

Chester Caledonian Association



Our History

1884

Chester Caledonian Association, one of the oldest Scottish societies in England, was founded by Mr Tom Beck and Mr Livingstone with the first meeting at The Old Nag's Head, Cocoa House, Foregate Street, Chester

1885

In February 1885, the Association elected its first President, Dr Alexander Hamilton. It opened its Spring Session with a meeting in The Odd-fellows Hall in Lower Bridge Street. In the early days, the Association was a literary and debating society and lectures were given on serious topics of the day.

1890

The Ram's Heid Snuff Box was presented to the Association by Mr Yerburch, the Member of Parliament for Chester in the late 1800's. After over a hundred years, the Ram's Heid was showing its age but in 1997, Professor Anderson (President 1996/97) organized a programme of rehabilitation including the provision of new ears.

Around this time, the association acquired the President's Jewel. It originally bore the Arms, which the Association used for many years. These Arms consisted of the shield of the City of Chester with the Royal Supporters and the Scots Royal Motto "*Nemo me impune lacessit*" (see later)

1900

By 1900, lectures and debates still figured in the syllabus but, in marked contrast two airgun competitions were arranged reflecting the prowess of members who had served in the Zulu and Boer Wars.

1920's & 1930's

Whist drives were popular. With the emergence of popular cinema, films were shown and lectures were illustrated by film.

The Statuette of Robert Burns on an oak plinth was presented to the Association by Mr. Thomas Keith-Hill usually known as Sandy Keith-Hill. He was president in 1926-27 and was a prominent member of the Association for many years. His younger son Allan was a heraldic expert who was responsible for the design of the badge and the large badge of the association (see later). Alan Keith-Hill was the President in 1959-60.

1957

Chester Caledonian Reel Club was formed at the Annual General Meeting.

Around 1957, Mr. Allan Keith-Hill, the heraldic expert mentioned earlier, was known to the Lyon Court. He pointed out the impropriety of using Arms without authorisation so he designed a badge to use in lieu of Arms. This badge still displays the City Shield but it is suspended from an oak tree. The St. Andrew's Cross is similarly displayed and the badge includes the Scot's thistle and the motto "*Keep Faith*". Mr. Keith-Hill arranged for the badge to replace the Arms on the President's Jewel.

At the same time, he designed the Large Badge of the Association which is exhibited at major functions. This was produced shortly after designing the Association's badge. He provided illustrations for publications on heraldry and his map of Caernarfonshire was published to mark the Investiture of the Prince of Wales at Caernarfon Castle. Like the Ram's Heid, the badge had become a little dilapidated over the years and Mr Ian Macdonald (President 1994-95) arranged for it to be repaired and renovated.

Alan Keith-Hill also drew the Arms of Robert Burns shown on the current Burns' Dinner menus.

1959

The then Duke of Hamilton, with the approval of the Lord Lyon, King of Arms, granted permission for the members of the Association and the Reel Club to wear the Hamilton tartan.

Around this time, the President's Wife's Cairngorm Brooch was purchased by Mr Tom Lea from Hamilton and Inches in George Street, Edinburgh. The original intention was that this very handsome Cairngorm would be worn by the Presidents' wife on a tartan sash.

1995

The Quaich (or Cuach) was presented to the Association by Mr Ian Scott, shortly before he left the Chester area to return to his native Aberdeenshire. Mr Scott was President from 1995 to 1996.

2004

The death of Tom Lea, who had been twice President and for 50 years, Secretary of the Association. In his memory, Paul Anderson composed a fiddle tune, "Tom Lea's Rant".

2009

An outstanding piper, Niall Rowantree, who had been a guest at a number of Burns' Dinners, volunteered to write a pipe tune to commemorate both the Association and the 250th birthday of Burns. The "Chester Caledonian Association Reel" was premiered and acclaimed at the Burns' Dinner.

2014

Paul Anderson is made an honorary member of the Association.

Dr Ian Gill retired as secretary after many years of sterling service.

The 50 cm high statue of William Wallace was offered to the Association in 2014 by a Mr Ted Goddard from Frankby, Mr David Murdoch was president and purchased the statue for the Association. Mr Goddard donated the money to an Autism Charity.

