

# The Scottish Country Dance Teacher

## TAS Newsletter January 2016

Newsletter of the Teachers' Association Scotland (TAS)

TAS is an RSCDS affiliated group

[www.countrydanceteachersofscotland.org.uk](http://www.countrydanceteachersofscotland.org.uk)

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### From the Chairman

I'm writing this after spending a day hillwalking in the most dreich of conditions, but one always feels good afterwards. It's the same when I go dancing. Fortunately, it is always very pleasant with a warm friendly atmosphere and leaves one feeling really good afterwards. The RSCDS AGM Ball was one of these occasions and I thought the atmosphere was especially friendly and relaxed this year. The actual AGM itself was a rather drawn-out affair, especially regarding the rise in subscription charges. I cannot help but wonder what other association is quite as cheap as our Scottish Country Dancing? As someone very wisely said in conversation at one of our Dundee Branch dances, 'if there wasn't an RSCDS we'd have to invent one'. I think the most depressing thing is that so many people are prepared to moan about the actions, efficiency, new dances or whatever, yet when it came to the election of office bearers, there were many uncontested places. On a pleasanter note, preparations are well on the way for our next meeting in Forres. Margaret Ross and her team have been very busy and we can look forward to another very successful meeting. I wish you all a very happy time ahead and a grand 2016.

*George T. Watt*

### **Spring Workshop - Forres Town Hall - Saturday 9 April**

The venue is The Town Hall on the Main Street, Forres. The following is a draft timetable.

#### **Musician: Frank Thomson of Aberdeen**

10.30	Coffee or tea, and registration
11.00	Morning session: Neglected Dances 1
12.30	Lunch - bring your own - tea and coffee provided
13.15	Afternoon session: Neglected Dances 2
14.30	Update on Dance Trad
15.00	Social dancing
16.00	Finish

If you intend coming, please email or phone the Treasurer, Judith Borup, ideally before March 30th.

**Judith Borup: 01738-842789 or [j.borup@btinternet.com](mailto:j.borup@btinternet.com)**

**Cost: £4 for TAS members £6 for non-members of TAS**

TAS workshops are open to anyone teaching country dancing, whether they are qualified or not.

## TAS dates for 2016

Saturday 9 April 2016

Spring Workshop in Forres

Saturday 27 August 2016

Autumn Workshop and AGM in Broxburn

## AGM held at the Autumn Workshop on 29 August 2015

The Minutes of the 2015 AGM will appear in the newsletter immediately preceding the 2016 AGM. Here are the main points:

- It was excellent to see 54 members present with 50 apologies.
- Despite Peter Clark's valiant attempts, TAS is not listed on the RSCDS website as a Teachers' Association (and is still not listed Jan 2016 ed.)
- The membership fee remains at £5.
- Jane Meikle was elected as Secretary and Judith Borup as Treasurer. Maureen McCrudden volunteered to come on to the committee.
- The Spring meeting would be in Forres and the Autumn meeting in Broxburn.
- Grateful thanks were recorded for retiring Secretary, Peter Clark, and Treasurer, Les Lambert.

## Subscriptions

If you have not paid our small subscription of £5 for the current year, please send the form at the end of this newsletter to our new Treasurer, Judith Borup asap. If you have not renewed by the end of February, we will assume you wish your membership to lapse.

## TAS Facebook Group

TAS now has a presence on Facebook. Join the group - just go to Facebook and search for TAS. Only 27 members as of 10 January - so let's increase it, then we can share ideas online.

## TAS Website

The TAS website is live again. You can find it by googling Teachers' Association Scotland.

## Report on Workshop held at AGM of TAS on 29 August 2015

The workshop was a great success. It was devoted to the teaching of the dances in *Book 49*. This was undertaken by four of our younger, though very experienced, teachers namely: Amy Drysdale, Heather Cowan, Rachel Shankland and Ian Brockbank. They were ably supported by the wonderful musicianship of Adam Brady who played with a great understanding of the music, evidence of his awareness of its significance to the dance.

