

# **Trades House of Glasgow History of the Robert Burns Festival 2012-2022**

To cherish the memory of the poet Robert Burns (25<sup>th</sup> January 1759 to 26<sup>th</sup> July 1796) and encourage an interest in his writings and the Scots language and literature, a number of Burns Clubs have been formed since the bard's death. In 2011 there were four significant Burns Clubs within the City of Glasgow – the Bridgeton Burns Club formed in 1870, the Glasgow Haggis Club formed in 1872, the Royalty Burns Club formed in 1882 and the Sandyford Burns Club formed in 1893.

The first book, the “Kilmarnock Edition,” of the works of Robert Burns had been published by John Wilson in Kilmarnock in 1786 and the Kilmarnock Burns Club had been formed in 1808. Having been President of the Greenock Burns Club in 1843, a wealthy newspaper proprietor, Colin Rae Brown, went to London in 1863 where he formed the London Burns Club in 1868. A statue of Robert Burns having been erected in London in 1884 he successfully argued that the London club, of which he was President, should be given the prestigious position of being No.1 on the roll of Burns Clubs affiliated to the Robert Burns World Federation (RBWF) when it was formed in 1885 in Kilmarnock. However, when the RBWF roll was first announced in 1886 the reader started with “Kilmarnock Burns Club No.0, London Burns Club No.1...” and the position has not changed since. There are also District Burns Associations throughout Scotland and around the world most prominent in North America and Australasia. The Glasgow Clubs are all affiliated to the RBWF with Bridgeton Burns Club as No.49, Glasgow Haggis Burns Club as No.33, Royalty Burns Club as No. 9 and the Sandyford Burns Club as No. 68.

There was only one significant annual Robert Burns Schools' Competition within the City of Glasgow, which had been run for over a hundred years by the Bridgeton Burns Club, albeit restricted to state schools in the east end of the city and later the East Glasgow Music School. Three Past Presidents of the Bridgeton Burns Club, Bryan McKirgan, Bob McDonald and Jack Steele, had been unsuccessful at different times in getting Board approval to widen participation in the competition to schools elsewhere in the city and, more particularly, to afford the winning children an opportunity to enter the National Burns Competition run by the RBWF. Neither the Bridgeton Burns Club nor the Glasgow and District Burns Association had ever shown any enthusiasm for putting forward participants in the National Competition.

The annual RBWF National Schools' Competition is held in a different location within Scotland each year with sections covering piping, recitation, singing and instrumental. Prizes are awarded for the 1<sup>st</sup>, 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> places in each section for Primary Pupils in P4/5 and P6/7 and for Secondary Pupils in S1/2, S3/4 and S5/6. There are also awards for the Overall Best Performer in each section and for the Overall Best Team in each section and in the competition overall, based on the district entries. The four overall best performers then compete for the coveted title of Burnsian of the Year. Competition entries would normally be submitted by the District Burns Association but could be submitted directly where there is no association interest. These entries would be annotated by the RBWF under the district association pertinent to the source of the application.

## Festival Beginnings

In the spring of 2011 Bob McDonald, travelling on the train back to Glasgow after attending the schools' competition at the Edinburgh and District Burns Association, again thought of the need for a Glasgow competition where winning participants might compete in the National Competition. Bob approached Jack Steele, who was then Late Collector of the Trades House of Glasgow, with the idea of running a Burns competition in the Trades House open to all children within the city, both state and public schools, with the opportunity to participate in the National Competition. Jack Steele was enthusiastic and both Bob and Jack met with Ian Paterson, Clerk to the Trades House, on 27<sup>th</sup> April 2011 to discuss the addition of a Burns Competition to the existing series of School Competitions within the Trades House calendar - School Craft for secondary schools, where pupils would manufacture an item in wood, metal or plastic, and Citizenship for primary schools. Ian Paterson agreed with the concept provided the competition and subsequent prizegiving concert did not entail any cost for Trades House or input from the office staff. Diary dates were set as 18<sup>th</sup> February 2012 for the competition and 27<sup>th</sup> February 2012 for the prizegiving concert.

At the time Bob McDonald was Secretary to the Glasgow and District Burns Association and Bob had proposed that they be invited to assist with the running of the Trades House competition with due recognition being given to the Glasgow and District Burns Association (GDBA). Bob suggested that the event be called a 'Robert Burns Festival,' similar to the Glasgow Music Festival, to avoid the term competition, which he thought was disliked by school teachers. The meeting of the GDBA on 5<sup>th</sup> July 2011 approved the proposals and Bob McDonald and George Anderson were tasked with the organisation of the event.

