

The Scottish Country Dance Teacher

TAS Newsletter November 2019

Newsletter of the Teachers' Association Scotland (TAS)

Recognised as an RSCDS Teachers' Association

www.countrydanceteachersofscotland.org.uk

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From the Chairman

As we come close to the end of this decade and look forward to a new one (hopefully for TAS the 'soaring' rather than the 'roaring' twenties) we will be entering a time which will see the centenary of the RSCDS and a less grand but still notable anniversary of our Teachers' Association – the former a giant upon whose shoulder the latter can sit in order to see far and speak words of wisdom into the leviathan's ear and thus have a vision and purpose. From the founding of TAS to the present much has been developed and achieved and further growth, consolidation and influence is both possible and desirable.

It is said that knowledge is power and certainly the members of TAS bring much knowledge, experience and wisdom to the Association's activities and it is on this collective and shared knowledge, feeding our focus and goals, we must build. Perhaps this can best be done on two very different levels – one practical, the other inspirational, and both very much compatible. At the practical level, for example, it is my hope to compile a directory of potentially suitable premises for our future workshops and meetings; for us to pick up on suggestions made at the recent AGM about a 'taxi' service from public transport links to the venue for the day for those members coming by bus or train. And, on the more inspirational level, for the committee, at workshop planning stages, to consider the ideas raised about more variation in the day's events and getting a balance between dancing and discussion, the active and the cerebral. To this end, it is important that each and every one of us take pride in the shared stewardship of our Association and its function and aims and thus be confident in broaching ideas for the content and format of future workshops/events. Each one of us can bring his or her own individual gifts and insights, born out of years of shared pleasure in teaching and participation in SCD, to help inspire, devise and

practise effective strategies for influencing the improvement of standards in relation to our national form of ballroom dance. It is through such active participation and involvement that we can surely add to what we do and how well we do it.

As a certain sage once said, "Let us cherish the past, adorn the present, shape the future".

Oluf Olufsen

From the Editor

My thanks to all those who have contributed material for inclusion in this issue of the Newsletter. George Watt has written an excellent report on the Autumn Workshop and you'll also find brief notes from our Secretary on the outcome of discussions at the AGM. Unfortunately, a suitable venue for the Spring Workshop has not yet been found, but our Chairman is working on this and members will receive more information in due course. Susan Mackay has collated the responses to the TAS questionnaire and Roy Bain has sent an update on the progress of the Scottish Schools Working Group. Jimmie Hill has unearthed some interesting advice from Thomas Wilson (published in 1820) as well as offering more up-to-date thoughts on common concerns raised by teachers at a recent workshop in North America – beware of the RSCDS Police! The Newsletter is the ideal vehicle for sharing advice or concerns with other teachers so if there's anything you'd like me to include in the next issue please send me your ideas. I'm aiming to have it ready for circulation in February 2020.

Happy dancing!

TAS Dates for your diary

Spring Workshop, 25 April 2020

Venue to be confirmed: please note the date.

Autumn Workshop & AGM, 29 August 2020

The Autumn Workshop and AGM will be held in Broxburn. Details will be circulated later.

TAS Subscriptions

TAS subscriptions for the year 2019/20 are now due. If you have not yet paid, please complete the renewal form at the end of the Newsletter and send it and your payment to the Treasurer.

TAS Autumn Workshop Report

There was a good turnout of members who were welcomed by our Chairman, Jimmie Hill. Sue Porter our Treasurer was there to make sure no one got in without paying, Susan Mackay as secretary was scurrying around making sure everything was prepared and ready while Jayne Riddet ensured that the very welcome coffee was ready and waiting.

No new RSCDS Book of dances this year so the committee had to come up with something else this autumn. They chose exercises for some less common formations. Janet Johnston coordinated this session, which started with Morag Barclay giving us Corner Pass and Turn but with first Couple passing their 1st, then 3rd corners. This formation is featured in the dance, *Amhuinnsuidhe Castle* an 8x32 Bar Strathspey by Deirdre MacCuish Bark.

Oluf Olufsen then gave us an exercise for 3 Couple Rights and Lefts. He began with an exercise in various step lengths before going into sets. Using the back of hands rather than shake-hand hold, encouraged hands at shoulder height and eye contact.

Margaret Ross then had the unenviable task of teaching Axum Reels. For those who have not done them, this involves crossing over from 1st Man and 4th Lady's position and everyone passing Left Shoulders throughout. Is that really a reel? I'm not sure how Margaret pulled it off, but pull it off she did! No one can be terribly surprised that this particular formation has never quite caught on.

