

Frances M Gordon

On 31 July 1994 the Aberdeen Branch of the RSCDS and the Society as a whole lost one of its most loyal members. Frances Mary Gordon had been a Scottish Country Dance enthusiast since her school days in Larbert, where she was taught by that doyenne of Scottish Country Dancing, June Scott.

Frances was a life member of the Aberdeen Branch. As a keen exponent of the art of dancing, she attended classes regularly - advanced, very advanced and demonstration - and she competed in festivals all over Scotland as well as being a member of demonstration teams. At the Summer School at St Andrews she also enjoyed the Ladies Highland Class which she only forsook for a less demanding SCD class in recent years.

Frances' contribution to the Aberdeen Branch was not only as a dancer. She was a member of committee for many years, vice-chairman from 1977 and subsequently chairman from 1980 to 1982. In addition Frances represented the Branch on the Executive Council of the Society and as a delegate to the Annual General Meeting on many occasions.

Comparatively recently Frances took her Teacher's Certificate and again Aberdeen benefited from her industry. The Thursday afternoon class was initiated in 1988 and Frances became the first teacher. The class has proved to be very popular and its success was in no small measure due to her. Those who attended the class regularly were extremely disappointed when she had to give up teaching because of ill-health.

Another of Frances' leisure pursuits was writing short stories and her friends in the Scottish Country Dance world do feature though often in a different context. She had a keen eye for detail and was very perceptive, being aware of her own, as well as the foibles of others. She was perhaps too kind to her subjects but nonetheless it is quite daunting to recognise yourself or your characteristics even though you do appear in a different guise!

Once she had retired Frances returned to studying and attended Aberdeen University where she was taking an MA degree in History. She thoroughly enjoyed her time at university and acquitted herself very well, gaining a number of prizes. Both staff and fellow students thought highly of her and there is no doubt that she would have emerged with a degree of considerable merit had she lived to complete her course. It is no accident that an assignment for which she received high praise was one entitled "Scotland's Century of Dance": it is an excellent piece on dancing in Scotland in the 17th century and is worthy of a place in our archives.

For a number of years Frances had been a keen exponent of family history and the skills used in that pursuit and in her studying, as well as the attention to detail and carefulness which she had used during her work as a pharmacist, made her an ideal choice for archivist for the Society. In the autumn of 1991 Frances was elected archivist and she approached that job with the thoroughness that was characteristic of her, regularly travelling to Edinburgh to carry out her duties. It was a role which she particularly enjoyed and it brought her into contact with members of the society world-wide as the queries came "frae a' the 'airts". As archivist, Frances was also a member of the Publications Committee and to that she brought not just her love of dancing but also her appreciation of music.

To provide details of Frances' connections with, and contribution to, Scottish Country Dancing is one thing, but that is to ignore the qualities which we associated with Frances. She was one who valued tradition, had a strong sense of purpose, a quiet dignity and elegance, an ability to think things through in a logical manner and along with these qualities, a well developed sense of fun.

In a talk which she gave on the Scottish Country Dance archives Frances said, "Dancing is a physical art form which is notoriously difficult to put into words, particularly the written word". Finding words to express what Frances Gordon meant to her many friends in the Scottish Country Dance world is not easy. Perhaps the most sincere way of paying tribute to her is simply to say that she is greatly missed.

Jean M Martin
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