

# Edinburgh University Folk (Song) Society

## 50th Anniversary Celebrations

Saturday 15th November, 2008

St Brides Centre, Orwell Terrace, Edinburgh  
Doors (and bar) Open 7:30pm for 8pm start

For enquiries and tickets email  
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or phone 0131 258 3183

### Programme



Edinburgh Uni FolkSoc meets every  
**Tuesday from 9pm**  
during term time at **48A Pleasance**

(a wee door halfway down the hill from the  
courtyard entrance, before you get to the Sports Centre)

New and old members always welcome



It's 50 years since the first meeting of the Edinburgh University Folk Song Society (subsequently known as the Crown Folk Club and now EUFolkSoc). Co-founded by Hamish Henderson and Stuart MacGregor the society was one of Britain's first folk clubs, played a key role in the revival and continues to provide a platform and meeting place for young singers and musicians from across the world.

To celebrate, EUFolksoc (as part of the Carrying Stream Festival) are holding a 50th Anniversary Concert on Saturday November 15th, 2008. Venue is St Brides Centre, Orwell Terrace, Dalry, Edinburgh.

After an on-the-road summer spent tracking down former members with an aging VW Golf and a seldom opened bottle of whisky, the organisers have brought together an array of people who have been mainstays of FolkSoc over the years. Their aim was to find folk who contributed week in week out, who had the great stories about the club, and would make the event a fitting 50th celebration.

Those taking the stage for a song, story or tune are:

Dave Barfoot	Ally Bell
Morag Brown	Jim Closs
Scott Gardiner & Johnny Kemp	Donald Gorman
David Hamilton	Ian & Gilly Hewitt
Sandy James	Kat Jary
Maria Johansen	Ella Leith
Fin Loening	Bria Mason
Dolina MacLennan	Paul Murray
Katie Smith	Off Centre Ceilidh Band
Kit Patterson	Eileen Penman
Oisin Plumb	Zarya Rathe
Rachel Reay	James Shewan
Alasdair Slessor	David Stevenson
Phil Taylor	Kay Thomson
Ian Ward	Becka Wolfe

We've divided the 50 years into four eras (current, '90s, 70's & '80s, '50s & 60s) and the performers from each era will appear on stage together. We'll get half an hour of music and chat from each group.

After the concert (but at the same venue) there will be a dancey ceilidh (with the FolkSoc houseband Off Centre leading the playing) singaround and instrumental session.

## The format of the evening

### 7:30 pm

Doors Open

### 8pm

Concert Starts with genial MC Ally Bell:

**'90s era:** Tunes, songs and mebbe a bit of dancing, from Kat Jary, Maria Johansen, Johnny Kemp, Scott Gardiner, Kit Patterson.

**'70s – '80s era :** Tunes, songs and definitely no dancing, from Donald Gorman, Ian & Gilly Hewitt, Eileen Penman, Kay Thomson.

**Current era:** An exercise in seeing how many folk you can fit on a stage, with Dave Barfit, Morag Brown, Sandy James, Ella Leith, Fin Loening, Bria Mason, Paul Murray, Oisin Kingsley Paul Plumb, Zarya Rathe, Rachel Reay, James Shewan, Alasdair Slessor, Katie Smith, Ian Ward, Becka Wolfe.

**'50s – '60s era:** Songs and stories, from Jim Closs, David Hamilton, Dolina MacLennan and Phil Taylor.

### 10:30pm

Main Hall: Dancing to Off Centre, David Stevenson & others.

Bar Room: Session and Singaround.

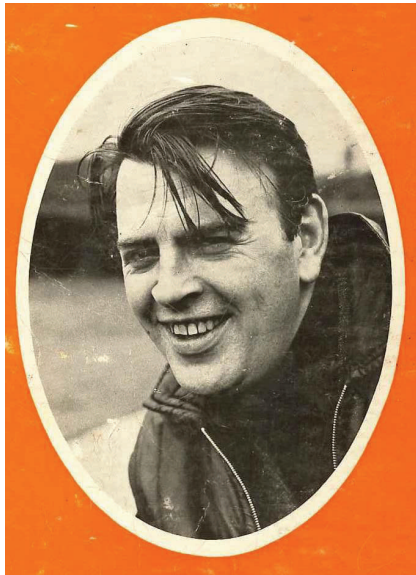
### 12 midnight

The End

EUFolkSoc would like to thank everyone who has made this 50th Celebration possible. Firstly, the lovely people at Edinburgh Folk Club, for incorporating our event as part of the Carrying Stream Festival. They have tholed our dithering and indecisiveness wi saintly patience. Secondly, the St Brides Centre for their hospitality. Thirdly, all FolkSocers past and present who have helped us in all manner of ways: the performers and those behind the scenes. Finally the audience who have turned out to support the event. We hope you all have a great night.

