

# Summer School 2019

Week 2: 21–28 July 2019 by Gill Gordon

The walk from St Andrews bus station to University Hall had a sense of familiarity about it; a homecoming of sorts. It's a path I've walked twice before, in 2011 and 2017, and one I hope I'll walk again. As I passed the labyrinth, I wondered whether, this time, I'd actually enter it. It beckons, inviting you to step in and contemplate the manner in which a chosen path leads into something and then back out again. But right now, all I wanted was to check in, unpack, shower and relax after the long journey. Flying via Dubai saves money, but it is something of a challenge. The flight departed at 18:20 on Thursday, but I'd been on the go since 09:00 that morning. After landing in Edinburgh at 15:00 on Friday afternoon, I caught the bus for the two-hour ride to St Andrews. It was now heading for 19:00. Definitely time to stop moving!

So I trundled my case along the path towards my 'home' for the next ten days. I've always thought of Summer School as a bubble; this time, I heard others describe it that way, too. And it *is* a bubble; a brief period when you willingly move away from everything else that matters and enter a world that has only one objective: to dance.



The labyrinth in Kinburn Park; completed in October 2016, by the St Andrews Quakers, to mark their 50th year of worshipping in the town.

Each year, the RSCDS holds an annual Summer School at St Andrews, a charming university town on the east coast of Scotland. Summer School takes place over four weeks, with most participants attending just a single week (you can go for two). Each week seems to have its own 'flavour' and regulars often return for the same week. Week 3 has become both Musicians' Week and Youth Week (when adult participants can bring their children), so it tends to be the most crowded. This year, Week 1 had the lowest attendance, with about 60 participants, whereas Week 2 had around 160 people, and that number was set to double in Week 3. But, regardless of which week you choose, it becomes *your* week, *your* experience.



Dancing in the Younger Hall is a highlight of Summer School

## So what is Summer School all about?

Well, a key part of it is meeting dancers from all over the world. Being somewhat isolated at the southern tip of Africa, it always surprises me how far Scottish Country Dancing reaches. This year, my class had dancers from New Zealand, Australia, Germany, Czech Republic and the UK. And me, the sole South African. In other classes, there were dancers from Italy, Russia, Switzerland and Japan – and those are just the countries I know of...

This year, an overlapping schedule with an SCD dance week in Calgary meant that Americans and Canadians who might have come to St Andrews possibly opted to stay closer to home. On previous trips, I've met dancers and teachers from across North America, from Charlotte (North Carolina) in the east to San Francisco and Vancouver in the west. In 2011, one of my class musicians was a Japanese fiddler who'd studied the Celtic-influenced fiddle-playing of Cape Breton, Nova Scotia.

Summer School runs from Sunday to Sunday. It is based in University Hall, one of the residences of St Andrew's University. Accommodation is in single bedrooms, with shared bathrooms. The dining hall serves three meals a day, with plenty of choice, and each corridor has facilities for making tea or coffee (and a fridge to keep drinks cold). Formal registration takes place from 16:00 on Sunday. (First-timers get a gold star on their name badge and 'old hands' readily offer guidance on things like directions to class venues, or the location of the party room.)

After dinner, the first dance kicks off in the Common Room. Unlike the other evening dances, no programme is put out in advance, and dances are chosen from the *Collins Guide to SCD*. This is your first opportunity to get a sense of who's there and assess your dancing against everyone else. At first, it might be a bit intimidating, but you'll soon find yourself being invited to dance, or asking someone to dance, and when the music starts and your feet start moving, you'll understand why you are here.



*Clockwise from top left: An afternoon walkthrough with Zsolt Molnar (in kilt) in Victory Memorial Upper Hall (2019); stretching before a class in Victory Memorial Lower (2011); Thursday night dance in Younger Hall (2017); social dancing in the Old Dining Room (2017).*

From Monday to Saturday the daily routine comprises classes from 09:30–12:30, with a tea-break halfway. In the afternoons, there are walk-throughs of that evening's dances, optional classes (Ladies Step; Highland), and a chance to flash your cash in the RSCDS shop, the shoe shops and the dress shop. This year, we also had the opportunity to participate in group discussions on how to promote SCD, and attend a talk by one of the musicians. In some weeks, dancers are asked to volunteer a few hours of afternoon time to stooze for the exam candidates, both for their practice classes and for the final exams. There's almost not enough time to do it all!

