

# The Chanter

Nottingham Scottish Association Newsletter  
December 2010

## Recipe: To Make a Ballant

To make a ballant:

take onie image scents frae the dark o your  
mind,

sieve it through twal' years skill

í the fewest words can haud it

(meantime steeran in your hert's bluid),

Spice wí wít, saut wí passion,

bíle í the hettest fire your love can kindle,

and serve at the scaud in your strangmaíst

stanza

(the haill process aa to be dune at aince)

Syne rin like hell afore the result explodes!

Alexander Scott

## **From the President**

Time, as ever, rushes on. Since my last message, Sue and I have enjoyed a fortnight in a rather wet Lochaber in the company of various family members. We've also seen our daughter and family off to Boston (USA not Lincolnshire – so that's next year's holiday destination fixed)!

The Association is now fully into our autumn programme with pleasingly high numbers attending the Thursday night dances and some lively programmes. We have continued –thanks to Bill and Jeanne Dall and various helpers – to provide support for our newer dancers and that is really paying off. Bernice Young's programme of walks continues at regular intervals and we have a full programme of activities to come – see [www.nottinghamscottish.org.uk](http://www.nottinghamscottish.org.uk) for full details.

Coming soon are our Halloween Ceilidh on Saturday 30<sup>th</sup> October and the annual St Andrews Night Dinner and Dance on Saturday 27<sup>th</sup> November. This is followed by the St Andrews day service on Sunday 28<sup>th</sup> November and a ramble followed by a Christmas Lunch on Monday 6<sup>th</sup> December. I hope we'll see you at one or more of these events.

**Andrew**

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## **Oberammergau 2010**

Would you like to go to Oberammergau? Do you know what it is? Yes & Yes

This was the exchange between good friend Cherry and me at the end of a shopping trip to get her a Mother of the Bride outfit. Many of you will know Cherry as the Rector of Kimberley's wife, where, the 'Nottingham Scottish' for many years helped out with their Burns nights until her husband David's retirement. So, this July, off we went for a week in Austria with an overnight stay in a village close to Oberammergau in Germany. In a small Austrian village just outside Innsbruck, Cherry and I travelled on numerous cable cars and clambered up and down mountain tracks having an exhausting time with wonderful weather in the great outdoors. That said, now to the reason we actually went on this holiday.

OBERAMMERGAU... if you get the opportunity to visit whilst the 'Passion Play' is on I urge you to jump at it. In July 1633 the plague had taken 84 adult lives. The village council, in a desperate act of faith, summoned all who could to meet in the church and there, before the altar, they made a solemn vow to perform every tenth year a play of the Saviour's suffering and death, if God would deliver them from the disease. From that day there has never been a recorded death from the plague. From that day only twice has the play not been performed.; in 1770 when Passion plays were banned and in 1940 owing to World War II.

What an experience! To appreciate it fully you need to have a little background knowledge of the whys and wherefores. Here's a small sample; it only happens every ten years. All who take part in the play must either have been born in the

village, lived there for over twenty years or, in the case of children, attend the village school. The village population is just over 5,000 & over 2,000 of these are involved in some way or another in the play. It's likely that every house has a participant, i.e. actor, director, wardrobe person, scenes, lights, singer etc.

Not to say the owners of the animals used. *What animals?* The donkey carrying Jesus, of course, but add to that a large horse being ridden on stage, also the six to eight sheep and five or six goats, the crate of doves that were let loose, not forgetting the two camels. Often on stage at any one time were 150-200 people in the crowd scenes, including children & babies in arms.

The theatre seated just under 5,000. The audience is under cover but the stage is in the open and they only put the roof over if the weather is very bad, as it is said the weather adds to the atmosphere. The play is six hours long. There is a three-hour interval when everyone gets an evening meal. Believe me, you will not fall asleep in the second half. I was surprised how violent it became.