Letters were sent to Primary Headteachers by the Trades House, signed by Jack as Deacon Convener Nominated, inviting participation from Primary 6/7 pupils. Not knowing what the response would be it had been decided to limit the opportunity to participate in the competition's first year. Participants were given the option of performing a 'recitation,' a 'song,' or an 'instrumental' piece of their own choice on the condition that it was a work by Robert Burns. Entrants were given the opportunity to compete in more than one section. The winner in each category would receive a framed certificate and a gold medal along with a pewter quaich to be kept by the school for a year. The second and third prize winners were given framed certificates. As the competition was to be held on a Saturday, parental consent and travel supervision were deemed important. Copies of a letter to be sent from the Headteacher to the parent of participating children were provided together with a Parental Consent Form. All entries were to be sent to the home of Bob McDonald as Secretary of the GDBA. It happened that no entries were received from the private sector due to them having a school holiday week at the time of the competition. In the end there were 50 participants – 26 verse speaking and 24 singing and instrumental - in what would be the first Robert Burns Festival, albeit restricted to Primary 6/7.

When Jack Steele assumed the office of Deacon Convener in October 2011, the Trustees of the Trades House representing the fourteen individual crafts were updated on the proposals for the Burns Festival and invited to give their support financially or by way of serving as stewards on the day. Donations totalling £1,600 were received from seven crafts, to which was added a donation of £1,200 from the H. Lumsden Trust, managed by the Trades House for educational purposes. Large pewter quaichs were purchased for each competition section and appropriately engraved. These, together with silver gilt medals for the winners, cost £771. The overall cost of running the competition was £2,862 including £1,200 for hall hire, £616 for security, and £175

for the Trades House photographer, who made a photographic record of the competition prizewinners at the Festival Concert.

Bob McDonald organised adjudicators – George and Inez Anderson (Recitation), Hugh O'Rourke (Singing) and Kerry Burley (Instrumental). An invitation was extended to RBWF President, Jim Shields, the RBWF Schools' Convener, Isa Handley, and GDBA President, Jim Slater, to attend the competition. They were also invited to the Festival Concert when the first, second and third place winners in each section performed and the award presentations were made. For additional entertainment at the first concert Kerry Burley sang four songs accompanied by Hugh O'Rourke. The Deacon Convener, Jack Steele, welcomed the pupils and guests to the concert and his wife, Anne, presented the various awards – a format that would continue in future years. Likewise, Bob McDonald acted as Master of Ceremonies and Jack Steele gave the Vote of Thanks at all the concerts over the period of this history. On this occasion the visitors to the Trades Hall were invited to a guided tour of the building under the guidance of Deacon of the Weavers, Charles Newlands, also a Past President of the Bridgeton Burns Club. The winners were invited to participate in the National Schools' Competition organised by the World Federation. Here, a fourth place in the instrumental section was awarded to one of the entrants from the Trades House Festival.

Due to a misunderstanding the Trades House Robert Burns Festival had been promoted on the day as a GDBA event sponsored by the Trades House. Deacon Convener Jack Steele was concerned that there was no back-up committee within the GDBA to take on the organisation of future events without the services of Bob McDonald, who had resigned as Secretary of the GDBA. Jack proposed that the Trades House should organise the event on its own and Bob, who was a member of the Incorporation of Wrights and the Incorporation of Tailors, agreed. The proposal was presented to the Meeting of Trades House held on 26<sup>th</sup> September 2012 and approved with the Robert Burns Festival thereafter having the standing of an annual Trades House event. Bob McDonald was appointed Coordinator of the Festival Committee.

While the 2012 festival had received £1,600 in sponsorship from the fourteen Crafts within the Trades House, many saw this as a "one-off" with no guarantee of further sponsorship in future years. The Crafts already provided £5,300 annual sponsorship for the School Craft and School Citizenship competitions run by Trades House. It was decided to seek corporate sponsorship for future events and Jack Steele approached Brewin Dolphin, who provided £1,000 for the 2013 event through the auspices of Divisional Director Angus Kerr, a Past Deacon of the Incorporation of Wrights. As committee Treasurer, Bruce Reidford undertook to see if Tunnock's would sponsor the winner's medals, which they did. Bob McDonald also secured the support of Glasgow Kelvin College to fund all photocopying, which they continued to do in successive years.

