

Jean Swanston

Atholl Clasp winner 2020

I was born and brought up in Leith before 'moving' to Edinburgh for several years before marrying and moving to Logierait where I've now stayed for over 45 years.

Because my mother couldn't dance, she was determined that her daughter would never feel the trauma of not being at ease in a dance hall! Therefore, on my 3rd birthday I was sent to dance classes, firstly Ballet, Tap and Highland for 5 years with Maureen McMahon (1946 World Juvenile Champion), then with Jeanette Jamieson for 3 years. Although I'm interested in all forms of dance, by the age of 11, Highland had become my focus.

By now my teacher was Cissie Tucker, one of the founding members of the Scottish Official Board of Highland Dancing, who along with her daughter Marjory Rowan, (SOBHD Director of Administration for many years) firmly instilled into all their pupils the importance of technique!

The next 17 years were spent doing Highland, firstly in the class alongside Marjory, then being taught by her at Windsor Street in Edinburgh where Celia Orr and I danced on polished brown linoleum. That really taught a dancer how to cope with slippery floors!

Highland Games has always been my first love and I competed for 41 seasons. Now I organise the dancing competitions at seven Highland Games in Perthshire. As a competitor I succeeded in winning many prizes and Championships which included the British, United Kingdom and All England Championships. In 1964 and 1968 I received the Adult Oscar, but the highlight of my competitive career was achieving runner-up in the Adult World Championship in 1970 and 1972.

I love teaching, and I'm fortunate to have a small Studio at our house. Approximately 40 dancers attend classes. I do have some adults who dance too including men from the Atholl Highlanders. This is great fun, and at the Annual Parade in 2019, I was so delighted to be made an Honorary Atholl Highlander. I wear my badge with pride.... but don't look for me on the parade ground LOL.

As a member of the Royal Scottish Official Board of Highland Dancing's world-wide judging panel I've judged not only most of the Championships held in Britain including the World Championships at Cowal Games, but also the US Championships, the Canadian Championships and the Australian Champion of Champions.

In November 2016 I was delighted and honoured to be elected Vice President of the RSOBHD. Then at the 2020 AGM (on Zoom!) I was again honoured by the Board membership when I was elected an Independent Member of the RSOBHD. "My cup runneth over."

At the end of the AGM the Chairman always presents the Atholl Clasp. Considering I have arranged the engraving of this very award yearly since 2000 and that I had already told the silversmith who I believed the recipient to be, you can understand how taken aback I was when my office door opened and there was Liz Douglas the Atholl Dancing Association chairperson along with my husband, John. I could not believe that I was the recipient of the Atholl Clasp. Once the shock abated I realise just how fortunate I am in the world of Highland Dancing, and I am proud to share this award with so many illustrious professionals from the past 20 years.