

THE SAINT ANDREW SOCIETY OF WESTERN AUSTRALIA

ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING – FEBRUARY 2012

CHIEFTAINS REPORT

It was an unusual year . . . depending on the way that you looked at it, you could say it was successful and you could say it didn't meet expectations.

On the one hand we had one of the best Committees I have been associated with during my eight years as Chieftain of the Society, and the 2011 events were very well organised and run.

Yet on the other hand we struggled to get the sort of guest numbers we have enjoyed in the past at our events . . . apart from the Chieftain's Ceilidh and the Burns Supper.

A number of reasons have been put forward for this, but I'm inclined to believe that we were affected by the general malaise in consumer spending that has hit the Perth retail industry.

Anecdotal evidence indicates that other comparable events, dinner dances and the like, throughout the metropolitan area have suffered a similar lack of numbers.

However, the people who did attend the five events the Committee arranged – the St Andrew's Day Ball, the Burns Supper and three ceilidhs – claimed to have thoroughly enjoyed themselves.

My thanks goes to a core group of members who supported every event and often encouraged other people to attend.

Over the year, the Committee was busy in other areas, too.

We made great strides forward with our website and I am convinced that will get even better in the future.

We produced seven issues of our newsletter, *The Saltire*.

We developed two new pull-up display banners, which many members will have seen at Society events. These are not only easier to transport and erect, they also present a more professional image of the Society.

We developed a Society Facebook page. I started this during the year, but only a small number of people have become "Friends" of this page so far, and we need up to 100, I believe, before it can become an entity on its own, rather than just being connected to my Facebook page.

I would urge as many of you as possible to become a "Friend" of this page and encourage your friends to do so, too. There is no doubt in my mind that

this has the potential to be a significant promotional tool for the Society, but we need the assistance of members and friends to develop that potential.

Another significant initiative undertaken by the Committee was the filming of the majority of the Scottish Country Dances that form our dance catalogue and placing the videos on YouTube, then linking them to the list of dances on the Society's website.

The reason for this was that we felt it would help people who couldn't do the dances, or needed to freshen up their technique, if they could watch them on our website, but when we went into YouTube we found that the examples there were poor.

Also, during the year the Society supported a new Scottish group in Bunbury . . . the MacAussies, which is run by two Society members, Ellen and John Reid . . . with a number of members attending its first Winter Ceilidh.

We all had a really good time before and during the ceilidh, as well as enjoying a weekend away.

The Events

Our main event of the year was, as always, our annual celebration, the St Andrew's Day Ball, held on 26 November at the Novotel Langley Hotel.

The portents for the Ball were not good, with very few new people turning up to our pre-Ball dance classes.

That translated into such low numbers of Ball guests, at one stage it was thought the event would have to be moved to a smaller room in the hotel.

In the end we did get enough people attending to remain in the original ballroom, but it was the lower numbers of guests at the Ball that coloured the Committee's view of the year as a whole.

In effect, this pleased many regular guests, because the tables weren't bisected by the dance floor, as in the past, which resulted in the guests being at one end of the room, with the dance floor and the Heel n Toe Band at the other end.

The pipe band was the excellent Perth Metro Pipe Band, which is currently the leading pipe band in Western Australia.

There were no official guests to present the toasts to "St Andrew and Scotland" and "The land We Live In", but they were admirably undertaken by members Mattie Turnbull and Darian Ferguson.

The best event of the year, in my view, was the Burns Supper, held in the Parmelia Hilton's Argyll Room on the Bard's birthday, 25 January, as is our tradition.

We had 150 guests, a great many of whom were non-members and at one of our events for the first time, and many of whom were young people, which was very pleasing.

This was a wonderful evening. The Bard was appropriately honoured and remembered – the toasts were excellent – and there followed an evening of Burns songs, recitations and dancing to the Heel n Toe Band.

My thanks go to the Society members who delivered the toasts – Brian McMurdo (Address to the Haggis), Sandy Milligan (The Immortal Memory), and Doris LaValette (Response from the Lassies).

I gave the toast Tae the Lassies.