Edinburgh University Folk-Song Society (FolkSoc) was officially born on the 18<sup>th</sup> April 1958. This inaugural meeting, which hosted Jeannie Robertson as guest artist, was born from several impromptu ceilidhs in living rooms and kitchens around Edinburgh, with many who we now know to be leading lights of the folk revival.

Hamish Henderson, the celebrated folklorist and collector at the School of Scottish Studies, sought out singers and tradition bearers from within the student body – some of whom were originally bewildered by the attention. “We didn’t know what a folk song was in ‘57,” Dolly MacLennan remembers. “Everything was a folk song!” With his interest and encouragement, and that of other staff, students and locals, the society was formed.



Stuart MacGregor (left) was the first president (and “driving force”, says Jim Closs) and described the society as a “folk-song workshop in which student balladmakers and singers could learn their craft, swap songs and extend their knowledge of the traditional music of Scotland and other countries”. Subsequent presidents were voted in – formally and accountably in the beginning, and on a less rigorous basis in latter years.

From Hamish’s book “Alias MacAlias” we know that this first official meeting was held in the SRC Hall, Old College, and that the following meeting was ‘themed’ with Love Songs, the next with North-American Folk-songs, and the fourth was a public ceilidh with Hamish’s colleague, Calum MacLean, as MC.

After this the official records slip into obscurity as Hamish and his colleagues retreated in involvement (although still often attended) and the student members took over, each president influencing the atmosphere with his or her own musical preferences and the society taking its cues from the current fashions in the folk world. FolkSoc’s early meetings were quite intimate and like traditional ceilidhs, with maybe a dozen or so performers. But they gradually built up until, by the mid-’60s, the membership stood at several hundred with a core of about 30 performers. The society was wealthy beyond its wildest dreams. Virtually all of the performers then were singers, as was the case at folk clubs across the country.

Due to the size of the membership, the Friday night meetings were run as a ‘disciplined concert’ in a big university-owned hall on the corner of Marshall Street, with the President responsible for deciding the running order of those who wished to perform, and occasionally booking professionals like Archie Fisher or ‘tradition bearers’ like Jimmy MacBeath and Willie Scott.

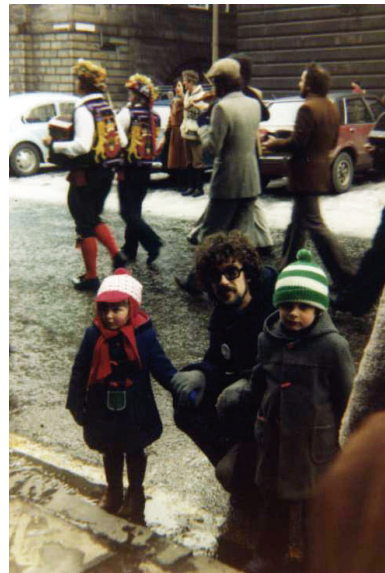
However, as this set-up was intimidating for some and couldn’t include everyone, a less formal session was established on another night, which encompassed singarounds, instrumental lessons and workshops. These sessions took place in a university-owned flat in Potterrow which was given over for the society’s use – the origins of the FolkSoc room which exists to this day, although now at 48A The Pleasance.

As it went from strength to strength, FolkSoc was able to put on popular events during the Edinburgh Fringe, and to visit and host other Scottish folk clubs. It was very well integrated with the broader Edinburgh folk scene, with local performers coming and going between different clubs.

One such club had met in the Crown Pub on Lothian Street, before the pub closed and the building was bought by the university. By the mid ‘60s FolkSoc had moved to this ex-pub location after Potterrow had been demolished and other venues had been tried and found lacking. Soon it began being referred to as the Crown Folk Club, and this name stuck even after it



had relocated again – this time to the characterful Lady Glenorchy’s Church crypt / basement, Drummond Street.