The first meeting of the new Trades House Robert Burns Festival Committee was held on 1st October 2012 in the Deacon Convener's room. The new committee comprised Bob McDonald as Coordinator, Deacon Convener Jack Steele as Secretary, Ex Deacon Anne Steele, Late Collector Bruce Reidford, Dr Kirsteen McCue (Centre for Robert Burns Studies, Glasgow University), Dorothy Gunnee (Head of Instrumental Teaching, Glasgow City Council Education Services) and Tommy Fowler (Composer). Given the Trades House charge of £1,713 for letting and security for the festival (compared with £450 for the School Craft Competition and £540 for the School Citizenship Competition) it was decided for 2013 to hold the competition element in the

Renfield St. Stephen's Church Centre, 260 Bath Street, where three sizeable areas including the hire of two pianos cost only £280. Here the different locations also provided the potential for noiseless inter-action between the different sections of the competition. The date for the competition was amended to Saturday 23<sup>rd</sup> March 2013 and for the concert in Trades Hall to Monday 15<sup>th</sup> April 2013. It had been decided to again limit participation to Primary 6/7 with the numbers taking part falling off to 36 overall – 17 for verse, 13 for singing and 4 for musical instrument. The High School of Glasgow was the only non-state school participating, with a focus on the instrumental section. The adjudicators were Margaret Tomlinson (Verse), Dorothy Gunnee (Singing) and Tommy Fowler (Musical Instrument). The GDBA and RBWF were represented at both events and winners were selected to go forward to the RBWF competition in Dunfermline. Feedback from the Festival indicated that teachers and participants would prefer if the competition were held in the Trades Hall. John Gilchrist had been appointed as Chief Executive and Clerk in Trades House and the hall hire charges were thankfully reduced from the previously charged £1,816 to £500 and would remain at this level for successive years.

## **School Questionnaire**

With the success of the first two Robert Burns Festivals the committee circulated a questionnaire to past and potential schools participating in the event to ascertain when the most appropriate time was to hold the festival – during or after the school day or on a Saturday, and in which month, January or February being preferred. Bob McDonald, Dorothy Gunnee and Tommy Fowler also met with Margaret McKinlay, Glasgow Education Services Quality Improvement Officer (Literature and Education) in the City Chambers, who promised her support. It was decided that future competitions should be held on a Friday late in January commencing at 4pm. with the concert on the second Monday after the competition. It was also decided to open up the competition to Primary 4/5 pupils, which entailed the production of three additional quaichs for section winners. At the Festival Committee meeting on 16<sup>th</sup> December 2013 the competition date was set as Thursday 23<sup>rd</sup> January 2014 and the concert on Monday 3<sup>rd</sup> February 2014, both in the Trades Hall. The change to a Thursday was to allow the commercial let of the halls on a Friday. Brewin Dolphin donated £200 in sponsorship while Bruce Reidford indicated that there was a surplus from the 2013 event of £1,000 so no further sponsorship was necessary, although Tunnock's again paid the invoice for the medals and engraving which was gratefully received.

## **2014**

The 2014 event saw the same number of P6/7 pupils taking part at 36 – 15 verse, 13 singing and 8 instrumental – with 23 taking part in the P4/5 section – 12 verse, 6 singing and 5 instrumental. At the competition all the participants, teachers and parents would assemble in the Grand Hall to be given a word of welcome by the Deacon Convener before proceeding to the various competition rooms. The President and Schools' Convener from the RBWF attended and selected winners took part in the National Competition where a silver medal was awarded to Amelia Neilson for 2<sup>nd</sup> place in the P6/7 instrumental section.

In October 2014 Bob McDonald, then aged 80, expressed a wish to retire from his role as Coordinator after the 2015 event. Jack Steele wrote to the Deacon Convener, Hamish Brodie, and the Platform of the Trades House on 28<sup>th</sup> October 2014 incorporating a report on the success of the Festival requesting its circulation to the members of the House with a view to a replacement Coordinator being found, also additional committee members, from interested craft members. Late Deacon Iris

Gibson might have become Coordinator but had just accepted the role of Coordinator of the Schools' Craft Competition. With no replacement Coordinator forthcoming, Bob McDonald agreed to continue in the role of Coordinator with additional support being provided, in particular from Dorothy Gunnee, so that Bob no longer had to collate all the entries. Additional support was also to be provided by the Trades House staff in the promotion of the event. By this time Dr Kirsteen McCue, who had been presenting apologies since the first meeting, dropped off the committee. Ex Deacons Alastair Campbell and David McMillan volunteered to serve as stewards at the Festival. Other stewards would be found with one to assist the adjudicator and one to man the door to ensure that performances were not disturbed.

