

# *The Scottish Country Dance Teacher*

**TAS Newsletter December 2020**

**Newsletter of the Teachers' Association Scotland (TAS)**

**Recognised as an RSCDS Teachers' Association**

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

*Chairman: Oluf Olufsen*

*Secretary: Susan Mackay*

[Susan.mackay@hotmail.co.uk](mailto:Susan.mackay@hotmail.co.uk)

*Treasurer: Anne Robertson*

*Committee: Jayne Riddet, Margie Stevenson, Anne Smyth*

*Newsletter Editor: Mary McFarlane*

[marymca@googlemail.com](mailto:marymca@googlemail.com)

## From the Chairman

This 'extra' edition of the newsletter comes to you in these troubled and difficult times both as a goodwill message as we approach the Festive (?) Season and as a heartfelt thank you from the TAS Committee.

By now, you will have been in receipt of the results of voting arising from what we have to term a 'virtual' AGM. On behalf of the Committee, may I extend a sincere thanks to all who took part by voting and returning ballot papers, whether electronically or by conventional mail, so punctually as to ease my role as proxy and allow the count (and double-safeguard check on that count) to progress smoothly. It was interesting to note that the 'turnout' appeared to be marginally higher than that of recent years' actual attendance at the Autumn Workshop and AGM. Is there a lesson for us in this? While I think we would all agree, almost without exception, that, given our dance pastime is, by definition, 'social' and that we are all very much missing the joy and happiness of meeting and mixing and moving to our uplifting music, nonetheless there might be a case for deploying the assistance of modern technology and its possibilities for enhancing what we, as a teachers' organisation, can develop and achieve. Certainly, the Committee have used the Zoom platform to conduct meetings and found this to be effective and useful in keeping 'business' going while, at the same time, aware that seeing each other on a screen and talking at such a distance can never replace the immediacy and ease of being in each other's presence.

It was very gratifying to receive messages of thanks from many of you about how we are managing to maintain contact with you, the membership, and, along with the Committee, I feel pleased that we are still able to communicate and keep a sense of togetherness and onward movement through these dark days. The joy of being together again in class and on the dancefloor is something we must not lose sight of

and I know that many members are keeping in touch with individuals from their respective classes to offer comfort and company and hold onto the very threads of the SCD tapestry. Well done! And we should also, with great respect and gratitude, offer the same commendation to all those within the RSCDS (teachers, dancers and HQ staff and helpers – many of whom, in all these categories, come from among our own TAS ranks) for the wonderful work undertaken online to keep us 'dancing' and bring the Society AGM and its support events to us, both at home and overseas. I am sure we have all gained joy, pleasure and benefit from the weekly 'broadcasts'.

As we come to the end of the year in which Covid-19 knocked everything for six and set us all reeling (but not in the way in which we would like to have been), may I take this opportunity to wish you all a truly happy Christmas in these abnormal times and, in the spirit of the season, convey greetings of health and hope and happiness, mixed with peace and plenty, and tidings of better days to come back on the dance floor and beyond in the New Year 2021.

All Best Wishes,

*Oluf*

## From the Editor

When I introduced the February edition of the Newsletter we had no idea of the pandemic that was about to hit the World and the effects it would have on all our plans for 2020 and beyond. The Spring Workshop was an early victim of the virus. Will we be able to meet in Bridge of Allan in Spring 2021? Who knows, but please put the date in your new diary in the meantime.

Our appeal for material for inclusion in this Newsletter resulted in two 'dancing' contributions, both from south of the Border. Perhaps the weather there was more conducive to dancing out of doors. Oluf provided some dance-related snippets and Margie Stevenson sent me a poem written by Pat Batt and aChain Spiral – can you work out the name of the dance?

Thanks to everyone for their input. I hope you enjoy the Newsletter.

Merry Christmas everyone!



## A Date for Your Diary

TAS Spring Workshop – Saturday, 17 April 2021, in Bridge of Allan.

## Scottish Dancing in Taunton, Somerset

*By David Smith*

A large patch of grass outside my block of flats has its benefits.

Taking advantage of that and the then rule in England that up to six people from different households could meet up outside, I organised what became a series of three outdoor, no-contact, three couple set dance sessions during the mid to late summer.