It is always good to have the opportunity of being taught by different teachers. They bring a fresh approach and a different interpretation of the instructions of the dances. The instructions are there for everyone to read, but sometimes they can be very wordy and all teachers have to find a way of simplifying them to suit the requirements of their own classes. At TAS workshops, the dancers themselves are experienced dancers and teachers and are therefore more receptive to the teaching of others, but even they can learn something and pass it on to their classes. Many who were in attendance at the workshop had already seen the dances taught by other teachers and had studied the Teachers' Notes but I, on a personal note, was pleased to hear Ian Brockbank suggest an easier way of remembering and conveying the couples' tracks in the last eight bars of *The Library of Birmingham*.

Each of the young teachers brought their own style and enthusiasm to the event. They brought the dances to life and, judging by the reaction of their 'pupils', I'm sure they knew that their efforts had not fallen on stony ground. The dancers I believe enjoyed the whole event in their capacity both as teachers and dancers. The workshop was indeed a worthwhile event.

Margaret Ballantine (Secretary, North Ayrshire Branch)

## Book 49 Notes and videos

In past TAS newsletters we have printed notes on dances for the latest book. The notes for Book 49 are available on the RSCDS website. However, there are now official videos up on Youtube. If you want to watch a dance from Book 49 before you teach it, simply go to Youtube and type in Book 49.

## Song and Dance in Scotland

This year the Traditional Music and Song Association (TMSA) of Scotland celebrates its 50th anniversary. It is interesting to think about the differences between the different organisations in Scotland and England which preserve our dance and song traditions.

In the latter part of the 19th century and the early part of the 20th there was an increased awareness of nationhood and cultural traditions Europe-wide. Politically, both Italy and Germany only became countries as we know them today in 1871. Norway gained its independence from Sweden in 1911. Gladstone introduced an Irish Home Rule Bill in the 1880s but it failed. In May 1913 the House of Commons passed the second reading of the Scottish Home Rule Bill by 204 votes to 159. It did not proceed further due to the First World War.

Culturally, here in Scotland, An Comunn Gàidhealach was founded in 1891. The Royal National Mòd dates from 1892. Marjory Kennedy-Fraser started collecting Gaelic songs in 1905 on the island of Eriskay. Cecil Sharp in England became interested in traditional English dance when he saw a group of morris dancers at the village of Headington Quarry, just outside Oxford, at Christmas 1899. At this time, morris dancing was almost extinct, and the interest generated by Sharp's notations kept the tradition alive. Sharp went on to publish books of Morris Dances and the Sword Dances of northern England before the outbreak of the First World War. By 1923 the Scottish Country Dance Society was a relative latecomer on the British cultural scene.

The English Folk Song Society (founded in 1898) and the English Folk Dance Society (founded in 1911 by Cecil Sharp) came together as the English Folk Dance and Song Society in 1923. (EFDSS), the same year that the Scottish Country Dance Society was founded. Cecil Sharp died in 1924 and in 1930 Cecil Sharp House was opened as a lasting memorial to him. It is a multi-functional building on a prime site near Regent's Park, housing the Vaughan Williams Memorial Library, admin offices, an impressive ballroom and several dance studios. In 2009 EFDSS became an Arts Council England Regularly Funded Organisation (and in 2012 a National Portfolio Organisation). The RSCDS, on the other hand, has always been self-funding, now with a large international membership base. We own our own offices, but in my memory the only person ever to suggest that the RSCDS exchange Coates Crescent for a dual-purpose office and dance space was Bill Clement, who was familiar with the number of old 'drill halls' becoming vacant in Edinburgh.

In my own experience Cecil Sharp House is a vibrant place which dancers value. In 2012 the Heritage Lottery Fund, National Folk Music Fund and Folklore Society supported 'The Full English', to create the world's biggest online portal of English folk music, song and dance manuscripts – as well as a national programme of workshops, lectures, training and community events. The large financial reserves of the RSCDS more or less rule out any public funding.

Given the shared roots of our country dance traditions – often the same dances and music – it is strange how little contact there has been between the RSCDS and the EFDSS.