The play is in German (you do get an English copy) but we all know the story. It starts with Jesus coming into Jerusalem and ends at the empty tomb. It really is an incredible play, and it is amazing how they manage to portray it so well on a stage always exposed to the audience. So realistic that at one point Cherry and I looked at one another and, as one, said 'Wow' - not an excited 'wow' but a hushed 'wow' of disbelief. I had intended to write about the play but I can't; as I have said, you know the story, you have to be there to 'feel' it. My words can't do it justice.

Cherry and I have agreed if we are both around and physically able we will return in 2020.

**Bernice Young**

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## **China – The Great Wall and Beyond.**

With its vast area and 1.3 billion people, the People's Republic of China is a land of infinite variety and wild contradictions. A score or more of modern cities compete to emulate Hong Kong's glittering skyline and economic dynamism, but farming methods have hardly changed for 2000 years; straw-hatted peasants till the soil by hand or guide the plough behind a pair of lumbering water buffalo.

When we flew over China we were lucky to have window seats to enjoy the passing panorama of intensively cultivated plains, rice-growing wetlands, rugged mountains and empty deserts. The scenic beauty of the great river valleys and dramatic gorges inspired a tradition of painting that you might think exaggerated, until you board a boat and see the reality.

The legendary sights we visited are truly unforgettable: the awe-inspiring Great Wall, the gorgeous palaces of Beijing's Forbidden City, the unique Terracotta Army of Xi'an (pronounced Che'an). With pride in the past restored, archaeologists are uncovering

new wonders all the time. To-day's China is just as compulsive: the street scene and teeming throngs, the sounds and smells, people doing their morning tai chi exercises, playing cards or dominoes, having a haircut. Markets and stores offer an endless range of arts and crafts at enticing prices, and the varied restaurants and food stalls make eating out an adventure.

China is undergoing transformations that would have seemed unimaginable only quarter of a century ago. The consumer boom that began in the 1980s has put TV sets into over 90 per cent of homes worldwide. In the cities, the latest fashions have replaced drab uniform clothing, and the trendy young go clubbing. Chairman Mao must be spinning in his tomb. Very high taxes on cars, and low fares on public transport, are intended to discourage car ownership, but today's traffic jams are made up of more than just buses and bicycles.

Religious freedom has been restored now that the Cultural Revolution is a distant evil memory. 'Stop at One' the one-child policy is still applied with some variations, many can't afford to marry and start a family until they are thirty plus as there are more and more ageing dependants for each person at work, and China has no state pension.

China is just too vast to see in one visit, or even several, so we had to plan a route to take us to the main attractions. Unlike the old song, we did not take a 'slow boat to China' our ten hour flight from Heathrow put us down in Beijing. There we walked on The Great Wall, fantastic! Tiananmen Square with memories of tanks versus students was quite moving, and then into The Forbidden City, Temple of Heaven and Ming Tombs. The Summer Palaces with sumptuous pavilions, pagodas and temple gardens helped to fill our first three days.

A two hour flight took us to Xi'an, famed for The Silk Road and The Terracotta Warriors. Three halls the size of aircraft hangers house rows and rows of warriors with many more being restored. The warriors were discovered by a peasant farmer digging a well during a drought in 1974. So far over 7000 figures of warriors just over life-size, with hundreds of horses generally in lines of four, interspersed with chariots have been uncovered. Three hours flying took us south to Guilin on the Li River, famous for fishermen using trained Cormorants to catch fish. Next day in near monsoon conditions we set off on a four and half hour cruise down the Li River, the gentle pace is ideal to view and photograph the impossibly shaped mountain peaks all covered in lush green vegetation.

Turning north-west our flight took us to Chendu famous for The Panda Research Centre, where they have enjoyed great success breeding Giant Pandas and the equally rare Red Panda. Our walk through Chendu was interesting to say the least, in the remoter rural areas westerners are still objects of curiosity, especially Jeanne with her blonde hair, lots of girls wanted to feel it and have their pictures taken with us. We were not sure whether we felt like film stars or beings from outer-space.