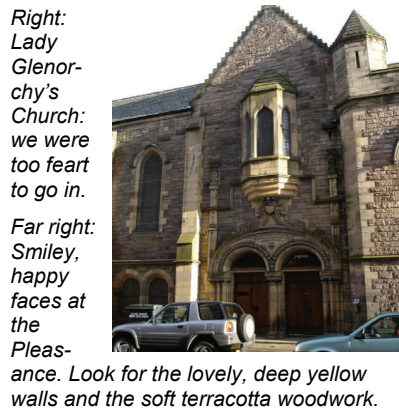
Left:  
Marching folk troop during 1984 Edinburgh Folk Festival.  
Right:  
Edgar Ashton & Bill Fulton, Thurso 1978.





Throughout the 70s, the infrastructure of FolkSoc was strengthened, and with the money brought in from a series of extremely successful concerts in the Fringe, The Crown (as it was still called) was able to book many big names (including Planxty, Billy Connolly and Jean Redpath – herself a former FolkSoc member) and became a much loved venue. In fact, it was far more of a community folk club at this point than a solely student body.

During the mid 80's a venue change (to rooms at The Pleasance) and a wholesale change in the team of organisers, led to the society becoming more student-focussed. This, in turn, brought an end to the regular concerts and the Fringe involvement. One constant during this time was Edgar Ashton - a stalwart of FolkSoc for 25 years. Edgar was not a musician himself, but he played the tape recorder to great effect. He recorded a huge number of the FolkSoc gatherings over the years, and made comprehensive lists of what was played or sung each night. On his death "The Edgar Ashton Collection" was given over to The School of Scottish Studies.



Right: Lady Glenorchy's Church: we were too feart to go in. Far right: Smiley, happy faces at the Pleasance. Look for the lovely, deep yellow walls and the soft terracotta woodwork.



FolkSoc during the 1990's became more about tunes than songs. This reflected a general trend in Scottish folk music, with the young artists and bands of the time concentrating on instrumental music. Singer Scott Gardiner recalls his introduction to FolkSoc: "all we sung in the first two hours was a verse and a half of the Welly Boot Song, I wasna sure if my £2 (membership fee) had been well spent." This changed over time and in 2008 there is typically a 60/40 song/tune balance.

Throughout the 50 years FolkSoc has travelled to participate in musical events over the country. The '60s alliances with Dunfermline and St Andrews Folk Clubs, foreran the recent repeated trips to Penicuik and South Shields. '70s expeditions

Below left: Taking up valuable sun-bathing space on the ferry back from Orkney. Below right: FolkSoccers on some bales during 2008 weekend away. Spring barley straw, 4' x 4' net wrap.



to the Thurso Folk Festival draw eerie parallels with the now-traditional FolkSoc trip to the Orkney Folk Festival (every year since 2000).

Likewise the international makeup of FolkSoc has always been an important and distinguishing part. In the very early days, Dolly MacLennan remembers international nights in which Jeannie Robertson performed alongside a West Indian steel band, and Shetland singers danced the limbo. In 2008 roughly half of the members are Scottish, a quarter from the rest of the British Isles, and the remainder from other nations (mostly North America or continental Europe). For our 50<sup>th</sup> birthday party there are former members coming over from Denmark, Italy, Ireland and Norway to help us celebrate. The event will feature performers from across the eras of the club, with the concert divided into four sets: current members (FolkSoc New and Nearly New) those from the '90s (FolkSoc Used, But Not Neglected) a group from the '70's and '80's (FolkSoc Road Fund Tax Exempt) and FolkSoc "You Can Have It In Any Colour You Like As Long As It's Black" (from the late 50s and 60s).

Although FolkSoc's repertoire has changed and adapted with fashions and fads, one consistency has been how broad a definition of 'folk music' has been used. Throughout the last fifty years, FolkSoc has provided a stage for people to indulge their favourites, whether it be Gaelic waulking songs, jazz, Romanian drinking songs or bluegrass. Phil Taylor summed up the anything-goes attitude thus:

"If you think it's a folk song you can sing it. If we don't think it's a folk song we might not like it, but you can still sing it!"

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So that's the potted history of the society. Apologies for any misinterpretations on our part, or if we've no written it like you remember it. We'd like to thank the following FolkSoccers who gave up their time and their teabags to answer our questions: Casey Divine, Paul Murray, Kay Thomson, Ian & Gilly Hewitt, Dolina MacLennan, Bill Fulton, Donald & Joyce Gorman, Jim Closs, David Hamilton, Kit Patterson & Kat Jary, Phil Taylor.