

# *The Scottish Country Dance Teacher*

**TAS Newsletter November 2017**  
**Newsletter of the Teachers' Association Scotland (TAS)**  
**Recognised as an RSCDS Teachers' Association**

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

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## From the Chairman

So far this year we have had excellent attendances at the Dumfries and Broxburn workshops. One of the things I like about TAS is the informality and good humour at all our meetings and the AGM workshop was no exception. Well done to Janet, Sue and Mo – team teaching at its best!

Good news! At the AGM Peter Clark proposed that we approach the Society with a view to publishing a Children's Book which would be suitable for use at Days of Dance and Festivals. I wrote to the Society with our proposal. At the same time the Chairman Elect, Andrew Kellett, had been soliciting reports on teaching in Scottish Schools. The outcome of this is that at its recent meeting the Management Board agreed that a new Working Group would be set up by Anne McArthur and myself to work with TAS to write a detailed plan for a schools' project. This will include the production of a Festival Book, in which we will be able to draw on the expertise of TAS members. So, our idea of producing a book for children has been integrated into a new schools initiative. I hope all TAS members will be pleased with this outcome as we now have the full backing of the Society.

I would like to thank all members at the August workshop who gave me information about Days of Dance and Festivals in their area. I have written a short report on this later in the newsletter (see p6).

The AGM also agreed to give up to 10 grants of £50 each to young people attending Spring Fling in Glasgow. The application form has been sent to all members. Can I encourage everyone to pass a copy on to anyone in their area who is thinking of going.

I would like to encourage as many members as possible to attend our Helensburgh Workshop in April. Helensburgh Branch are holding a dance on the Friday night, so I might see you on the dance floor!

*Jimmie Hill*

## From the Editor

In this newsletter you can read Margaret Ballantine's excellent report on the Autumn workshop in Broxburn. My thanks to Margaret and also to Moira Stephen for the photographs reproduced here. Additional photos from this very enjoyable day can be seen on the TAS website. Also thanks to Muriel Bone and Jimmie Hill for their contributions which can be found on the pages that follow.

The AGM took place after the Workshop and a resume of the main points from the meeting is included in this issue. The Minutes of the meeting will be published later.

The copy deadline for the next edition of the Newsletter will be early February. Please send me any comments, reports or articles you would like me to include.

## TAS Dates for your diary: 28 April and 1 September 2018

It was agreed at the AGM that the Spring Workshop will take place in Helensburgh on Saturday, 28 April and that the Autumn Workshop and AGM will take place in Broxburn on Saturday, 1 September.

Preparations for the Spring workshop are well under way. A hall has been booked in Helensburgh. The morning session, entitled 'Controlled Abandon', will be led by Helen Russell, RSCDS Chairman. The musician will be George Meikle.

## TAS Autumn Workshop, Broxburn, Saturday 26 August 2017

The Chairman, Jimmie Hill, welcomed members old and new and, on behalf of TAS, extended congratulations to members Lesley Ross and Annabel Harrison who had recently, at St Andrews Summer School, attained fully qualified teacher status.

Jimmie introduced Janet Johnston, Sue Porter and John Wilkinson, the instructors for the day. Janet and Sue would teach all the dances in *Book 51* which is intended to be used for young and less experienced dancers. There had been a suggestion that the book could also be used for festival dances but, since festivals are mainly held in the UK, that idea was rejected and the decision was made to present it as a book for young and less experienced dancers. The second part of the workshop would be taken by John who would advise on 'Good Dem Dances'. The musician for the day was Mo Rutherford.

Janet conducted a warm up session before teaching the first dance. She and Sue taught the dances alternately and all twelve dances were taught. The dances in themselves, as might be expected given the purpose of the book, are straightforward but still need to be phrased carefully so that the dancers anticipate potential problems. For example, in *New Year Jig*, when the first couple have finished in third place, the fourth couple must be ready to step in and up in order to be in place for the new top couple starting their figure of eight.



In *Bohemian Reflections*, at the end of bar 16 when first couple finish in 2nd place opposite sides, the ladies must be ready to flow into 'ladies chain'.

These are only examples of why everyone must be alert and ready to anticipate the phrasing of the dance.

Janet and Sue pointed out the potential difficulties and explained how to deal with them. Their teaching, as always, was clear and any questions from the dancers were answered with a full explanation.