Beginning with the lists which Mervyn Short and Sue Porter had drawn up of dances which could be amended, I created for the first session a programme of three couple dances which were less familiar, terrified to be honest that if the dance was familiar people might start giving hands etc without thinking. By the second and third sessions we were using more familiar dances as the mainstay of the programme. We also did at least one dance once through for each couple so that we could add popular dances which were not suited to a three-couple set.

There were rules. Everyone was asked to wear a mask or face covering and to bring their own refreshments. People were asked to dance in a wide set and also to remain two metres apart in the intervals between dances as well as during the dancing. I also asked that, if anyone felt unwell in the days immediately following the dancing, they should let me know so that I could inform the others.

Lessons from this? Well, given that we hadn't danced together for four months, the definition of "2m apart" was in truth somewhat flexible! On the other side, the sometimes-maligned issue of technique made a glorious comeback as people tried to adapt to dancing in much wider sets than they were used to. Reels of every sort, figures and half figures of 8 and the formation retire and advance all appeared with some regularity. Oh, and by the last session in October even the hardest of the dancers agreed it was time to move indoors. Sadly, the second lockdown has put paid to this but we do intend to begin again when the warmer weather returns. But above all, the huge lesson from all of this is how much we all missed the joy of dancing! That is what we will hold on to for the future.

A quote from Noah Webster  
(with thanks to Oluf...)

*Dance is an excellent amusement ... Its excellence consists in exciting a cheerfulness of the mind, in bracing the muscles of the body, and in producing copious perspiration.*

# A Brain Teaser

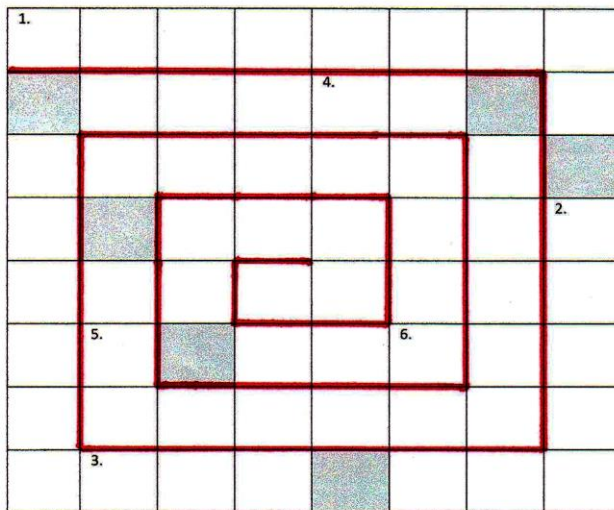
Devised by Margie and George Stevenson

## Chain Spiral

The answers are all names of RSCDS dances

**NB .** The **last** letter of each answer is the **first** letter of the next. (ie the last letter of the answer to Q1 will fall on the square with the number 2 in it - so you will already have the first letter of the next answer written in !)

Write your answers following the spiral to end in the centre. Rearrange the letters in the shaded squares to reveal an RSCDS dance with a Burns connection



Hidden Dance  
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## Clues

1. Sounds as if the butcher's done his job on this cuddly little farm animal. (4,7)
2. *Go torch Mull* somehow to flush out this dance with special reels from Aberdeenshire (7,4) (*anagram*)
3. Tam o' Shanter's mare sounds full of fun (3,9)
4. A rod or a group of teachers not out to bring in the crops (7,7)
5. Linger for some time covered in sticky black stuff ? (5,1,5)
6. *Hare fool me* somehow for a border nobleman (4,2,4) (*anagram*)

## Nasty Habits

By Pat Batt

*I have some nasty habits –  
I'll confess it loud and clear  
For that might sound a warning bell  
To other dancers here.*

*I've curtsied to my partner  
Whilst chatting to a friend –  
My partner vainly wondering how  
He's managed to offend.*

*My hands too low in rights and lefts,  
Too high in hands across.  
I sometimes have a mental blank  
And cause complete chaos.*

*I'll own I've viewed my partner  
With a vague, unfocussed eye  
And given absent-minded hand  
To drift – unseeing – by.*

*I've danced an eight bar reel in six,  
A six bar reel in eight,  
I've turned and cast too early  
And I've turned and cast too late.*

*When slipping in a circle  
I have not closed my feet,  
My strathspey sometimes scrapes the floor,  
My setting is not neat.*