## 2015

For the 2015 event Jack Steele wrote to Alasdair Ronald, Divisional Director of Brewin Dolphin and a member of the Coopers, seeking sponsorship to be rewarded with the promise of £500. With Margaret McKinlay of Education Services continuing her support a Burns Festival entry pack was circulated to all schools with the competition programmed for Thursday 29<sup>th</sup> January 2015, the Friday not being available, and the concert for Monday 2<sup>nd</sup> February 2015. For the first time the competition was extended to Secondary Pupils from S1 to S6, with 6 entries for instrumental, 15 for singing and 2 for verse. The number of Secondary pupils taking part were anticipated to be low though they could be subdivided in future years should this change. The total entries rose from 59 the previous year to 116 with 8 Primary Schools and 3 Secondary Schools taking part. Additional quaichs were purchased for the three sections for Secondary School entrants which were paid for by Tunnock's along with the medals for all the winners.

Before the event even took place the Committee were delighted to congratulate Dorothy Gunnee for her award of an MBE in the 2015 New Year Honours for 'Services to Community Music and Young People in Glasgow.' Contributing to the award was Dorothy's work with the East Glasgow Music School and the Glasgow Music Festival, also with Schools' and Youth Orchestras and the founding and management of the Glasgow Symphony Orchestra.

For the 2015 Festival competition the reception desk was manned by Anne Steele assisted by Alison Dick and the total number taking part was 116 split as follows: 31 from P4/5, 62 from P6/7 and 23 from S1-S6 with the numbers in each competition section similar to previous years. The overall number taking part was an indication of the growing popularity of the event. It was decided to utilize all the rooms available in the building, including the North and South Galleries and even the small meeting room on the second floor for verse speaking. The verse adjudicators were Barbara Williamson and Pat McCowan, for singing Dorothy Gunnee and Beryl Fisher, and for instrumental Tommy Fowler. Gordon Gunnee acted as accompanist as required – a role faithfully performed at all competitions. Of the 25 prizewinners 17 were asked to perform at the concert with little repetition of the 'own choice' pieces being performed.

In 2015 the RBWF President was Jim Thomson, who attended the Trades House event. With the National Schools' Competition being held that year in Hutchesons' Grammar School the Trades House Festival adjudicators Dorothy Gunnee, Barbara Williamson and Tommy Fowler were invited to serve as adjudicators at the National Competition, with 100 taking part in the Secondary pupils Competition and 140 in the Primary Competition. This was an excellent year for the Trades House participants with Molly Forrester winning the S3/4 section in the national singing competition and Ellie

Forrester coming 2<sup>nd</sup> in the S1/2 section. Leo Paterson was 3<sup>rd</sup> in P4/5 recitation. On the instrumental side Helen Downie was 2<sup>nd</sup> in P6/7 and Zixuan Yao 3<sup>rd</sup> in P4/5.

Ex Deacon Ian Gray and Late Deacon Iris Gibson were welcomed as new members of the Festival Committee at its meeting on 17<sup>th</sup> June 2015. Bob McDonald reported that Margaret McKinlay of the Glasgow City Council Education Services, who had been of great assistance in the circulation of information on the Trades House Festivals, was retiring in June 2015. Thankfully, her successor, David Byrne, assured the Trades House of his continuing support. Anne Steele stepped down from the committee and was thanked for her services. While the committee had been concerned about the numbers in the Trades House event, it was noted that the competition lasted two hours whereas adjudicators could work for up to three hours. This meant that additional entries could be accommodated and were to be encouraged.

A review of the accommodation for the event determined that the small meeting room on the second floor was unsuitable as only the participant and adjudicator could be accommodated. For 2016 the two sides of the partitioned Reception Room on the ground floor were to be used. Ian Gray took on the task of redesigning the publicity flyer to ease the workload in the Trades House office. Jack Steele again wrote to Alasdair Ronald and the Festival received a further £500 sponsorship from Brewin Dolphin, although this was to be the last year.

## **2016**

At the December committee meeting the adjudicators for the 2016 event were confirmed as follows: Verse – Pat McKenzie, Barbara Williamson, Pat McCowan and Maureen Langford; Singing – Dorothy Gunnee and Beryl Fisher; Instrumental – Tommy Fowler. Given the numbers in each section to be adjudicated, the accommodation in the Trades Hall was used as follows: The North Gallery for P4/5 Verse and the South Gallery for P6/7 Singing. The two halves of the Reception Room were used for P6/7 and S1/S6 Verse. The Saloon was used for P4/5 & S1/S6 Singing and the Grand Hall for all Instrumental performances.

