



## Roy Goldring: The man his dances and his music

*A presentation given to the serTA Workshop on 29 September 2024, by Muriel Johnstone, supported by Ian Robertson.*



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### MORNING SESSION

Muriel started by telling us about the man. After National Service, he became a Civil Servant, eventually settling in Ilkley, Yorkshire with his wife Doreen. He was a family man, with Doreen much involved in the decision making about his dances. At one point he and Doreen had tried English Country Dancing but found it wanting. Once they had discovered Scottish Country Dancing, though, it was a different matter. Roy, we were told, was a golfer, an expert on art, a lover of classical music and a jazz enthusiast - an enthusiasm he shared with Muriel and was wont to send her "...cassettes galore of recordings taken off the radio and from his collection of records."

Muriel told us of her first encounter with Roy in St Andrews at the Summer School of 1977, when he and Doreen were successfully taking their teaching certificates. She was rehearsing in the Common Room of University Hall, in preparation for playing for the evening's social dancing, when in came the man wanting to know what it was that she was playing. It was the strathspey *Farewell to Cramond*,

which she had recently written. "Can I have it?" he asked! At this stage, she had no idea who this person was, but they chatted for a bit, and he asked her to play for a group of dancers who were trying-out some dances he had devised. The dance he wanted the tune for was *Cuillins of Skye* which was subsequently submitted to the RSCDS for the leaflet - *4 Dances for 1978*. Muriel and Roy went on to become great friends and worked together on publishing his dances. She and husband Bill were part of a widely scattered group of teachers and dancers who tried out his dances and sent back comments.

We learned that Roy was very careful about his choice of tunes for his dances and equally so about whether a quick time dance should be a jig or a reel. He was particular about phrasing and the 'light and shade' in a dance, but what stood out most was his emphasis of dance as a social experience. This, Muriel said, was why so many of his dances appear regularly on programmes around the world.

In devising his dances, Roy kept in mind the need for beginners to have achievable figures so that they might have fun as well as being challenged. He thought too about the difficulties older dancers might experience: awkward changes of direction, anything sudden, quick turns and the like. Muriel called him "The Really Useful Dance Deviser" because his books of dances contain "almost anything you might need to teach a class - at any level". She particularly liked his method of introducing parts of a really difficult figure to avoid overwhelming those new to it: the turns in the second half of the Tournée are in *The Compliment*; the leading through, crossing your partner over and casting in *Dunfermline Glen* is a good introduction to the Rondel without the complication of arches and 3-bar phrasing.

In all, Roy devised some 221 dances that have been published, 32 of which are published by the RSCDS, including the *Scotia Suite* of dances, which celebrate the centenary of the Scottish Antarctic Expedition led by William Spiers Bruce. Muriel surmised that there are probably a good few more dances we don't know about.



Between 1986 and 2005 the following books of his dances were published:

- Leeds RSCDS 25th Anniversary Book has 6 of Roy's dances
- 10 Social Dances
- 24 Graded & Social Dances
- 12 More Social Dances
- Graded & Social Dances 2
- 15 Social Dances
- 14 Social Dances for 2000
- Leeds 40th Anniversary Book - Social Dances 2002
- Graded & Social Dances 3
- A Reel for Alice & Other Social Dances
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Roy died in 2007, and there were obituaries written throughout the dancing world. Muriel read to us that written by Brenda Burnell of Leeds Branch:

“In the thirty years Roy lived in Ilkley, he emerged as one of our greatest creators of dances and it is in this respect that we will all, and future generations too, remember him. His knowledge of music allowed him to marry his dances to some wonderful tunes. His dances are great to dance – not too complicated but always with some new formation and extremely danceable. There are not many programmes that do not contain at least one of his dances”.

At the time of Roy's death, Muriel had been working to pull together all of his leaflet dances and continued to work on the project with Doreen, which, as Muriel put it, "completed the loop that circled many happy years of collaboration with Roy". These have recently been published, under the title '*Auld Friends Meet*', and with an accompanying double CD. Both are available from [www.scotsscores.com](http://www.scotsscores.com).

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## AFTERNOON SESSION

After lunch, Muriel amused us with further insights into Roy's character by reading from some of the many letters he had sent her. It seems that he not only had a way with dances, but a way with words too, writing with a clear and distinctive voice and a turn of phrase that raised a smile. Muriel then passed the lead to Ian Robertson.