In Scotland the dance and song organisations have remained separate. The RSCDS is this year 94 years old. The TMSA is only 50. For many of us it is a little known organisation. With a membership of over 1000 it organises hundreds of events across Scotland every year: festivals, workshops, competitions, and folk

sessions. According to Karin Polwart “there would not be this wealth of music we now have in Scotland,” had it not been for the TMSA. In a recent article in The Times, Sheena Wellington is quoted: “The TMSA has kept the flame alive, and the essence of the tradition has been handed down. There’s a value in singing the pure, uncomplicated song; playing the pure uncomplicated tune. It is important to be able to go back to the original source.” If we were to do this for country dances, we would have to re-write all the books containing historical dances. One recurring criticism of Jean Milligan in her lifetime was that she had lost this idea of the ‘uncomplicated original’. We have complicated a dance form which used to be uncomplicated and the culture out of which it grew no longer recognises it. The price of internationalism?

The patrons of the TMSA are Dr Aly Bain MBE, Dr Margaret Bennett PhD, Dr Phil Cunningham OBE, Dr Sheena Wellington, Dr Barbara Dickson OBE, Archie Fisher MBE. All the TMSA patrons are distinguished tradition bearers in their own right with a high public profile. There are many RSCDS members who are justly proud that our patron is HM the Queen, but there are also many who find the idea of a royal patron an anachronism in 2016. May I not be struck down on the spot for voicing this!

The following extract is worth considering from the TMSA website:

### **TMSA Aims & Policies**

#### **Mission**

To promote, present and preserve the traditional music and song of Scotland.

#### **Vision**

Our vision is that:

- Scotland’s vibrant living indigenous heritage of traditional music and song is recognised and valued within and outwith Scotland as an intrinsic part of our national identity
- there is equal and widespread access to opportunities for people within Scotland to learn, teach, attend and participate in Scottish traditional music and song at a range of levels, thus laying solid foundations for development and innovation whilst at the same time safeguarding the grassroots of our diverse heritage
- people globally can access information about Scottish traditional music and song, its practitioners past and present, and opportunities to participate in related activities.

#### **Values**

We value:

- the diversity of Scotland’s indigenous music and song heritage that stems from the cultural, agricultural, industrial and political history of Scotland
- the inclusiveness of our heritage which unites each community, crosses generations and enables a shared understanding between communities nationally and globally.
- the grassroots traditions (intrinsically and as a source for new interpretations)
- the contribution that participants at all levels of ability make to maintaining and developing Scotland’s traditional arts
- the financial and social contribution that Scottish traditional music and song makes not only to local communities but also nationally and globally.

#### **Strategic Aims**

- To ensure that the indigenous traditional music and song of Scotland continues as a vibrant living heritage
- To gain national and international recognition of Scotland’s traditional music and song as an intrinsic part of our national identity
- To ensure that information about Scotland’s music and song is globally available

Compare that with the current statement on the RSCDS website:

*The Society exists to promote and develop Scottish country dancing worldwide for the benefit of present and future generations.*

In its aims and objectives the TMSA sees Scotland as central and itself a part of Scottish identity. The reasons why the RSCDS has moved from a Scoto-centric to an international view of Scottish country dancing are many and various. At the 2015 AGM there was a discussion session on our new aims and objectives. We could do a lot worse than look at those of the TMSA. What do you think?

If you would like to know more about the TMSA, go to: [TMSA.org.uk](http://TMSA.org.uk)

*J. Hill*

## Did you know?

In the early editions of the Society books:

- Sets had 5 couples not 4.
- In strathspeys with "set twice", use the highland schottische step.
- When 'tripping' down the middle, advancing and retiring, the step used is the Polka (one, two, three, hop).
- In "set and turn", both hands should be given for the turn, the elbows bent, and the Polka step used.

## Old Dances TAS August 2015

The review of old dances has been completed with a slowly reducing number of scores as time went on. The first few books had 28 people submit suggestions but by the time the MMM was reviewed only 10 people submitted suggestions which has resulted in no dances being put forward from MMM.