Mo Rutherford's contribution to the teaching was invaluable. It is a joy to listen to her playing whether as a dancer or a non-dancer. She remarked that one of the tunes (Miss Isabella Reid's Reel for *Pluto's Head*) because of the nature of the tune, would have made a fine Strathspey and proceeded to demonstrate her point by playing it as such. Everyone agreed.

John took over the second part of the workshop by explaining how to choose 'Good Dem Dances'. The choice must be made to suit the audience. If dem teams are performing in church halls or to an audience in an old folks' home, then the dances must be visually appealing, not too long nor complicated. *The Triumph* would be a suitable choice for such an occasion. The top couple would be nearest the audience so that they would be facing them as they came back up the set. Good familiar tunes also please an audience of older people. A good example of this would be *The Linton Ploughman* danced to the tune *The Muckin' o' Geordie's Byre*. *Wind on Loch Fyne* and *Domino 5* would appeal because of their shape.

On bigger occasions the team could choose simple dances performed well or, at the other extreme, some of the McNab dances.

Medleys are also interesting to watch such as a 'Burns Medley' consisting of *Corn Rigs* danced conventionally up and down, followed by *The Lea Rig* shifting to set across and ending with *Duncan Grey* with set inverted.

On really big occasions the set could be made up of more than one team working in mirrored tandem and collectively. This would be visually appealing. John gave as an example a set consisting of two 3 couple sets, the couples at each end dancing as 1st couple. The first dance could be *The Wild Geese* danced as normal for the first 16 bars then as each top couple dance down the middle, they meet and dance 4 hands across before dancing up to second place ready for rights and lefts. The two end couples would leave the floor and the remaining four couples would blend into *The Axum Reel* and end in a square set ready to dance *Summer Assembly*.

This medley was danced and the result was certainly visually appealing.

The workshops were very informative and the dancers were kept on their toes. The instructors held the dancers' interest and their labours were not in vain for everyone benefited from the workshops.

*Margaret Ballantine*  
North Ayrshire Branch



## Brief Notes from the AGM held in Broxburn on 26 August 2017

The Minutes of the 2017 AGM will appear in the newsletter immediately preceding the 2018 AGM.

Here are the main points from the meeting:

- It was excellent to see 53 members present with 49 apologies.
- The membership fee remains at £5.
- Anne Robertson volunteered to come onto the committee and was duly elected.
- The Spring meeting will be in Helensburgh and the Autumn meeting in Broxburn.
- Excess Funds – 3 worthy causes were discussed and agreed: to provide assisted funding to 10 Scottish applicants to attend Spring Fling (Glasgow) and also to prospective teachers living in Scotland to attend a teaching-related course. Funding to support the production of a book of Festival Dances was also agreed.
- Grateful thanks were extended to retiring committee member Helen Bain.

## Glasgow Branch Examination success

Between Oct 2016 & June 2017 Glasgow Branch organised training and examinations for Units 1, 2 & 3. Most of the candidates were young people who have been dancing and teaching within the Glasgow University Scottish Country Dance Club and Alba Scottish Country Dancers. There were also two candidates who came forward from Branch classes.

The tutor for the Units was Alasdair Brown. These new part-qualified teachers have been involved in Glasgow Branch classes and also in the teaching of children for the Primary Schools Festivals.

The following six dancers have now completed Part 1 (Units 1,2 & 3) of the RSCDS Teaching Certificate:

Leanne Beeton, Abigail Brown, Amy Bryson, Eilidh Hart, Caroline Holmes and Sabina Lawrie.

Five candidates passed Units 2 & 3 in June and have recently sat Unit 1. If they are successful in Unit 1, by Christmas there may be another five Part 1 qualified teachers.

Those who passed Units 2 & 3 in June were:

Fiona Carroll, Fiona Fairlie, Debbie McAlees, Emma Watters and Eilidh Garden.

This project required the input of a lot of time and effort by many people including a sizeable number of volunteer dancers. It is hoped that their hard work will help secure the future of Scottish Country Dancing.

Congratulations to all the dancers involved.

*Muriel Bone*  
Glasgow Branch



## TAS Grant for prospective teachers

Prospective teachers living in Scotland can apply to TAS at any time for a teacher training related grant (e.g. help with the fee for Summer School or travelling expenses for a course elsewhere).

TAS funds will be reviewed each year and a maximum set per year for the amount available to be spent.

