Dances & Burns Suppers

I n addition to annual trips, many printing and papermaking firms held annual dinner dances. This was an occasion when the employer and the employee as well as important and influential customers celebrated the achievements of the preceding year. The annual dinner dance, traditionally held around Christmas, carried on well into the 1960s and 1970s.

Its place in the company's social calendar rose in importance as the tradition of annual trips declined in the late 1950s. Although clubs and societies within firms ran their own dances, the company annual dance often proved one of the few events of the year bringing together all parts of the firm. The programme of events usually followed a standard template of games, readings or theatrical performance followed by dancing to a live band.

And the dances were terrific! They used to have a dance, always at Christmas time in the Assembly Rooms in George Street.

Prior to the 1940s employers would often hold a concert or soiree in addition to the Annual dance. The soiree would often include a recitation and then a formal programme of musical performances. These events also featured dancing, which would start after the formal proceedings had finished, though employees had to pay for this portion of the evening's entertainment.

Many union and chapel events that took place within firms were organised through the local Secretary, the Father of the Chapel or a sub-committee. At R & R Clark in Edinburgh, the Case Chapel organised various outings for its members as well as the annual Burns Supper and Burns Supper Club Walk. Employees would meet at the Colinton Inn and walk the eight miles to Dalkeith, where they would then be treated to a traditional Burns Supper of 'Cock – A – Leekie soup and Haggis wi' the trimmings'.

And they used to play football on the way with a small tennis ball on a public road – all the way to Dalkeith in the middle of winter. They would think they were crazy now!

Such events did a great deal to foster a shared sense of community in the work space.