

The quick step to community spirit and healthy living

COMMENTARY

Liam Paterson

WHY is traditional dance in Scotland important?

When she was a child at Glamis Castle, the Queen Mother was taught Scottish dancing by James Neill of Forfar. She shared that experience with hundreds of young folk from castle to cottar house throughout Angus and Perthshire, where "Dancie" Neill taught. Learning to dance Scotland's traditional dances was a part of everyone's education.

Today, there is a danger that these traditions will be gradually lost if they are not passed on to our children.

This is one of the main concerns of the Scottish Traditions of Dance Trust, established in November 1995.

The foundation followed a series of Scottish Arts Council consultations held throughout Scotland, which highlighted the need for an organisation to promote and research all of the traditions.

In Scotland, at the start of the new millennium, there are many distinct traditions of

dancing - these include ceilidh, country, early, Hebridean, Highland, ladies' step, military, old time, Orkney, Shetland and step.

These traditions are an integral part of Scotland's cultural heritage, but are so often taken for granted. Why should these traditions of dance be valued?

At a social level, dance has an important role to play in that it helps bring communities together. This is particularly important at a time when community spirit and identity throughout the world are being eroded by the effects of mass media.

As more people spend leisure time at their home PC, it is good to remember that we can still communicate face-to-face.

Dance is not only enjoyable, it's also good for you. Encouraging the younger generation to dance their native dances has been very successful, and has proved to the trust that there is a definite and growing interest in our dance traditions.

● *Liam Paterson is co-ordinator of the Scottish Traditions of Dance Trust*

