



### Coming Back Next Week?

I'm sure "Coming back next week?", the title of the serTA workshop held on 19 March 2023 in Kings Langley Community Centre, strikes a chord with most SCD teachers. Few of us are immune from the sort of self-doubt that floods in when apparently enthusiastic new recruits attend once and then don't show up again (Was it something I said? Something I did? Was it pitched wrong? Was I boring?)

Well, unsurprisingly, William Williamson was anything but boring. He ran an interest-filled – and fun-filled – day for twenty-eight attendees. I challenge anyone not to have learned from his lively style, his useful tips, his refreshing approach – and his inimitable humour. The pleasure of the day was also greatly enhanced by the wonderful music – and thoughtful comments – provided by Sandy Nixon with his accordion.

The day was split into two two-hour sessions, which seemed to fly by. As usual, William managed to vary the pace in a way that kept us all thoroughly engaged, interspersing movement and dancing with sit-down discussions and useful anecdotes. Anyone who only knew of him as the current Chair of the RSCDS might have been taken by surprise by the freshness (nay, iconoclasm) of his approach. Those of us who have previously experienced his teaching further appreciated the way in which he used a lightness of touch to challenge some of the assumptions and orthodoxies we may have carried with us for years.

For example, counselling against doing things just because "It's the way it's always been", William advocated taking a fresh look (especially post-Covid) at new approaches. He suggested that we need to appeal to dancers in a different way, no longer keeping to rigid distinctions between country dancing and ceilidh dancing, but seeing it all as part of the rich tradition of Scottish dancing. He also advised that we be realistic about people dipping in and out, and about the need to communicate through modern media. He instanced the new ways in which the RSCDS, encouraged by the appointment of a new Chief Operating Officer (a "COO"), Jon Berridge, now talks direct to members via – among other things - Facebook (maybe even Tik Tok?), more accessible office hours, regular news bulletins and podcasts ("demystifying Coates Crescent").

"Don't be afraid to throw in your own personality" and "We don't want RSCDS clones populating the world". These were also key messages. Yes, there are good reasons for standardised terminology, and the manual is undoubtedly valuable, but have the courage to adapt and use words/demonstrations people understand until they get it! Be prepared to be flexible – throw away your lesson plan if you need to. Be willing to co-operate with other groups and swap/share teachers. No more "silos" or empire-building in a way that means that the empire dies with the emperor.

Illustrating his message by the way in which he himself ran the workshop, William provided us with lots of fun activities and good ideas which we could take back to our own classes. For example, we immediately did a warm-up in which we effectively marked out the “Virginia Reel” while moving individually around the hall (4 bars walk, 4 bars turn RH, etc., even including 8 bars stand still and talk to the person next to you!). The movements could include skipping, Groucho Marx walking, slip-stepping etc. as we warmed up. But at the same time we were learning the dance, and bits of technique were already coming into play. Throughout the day William emphasised weaving technique in as you go along.

At the request of attendees, a full list of the dances we did is included at the end of this report. For now, I’d like to comment on just one or two, on account of the refreshing way in which William taught them.

He recommended starting and ending with a “lollipop”. Our “lollipop” to start with was “Snowdrops in the Glen”, a pretty and relatively straightforward reel by Ruth Beattie which allowed for formation practice (promenade) as we went along. Later on, after illustrating how **not** to teach “The Deil amang the Tailors”, as our “lollipop” before lunch William then allowed us to let our hair down and dance “The Deil” with as many creative variations as we wished. In “Well Done Jack”, with tricky changes of direction, he suggested that there was no overwhelming need to get back out to the side in an orthodox manner after the back-to-back movement. And we practised using our body weight (in a very slight lean forward) to carry us from the pas de basque into the turn. The emphasis throughout was on making dancing enjoyable and not creating unnecessary barriers.

Throughout the day there were a number of discussion sessions in which participants raised fascinating topics and contributed interesting insights into experiences of (for example) the Core Training for Instructors (CTI), the Dancing Achievement Award (DAA), and running classes for dancers with limited mobility.

In one very interesting session we spent some useful and illuminating time talking about music and musicians. “Don’t treat your musician like a CD player!” was an essential message from William. We covered a range of topics, including the place of original tunes, the appropriation (or misappropriation?) of tunes by the RSCDS, the best tunes to finish a set, the speed at which bands play, on which topics Sandy had very interesting observations to make. William pointed out how much research musicians and bandleaders put into researching tunes, emphasising the importance of us **talking to them** (a point which should be self-evident but which was well made!). It may also be quite sobering to do so – we might find that we “see ourselves as others see us”.

If you were at the workshop, I hope you feel I’ve done justice in a very brief way to what was a most rewarding day. If you weren’t, I hope I’ve made you wish you had been. And finally, I hope that we’ll all be **coming back next time!**

**Alison Jackson, South Wales**

**List of dances:**

Virginia Reel (Reel)

Snowdrops in the Glen (Reel)

The Far Islands (Strathspey)

The Deil amang the Tailors (Reel)

Dunedin Festival Dance (not unlike Borrowdale Exchange – but “That’s English”) (Reel)

Anderson’s Rant (Reel)

Well Done Jack (Jig)

Miss Graham of Dykeside (Strathspey)

Osgood Mackenzie of Inverewe (Reel)