There's a dance every evening; sometimes a choice of two venues with different programmes, musicians and callers. The dances end between 22:30 and 23:00. And if you haven't had enough, the action in the party room kicks off a bit later, and can go on until the wee hours. Then you get up the next day and do it all over again!

The class venues are scattered about town. Walking to and from the daily classes and dances is very much part of the routine, and is a great way to get to know your classmates. Comfortable shoes (and an umbrella) are essential; you want to avoid getting blisters, if you can. (Somehow, I always manage to get a few. The local Boots Pharmacy does well out of me!) And the umbrella? It's summer. It's Scotland. It rains. (If you're lucky, it will rain when you're in class, not en route to class!)

When you decide to go to Summer School, one of the most important aspects is choosing your class. Classes are offered at all levels, from beginner to very advanced, but

because SCD is social dancing, with no grading system, it is very hard to set standards, and the classes tend to contain a mixture of dancers who are in the right place, and those who are not – much like a normal weekly class, which has to accommodate dancers at every level. From experience, I can say with confidence that being in a class that is right for you makes all the difference. There's a fine line between being able to extend yourself while enjoying your classes versus spending your time trying to keep up. If you are thinking about going, speak to one of the local St Andrews' alumni (*see last page*) to get some insight into which class you should sign up for. (You select your class when you book, not at Summer School.)

Each class has one teacher and musician from Monday to Wednesday, and another combination from Thursday to Saturday, so you get to experience different styles of teaching and, possibly, different instruments. Dancing to live music for all the classes and evening dances is one of the highlights of Summer School. There is absolutely no recorded music! Class musicians generally play accordion or piano, while the evening dances can be anything from a solo musician to a duo, trio or full band.

The RSCDS draws on some of the best musicians of the moment, and it is a treat to listen to them – although too often you're concentrating on what comes next, and not paying as much attention to the music as you should. Something we don't realise in Cape Town is how having a class musician impacts on the way a teacher teaches. When the teacher only has to click onto a track on the iPod or laptop, the music is 'just there.' But when there is



*Technically advanced class in Younger Hall (2017); note the width of the sets. Although the available floor space is a factor when you make up sets for social dancing, in an advanced class, dancers have to be capable of using their feet to cover distance. Sets are 1.5–2 metres wide and dancers stand at arm's length apart!*

a musician in the room, the teacher and dancers tend to be more engaged. The teacher also has to keep the musician informed about what's coming next. He/she can't be left hanging around while a dance is endlessly walked through; just like dancers, musicians have to stay warmed up, so they are able to play at a moment's notice. The teacher also has to let the musician know when to start playing. Instead of pressing the remote, this is done with the refrain: 'With the music, ready and ...' which cues both musician and dancers. A huge advantage of having a musician is that the teacher can ask him or her to start from any bar. This means that when you're learning a dance, you can break it into sections and dance them to the correct bars of music, something that is seldom possible with recordings.

The programmes for the evening dances come out a few months before Summer School. With 12–16 different dances on each night, you're grateful for each one you're familiar with! Cribes are available online and, as some of you will recall, in the weeks before I left, Heather and Kim were kind enough to include some of my Summer School dances in their classes. This time, I opted to revise dances