Lesley Ross then gave us an exercise for the formation in *Best Set in the Hall*, all set, advance and pull your right shoulder back to be back to back with your partner, then set and cast to the opposite side. Simple, but very effective.

Margie Stevenson gave us a very up-beat session for the Rondel which she likened to baking a cake. Dear Reader, do allow your imagination to whet your appetite. All couples dancing round in a circle raise hands on bars 1 3 5 7, Rondels will never be the same again. However, on a more serious note she emphasised the need to maintain good posture and for the ladies and the 1st Couple, the importance of anticipation to keep within the unusual timing of the Rondel.



Jimmie Hill then gave us an up-date on the book of dances for children and Beginners. This is a project carried forward from our previous session in

Helensburgh which now includes dances written by children. The notation is written to aid school teachers and those not familiar with RSCDS vocabulary, to be able to teach the dances. The instructions also say first boy or second girl in a bid to make it more user friendly for school children. The RSCDS has agreed to publish this book so we look forward very much to seeing this project come to fruition. We then danced a selection of dances from the book beginning with *The Piano Player*, a really splendid dance. This was composed by young pupils for Pat Clark, their piano player, and Pat composed a tune to go with it. We then had the *Milnorduff Meeting* by Wendy West, which she devised for her children's class in Milnorduff Hall. Children are fond of 4-couple dances which are great fun, but it does mean a lot of dancing, especially for those less fleet of foot. From Dunfermline, a young lassie gave us the *Profiteroles*, another great dance suitable for all ages. Next we had a square dance, *Colquhoun Square* which was written by a group from TAS, and we finished off with *Stone of Scone* another 4-couple dance and *The Third Forth Bridge*. I can assure you our members had now worked up an excellent appetite for lunch. In conclusion, Jimmie pointed out that many dances had titles which could be used as part of a school project, for example the aforementioned *Stone of Scone* which could be incorporated in a history lesson.



After lunch Lyn Bryce gave us a session on the dances by John Duthie. John Duthie started a class in Galashiels in 1926 which is still running to this day. John Duthie wrote some wonderful dances many of which still crop up on dance programmes. We started with the *Pinewood 2-Step* which was specifically written as a warm up dance. Then it was *The Back o'Bennachie* with its consecutive reels of three with the 1st couple and 2nd man then 1st couple and 2nd Lady. *Ellwyn Strathspey* was followed up by the Reel *Ellwyn's Fairy Glen*. Lyn pointed out that 'minicrib' does not follow the original instructions in some instances and it is important to check the original publication and not just assume that minicrib is correct. These dances were from a book, *8 Scottish Country Dances*, published by Mozart Allan in Glasgow and carried the price tag of 3/6d.

Susan MacFadyen then gave us a talk on the various styles of music from around the airts of Scotland with examples which were beautifully played. Starting with Gaelic Waltzes from Tiree, the land of her Father's people, featuring one of my favourite Gaelic airs, *Calum Beag*. To get a true reflection of the feeling for these tunes Susan would listen to the original Gaelic songs. Susan said she likes to use these waltzes for the cool down as they have a nice relaxing air about them. Then it was up to Shetland where the 2-step is popular.

Shetland tunes tend to be very bouncy and have a lot of notes. Susan played a 4/4 reel then played a 2/4 reel to show the difference. Then it was to the North East of Scotland and the music of James Scott Skinner. Scott Skinner was a flamboyant character who composed some lovely Strathspeys. However, Susan expressed how some of his slow Strathspeys were played faster for dancing and lost their musicality, *The Dean Bridge of Edinburgh* being a classic example of this. Susan also talked about the music of William Marshall, Neil Gow and Rob (Red) MacIntosh, a particular favourite of hers. We discussed, was the original tune essential? The consensus was, not if the original tune wasn't particularly well known. Some of us were aware that the 'original tune' was not necessarily the 'original tune' as suggested by the dance devisor.



The meeting finished with the AGM and the minutes from this will be distributed in due course so I am not going to write them here. However, I will give a wee note on some of the discussions and decisions. Jean Martin sent her apologies and a request for TAS members to consider putting themselves forward for positions within the RSCDS committees. Our association is healthy financially with close to £3,000 while our running costs are around £800. We have given grants for younger dancers to attend the Spring Fling and a discussion was held to decide what we might do in future. Should we support Spring Fling in St Petersburg, Russia and Ontario, Canada; or promote something nearer home? How best to encourage Scottish Country Dancing in 16 and over? Jimmie Hill's Chairmanship has done its 3-year cycle and it was time for him to stand down; he has really moved TAS along during his tenure. Oluf Olufsen agreed to take over this exciting role and we wish him well and look forward with confidence to the next 3 years. Sue Porter has agreed to stay on as Treasurer to maintain continuity. Janet Johnston's time as an ordinary member of the committee is over, and she too has been a great asset for our association. She has been replaced by the invigorating presence of Margie Stevenson.