### Roy and Music

Ian told us that some 25 different composers (see the list below) were represented in Roy's publications. He was good at picking tunes for dances, especially those that have a feel of always having been around, as if they'd been written a century or two ago – with Ian demonstrating the like.

Ian picked out a few of those composers for special mention, starting with the legendary Jim Johnstone, drawing particular attention to the waltzes he had written for the SCD community. The others specifically mentioned were Alastair Hunter, George Meikle, Bobby Crowe and John Renton. Ian talked about and demonstrated, how, with an attuned ear, the discerning listener could spot the musical phrases characteristic of these various composers.

Whilst Roy was generous in honouring lots of musicians that had helped him along the way, either by playing for his classes or dances or for suggesting tunes or composing tunes for him to match up to

his dances, he also used a great many traditional tunes. An avid listener to “Take the Floor” he was familiar with all the bands, and he would pick out tunes from their broadcasts and write asking if a certain tune had been used for a dance and if not, “could he have it?!” It almost goes without saying that Muriel herself composed many a tune for Roy, sending him cassette recordings of all kinds of music for him to listen to and choose from.

## Composers, the full list

<b>Nancy Dickson</b>	Pianist	<b>Jack Lindsay</b>	Fiddler
<b>Muriel Johnstone</b>	Pianist / Band leader	<b>Judith Smith</b>	Fiddler
<b>Moira Reekie</b>	Pianist	<b>George Stirrat</b>	Accordionist/ Band leader & pianist
<b>Pat Clark</b>	Pianist	<b>Neil Barron</b>	Accordionist/ Band leader
<b>Ian Findlay</b>	Pianist	<b>Sandy Nixon</b>	Accordionist/ Band leader
<b>Jean O'Connor</b>	Pianist	<b>Ian Crichton</b>	Accordionist/ Band leader
<b>Gillian Cummins</b>	Pianist	<b>Alastair Hunter</b>	Accordionist/ Band leader
<b>Wouter Joubert</b>	Pianist	<b>John Renton</b>	Accordionist/ Band leader
<b>Alastair Taylor</b>	Pianist	<b>Ian Muir</b>	Accordionist/ Band leader
<b>Donald Ridley</b>	Accordionist/ Band leader	<b>Nicol McLaren</b>	Accordionist/ Band leader
<b>Alasdair Heron</b>	Fiddler/ Band leader played with George Stirrat/Charlie Kirkpatrick/Lex Keith/Norman Currie	<b>Jim Johnstone</b>	Accordionist/ Band leader
<b>Bert Murray</b>	Fiddler	<b>David Hall</b>	Accordionist/ Band leader



## WHAT WE DANCED

As well as telling us about Roy, during both the morning and afternoon sessions, Muriel and Ian helped us to explore some of Roy’s dances. They were:

## Morning Session

Dance	Book	Devised
Society Piper   R32   3/4L	10 Social Dances	1986
Cuillins of Skye   S32   3/4L	Leaflet 4 for 1978	1978
Tae Fife and Back   J32   4/4L	12 More Social Dances (Now in 22)	1994
The Compliment   S32   2/4L	12 More Social Dances	1994
The Dancing Years   R88   4/Sq.	3 Anniversary + Auld Friends Meet	1992

## Afternoon Session

Dance	Book	Devised
More Bees A Dancing   R32   3/4L	Graded & Social Dances 2	1996
The Water of Fleet   J32   4/4L	15 Social Dances	1999
Well Kent   S32   3/3L	A reel for Alice	2000
John of Bon Accord   R32   3/4L	Book 33	1985
Dunfermline Glen   S32   2/4L	12 More Social Dances	1994
Miss Johnstone of Ardrossan   R32   5/5L	14 Social Dances	2000

*With much thanks to Muriel for sharing with me the transcript of her session, without which my own notes would have been wholly inadequate to convey such an informative and joyful day of dancing.*

*Gerry Elliott.*

### **Acknowledgements and Further Information:**

Top photo from Leeds Branch of Roy Goldring receiving his RSCDS Scroll of Honour from Lord Mansfield.

A list of all the Roy Goldring dances taught by Muriel at the workshop has been uploaded to the SCDDDB by Stu Kreloff. <https://my.strathspey.org/dd/list/52911/>

A full list of all Roy Goldring Dances is available on the SCDDDB list here  
<https://my.strathspey.org/dd/person/146/#dances>

There is also a film of an interview with Roy Goldring discussing his dance EH3 7AF on the Scottish Country Dancing Dictionary <https://www.scottish-country-dancing-dictionary.com/video/eh37af.html>