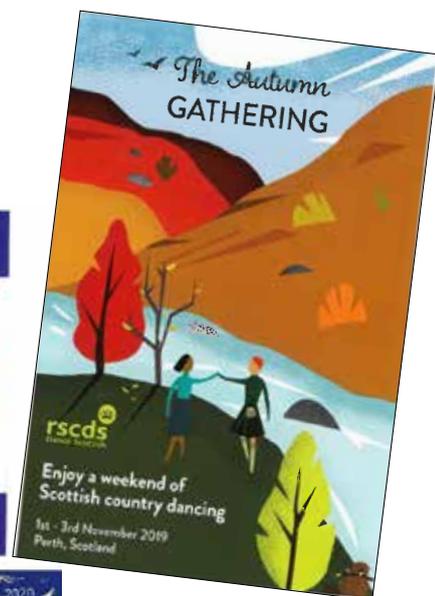
that we'd already done in Cape Town, rather than try to learn dozens of new dances which I'd have forgotten by the time I got there. In general, the evening dances are recapped, not walked through, although the caller may offer a single, quick, walk-through of a more complicated dance. If you're able to dance confidently from cribs and a recap, the evening dances won't hold too much terror. If, like me, you

learn from the 'feet up' not the 'head down', you might find yourself doing more watching than dancing, but that's okay, too. The main thing is to do what makes you happy. I've seen beginners doing dances they've clearly never encountered before and, with the help of their partner and the rest of the set, getting through them. I've also seen inexperienced dancers making a total hash of things, to the annoyance of their far-more-competent set who were perhaps losing their chance to do a dance they really enjoy. Only you can determine whether the wise move is to step in or sit out. The afternoon walk-throughs are invaluable, but it can happen that the dances being walked through that day may be the ones you already know, not those you don't. If you're lucky, someone in your class might offer an additional quick walk-through before or after supper. I joined in a few impromptu recaps right outside the dining hall!

#### DANCING AROUND THE WORLD WITH THE RSCDS

The Royal Scottish Country Dance Society is based in Edinburgh. As the organisational heart of Scottish Country Dancing worldwide, it serves to promote and uphold this unique form of dance by means of education and training, communications and marketing. The annual **Summer School** is one of a number of events run under the auspices of the RSCDS throughout the year. Other residential events include **Winter School**, which takes place in Pitlochry in February; the **Autumn Gathering** (formerly AGM weekend), in Perth (Scotland) in November; and **Spring Fling** (under 35s) / **Spring Fringe** (35+), held in a different European city each year. Other residential events organized by RSCDS branches are **TAC** (Teachers Association Canada) Summer School, **Australian Winter School**, **Asilomar Weekend** in San Francisco, **Kuckucksnest** in Germany, **Scottish Weekend** in Maryland USA, and **New Zealand Summer School**.

There are dozens of weekend workshops and day schools held throughout the year in different countries and cities. If you are travelling abroad, it is worth finding out in advance whether there'll be any dancing where you're going. Just as we welcome visitors from overseas, you'll be warmly welcomed at classes and dances. So always remember to pack your dancing shoes.



Three of our evening dances were held in Younger Hall (the venue in many YouTube videos, including the weekly demonstrations). It has the most amazing sprung floor; when you're waiting your turn and everyone is dancing, you feel yourself bouncing up and down! The Thursday night dance (the only 'optional extra' of the week) is when the demos take place (SCD, Highland, Ladies Step). Each week's teams are picked on Monday and the chosen dancers learn their choreographed routines in just four afternoons. No pressure then... One of the 'mysteries' of Summer School was solved when I saw a rail of identical black dresses hanging in the office: the RSCDS supplies the demo dresses and sashes and (*who knows*) maybe they even pick the demo dancers not only because they dance well, but because they'll fit into a dress!

Friday night is ceilidh night, when there is no formal dancing. Anyone who wants to is encouraged to perform a song or play music; often, a group will do a fun take on a well-known dance. A highlight is when the musicians play. Throughout the week, class musicians play for the evening dances, but when they all start jamming at the ceilidh, it's musical magic!

