



## South East Region Teachers Association

# **Subtle Motivations** **Anne Smyth of Fort William** **with Barbara Manning** **March 2012**

Reporter: Ken Martlew

Twenty four of us were privileged to attend this meeting. Unfortunately the date clashed with a MacLennan rehearsal, and it was Mother's Day, so a significant number of regional teachers missed an excellent session.

Anne's relaxed but entertaining manner belied the continuous flow of information she passed on, and she effortlessly (or so it appeared!) held our attention all day. Such enviable expertise has been honed by her many years teaching Scottish dancing all over the world. Her ability to analyse her methods also reflected her experience training and examining RSCDS teachers.

The mysterious title gathered meaning through the day. Anne gave us what was in essence a conventional teacher's workout, building up skills exercises, steps, formations, and dances of increasing complexity. However, throughout, she had a practical approach to anticipating what is likely to happen in our classes, and imparting subtle ideas on how to motivate our

dancers to do what we are trying to teach. Those of our number fit to do so were on the dance floor most of the day.

Her starting point was that it should always be **FUN**, and she kept it that way all day. We should always be ready to **PRAISE**. Keep the class **MOVING** – never stand talking at them for more than a sentence or two. Make sure everyone has a **FAIR SHARE** of the action – sometimes ask for a rearrangement that gives everyone a new partner without their having to choose one, in case the same person gets left out. Give them only what they **CAN ACHIEVE** – for example, choose a sequence of dances that introduces only one new element each time. Always the aim is to **MOTIVATE** the dancers into acquiring the skills needed to perform particular dances adequately.

Anne's use of a **variety of styles of music** depended very much on the expertise of Barbara Manning at the piano, who came up with all sorts unlikely but popular tunes played with panache and a smile.

The day started with a long watch-me-and-do-it warm-up to Ragtime tunes, including "Turkey in the Straw", "Whistling Rufus", and some jazzed up McPhail tunes. Anne's entertaining manner and infectious love of a variety of dance and other PE movements immediately had us waving and shaking around amid laughter that took our minds off painful joints from the previous night's dance. The waltz routines that followed anticipated more technical footwork to come.

After **skip change** round the room to "Row, row the boat", and "We are the Champions" at normal and slow speeds, we paired and were asked to dance individually round our partners in 8 bars ( ). Not many anticipated the slow phrasing! (laughter). Then 4 bars, and finally 2. Barbara then gave us an impressive **sequence of jig /reel**, switching every 4 bars, and after watching our partners skip round the room there was some debate whether this significantly changed the step or not. It was harder in reel time, which possibly took some life out of the step.

Formations started with **hands across**. We had to imagine hooplas on the floor, and dance round them. The hooplas kept returning – for circles, turns, and reels. Ideally you bring some real visual aids, notwithstanding Health & Safety. As always, **LOOK AT** your partner when dancing with them. *However*, if you really can't stand eye contact with this person for the duration of the figure, look at their hand or shoulder instead!

**Granville Market** (2nd Graded Book) gave us an easy round the room dance in skip change, thinking about shape and hands.

**Reels of 3** came next, in several varieties. Starting individually around 2 hooplas, we picked up the geography, changing body angles, and covering. In lady up / man down reels we observed that corners could cover every 2 bars with the diagonally opposite dancer.

**Anderson's Rant** (Miscellany) introduced **crossover reels**.

**Pas-de-Basque**. Anne gave some useful analysis of the varieties of 2-beat Pas-de-Basque that occur, and how to correct them. We tried keeping in time with other dancers in files with hands on the next person's shoulder, to the tune "Running Bear". Interestingly we tried this *with our eyes shut* – much to the amusement of our bandaged observers!

**Chains**, leading to **rights and lefts** – starting with an exercise for the curved shapes, angling the body correctly, and handing. To cross the dance in a lozenge shape it follows that as you give hands to the other dancer your arms will be angled away to keep you well apart.

**White Cockade** (5/11) finished the morning session – a Beginners' dance with some challenges, especially the change from setting to travelling.

After lunch we were back in action with –

**The Dashing White Circle** as a warm-up dance.

This heralded the inevitable **pas-de-Basque travelling, setting and turning corners**. We again danced round our standing partners individually. When it came down to 2 bars, only Mervyn had long enough legs to achieve this (*almost* – more laughter).

Next, we moved into exercising the brain a little more. Forming 3-couple sets, we danced as a medley “**The Machine Without Horses**” (12/12), “**Mrs Stewart’s Jig**” (35/1) and “**The Gathering**” (Miscellany). Each new couple started the next dance, and only “The Gathering” was walked. It proved a good incentive for cheerful team work to join up the memory circuits, with the aim of keeping going whatever happens.

Some deceptively light-hearted **Strathspey exercises** followed, the components of the step danced to the Skater’s Waltz (as one does, I suppose). Anne’s entertaining delivery subtly motivated us through the pain thresholds of the bent knee, pushing off from the back foot, stretching into both halves of the step, and the slow pull-through.

The footwork was kept in sight as we negotiated **two-handed turns** round more hooplas, hugging between us imaginary balloons which must not be allowed to burst. Releasing hands as soon as the balloon might be squashed gave a vivid picture prompting us to let go on bar 3. A typical Anne embellishment was to invite everyone to clap in the waiting bars of turn for 2, wait for 2, repeat.

**The Crooket Horned Ewie** (14/4) presented our next challenge – **phrasing**, especially in the long solos for 1st couple, some again across the music. Not obviously a winner in the ballroom, the dance was an excellent choice for a workshop.

A **Strathspey poussette** was next, and with a hint of a small amendment to be added in the forthcoming Blue Book revision (what a shame, they aren’t returning to the original

diamond poussette as most of us hoped!). Various problems, including changes of feet, were discussed.

**Rights and lefts for three couples** took us to the next dance:

**Moranbank** (Banff Book). 4 and 12 bar phrases across the music kept us thinking, and the dance was enjoyed by all.

The final challenge was to the **brain**, in the shape of one of John Wilkinson's more devious 3-couple creations:

**Jackie's Fankle** (= "mess-up"). Numerous 2-bar phrases and "whilsts" meant that every dancer had to think for himself. There is a fine line between it being a great dance, or a right fankle! An excellent conclusion to the day, for which each set managed to hold it together.

The **cool-down** still held our interest, with more of Anne's irresistible enthusiasm for elegant dance and rhythm pervading standard routines. Why not allow the arms and hands to waltz to Barbara's "Ashokan Farewell" while squeezing the lactic acid out of one's Achilles tendons?

More drinks and cakes provided by our **excellent hosts, Brian and Marion**, preceded a **plenary discussion on future plans**. Several suggestions for dates, venues and topics were made, and the results will no doubt be circulated as soon as confirmed. **All are encouraged to submit any further ideas to our organisers for consideration.**

The meeting dissolved rather than concluded as several intrepid travellers from as far away as the Isle of Wight had to leave. The clash of dates was unfortunate, and will be avoided in future. However, **the meeting is open to anyone who teaches an SCD class**, and it really is a great opportunity not just to brush up dancing and teaching skills, but to network with other teachers.

**Thanks** were enthusiastically given to Anne Smyth (guest speaker) and Barbara Manning (pianist) for an exceptionally

good workshop; to Brian and Marion Pierson for hosting it; and to our three organisers, Mervyn Short, Mike Johnson, and Rachel Wilton. All have done sterling work on our behalf.

Ken Martlew (Hemel Hempstead, Herts.)