Applications for funding should be made to the Treasurer. ([j.borup@btinternet.com](mailto:j.borup@btinternet.com))

## Country dancing in schools – assessing the situation

Who knows how much country dancing is being taught in Scottish primary schools? I wish I did. As a start, I have tried to compile a list of all the Days of Dance and Festivals in which RSCDS teachers and branches play a part. I circulated a list at our August workshop and, so far, I have 21 events, ranging from the three Ayrshire Days, each with c. 600 children, to the Music Festival on the Isle of Arran with c. 60 children taking part in the country dance section. In total, these 21 events involve around 5000 children annually. This is an incredible achievement for everyone involved – the children, the schoolteachers, the RSCDS branches, teachers and helpers. Some festivals are competitive. Some are non-competitive, when everyone gets together just to dance. Some are a combination. The festivals use single musicians; the Days of Dance use bands. There are probably thousands more children who are being taught by us or by teachers trained by us. One thing is certain: the experience of coming together with hundreds of other children is a memory for life. Dancing to great music at primary school builds in cultural memories which partly define us as Scots. Our aim must be to ensure that as many children as possible have a positive experience of country dancing at school.

But there are currently 400,000 children in our primary schools. What is happening to all the others we do not reach? Can we confidently say that all Scottish children leave P7 being able to dance *The Dashing White Sergeant*, *Strip the Willow*, the *Gay Gordons* and the *Canadian Barn Dance*? I would like to think that is the case. The RSCDS is the only Scottish organisation which promotes country dancing. It would be good to know what is going on, not just in areas where we have teachers.

Speaking personally, I was taught the basic social dances at school for the annual school Christmas Party. I was taught by ordinary teachers who had learned the dances from their teachers, who had learned them from their teachers, who had probably never heard of a country dance society. I wonder if this is not the pattern throughout the country for the majority of Scottish children. We really need to know more about what is happening in areas where we are not already directly involved. Do you have children, grandchildren, nephews, nieces, great nephews, great nieces in primary school? Do you know anyone with children currently in primary school? Do you know any primary schoolteachers? Ask them what country dancing they do, what dances, for how long each year, and who teaches them. If you know schoolteachers, ask them if they have a copy of *Jigs and Reels*.

We need to get more information about what is happening before we can make any recommendations. If you have any information, please email me at [macleodhill@mac.com](mailto:macleodhill@mac.com).

Jimmie Hill

## Spring Fringe 20-22 April 2018 in Glasgow

Although the booking system on the website is not open yet, basic information about Spring Fringe can be found here: <https://www.springfringe2018.com/>

Details of dance programmes, classes and other information will be published on the website as it becomes available so do check again nearer the time.

A Fringe email has been set up for enquiries & for dancers to register interest: [fringeinglasgow@gmail.com](mailto:fringeinglasgow@gmail.com).

Fringe mobile no. 07593 537133

The Fringe is also listed as an event on the RSCDS Glasgow Facebook page <https://en-gb.facebook.com/RoyalScottishCountryDanceSocietyGlasgowBranch/>.

## What is the spirit of the dance?

I recently borrowed a copy of Jean Milligan's 'Festival Booklet'. It is a small 16-page booklet written by her in 1924 to give advice to teachers entering teams for the country dance sections of Music Festivals. This is what she says about 'the spirit of the dance':

Take, for example, the first figure of *The Triumph*, when the first woman goes down the middle and up with her own partner, then down again with the second man, followed by her own partner, then up the middle under the arch made by the two men, verily in triumph. Naturally this figure must be done gaily and triumphantly, but without the least suggestion of exaggeration or overdone acting, or the charm is at once lost. The whole movement of the dance should seem to say, "Isn't this fun!" and when the dancers have this feeling they are, indeed, in the spirit of the dance.

Another of the dances which requires the dramatic touch is the *Flowers of Edinburgh*. In this dance the partners chase each other; first the man follows the woman, who eludes him and comes up on the other side of the set, and then the woman follows the man. Again, the fun of this chase must be realised to get the correct spirit. That there is a chase at all is often completely lost sight of, and the movement is done without the least attempt at showing this little piece of fun between the partners. As this chasing and escaping and chasing again 'is' *the Flowers of Edinburgh*, the whole character of the dance disappears if it is not distinctly shown. To get this spirit it is not necessary to hurry or rush the dance. It can be shown almost entirely by facial expression and the movement of the head. Make the performers love the dance and you will have no difficulty in getting the correct spirit. It is the same in all types of dancing.

\* Teachers may be interested to know that the figure in bars 1 – 16 of *The Flowers of Edinburgh* was a standard country dance formation, called 'Hunting'!

Jimmie Hill