In the earlier years Bob McDonald would accept late entries so that schools and the pupils were not disappointed. However, as the competition numbers increased it became more important to complete the organisation well before the date of the competition. Even though the competition was being held in late January entries were requested by 5<sup>th</sup> November. Dorothy Gunnee, who had taken over the coordination of entries from Bob McDonald, needed to find a period in her diary that did not impact on her other commitments to the Glasgow Music Festival where she also coordinated the entries. The new closing date was not achieved in the first year of asking but the schools would respond as requested once the condition became more rigidly enforced. The overall level of participation remained strong at 107 with the reduced number being down to a reduced entry from the Secondary Schools from 23 to 17. The 2016 competition and concert were attended by Deacon Convener Ruth Maltman and Collector Alistair Dorward together with Peter Hughes, President of the RBWF, and Enez Anderson representing the GDBA. This year none of the Burns Festival winners were successful in the RBWF competition.

## **Year Plan**

In the run up to the 2016 competition the whole organisation of the Competition was taken to a new level of sophistication to ensure the smooth running of the event in future years. Dorothy Gunnee produced a 'Year Plan' for the Festival itemising the

activities that need to be covered throughout the year and the persons responsible. Dorothy also produced a 'Guide for Adjudicators' and a sheet covering all 'Essential information for teachers and parents' - from what to bring and what would happen on the day. With the help of Iris Gibson, who had taken on the role of organising all stewarding, a list of all 'Stewarding Duties' was also produced. These guidance notes would serve the competition in ensuing years albeit minor changes might be introduced where necessary.

The Year Plan began in February, immediately after the concert, when the dates for the following year were to be put in place. In March, adjudicators and "official" accompanists were appointed at no fee and Trades House was requested to organise piano tuning prior to the next year's competition. In April, the flyer was amended and proof-read and the distribution list updated. The flyer, syllabus and entry forms were to be circulated in August and any sponsorship confirmed. With the closing date of 5<sup>th</sup> November entries were collated that month and any anomalies rectified and a timetable for the competition and concert put in place. Also, during November, the accompanists were to be confirmed, potential stewards contacted and performance certificates organised. Formal invitations were to be sent by the Festival Coordinator to the Presidents of the RBWF and GDBA and the Deacon Convener and Collector of Trades House to attend the competition and concert, while the Secretary would similarly invite the Festival Sponsors. In December, the required number of stewards were appointed and issued with instructions. In January, any sponsors were provided with publicity material and invited to attend the concert. All room arrangements were confirmed with Trades House, and trophy holders were reminded to return these on the day of the competition. The first, second and third prizewinners in each class were invited to attend the Prizegiving Concert where the first and second would give a rendition of their competition piece. Into February, after the competition and before the concert, the trophies and winners' medals were engraved and Trades House certificates finalised and framed ready for the concert presentation. The programme for the concert was also finalised and printed. Immediately after the concert letters of thanks were to be sent to the performers, stewards, hall keepers, adjudicators, accompanists and the sponsors.

The annual cost of running the Burns Festival had settled at around £1,150 each year. With the loss of sponsorship by Brewin Dolphin alternative funding arrangements were necessary. For the 2016 event Tunnock's provided £567 and the Lumsden Trust £500 with a similar amount in 2017. Iris Gibson was now able to enlist sufficient stewards with a training session being given in advance for any that had not been previously involved in the competition. Iris also obtained feedback from the stewards after the event and presented this in a report to the next committee meeting for consideration. Jackie Mullen from the Trades House office was now supporting the committee meetings and taking the minutes, a role she would undertake in successive years. Tommy Fowler was not available in 2016 and was replaced by Andrew Morris as the instrumental adjudicator. Ruth Maltman, the first lady to hold the office of Deacon Convener, and RBWF President Peter Hughes and Schools Convener Isa Handley faithfully supported the Festival and concert. Although several entered there were no Trades House winners in the 2016 RBWF Schools' Competition.

## **2017**

For the 2017 Festival it was decided that competitors could only compete in one aspect of the competition as it was no longer practical to coordinate participation in different aspects. This and the enforcement of the entry date led to the number of entries dropping from 107 to 50 with only 4 Primary and 1 Secondary School taking part. This

was a one-year blip as the following year the entries rose to their highest with 137 entries from 10 Primary and 4 Secondary Schools. The Festival and Concert were still successful and supported by Deacon Convener Keith Brown, whose wife Rita presented the prizes, and by RWBF President Bobby Kane. Emily Gill P6/7 went on to win 3<sup>rd</sup> prize in the instrumental section of the 2017 National Schools' Competition.