*My toes have turned both in and up,  
I have not paid attention,  
And there were other lapses  
That it's better not to mention.*

*Well, there was one occasion –  
It must have been the whisky -  
When I danced Bratach Bana  
And the others did The Frisky!*

*Yes, I've got nasty habits  
And I only hope that you  
When reading this confession  
Don't think "I've got them, too"!*

## It Shouldn't Happen to a Scottish Country Dance Teacher

By Oluf Olufsen

*A gentleman, alas now deceased, who danced in my social class once afforded a great deal of amusement to us all. This individual was a real character who did much for the community and those less privileged than himself. A kenspeckle figure around the town and surrounding district, he had a pawky, generous sense of humour. Indeed, he relished re-telling this story against himself and, to that end, I feel he would have been happy for it to be shared with you all.*

The dance had been taught by me in the time-honoured fashion of isolating the tricky elements of its figures and dancing through them and then putting all together, following on from a brief recap. The gentleman in question was in first place. The dance, a jig, started with first couple leading down the middle and up. With great gusto, he set off, hand extended to partner. Simultaneously, his dentures shot out of his mouth, sliding in front of him down the set. At the end of bar 4, as though it were part of the dance, he managed, with a smooth looping, stooping and scooping action, and without breaking stride or rhythm, to return the false teeth to his mouth and lead his by now helpless partner to the top, smiling triumphantly at an amazed and amused set.

## Any Beans Will Do

*By George Hobson*

Watching fellow geriatric internees keeping fit to the ministrations of a Wiltshire coordinator (male younger and FIT) I thought, "How like our Scottish Ghost Dancing in it's demands for using every-day items for slightly dubious repurposes". But rather condescendingly noting that we at least don't have a baked bean fixation; there always comes a stage in the exercise diatribe where he says, "You need your mini-dumbbells to provide resistance for this exercise, if you haven't got any, tins of baked beans will do" and it matters not that I howl every time "But I don't like baked beans can I use tinned peaches?" – I'll swear I can hear silent disapproval from all over Wiltshire "It must be beans, but any beans will do". This usually gets me into singing all the other songs (or my versions of them!) from Joseph and His Technicolour Dream Coat. Which always makes me ludicrously happy.....

What was the point of this? I've lost myself again..... Oh Yes! It made me realise that in my obsession with smiley faces and something to dance around, I had forgotten one very important thing about real dancing! Which is that when anyone gives you a hand for a turn or whatever, they also invariably give you weight, they drag you down a little, or try to. So I tried doing my ghost dancing carrying a can of baked beans in each hand (any beans will do) and it made an amazing difference, the extra weight in each hand gave me a much better consciousness of where they were, keeping them by my sides became easy, the slight weight encouraged keeping head up and shoulders back (good old Alexander), and above all stopped me putting my hands in my pockets. On raising a hand for a turn, the can drew my eyes and gave a natural centre to pivot around in the turn. In circles the double weight on the raised hands in some strange way made slip step circles more "circley"; in strathspey it made the rotation of shoulders relative to the hips almost natural. Allemandes and Poussettes seemed to have so much more point with the addition of the slight downward drag; I never ever thought that I might miss that!

This Week's dance: *Mairi's Wedding*

With two tins of beans (Any beans will do) and, while you learn to leave the beans unspoilt, we will give the smiley corners a rest

**Bars**

1-2 Turn the right hand beans all the way round to face out own side

3-4 Cast off one place

5-8 Turn the left hand beans with long arm turn and longing glances slightly more than one turn to face first corner

9-32 Giving right shoulder to each corner position in turn (1,2,3,4) dance round that corner position then pass in a curve through the centre to the next corner, as you pass through the centre you may raise and gently regard either your right hand beans or your left hand beans (strictly it should be left hand beans, right hand beans is Mairi's Divorce)

33-40 From own side second place dance reels of 3 (figure 8s with ghosts) across with couple on your right, finishing in second place own side

41-48 Raise both your beans and circle slip step to your left and back to your right. If you are old and little like me, circle inside the set, if young and vigorous like you, circle outside the static ghostly corners

Repeat as often as your personal beans last.

*(Safety note: a risk assessment should probably be carried out before dancing with beans as a dropped can might do some damage to your toes! Ed.)*

