's strategic framework document, which provides a 0-4 level approach to restrictions. Under these restrictions, Scottish country dancing is permitted as an "organized contact sport"(!) with no requirement of the 2-meter (6 feet) rule outdoors in Level 0, 1 and 2, and none for indoors at Level 0.

Sportscotland advises that dancers will be allowed to have hand contact and do not need to wear face masks while dancing indoors. However, masks should be worn when not dancing. That also applies to teachers and musicians, who should wear masks when not actively teaching or playing. Attendance lists are also required for contact-tracing purposes.

England, Ireland and Wales have their own rules for sports and exercise.

Locally, the Spokane Scottish Country Dancers are vaccinated and raring to go, but the high local rate of infection, including breakthrough infections, is giving us cause for concern, so we have not yet danced together. Instead, we are keeping in touch by holding outdoor get-togethers at the homes of various members, while hoping we can go back to dancing our jigs, reels and strathspeys before too long.

Anna Guthrie

Tartan Day and Burns

As you know, the Society's National Tartan Day event, which ordinarily would take place on or around April 6th - the date of the signing of the Declaration of Arbroath in 1320, which was Scotland's manifesto of independence from England - was canceled in 2020. In 2021, Covid again made it impossible to hold the event. We are hopeful that it can take place in 2022.

The Society's main event of the year, Burns Night, held on or around January 25th, is still some way away, so a decision on whether it can go ahead in its traditional format cannot yet be made. We are hopeful that we will be able to host the event in a space that allows for more social distancing and there would need to be accommodations and changes made to follow COVID guidelines. An example of this would be social dancing, we would only do partners, no group dances. The Society was able to hold it in 2020, being prior to the outbreak of Covid, and in 2021 held a zoom meeting incorporating as many of the elements of a traditional Burns celebration as possible - although some of the main attractions such as the dinner, and the social dancing could not take place. We will keep all of you posted with our plans and we are remaining flexible during this time.

Covid in Scotland

When I reported on Covid in Scotland in June, I painted a rosy picture, with case numbers falling, and Scotland being better than the UK as a whole. Unfortunately, Scotland has experienced the same wave of the Delta variant as everywhere else in the world, and in fact fared worse than the rest of the UK. In early January the seven-day average number of cases peaked at 2,300, before dropping in May to under 200. However, the end of June saw a sharp spike to 3,450. This quickly dropped by the beginning of August to under 1,000, but then in September there was an even greater spike, to 6,400 cases.

For the UK as a whole, it was the January spike which was the most pronounced, at 60,000 cases per day. The June spike was 46,000, and since then cases have plateaued at around 38,000. Totals since the inception of the pandemic are as follows:

	Cases (000s)	Percent of population	Deaths	Percent of population
Scotland	550000	10.1	8,514	0.16
UK	7,600000	11.4	136,000	0.20
US	42,800,000	13.0	687,000	0.21

The following information is a summary of the rules and regulations applying to Covid and travel as of today. If you plan on traveling to Scotland, you should do the detailed research to find out the rules on your date of travel, and find out exactly how to set about fulfilling the various requirements. A good starting point is www.gov.scot.

On August 9th, restrictions on physical distancing and limits on gatherings were removed, though masks were still required in many public spaces, including schools. This relaxing of restrictions may be part of the reason for the spike in cases which started around then.

From October 1st, anyone over 18 years old will need to show proof of vaccination before entering nightclubs or other adult entertainment venues, unseated indoor live events with more than 500 people, unseated outdoor live events with more than 4,000 people, and any event with more than 10,000 people. People who have had close contact with someone with Covid will no longer have to automatically self-isolate for two weeks, but will need to take a PCR test and self-isolate until the results come back: with isolation ending if the results are negative. Masks will still be required in public places such as schools, shops, hospitality venues and public transport.

Travel to Scotland is still under the red, amber and green system described in the June Thistle. Red countries are those with the most exposure risk of Covid, green the least, and amber in the middle. Requirements for testing, both before and after entry into Scotland, and quarantining after arrival, increase in rigor from green through to red.

The US is currently in the amber category.

All visitors to Scotland need to take a pre-departure test, and fill out a Passenger Locator Form. Fully vaccinated people can travel without having to quarantine on arrival, but need to take a PCR test two days after arrival. Non-vaccinated people will have to quarantine and take a test eight days after arrival, in addition to the two-day test. PCR tests are available from the National Health Service for UKL68 (around USD100).

From October 4th, the rules will be relaxed a bit, more so in England than in Scotland. The green and amber list of countries merge, leaving just the red and green lists. People arriving in England from green list countries who are fully vaccinated will not have to take a pre-departure test, though they will still have to take the two-day PCR test. However, people arriving in Scotland will still require the pre-departure test as well as the two-day test.

Fall Folk Festival

Fall Folk Fest takes place November 13 and 14, 2021 at Spokane Community College. Last year the entire event was held virtually. This year, organizers are hoping to have a live event, although obviously that might have to change - in which case the event will again have to be virtual only, with videos from performers. If the event does go ahead live it will be held only in the Lair at SCC. The small gym, where the Scottish program of highland and country dancers and the Angus Scott Pipe Band always performed, will not be used this year.

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