### **Jean Armour Trust**

Bob McDonald suggested that an approach be made to the Jean Armour Trust for £700 to meet the balance of the costs of running the Festival in 2018. The Jean Armour Burns Trust had been constituted from the proceeds, circa £15m, of the sale of the retirement cottages in Mauchline to East Ayrshire Council with an annual return of around £0.5m. The history of the cottages is worth noting. The house in Mauchline, where Jean Armour and Robert Burns started married life together, had been acquired in 1915 and named Burns House with the rooms being used to provide a dwelling for lady residents of restricted income. When no longer fit for purpose a row of cottages known as the 'Jean Armour Burns Houses' were built by Glasgow and District Burns Association and opened in 1959, the bicentenary year of the birth of Burns, funded largely, if not wholly, by the Glasgow area Burns Clubs. The Trades House funding application to the Jean Armour Trust was granted for one year only with the accompanying letter suggesting that the Trades House should be able to find a replacement sponsor for future years. Later, however, Trustee George Anderson suggested that it would be appropriate for the Trades House to make further application given the increasing level of the Trust funds and the small number of scale of the requests received.

Bruce Reidford had retired as Finance Director at Tunnock's in 2017 and therefore no request for support from Tunnock's was made for the 2018 festival. To make up the financial shortfall of the Burns Festival in 2018, £500 was awarded from the new St Andrew's Fund managed by the Trades House. This trust had been established from the remaining funds of the St Andrews Society in Glasgow, which had at the time been disbanded.

### **2018**

In 2018 the Festival ran smoothly with Maggie Milton taking the second adjudicator slot for P6/7 singing. Betty McKenzie also came on board to take the number of verse adjudicators to five. The newly refurbished Adam Room on the ground floor was split and the lower half used for verse speaking and the upper half for P6/7 singing using an electronic piano for the accompaniment. Guests welcomed to the 2018 Concert by Deacon Convener Alistair Dorward, included a strong deputation from the World Federation with President Ian McIntyre, Bill Nolan, SVP, Brian Goldie JVP and Isa Hanley the Schools' Convener. Enez Anderson represented the GDBA and George Anderson and Robin Stevenson represented the Jean Armour Trust. 2018 was the most successful year so far for those taking part in the RBWF National Schools' Competition. Maya Khaund Marshall was 1<sup>st</sup> in the P4/5 instrumental and Cameron Davis 2<sup>nd</sup> in the P6/7 Instrumental and the Glasgow participants won the Overall Winning Instrumental Team. Also, Eklarya Singh was 1<sup>st</sup> in the P6/7 Recitation and was voted the Overall Best Verse Speaker.



## **Trades House Burns Supper**

Jack Steele and Bob McDonald aspired to have a couple of winners from the Burns Festival take part in the annual Trades House Burns Supper. This event had previously been organised by the Trades House Lodge before it became a Trades House event organised by the Late Collector of the Trades. It was hoped the performance of festival winners would give a wider recognition of the success and value of the Burns Festival in the Trades House calendar. However, for two years the suggestion was rejected as impractical. When Tom McNally became Late Collector in 2017-18, he took a different view and the best performers in each discipline from the recent past Festival were invited to perform at the Trades House Burns Supper in 2018 to much acclaim. It was decided that Trades House Festival winners would be invited to perform in subsequent years.

### **2019**

To replace the one-off contribution from the Jean Armour Trust, the Trades House 2019 Festival was grateful for a contribution of £600 from Tunnock's. Other costs were again met by the Lumsden Trust. In 2019 there were 139 performers from 16 schools taking part, including 4 additional Primary schools, although the overall entry only increased by 2. Diana Cuthbertson and Paddy Burnett replaced Barbara Williamson for verse speaking and Marie Louise O'Neill replaced Maggie Milton in singing. An additional accompanist was called for - a slot filled by Michelle McMonagle. It was decided to dispense with the welcome speech at the start of the Festival given the increasing numbers to be accommodated. Instead, it was decided to send participants direct to their rooms, where they would be visited by the Deacon Convener Alistair Dorward and the VIPs attending the event. The reception for participants was moved from the Grand Hall to the Adam Room on the ground floor and colour coded stickers were introduced to identify the performers in each part of the competition. Brian Goldie SVP represented the RBWF and Enez Anderson the GDBA. Later in 2019 Janet Pierotti, Aileen Brodie and Brian Evans swelled the ranks of the committee.

