

## The Robert Burns Association of North America 2015 AGM & Conference

The Calgary Burns Club must be congratulated on hosting a most successful and enjoyable event. The weekend kicked off with the golf tournament on Friday morning and Ronnie O'Byrne again was the winner of the day.

The RBWF President Jim Thomson sent his apologies, as he was unable to travel due to recent heart surgery.

However, we had a strong representation from Scotland, with Jane Brown the immediate Past President, Alison Tait, the Federation CEO, Bill Dawson the Burns Chronicle Editor and a Past president, his wife Leslie, Willie Gibson and Professor Gerry Carruthers. Bill & Leslie were celebrating their 40<sup>th</sup> wedding anniversary.

While registration was underway in Friday afternoon, the directors met in the Lincolnshire Suite.

Later in the same suite a **wine reception was held for delegates.**

The evening took the form of a Ceilidh with 90 in attendance.

The delegates and guests gathered in the lobby of the Windsor Ballroom for cocktails and were ushered into the ballroom with a Grand March, led by Ron Pratt & Henry Cairney.

Following an excellent dinner we were entertained by Calgary Burns Club Singers, **The Calgary Fiddlers**, a group of teenage musicians and Dancers. The Calgary Club



had provided the material for the mini kilts worn by the girls, prior to their going on a major tour.

There were several individual contributions including a reprise of Jane & Willie's 'My love is like a Red Red Rose', followed by **Ron Platt's enactment of Holy Willie's prayer in appropriate costume.**



Following some **Ceilidh dancing**, the night was rounded off with a rousing Auld Lang Syne.

On Saturday Morning **the AGM** was held in a section

of the Windsor Ballroom and President Robert Boyd guided us through the business within an hour.



After lunch the conference commenced with the Jim Connor Memorial Quiz, moderated by Jim Cunningham.

Ronnie O'Byrne scored the highest to win the event closely challenged by Les Strachan & Bill Dawson.

We then were treated to 3 excellent seminars, Burns & Edinburgh by Ronnie O'Byrne, **The Publication of Tam O'Shanter**, by **Bill Dawson**, who researched hitherto unknown details of the events and has now put to rest many questions.



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The closing session by **Prof. Gerry Carruthers** explored the way Burns character and works had been manipulated by both sides in the independence debate, repeating what had been done before to bolster patriotism and recruitment in past wars.



In the evening we gathered for **cocktails in the lobby of the Windsor Ballroom**, then moved into the Ballroom where the M.C. Ian Denness guided us through the formal introductions, national anthems and welcoming address by the new Club President Paul Armstrong.

The formal Burns supper followed the tradition of the Calgary Burns Club in which each course is introduced by a 'remove'.

The haggis was paraded in, lead by the Pipe Major of the Calgary Police Pipe Band and the haggis was addressed by the youngest member of the club, **Jamie Osbourne**.

While we relaxed with our coffee, the Calgary Police Pipe Band & Dancers entertained us with traditional music and highland dance, taking us to the intermission.



When we returned the **Calgary Burns Club Singers** warmed us up with the Star of Robbie Burns and a couple of other songs which led us into the formal toasts. We were all surprised when after the toasts, we were advised that Alison Tait was leaving the post of Federation CEO and would not be replaced. She will be sorely missed!

The award for the golf tournament was presented to Ronnie O'Byrne, then **Elma**

**Connor presented Ronnie with the Jim Connor Memorial trophy.**

There was some hilarity as the quiz consolation prizes were awarded. Jim & Jean Cunningham entertained us with an amusing toast to the lassies and the reply, interpreting a 1950s article on what a wife's responsibilities were and how she should attend to her husband. The humour caught the spirit of the evening and spilled over into Sandy Paterson's Immortal Memory.

After recognizing Absent Friends, Maureen Hutchins and the Calgary Burns Club Singers sang the song 'Absent Friends'

The company formed a circle around the Ballroom and joined in a rousing Auld Lang Syne.

On Sunday Morning a large group gathered in the Lincolnshire Suite for a short ecumenical service led by individual RBANA member Rev. Debra Brewin-Wilson, who also led the singing of the hymns, set to familiar Burns' tunes, with her Clàrsach {Scottish Harp}.

We then took our leave, looking forward to the next conference in Dallas on April 22<sup>nd</sup> to 24<sup>th</sup> 2016.

The clubs participating this year were as follows:-

The Calgary Burns Club, Scheihallion Scottish Heritage Society, The Medicine Hat Burns Club, The Halton Peel Burns Club, The Robert Burns Society of Doon, The Winnipeg Robert Burns Club, and The Heather & Thistle Society of Houston  
Five Independent members, plus the 6 visitors from the UK.

