



South East Region Teachers Association

Come and Try Scottish Country Dancing Wendy Mumford Come September 2010

Reporter: Pamela Cross

This workshop took place in the Memorial Hall in Finchampstead, a charming spot which tested the map reading skills/satnav of those not already familiar with it. The planned topic for the first part of the session, teaching Scottish country dancing to children, had been changed when Marilyn Watson, who had agreed to give that session, had an unfortunate injury. We hope she is recovering well and we look forward to her session in the future.

Wendy Mumford stepped in at short notice. Her topic was 'organising a taster session' What we got wasn't so much a taster as a full three course meal!. Her request to us not to put on dancing shoes at the start of the session left us wondering whether we were going to be sitting through a lecture, but this was a ruse to get us thinking like beginners. Wendy took us step by step through running a ceilidh for non-dancers, a taster weekend for beginners and further integration into a regular class. As we played the part of the beginners in her very practical demonstration, we enjoyed doing a number of simple dances, including some devised by Wendy to illustrate certain formations. We also enjoyed pretending not to know what we should do, and taking every opportunity to misunderstand, but Wendy took all that in her stride. At the end we

had a question and answer session, and Wendy handed out some excellent summaries of her session with suggestions for dances to use to build up skills progressively. Thanks, Wendy, this was a really well planned and delivered workshop and especially admirable given the short notice.

After a break for lunch, the second session was organised by Mervyn Short and involved teaching tips for various formations from both sides of the dance. Mervyn had asked for suggestions for formations to include in advance. However, not all of those making suggestions realised that they were going to be demonstrating their own tips for teaching the formation before getting advice from the rest of the group. That way, Mervyn cleverly got most of the teaching done for him. We had, among others, tips for teaching stepping up and down (Judy Valvona, all the way from the Isle of Wight), setting to corner and partner (Ann Dix), the tournee (Barbara Martlew), and set and link for three (Catherine Smith). A particularly memorable tip was to practice for set to corner and partner in a circle, giving hands to guide people from the centre to the edge of the circle (easier to demonstrate than describe). The 'teaching from both sides of the dance' meant that the men got a chance to dance formations such as the tournee from the womens' side of the dance, which was an eye opener for them and also fun.

For both the morning and afternoon sessions we had music from Keith Anderson on the fiddle, who coped with requests for various snatches of reel, jig or strathspey music expertly, and greatly enhanced our day.

This workshop managed to be extremely useful and practical while also being great fun, the laughter almost drowning out the music at times. The lovely cakes at the tea break also deserve a mention. This will be a tough act to follow.

Pamela Cross