2019 was also the most successful year for those taking part in the RBWF Schools' Competition held in Irvine Royal Academy on 23<sup>rd</sup> March. Maya Khand Marshall was 2<sup>nd</sup> in the P6/7 Instrumental section with Sarah Campbell coming 2<sup>nd</sup> in the P4/5 Singing competition and Landi Weng 1<sup>st</sup> in the P6/7 Singing competition. Liam Kearney was 1<sup>st</sup> in the S1/2 Recitation and Abbie Mochrie 3<sup>rd</sup> in the S3/4 Recitation. Liam Kearney was also declared the Overall Best Verse Speaker. As in previous years the winners of the four sections - piping, recitation, singing and instrumental - competed against each other for the accolade of Burnsian of the Year. The accolade went to Liam Kearney and he received his award from the President of the Robert Burns World Federation, Bill Nolan. The Schools' Competition Convener was Lesley McDonald and Bob McDonald served from 2010 as a member of the national competition committee resigning in 2021.



From the left: RWBF President Bill Nolan, Lelsey McDonald, Liam Kearney and Bob McDonald

Liam Kearney had been a regular competitor at the Trades House Festival since 2015 encouraged by his teacher Mrs Liz Boville at St Monica's Primary School in Milton before he went to St Aloysius' College where he became the RBWF 'Burnsian of the Year' at the age of 13. With his new found passion for Robert Burns Liam and others from the Festival were invited to perform at various events including the Trades House Burns Supper, the Scottish Food Trade Association Annual Dinner and the Spirit Aero Systems Charity Burns Supper at Ayr Race Course.

In May 2019 Jack Steele wrote to Boyd Tunnock seeking sponsorship of £1,000 for the 2020 Festival and was rewarded with a promise of an annual £1,000 in support of the Trades House Burns Festival going forward. This removed the annual requirement to seek sponsorship and was a great boost for the Trades House Burns Festival, much appreciated and gratefully acknowledged. The committee welcomed Aileen Brodie to its ranks and in June 2019, Jack Steele had the pleasure of writing on behalf of the committee to congratulate Sir Boyd Tunnock on the award of a knighthood by Her Majesty the Queen.

## 2020

The growing popularity of the Trades House Burns Festival was evidenced by a total of 215 participants from 17 schools for the 2020 Festival, the highest number ever. There were 144 for verse speaking, 56 for singing and 15 for the instrumental section. To cope with the larger number of verse speakers the competition was split into two sessions one between 1.30p.m. and 3p.m. for P6/7 verse speaking and one between 4.00p.m. and 5.30p.m. covering verse for P4/5 and S1-6 together with all the instrumental and singing entries. A third singing adjudicator was required, filled by Cathy Rafferty, and a fifth adjudicator for verse speaking filled by Jean O'Donnell. Again, the competition entrants were received in the Adam Room before being dispatched to the room allocated to their performance. Continuing the tradition of his predecessors Deacon Convener Bruce Reidford extended a warm welcome to those attending the Festival Concert on 24<sup>th</sup> February 2020 accompanied by Collector John McKnight, while the RBWF was represented by President Brian Goldie, SVP Marc Sherland, PP Peter Hughes and Schools' Convener Lesley McDonald with the GDBA again represented by Inez Anderson.



2020 Competition Prizewinners in Trades Hall with seated in the middle row from left to right: Bob McDonald, Peter Hughes, Inez Anderson, Lesley McDonald, John McKnight, Bruce Reidford, Anne Reidford, Brian Goldie, Marc R. Sherland, Jack Steele

An invitation was extended for Sir Boyd Tunnock and his wife Anne to visit the 2020 competition and attend the Festival Concert and, while he originally accepted through his PA, Marg Paterson, he was unable to attend at the end of the day. A separate invitation was extended to attend the Trades House Burns Supper but Sir Boyd and Lady Tunnock were not available. The winning schoolchildren together with the VIPs who attended the Prizegiving Concert are pictured below.

Regrettably, the RBWF National Schools' Competition had to be cancelled due to a world-wide Covid pandemic. In the UK, a three-month national lock down commenced on 23<sup>rd</sup> March 2020 with all but essential occupations being suspended and employees put on furlough. However, Trades House Burns Festival Committee meetings were still held as normal through the virtual means of Zoom communication on the web.

## 2021

Anticipating the pandemic to be over, arrangements for the 2021 Festival were announced with 14<sup>th</sup> January as the date for the competition and 22<sup>nd</sup> February as the date for the prizegiving concert. The committee had aspirations to build on the success of the 2020 Festival with Bob McDonald even hoping to add a competition for choirs. Although the pandemic had largely abated during the summer months, further restrictions on gatherings had to be introduced as a new 'Delta' strain of the pandemic spread once again from the autumn. It was realised that it would be impossible to hold the 2021 Festival as normal. Bob was adamant that we should not lose touch with the schools and, to keep the Festival alive for future years, it was decided to give the schools the opportunity to submit videos of individual children performing a work of Robert Burns for which a certificate would be awarded to each child to acknowledge their participation. It was decided, however, that the likely variation in the quality of these video submissions would make it unfair to determine who might be a winner. The National Robert Burns Schools' Competition for 2021 also had to be cancelled. To encourage children for the future certificates from the Federation were sent to participating children in recognition of their Trades House performances.

