

# **ST. COLUMBA'S SCOTTISH COUNTRY DANCERS**

## **ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING 2025**

**Monday 10 March 2025**

**St. Columba's Church, Lower Hall, Pont Street, SW1X 0BD**

### **1 Apologies for absence**

There were apologies from Maureen Campbell, Judith Jones, Steve Oakes, Rona Black, Daniel Capron, Duncan Campbell, Lesley Hall, Peter Knight and Thelma-Jane Robb.

### **2 Minutes of the 2024 AGM**

The minutes were accepted by the meeting; proposed by Lindsey Rousseau and seconded by Caroline Banksy.

#### **2a Matters arising**

There were no matters arising.

### **3 Treasurer's Report**

Margaret presented the accounts and said that our total surplus for the year, after paying for bands and sundry expenses associated with Band Nights was £2,368.44. Costs comprising our annual donation to the church (£2,500) and miscellaneous expenditure (£119.19) amounted to £2,619.19. This represented a shortfall of £250.75 for the year.

A surplus resulted at all the Band Nights except 20 May 2024 when a loss of £68.94 was incurred, which was attributed to lower attendance due to rail strikes and vacations.

£230.00 was raised for Scotscare at the annual Christmas Carols and Mince Pies dance.

Balance on 1 January 2024 was £3,335.08 and on 31 December 2024 was £3,084.33.

Margaret thanked Duncan Campbell for auditing the accounts.

Acceptance of the Treasurer's report was proposed by Brian Pierson and seconded by Valerie Strachan.

### **4 Convenor's Report**

Willie gave the convenor's report:

We have had a very enjoyable first half of the season. The number of dancers has remained fairly stable, with around 3-5 sets on regular dance evenings and 5-6 sets on Band Nights.

A small number of new dancers have been attending regularly including some who have had minimal dancing experience. Nonetheless, they are keen to learn and have been picking up the steps and formations quickly. They are making a valuable contribution to St Columba's. I would like to thank our dancers for making newcomers so welcome. It is important that we attract new dancers if we are to continue to thrive and hopefully grow.

### **MCs**

I reported last year on the massive contribution that our dedicated team of MCs make to St Columba's Dancers. When a job is done well and appears to run with minimal effort, you can be sure that there has been considerable work going on in the background. This is the case with the MCs. They meet three times a year, having prepared for each meeting, and do their best to construct balanced programmes with a blend of dances of varying complexity, incorporating familiarity, stretch, minimal overlapping figures and of course occasionally introducing unfamiliar or new dances.

We do our best to repeat new or unfamiliar dances in successive weeks (2-3 times) so that they become embedded in our collective memories. It does not always work out as well as that due to the complexity of constructing balanced programmes.

Last season (2023-24) we danced:

No. of Different Dances	No. Repeats	Dances Danced
75	1	75
36	2	72
33	3	99
16	4	64
18	5	90
3	6	18
181		418

The full analysis for this season (2024-25) is not yet available but is likely to be similar.

My thanks go to all the MCs for their expertise and dedication. They truly work together as a team.

### **Committee**

It is with sadness that we accepted the resignation of Helen Miller as a member of the St Columba's Dancers Committee. You will know better than me how long Helen has attended St Columba's dancers, how many years she has spent as a member of the committee and been Lena's partner in the kitchen. It is no small number. Helen

made evenings appear seamless, quietly ensuring that each event was well organised with minimal fuss and quiet efficiency.

The St Columba's dancers committee quietly goes about its business on a week-by-week basis so that we can dance with ease. I would like to extend my personal thanks to the committee members who make it all happen. Thelma, Margaret, Lena, Steve, Sarah and Joan have been a great help and loyal support.

May I also say thank you to you all for coming along here each week and making it such a happy occasion.

## **Bands**

We have held three band nights so far this season:

- Chris Oxtoby
- Dave Hall
- Frank Reid (Burns Night)

Still to come:

- Ian Robertson
- Craigievar

Attendances at Band Nights have been solid, similar to last season and we have been fortunate to enjoy atmospheric events.

We were asked at the last AGM (2024) why we did not have a Band Night in April. This was discussed at committee and it was felt, on balance, that five Band Nights, was about right. What we have done, this season, is space them out a little better and rather than have a Band Night in early March we have moved it back three weeks to late March.