Margaret McCann looked at the scores and short-listed those with the highest scores. Margaret Ross and I then reviewed these and have suggested the following. They are not all those with the highest scores, but we selected them for being slightly different and perhaps more interesting. For instance, many of the dances on the long short list had similar 16 bars of 'set to and turn corners, reels with corners'.

There was no scientific methodology however it could be re-done just choosing the highest scoring dances as a percentage of the people who submitted for each book. So a score of 5 from 10 people actually is higher than a score of 10 from 28 which would then bring in dances from MMM. However, as the overall submissions are low we felt it needs to go back to the group.

### What next?

Do we circulate this round for people to file away or use for classes and dance programmes?

Do we use these as a basis for the next TAS workshops?

Do we suggest that they are used for the next RSCDS AGM programme?

(After discussion at the AGM, it was decided to use their work as a basis for the Spring Workshop. *ed.*)

### Strathspeys

Glasgow Highlanders	Bk 2 - 5 votes	Unusual progression, RL's, Reels, Highland steps
Delvine Side	Bk 2 - 9 votes	Allemande to corners, turn 2H. 3's only dance as corners
Peggy's Love	Bk 8 - 9 votes	Allemande, set to corners, Half Diamond Poussette

### Reels

Triumph	Bk 1 - 10 votes	Dance up in "Triumph", unique Poussette to bottom
La Tempete	Bk 2 - 5 votes	Basic formations, all steps required, mixer
Longwise Eightsome	Bk 18 - 6 votes	Medley, Chain, Promenade, Poussette, reel, circle

### Jigs

Scottish Reform	Bk 3 - 8 votes	Balance in line across, Poussette, very hard work!
Golden Pheasant	Bk 16 - 6 votes	5 formations and transitions. GPO-CDT
Gentle Shepherd	Bk 17 - 5 votes	Slow Jig, phrasing, 4's are admiring goal posts

*Kate McArdle (on behalf of the Neglected Dances Group)*

***Please note that the dances to be taught at the Spring Workshop will be the choice of the workshop leaders, not necessarily those above.***

## Book 51 – a really important issue for Scottish teachers

If you haven't heard already, the Society is going to devote *Book 51* to dances for young dancers. These dances will be aimed at:

- Children's Festivals
- Teaching younger dancers
- Social dance programmes for less experienced dancers of all ages.

For us in Scotland this is a really important issue. If you are involved in Children's Festivals, you will know the dearth of Society dances suitable for primary-age children who only have a limited time to prepare for a competition. If you have been involved in organising a Festival or adjudicating, you will know how difficult it is to find suitable dances.

**Please become involved in this and submit suitable dances before 25 March this year. All the information is on the Society website at [book51@rscds.org](mailto:book51@rscds.org) You can only submit dances via the RSCDS website.**

All the rules are there. Teachers who teach children's classes worldwide simply do not understand the problems we face. They teach motivated children who come to a regular children's class. Here in Scotland we have hundreds of primary schoolteachers - often with no training in teaching country dancing - who have to prepare children with very limited time and resources. We need more good jigs and reels with simple formations and a maximum of 4 bars of pas de basque – so no poussettes, please!

## SERTA and TAS

SERTA is the South East Region Teachers' Association, the only other teachers' association in the UK. Mervyn Short has suggested that we might want to organise a joint event, perhaps in the Lake District or northern England. If you think this is an idea worth pursuing, please let our Secretary, Jane Meikle, know.

Meanwhile, if you would like to join Serta in celebrating their 10th anniversary, it will be held in the Hotel Piccadilly, Bournemouth 16 - 18 September, 2016. The teacher is Pat Houghton and the musicians for the weekend are Judith and Ian Muir. Go to [greengingerband.co.uk/sertawp/?p=343](http://greengingerband.co.uk/sertawp/?p=343) where you can download an application form.

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## ***TAS membership renewal 2015 - 2016***

**Please send a cheque for £5 payable to TAS to:  
Judith Borup, 11 Taylor Avenue, Methven, Perth, PH1 3EF**

**Name** .....

**Address** .....

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**Post code** .....

**Phone Number** .....

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