Susan Mackay read out some of the responses to the questionnaire. Some considered Broxburn unsuitable due to travel restrictions but it was pointed out that there are buses every 19 minutes from Edinburgh and trains every 10 minutes from Glasgow to Uphall nearby. However, it was decided that next year's AGM and Workshop will be held in Broxburn and another venue considered thereafter. The Spring Workshop will be in Falkirk (*Editor's note – change of venue - to be confirmed*). Dundee was suggested but as last year's was held in Perth it was felt that should be kept for a later date. (Could a certain G Watt be persuaded to coordinate this?)

We had a resume on the Scottish Schools Working Group from Roy Bain. Things were going more slowly than he would wish. Scotland had been divided into zones on Branch and Local authority lines with representatives sought for each zone. Some of those had not yet been filled. The working Group will have an exhibit at the Scottish Learning Exhibition for Teachers and local authorities. Literature had gone out to schools and every school will be emailed with links to the Website. The original *Jigs and Reels* CDs are wearing out and Ian Muir is looking to replace them with recordings that can be downloaded. This is also planned for DVDs of dances and work is being carried out for that. By next year it is hoped to also have the *Jigs and Reels* book in a download format. Contact had been made with Sport Scotland and we are now registered with them and at the next RSCDS AGM in Perth, a meeting will take place with John Swinney, the Education Convener in the Scottish Parliament. A small team will have to be selected for this. Jayne Riddet has a class with Glasgow University at their Dumfries campus and there is a similar set up with Queen Margaret University in Edinburgh. Work is on-going with CPDs.

Eileen Meany gave the vote of thanks.

George Watt

Brief Notes from the AGM held in Broxburn on 31 August 2018

The Minutes of the 2019 AGM will appear in the newsletter immediately preceding the next AGM.

- TAS annual membership fee to remain at £5
- Committee
 - Chairman: Oluf Olufsen
 - Treasurer: Sue Porter
 - Secretary: Susan Mackay
 - Members: Jayne Riddet, Anne Robertson, Margie Stevenson
- Use of TAS funds:
 - Members to be asked by way of short questionnaire whether to support
 - a Scholarship to Summer School for one 16-18 year-old, cost approximately £600 or
 - a young persons' workshop by putting funding towards venue/ musicians etc
- SSWG update – see report from Roy Bain later in this issue
- Please put forward fresh ideas for workshops
- Results of questionnaire regarding venues of future workshops and AGM, are published below.

TAS Questionnaire replies

31 replies received

Attend AGM regularly Yes - 26 No - 5

Comments –

- 1 I use public transport, Broxburn not easy to get to, would prefer alternative location
- 2 Often working, unable to attend
- 3 Would prefer further North
- 4 I enjoyed the AGM at Broxburn when all the new book dances were taught
- 5 Usually attend, but no longer driving

Happy with Broxburn Yes 28 No 3

Comments –

- 1 Yes, mainly because it is a good venue and reasonably close to me. However, I appreciate it might not be convenient for others & therefore would be happy to travel.
- 2 We joined TAS last year. We are happy with Broxburn, like the fact we can park next to the venue.
- 3 Suggestion of Perth as alternative venue, difficult transport to Broxburn.
- 4 Attended Broxburn once, but find travel very difficult. I live 26 miles west of Aberdeen.
- 5 Not particularly happy, Broxburn is a dreadful place to reach from the SW. Perth area perhaps?

Spring Workshops

	Number of respondents attending
Perth	21
Helensburgh	14
Dumfries	17
Aberdeen	9
Forres	16
Inverness	12
Edinburgh	10
Pitlochry	17
Troon	9
Lockerbie	13
Glasgow	12

	Yes	Don't Mind	No Comment
Move East/West	15	8	8
Move North/South	16	7	8

Additional Comments

- It is a great idea and should continue
- Good idea to move Spring workshops around the country to give new people an opportunity to "try us out" without a long journey.
- Move workshops about Scotland where good transport links.
- Good to move workshop around other geographical areas but have no particular view on which areas would suit best.

