

## 90 YEARS OF THE MID-SUSSEX CALEDONIAN SOCIETY

“This year, 2016, the Mid-Sussex Caledonian Society is celebrating its 90<sup>th</sup> Anniversary by holding a Summer Garden Party in August.

When the committee of the Caledonian Social and Dance Society resolved to propose the creation of a Mid-Sussex Caledonian Society at their 8<sup>th</sup> January 1926 Social, little did they think that the Society would still be in existence 90 years later.

From 1926 to 1939, the Society was run by “County” Ladies and Gentlemen and the main function was an annual Social and Dance, held in the first quarter of the year. These were grand affairs, held in the Queens Hall, Cuckfield and involving up to 200 participants. They started at 7:30pm and continued until 2:00am the following morning. The entertainments included pipers (who also played for the Scottish Dancing), singers, demonstration dancers and comedians (Jock Walker, who had deputised for Sir Harry Lauder), together with an Orchestra to accompany the non-Scottish dances. From a committee meeting in May 1926, the minutes record that ‘it was resolved to recommend at a Future meeting when conditions were again normal after the “STRIKE” that a half-day’s outing by charabanc for a circular tour, visiting a seaside resort, be arranged’

It is believed that the society was in abeyance during the war years and was resurrected in the late 40’s. At this time, money was scarce and a different society emerged. Functions were held in local scout and legion huts and village halls and the events included Dances, Ceilidhs, Whist Drives, Halloween Parties and Burns’s Suppers. A St Andrews Dinner Dance was introduced in the 1960s. When the Dolphin Fair was resurrected in 1957, the Society took a Food Stall to generate funds for the society and continued this for many years. The Society also participated in 4 Dolphin Processions in the early 1960s. A significant

change at the end of this period was the introduction of associate membership. During this period, one of the major achievements of the society was to undertake the organisation and running of the County Ball, held in Lewes Town Hall on March 6<sup>th</sup>, 1965. The society managed to arrange some sponsorship from Baxters of Fochabers who, in addition to providing a generous hamper for the raffle, also provided soup for all the guests at the end of the evening – this was particularly welcome, as snow had been falling since the early morning on the day of the Ball.

During the period 1966 – 1986, the Society’s activities reflected the membership – lots of families with young children. In addition to the formal events such as St Andrews and Burns, many other activities were introduced to cater for the youngsters. At Halloween Parties, children (and some ‘older’ children!) dressed up, ‘dooked’ for apples and tried to eat treacle scones dangling from a piece of string. At Ceilidhs, the Society was blessed with a wide range of talent from within the membership, both adult and children - musical instruments were played, sketches were performed, recitations were given, songs were sung, dances were performed and a great time was had by all. We also enjoyed family walks, games evenings and talks. During the late 70’s, the Mid Sussex Pipe Band was formed, comprising many members of the society. Although independent, it was closely aligned with the society.

During the next 20 years, the membership has gradually tended towards the ‘empty nesters’. Children have grown up and moved far and wide. It has been difficult to attract and retain younger families, possibly because many mums now have to work, so time is precious and there are a huge range of other attractions for the youngsters of today. Accordingly, while the formal events of St Andrews and Burns remained popular, other events have changed. Walks with Scottish Tea are still popular, although the children attending are more likely to be grandchildren! Golf days and Barbecues have been introduced and trips have been organised (e.g. visits to the Houses of Parliament and a sail on the Waverley Paddle Steamer). Theatre visits with meals before or after the performance have become very popular.

During the first eighty years of its existence, while Scottish Dancing remained a common link, the Society has adapted to meet the demands of the times and the latest social trends.”