Two hours on the new impressive high-speed rail link took us to Chongqing and the start of a four day cruise on the Yangtze. It would be hard to choose a highlight of the trip, but the Yangtze Three Gorges Cruise with all the excursions would be up near the top. The cruise ends by passing through gigantic locks at the new dam. Work on

the dam began in 1994, and was completed in 1999 creating a massive hydro-electric scheme and a reservoir over 350 miles long. Sadly it forced nearly 2 million people to lose their homes and farms, thus relocating to high-rise flats. This massive dam was designed to control flood levels along the length of the Yangtze. (Ironically as I write, an e-mail has just arrived from one of our tour guides in Chongqing, saying how bad the flooding is today, and all Yangtze cruises have been suspended.)

Leaving the river behind, we travelled to Wuhan, Hangzhou and Suzhou, all up-market cities where the wealthy live and commute to Shanghai. At the peak of the building boom in the 1990s it was said that a quarter of all construction cranes in the world were at work in Shanghai, and it looked like most of them were still there. Expo 2010 was on whilst we were there, and the evening cruises with the city illuminated was truly mind-blowing. If you have ever seen the famous Hong Kong light show, Shanghai made it look like an amateur affair.

We ended our trip with two days in monsoon-swept Hong Kong before setting out on the long trek home.

Was there a down side? Let us just say, if you have ever experienced the 'French hole in the ground loo' then you are ready for China, we will say no more on that subject.

Was it worth it? It certainly was; every minute of it.

**Jeanne & Bill Dall**

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### **Barn Dance and Super Supper**

This year's annual Barn Dance was held in Papplewick Village Hall on Saturday 14 August and eighty members and friends turned up for the 'hoe down' (if that's the right term for it). In a variation from the normal programme of Barn Dances, we enjoyed an introduction to American Square Dancing. Some of the figures were familiar to us from Scottish Country Dancing and clearly both styles of dance have common roots. However, while some of the terms (e.g Allemande) are familiar, often the meanings are different. This made for an interesting and enjoyable evening. We also enjoyed our 'Super Supper' and much needed refreshment. Our thanks to Bernice and her helpers for a very good evening.

**Andrew Morrison**

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### **First Steps.**

Browsing through some back numbers of The Chanter recently I came across Iris's article about when she took up Scottish Country Dancing and it set me thinking back a long way to when I learned to dance, although unlike Iris, I was not taught by a handsome young man! Soon after I started at Oban High School we had a new addition to the teaching staff. Miss Jean MacDonald came in, not like a breath of

fresh air, more a Force Ten gale, determined to make PT (PE to our younger readers) an important part of the school curriculum. On the days when it was too wet or icy for hockey – and believe me it had to be *really* wet to cancel hockey – Jeannie, as she came to be known to all and sundry, decided it was time we learned to dance and specifically Scottish Country dancing. Well, much as I liked hockey, anything was preferable to running up and down the hockey pitch in the pouring rain or getting grazed knees on the rock hard ground and we did get to keep our skirts on! Excuses were brushed aside. Period pains, growing pains, colds and coughs didn't wash with Jean MacDonald – “the exercise will do you good.”

First we had to learn the steps and to do that we had to do skip-change of step several times round the gym, then strathspey step, followed by pas de basque on the spot over and over till we got the hang of it. Finally Jeannie decided we were ready to try a dance and we were put into sets. Lines had to be straight and dance etiquette had to be observed rigidly. You didn't just vaguely drop hands with your partner and let her drift to place, hands had to be held at shoulder level and you had to acknowledge the person you were setting to. Sometimes at the Nottingham Scottish when I go wrong I can still hear her strident tones “RIGHT shoulder reel – do you know your right from your left?” “Set to FIRST corner – are you listening to me?” (as if we could do anything else!) Of course there were some who hated it, but I found to my surprise I loved it and still do to this day. I couldn't wait to get my dancing pumps instead of wearing plimsolls. Some parents thought they were an unnecessary expense, but fortunately for me, my Mum was a keen dancer and a very good one and didn't mind at all if she went without something to get me my pumps.