I hope my 'meander' through Summer School inspires you to think about making your own journey. As I said at the start, you enter a 'bubble' when you walk the path towards the Hall. But as you head in the other direction at the end of your week, that bubble doesn't burst. Once the St Andrews bubble grabs you and you've experienced its magic, you'll want to go again. *Failte gu Alba!*



*Dancers from the 2019 High Impact Technically Advanced class doing a quick-time pousette. As you can see, even the 'best' dancers don't always have perfect footwork or synchronization. There's hope for us all!*

#### WHAT'S ON THE DANCE PROGRAMMES?

The programmes for the evening dances are sent out a few months ahead of Summer School. Of the 53 dances in Week 2, these were the dances I'd done before (sometimes long ago ....) and felt most comfortable with. I don't do well with just recaps, so I even sat out some of these on the night. Ironically, I missed one of the dances I knew best (and one of my favourites), Sands of Morar, because I was ceilidh dancing in the Old Dining Room, and it was on the programme in the Common Room. Our dance programme was shorter, but theirs went faster than I expected and they were halfway through Sands of Morar by the time I made it from one venue to the other. Oh well ....

12 Coates Crescent (S32)  
 Autumn in Appin (S32)  
 Duke of Perth (R32)  
 Follow Me Home (J32)  
 Good Hearted Glasgow (J32)  
 It's Just for Fun (J32)  
 Ladies' Fancy (J32)  
 La Flora (J32)  
 Light and Airy (J32)  
 Major Ian Stewart (J32)  
 Miss Hadden's Reel (R32)  
 Reel of the Royal Scots (R32)  
 Ruby Wilkinson's Farewell to Cranshaws (S32)  
 The Laird of Milton's Daughter (J32)  
 The Royal Yacht Britannia (R40)  
 The Sailor (R32)  
 The Sands of Morar (S32)  
 The Silver Tassie (S32)  
 The Starry Eyed Lassie (J32)  
 Tribute to the Borders (J32)  
 Trip to the Drakensberg (J40)  
 Wisp of Thistle (S32)

#### FLYING THE FLAG FOR CAPE TOWN

Gill Loubser is the undisputed champion when it comes to attending RSCDS events. Since 2004 she has been to a total of 16 Summer Schools, Winter Schools and AGM weekends. But we rise to the challenge!

Gill Gordon (2011, 2017, 2019) and Barbara Swanepoel (2009, 2011, 2016, 2017) are recent attendees. Heather Hodgson was at St Andrews in 2010, and she and Andrew attended Winter School in 2012; Campbell Tyler was at St Andrews in 2004, and he and Linda Oldert attended the International Branch weekend in Prague in 2011. Summer Schools play an essential role in training new SCD teachers. Heather Hodgson (Unit 3 2010, Unit 5 2012) and Kim Mills (Unit 3 2011) did their training at St Andrews; Caireen Alston opted for New Zealand (Unit 3 in 2009, Unit 5 in 2011), and she went to St Andrews in 2007.



#### THE STORY OF THE STAINED-GLASS WINDOWS

Along a ground-floor corridor in University Hall is a series of 12 stained-glass windows, celebrating a year in the life of the Hall.

The August window (shown here) depicts the Summer Schools that take place during the university vacation. The logo of St Andrews Summer School Organization is a stylized sun setting over the sea. The RSCDS, one of the longest-standing of the Summer Schools, is represented by the 'crown of ghillies'. Other windows depict the annual Hall Ball (January), Graduation (July) and Raisin Weekend (November), part of a tradition of new students being mentored by seniors who become their academic 'parents'. These days, the summer schools include coaching camps for youngsters from all over the world who are preparing for a career as professional golfers. What better place to begin your training than on the hallowed links of the fabled Old Course, the spiritual home of golf.



#### USEFUL INFORMATION

If you have questions about the RSCDS in general, or Summer School in particular, speak to the teachers and dancers who have been before. We've all had our own experiences over the years, so chat to more than one person to get a fuller picture. For practical information, go to the RSCDS website [www.rscds.org](http://www.rscds.org) (from the home page, go to Events). You'll find basic information all year round, but the specific details for each year are uploaded as they become available. (There's also a gallery of pics to view.) RSCDS YouTube page includes videos from the evening dances; refine your search (e.g. Summer School Week 2 2019) to view specific weeks. For information on what's happening locally, go to [www.scd.za.net](http://www.scd.za.net) or our Twitter page @RSCDSCapeTown. The RSCDS Twitter page is @rscdsdancescot. Join the conversation!