- Happy for Spring workshop to be anywhere in Scotland.
- I don't think I will be attending any more workshops or AGMs, my dancing is now of a poor standard!
- I am fortunate living centrally and therefore happy to go with majority. However, I think 2 important considerations are: 1. Good access by rail or road 2. Suitable venue with appropriate sized hall and good facilities.
- Central Scotland is best (for workshops), but not the venue in Perth because we could not park next to it. One of us did not come because we did not want to leave our dog in the campervan all day at a distance. We had to park a long way away next to the prison.
- It (workshop) should be moved to venues that can be accessed if possible by public transport.
- Workshops should be moved in order to give everyone a chance to attend.
- Workshops are most enjoyable.
- Hopefully could attract new members from other areas if regularly moved around.
- As I am past my "sell by date" I think the thoughts of the active teachers in our group should be taken before my views as I do not take a class now and am just on standby.
- As I don't attend Summer School I find the workshops very valuable. It is always interesting to learn what other teachers are doing. The workshops always seem very well organised with a well-balanced programme. Thank you for all the work that goes into arranging these days.
- A social dance on the Friday night is a good idea; it gives everyone a chance to get to know more dancers/teachers.
- Is there any way we could encourage younger/trainee teachers to attend? I appreciate all the hard work that goes into making the workshops varied and interesting and I think that on every occasion that is what has been achieved. I always look forward to the workshops, in fact I would like 3!
- I am usually away when the workshops are held so haven't attended many. Those I have been to have been very good.
- This has been talked about before, but it would be good to see progress on a joint workshop with SE region Teachers' Association. Perhaps find time at the Autumn Gathering or a Southern spring workshop in the next couple of years?
- Possibly keeping the venue in the Central belt would attract attendees from all areas but the advertising then has to go out to all areas/secretaries. When in a fairly 'local area' ie D&G branches & clubs in that area were targeted (and Ayrshire/Glasgow downwards). When in Forres, all branches/clubs in the North were targeted. The workshops are best attended I think when the topics are relevant and useable in the class situation. It would be good if occasionally the teachers' own personal development was addressed ie steps, hands, observation skills.

Scottish Schools Working Group

The formation of the Group is ongoing and I am still looking for a few more members from Argyll through Stirling and eastward towards Perth and down into Kincardine. Due to the difficulty in agreeing dates our first meeting is being held over Saturday 19th and Sat 26th October, not ideal but better than postponing till December.

Since my last Report at the TAS AGM the main focus has been on the Scottish Learning Festival, held in the SECC, Glasgow in mid-September. We were fortunate to have a cross-roads location near the main entrance and on the "main road" from the entrance to the Seminar area. The Exhibition, held annually, had over 200 exhibitors and attracted almost 5000 visitors over the 2 days. Visitors to our stand ranged from student teachers to heads of University departments and all levels between. Our team collected contact details from just over 100 visitors who were interested in our Education Resource packs. The contact details are being logged for future use and all will be acknowledged in the next few weeks. We were delighted with the response we received from those who came to meet us and with the contacts made.

During the set-up period a number of exhibitors stopped to admire and compliment us on our Stand; a pat-on-the-back for our in-house Graphic Designer Kat.

During the Autumn Gathering we will be meeting informally with the Deputy First Minister and Cabinet Secretary for Education, John Swinney, to advise him of what we do, the Education Resource packs we have and to ask for his assistance in bringing Scotland's culture of Dance & Music to all Scotland's young people. The team who will meet with the First Minister comes from the Management Board, the SSWG and E+T.

Roy Bain

Teachers' Concerns – the same everywhere!

Before teaching a recent teachers' workshop in North America, I handed out slips of paper to everyone and asked them to write down two concerns they have in their teaching. Some of the teachers had been qualified for longer than me; some were preparing their Units 4 and 5; and some were teaching with no qualifications.

The majority of their concerns were to do with mixed ability classes. How do you cope when two new beginners arrive in your intermediate social class, which may be the only class for hundreds of miles? This will be a familiar issue for most of us. Ideally, a dedicated beginners' class is the answer, but there are not many of them around – and they can be difficult, particularly if numbers are low. If only 12 people turn up in week 1, you can be sure that there will be many evenings in the winter when you don't have enough for one set. There is a limit to the number of 2-couple dances you can do in a 3-couple set. Beginners then miss out on one of the most difficult things for them – learning how a 3-couple dance in a 4-couple set works. And, of course, the downside to a dedicated beginners' class is they progress slowly, making it more difficult for them to

attend dances and balls. Encourage experienced dancers to come along and you risk them bossing the beginners about. And there is nothing worse for beginners than having their partner teaching them while the class teacher is speaking! I well remember one very experienced lady trying to be helpful in my beginners' class, but she regularly placed her male beginner partner at the woman's first corner, while she went to the man's corner – she was tall and usually danced as a man! The consensus at the workshop seemed to be to have a dedicated 30 minutes for the beginners before the main weekly class, then partner them sensibly for the rest of the class, and advise them when to sit out. This demands great sensitivity on the part of the teacher.