We also enjoyed a successful Carols, Mince Pies and Dancing evening when Fiona Gardener kindly accompanied us on the piano. We raised £230 for our chosen charity, Scotscare, for homeless Scots in London. Thank you to all who contributed so generously.

## **Finances**

### **1. Church Donation**

We continue to benefit from not having to pay for the hall at St Columba's. The hire fee for the hall is ca. £600 per evening. We get it, notionally, for free. Our donation of £2,500 (equivalent to £83 per dance evening) is a minimal contribution covering some basic costs such as the caretaker as well as power (heat and light). We have also benefitted this season from the installation of a new PA system in the church hall.

Last season (2023-24) we made a donation to the church of £2,500. We remain financially stable and the committee has agreed that we will again make a donation to the church of £2,500 this season. The money for the donation comes in part from Band Night surpluses, but primarily from weekly donations to tea and biscuits. This all adds up and is appreciated.

## 2. Band Fees

Band fees have once again increased, quite substantially in some cases, and we need to reflect these increases in our fees for the forthcoming season. To provide context:

Season	22-23	23-24	24-25 (Expected)	25-26 (Budget)
Total Cost of Bands	1,745	1,950	2,150	2,265
% Increase		12%	10%	7%

## 3. Publicity and Promotion

I said on previous occasions that an overarching objective is to retain and attract new dancers. We are reaping success in this direction, but we cannot become complacent. Continuous promotion is vital and includes:

- Continue to produce attractive programmes
- Being welcoming to newcomers, whether they be new to St Columba's, new to dancing or both
- Constantly promoting St Columba's Dancers through social media and direct contact
  - Website
  - Email
  - Facebook
  - Twitter (X)
  - Flyers (mainly used electronically)
  - Advertising (*The Reel*)

The Wix fees for website platform renewal amount to £450. This is a recurring 3-year cost that is of course subject to inflation. We are looking into a lower cost for the website. This would mean reduced functionality but would be sufficient for our purposes. The cost would be in the region of £275. There are incidental costs associated with the printing of Flyers.

## 4. Consumables

By consumables, I refer principally to tea and biscuits. I indicated last year that members of the committee had been selflessly donating consumables on a weekly basis and that this was a practice that we should not assume would continue. We have reached that point. Our weekly costs for consumables are increasing. It is not much on a weekly basis, but over a year it is manifest.

## 5. Burns Night

The committee has yet to decide whether we will hold a Burns Night with the full complement of Haggis, Neeps and Tatties next season. We most probably will hold an event, but it may be slightly different. There is a considerable amount of work

involved in purchasing, preparing and delivering the food on that evening. It is always good to have volunteers to help prepare the food, but it is not as straightforward as that. Volunteers working in the kitchen need to be formally trained which includes working with knives and hot pots. The committee is currently considering its position.

#### 6. Fees for season 2025-26

There were no fee increases for this season (2024-25). We last increased fees in 2023-24. Bearing in mind the cost increases that I have alluded to, it is recommended that we increase our fees as follows:

1. Donation for tea and biscuits: Increase from £2.00 to £2.50. However, we will accept card payments from the beginning of season 2025-26
2. Band Nights: Increase from £13 to £14
3. Burns Night: Increase from £16 to £17.50

#### **Motions:**

1. Church Donation of £2,500

Proposed for approval by Adam Bakker, Seconded by David Courtney.

2. Fees for Season 2025-26

Proposed for approval by Tom Cochrane, Seconded by Lindsey Rousseau

#### **5 AOB**

Sue Reed noted that not all dancers give a donation for tea and biscuits each week. This donation also covers dancing and the costs associated with provision of the hall for dancing. Responding, the convenor explained that it was not the ethos of St Columba's Dancers to charge a fee for the evening as we are a church social group and rely on donations, apart from Band nights for which we can charge a fee. Nonetheless dancers are getting excellent value from the modest donations and are encouraged to donate weekly.

Adam Bakker asked whether we could institute a ticket system whereby dancers purchase a subscription for tea donations. This will be considered by the committee.

Brian Pierson said he enjoyed our Burns Night and thought we should continue with Haggis, Neeps and Tatties.

The meeting closed at 20.40.

After the meeting dancers realised that a vote of thanks to Willie, our Convenor, for all the work he does, had not been given and came to the Secretary to ask that I include this in the minutes.