Traditionally the Society's first event of the year, the Chieftain's Ceilidh, was held on Saturday 7 May at the RAAFA Memorial Estate, Bullcreek, which has become a regular venue for this event.

The excellent crowd of 91 people included our usual group of ceilidh people, and a large group of young people who had chosen the ceilidh for a friends' night out.

As well as the Heel n Toe entertainment, a couple of guests provided a few songs.

Numbers at the Xmas in July Ceilidh, on July 23 in the Yokine Bowling Club, may have been down compared with previous years, but the guests threw themselves into the dances we have enjoyed over the years . . . even when they danced them to Christmas music, on a couple of occasions.

The Xmas in July Ceilidh entails more decoration work than any of the others and the venue was resplendent when the guests arrived, thanks to a major effort by the entire Committee.

We also had a great evening at the Spring Ceilidh, at the Scarborough Sportsman's Club on Saturday 10 September.

Although the 50-strong crowd may have been less than we have been accustomed to, the guests had obviously set their minds on letting their hair down, because they turned the event into a big party.

It was the first time the Society had held an event at that club and, with seating and dancing room for 80 to 100 people, it's a venue that will be used again this year.

The Committee

I have to say that I got a great deal of personal pleasure out of working with and enjoying the company of an excellent Committee.

The Society has been superbly served by the 2011 Committee, which was not only a group of highly committed people, but was a group of people that were good friends as well as fellow Committee members.

I must praise the work done by our Honorary Treasurer, Diana Paxman, who took over from a long-serving member and has made the job her own.

My good friend and Vice-Chieftain, Jeff Crookes, once again put in a power of work, but his workload was reduced considerably this year by the way the event sub-committees worked.

Susan Bogie, Reggie McNeill and Brian McMurdo all proved their excellent organising abilities and drove their teams to produce events that were very well planned and executed.

Brian, of course, was also a first-class Honorary Secretary.

First-year Committee members Doris LaValette and Cheryl Hill made a tremendous contribution and also showed impressive organisational skills.

Also, I must praise the huge effort put in by long-serving Committee member Cameron Dickson and Margaret Weir, in her second year on the Committee.

On behalf of the Society, I thank you all, most sincerely.

The Future

I am convinced that the great work of the Committee and the harmony that exists between its members had a great deal to do with the current success of the Society.

However, it is more important than ever that we have Committee members who have the skills to help advance the Society and are prepared to put in the hard work to make it happen.

We cannot continue to have the great fun evenings we have enjoyed over the years without the efforts of the Committee. If you would like to help to make it happen, I urge you to put up your hand today.

Although there is a bit of work involved in being on the Committee, there is also a lot of fun. Over the year, there is only one meeting a month and you will be asked to join at least one of the event sub-committees, which will involve attending a couple more meetings to organise the event.

There is no doubt that the resources boom has brought people to WA from around the world who are seeking to recapture the enjoyment they had as members of Scottish communities in Scotland and elsewhere.

The Society must direct its resources towards finding more ways of engaging with this group of people.

Our website continues to be a very popular means for people to find out about the Society and it is vital that we continue to develop this valuable tool.

I mentioned our Facebook page earlier in this report and, while people have their own views about this online tool, I would emphasise again what a significant and important promotional tool I believe it will become for the Society if developed properly.

To achieve a continuing rise in membership, we must promote the Society in every way possible.

I am still convinced that we must examine how we can expand on the service we provide our members beyond that of simply holding a number of events each year, and perhaps the new Committee could look at:

- Regional events, in the north and south of the metropolitan area, catering for people who cannot travel to the inner city areas.
- Sourcing a premises where we could have a regular “club night”, where people could gather for a drink and a chat, or for a bit of dance. Recent arrivals from Scotland have particularly continued to ask how they could get together with fellow Scots on a regular basis
- Dancing classes all the year round, perhaps as an aspect of the club night.

It would be most important that the above should be accomplished without putting further pressure on an already hard-worked Committee.

In concluding, may I thank the members of the Society for honouring me with the task of leading the organisation for the past year.

As I am sure you all know, the Society will always be very close to my heart.

Ken Suttie
Chieftain