Links with Chester and the surrounding area

Dinners have provided an opportunity to re-affirm the good relationship which has always existed with the City of Chester. In fact Mr. Norman Ribbeck – the Association's President in 1958/59 – was a former Mayor of Chester. The inclusion at the President's table of the Lord Mayor, the Bishop of Chester and senior members of the Armed Forces has cemented these warm feelings of mutual respect. The bill of fare and the length of the toast list on the 19th century menu cards suggests that members then were even more robust than they are today!

Throughout its long life, the continuity of the membership has been a manifestation of the loyalty which the Association has enjoyed. Long-serving Secretaries, sons who have succeeded their fathers to the Presidency a generation later, members who count their years in the Association over the decades and members who trace their family involvement over several generations; all these provide a vitality which is enjoyed not only by the members but contributes to the City which is their home from home.

In this, it has been greatly helped by various migrations to the area. Bass built a large brewery at Runcorn and the Bank of Scotland established a considerable business presence in Chester. Both of these took large numbers of Scots to Chester and these together with many Scottish staff members from the University of Liverpool gave new vigour to the Association. The Medical and Veterinary Professions have been particularly active within the Association and have provided many Presidents.

Caledonian Events

Burns Night

From the beginning, the celebration of the life, poetry and songs of Robert Burns has always featured strongly in the annual programme. This continues to the present day.

The Caledonian Association Burns' Dinner remains a major event in our calendar and one of the most eagerly awaited occasions in Chester with tickets being at a premium.

The Association has been fortunate in having, over the years, many distinguished Scots to propose the principal toast at its annual Burns' Dinner. Our version of a Burns' Dinner is one of the best and most traditional in Britain and we now book speakers for the Immortal Memory 2 or 3 years ahead.

St. Andrew's Ball

This is the Association's formal dinner dance that is graced by the presence of the ladies. The Chester Caledonian Reel Club was founded in 1957 and originally the Ball was centred on *formal* Scottish Country Dancing although in recent years, there has been an emphasis on more *informal* dancing but still with a traditional Scottish band.

Ceilidh

The annual Ceilidh demonstrates the tremendous depth of talent within the Association and its friends. In Lalands, Doric and Gaelic, with pipes, fiddle, clarsach, piano and voice we enjoy every facet of Scots poetry, song, music, story and dancing.

Men's supper

The Men's Supper retains a little of the educational flavour favoured early in the Association's history but always with an element of relaxation. Recent presentations have covered an eclectic variety of topics ranging from the distilleries in Scotland, real ale brewing to Chester Football Club. In 2014 the debate format was introduced to coincide with the Scottish Independence Referendum

Other activities

More recent activities that have been introduced include a Family Day at Chester Races and a Presentation Night when members, their partners and guests gather together to hear an eminent speaker.

Members can join the golfing group that competes for the President's Challenge Cup.

The Association is a member of The Lancashire and Cheshire Federation of Scottish Societies and for a number of years was Tug-of-War champion at the Blackpool Highland Games. The repetition of such prowess awaits the arrival of a younger team!

The successes of the events arranged by the Association has allowed it to become a significant supporter of both local and Scottish charities and in recent years it has donated thousands of pounds to nominated charities.

Although membership of the Association was originally confined to Scotsmen or men of Scottish descent, nowadays, the only criterion to join Chester Caledonian Association is an interest in Scotland. You don't even have to like whisky.

The Hamilton Tartan:

In the 1950's, there was an increase in the number of members of the Association and of the Reel Club who wished to wear the kilt and, for the benefit of those without a tartan of their own, the Association considered adopting a tartan.

The Lord Lyon, King of Arms was approached through Andersons, the Edinburgh kilt makers. With the approval of the Lord Lyon, an approach was made to the then Duke of Hamilton who gave permission for members of the Association and the Reel Club to wear the Hamilton tartan. This tartan was chosen because the first President of the Association was Dr A Hamilton. There are red and green based sets of this tartan available.

The kilt is now widely worn at the Association's functions but the Secretary remembered a Burns' Dinner at which there was only one kilt wearer (a Mr. Milne), apart from the pipers. Some of the older Lowland members were rather disapproving of Highland dress and Mr Ian Clarke (who was a retired tax inspector) remarked to the Secretary that "Burns didn't wear a kilt" to which the reply was "he didn't wear a dinner jacket either".

Mr Clarke seemed thrown in some ways but he was a splendid Scot of the old school. In the years following the Second World War, Tom Lea was privileged to know many members of great character, some of whom were veterans of the First World War. Although the kilt is fine in most circumstances, they had found it ill-suited to the trenches.