The next main concern was how to introduce 'technique' into a class which is convinced it only wants more and more complicated dances – again a familiar issue. How do you point out to someone who has been dancing for 40 years that they are not 'turning' their first corner, but arm-wrestling them? I squirm when I watch 'corner-partner-corner-partner' and see some of the contortions dancers use to 'get round' at the end of bar 4! For experienced dancers, 'technique' usually means footwork and horrible memories of everyone dancing up the hall in lines and the teacher pointing out 'faults' in front of everyone. I remember them well myself, particularly if the teacher was one of the 'great and good' of the RSCDS, beyond criticism, upholding what they saw as 'standards', but oh, how off-putting for so many less confident dancers, who quietly never came back to that class or that day school. Technique is, after all, only a means to an end – it is not an end in itself.



Among some of the other issues were: do I talk too much; how do I improve upper body control; how do I learn to project my voice; how do I prepare new dancers to go to a dance when they hardly know the basics; why don't my class remember dances; how do I get younger dancers to mix with older, less agile dancers?

One of the most interesting aspects of the workshop was that, when I suggested they can encourage older dancers to use skip change when turning in 'set and turn corners' in fast time, they were amazed. Although fully qualified, many had never met that idea. In their own words, they 'didn't think they were allowed to do that', as if a member of the RSCDS Police would arrive and charge them with 'not doing things correctly'. It was a worthwhile exercise for me, even if just to encourage them to have the confidence to do things their way. One teacher

came up and thanked me afterwards – she admitted she had been avoiding all dances with ‘set and turn corners’ for the past 15 years!

Jimmie Hill

Raised eyebrows!

Raising eyebrows seems to be in the news at the moment. Nobody bats an eyelid if two women dance together, but if it is two men, I have noticed eyebrows raised. At a number of recent dances I have noticed that young men have no hesitation in dancing together these days, even when their girlfriends or wives are present. When I taught the Edinburgh University group, it happened fairly regularly and nobody thought twice about it.

Thomas Wilson, on page 241 of his *Companion to the Ballroom* of 1820, gives advice on just this matter.

‘Two Ladies, or two Gentlemen, cannot dance together, without permission from the Master of Ceremonies; nor can permission be given while there are an equal number of Ladies and Gentlemen. In the absence of Gentlemen, when Ladies are permitted to form couples, and in the absence of Ladies, when it occurs that Gentlemen are permitted to form couples, they must always stand at the bottom of the set.’

So, there you are!

Jimmie Hill

Dates for your diary

RSCDS Autumn Gathering

Teaching Conference, Friday, 1 November 2019, Bells Sports Centre, Perth; cost £25
See RSCDS website for more details.

Falkirk Branch

RSCDS Falkirk Branch Christmas Dance will take place on Wednesday 4th December 2019 in Grangemouth Town Hall. Music will be provided by Colin Dewar. Tickets £15 (including supper).
For more information contact Dance.Convenor@RSCDS-Falkirk.Org.UK or Tel 01324 562 995.

West Lothian Branch

RSCDS West Lothian will be holding its annual Dance on Saturday, 7 December in Canon Hoban Hall, Broxburn. Music will be provided by Lindsay Weir and her Band. Further information from secretary@rscdswestlothian.org.uk

Aberdeen Branch

RSCDS Aberdeen Branch is celebrating its 95th Anniversary on Saturday 10th October 2020 with a dinner dance in Elphinstone Hall, University of Aberdeen. Luke Brady and his band will provide the music. Tickets will be available from March 2020 from aberdeenrscds@hotmail.co.uk or by calling 01224 636128.

Teachers' Association Scotland

Membership Application / Renewal **£5**

Year June 2019 - May 2020

Title

Name

Address.....
.....

Tel. No.

Mobile.....

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RSCDS Branch.....

Teaching Certificate Full /Part / None (Circle as appropriate)

First Aid Certificate Yes No (Circle as appropriate)

I enclose £

Signature.....

Date.....

Please make cheques payable to **Teachers Association Scotland** and send the completed form to the Treasurer:

Sue Porter, Schiehallion, Grianach Gardens, Oban, PA34 4LB

Tel 01631 563103

Email treasurer@countrydanceteachersofscotland.org.uk

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