As the Christmas dance season approached Jeannie decided the boys should join us and learn to dance too. To be honest, sometimes they were more trouble than they were worth as some of them thought dancing was cissy and they could just fool around – not in Jeannie's class, as they soon found out! Some of them turned out to be very good once they knuckled down and not all of them loved shinty and football to the exclusion of everything else.

The following year I was thrilled to be chosen to dance in a demonstration team at the Argyllshire Gathering. The only problem was I had to take the man's part as for once I was actually taller than my partner! Still, it turned out O.K. in the end.

After I left school and was allowed to go to the local hops, we did mainly Cèilidh dancing and it was to be thirty years before I did Scottish Country again, when I joined the Nottingham Scottish after meeting Dennis and Shona at a Burns' Dinner Dance and being encouraged by Shona to come along on a Thursday night. I found that although I was a bit rusty, I had never forgotten the steps and enjoyed dancing just as much as I did when I was in school. Jeannie MacDonald instilled in me a love of dancing which although was dormant for a long time, never died. Now in her nineties, I understand that she is still as indomitable as ever, in spite of being crippled with arthritis. This article is as much a tribute to a very special lady as it is to Scottish Country Dancing and I am sure she would be pleased to know that some of her pupils still love to dance and have not forgotten her.

**Margaret Barnes**

**Coming Soon!**

**27 November 2010: St Andrews Night Dinner**  
**Masonic Hall, Goldsmith Street, 7.30pm**  
Details and an application form enclosed.

**28 November 2010: St Andrews Day Service**  
**St Andrews with Castle Gate, 11.00 am**  
All welcome

**6 December 2010**  
**Ramble followed by Christmas Lunch** Information from Bernice Young  
(Tel: 0115 9637228)

**Treasure Hunt 24<sup>th</sup> July 2010**

On a warm Saturday morning over 20 members of the Association and friends met at the Papplewick Village Hall for a treasure hunt organised by Bernice and Alan. Setting off in pairs and small groups and following a mysterious set of clues we were first directed through the nearby children's playground, resisting all urges to have a quick go on the swings and slides. We were then directed into the adjacent wood and soon realized that in order to decipher some of the clues we needed to get inside the head of our organizers!

The hunt continued on with a pleasant walk through the nearby countryside, solving more clues on the way, leading us to the local church where we found that "serious and 3ft" did not refer to the daunting array of extremely large and ferocious looking nettles that barred our path but merely to the "grave yard" adjacent to the church! Despite the pressure of some particularly tricky clues I am pleased to report that all participants successfully made it back to the village hall where we were greeted with a delicious lunch and refreshing drinks. Congratulations go to Dr Nigel Sturrock and his family who were declared the eventual winners.

This was a really enjoyable day, with a good walk combined with something to stretch the mind - although Bernice's definition of 'a lay-by' may be stretching this too far! It certainly added to the day's enjoyment. Many thanks to Bernice and Alan.

**Dave Potter**

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**Walk-Through Dance**

As Chairman of Nottingham Branch RSCDS I have pleasure in inviting members of the Nottingham Scottish Association to our Walk-Through Dance to be held on Saturday, 20<sup>th</sup> November in the Wightman Hall, Stratford Road, West Bridgford at 7.30 p.m. Recorded music, admission £4 dancers and £2 spectators, bring and share supper.

David Page

**Walking Group** The next ramble will be held on Friday, 22<sup>nd</sup> October, meeting at 10 a.m. for a 10.30 start. Please contact Bernice Young for further details as the planned route is subject to change according to weather conditions.

**And finally...**

A Weegie stopped before a grave in an Edinburgh cemetery and read the inscription upon the tombstone:

*'Here lieth an Edinburgh lawyer and an honest man'*

'And who would ever think,' he murmured, 'that there would be room for two men in that one wee grave?'