2021 was the tenth year of the Trades House Robert Burns Festival and there might have been a celebration to mark the success of the event in the Trades House calendar. It was a great credit to the organisation of the Burns Festival that the founding committee members were still actively involved with Bob McDonald still acting as overall coordinator of the competition assisted by Dorothy Gunnee and Jack Steele, in

whose year as Deacon Convener (2011-12) the first festival was held, continuing as Committee Secretary. Tommy Fowler's support as an adjudicator from the second year of the competition was also worthy of recognition. This was Tommy's last year on committee as he was retiring to live firth of Glasgow. There was no celebration to mark the tenth year, instead, the tenth year was to be remembered for the Covid19 pandemic and a failure to hold both the 2021 Trades House Festival in its normal format and the RBWF National Schools' Competition. While the committee was grateful that none of its members had succumbed to the pandemic, it noted with sadness the passing of committee member Ian Gray - not due to Covid but due to cancer for which he had been undergoing treatment for over a year.

## **2022**

Despite the impact of the pandemic, the Festival Committee remained positive and met in June 2021 with the hope that all would be well for the 2022 Festival which was arranged for 13<sup>th</sup> January 2022. The application forms for entries were distributed in August 2021. By this time everyone over the age of 50 had been vaccinated with older people soon to be given a third 'booster' vaccination. However, the impact of the pandemic was clear with fewer schools taking part and only one entry from the East Glasgow Music School which had been unable to function since March 2020 due to the pandemic. There was only 1 entry for singing and 5 for instrumental, although the number for verse speaking remained strong at 132.

The committee were again dismayed, however, when a third wave of the Covid19 Pandemic known as the 'Omicron' variant struck in November 2021. The number of infections from it were doubling every two to three days giving some concern about the number of people having to isolate for ten days after testing positive for covid impacting on the available work force. This variant was said to be less severe with significantly fewer requiring hospitalisation, if they had been vaccinated. Nevertheless, the impact of the numbers with the virus meant that government restrictions on indoor gatherings were reinforced. At a zoom committee meeting on 27<sup>th</sup> November the decision was taken to abandon the live festival competition for another year and revert to a virtual festival instead. Video performances were requested for assessment. The importance of rewarding the best performers was not lost and this was to be reviewed once the submissions had been adjudicated. Hopefully some stand out performances would seem fit to be recommended for the RBWF National Schools' Competition, assuming that would be able to go ahead in 2022.

With the extension of mass vaccination to children it was recorded by mid-January 2022 that 90% of people over the age of 12 had their first vaccine and 80% their second and 67% a third, or 'booster, vaccination. With the daily numbers affected with the Omicron variant having reached a peak, the government were able to reduce the period of isolation to seven days and to relax the imposed restrictions from 22 January, too late, however, for the Trades House Festival to be held as in past years. School education had been severely affected by the pandemic with mask wearing and periods of home learning, such that there was some catching up to do. All of these factors had already impacted on the entries for the proposed 2022 competition and it was now clear that it might take a few years to get back to the level of participation seen at the 2020 event when the future looked increasingly promising. Sadly, by this time, the decision had also been taken to cancel the RBWF National Schools' Competition which had been due to be held on 22<sup>nd</sup> March for the Secondary Competition and 23<sup>rd</sup> April for the Primary Competition with Beth Kerr as the new Schools' Convener for the competition.

The impact of the Covid19 Pandemic led to many people, particularly amongst the retired, taking a more cautious view about their own activities and it would take time for confidence to be restored. The traditional Burns Suppers had been forcibly cancelled in 2021 but would largely be held in 2022 albeit some had been postponed to February or March. Importantly, the Trades House Robert Burns Festival, despite the pandemic, had proven to be a success, encouraging school children across Glasgow to learn of the works of Robert Burns. More importantly, it gave them the opportunity to take part in an adjudicated performance and be duly rewarded, with the added opportunity for some to participate in the Robert Burns World Federation National Schools' Competition. It will assuredly go from strength to strength in years to come.

Jack Steele  
Ex Deacon Convener

23rd January 2022