

**ORAL INTERVIEW
WITH
ANN ROUTLEDGE
EAST LOTIAN BRANCH**

RSCDS Oral History Project

East Lothian Local Association

Interview with Ann Routledge 16th December 2016

I went to Primary School in Galloway in the village of Port William. Scottish Country Dancing was taught to all P5, 6 and 7 children. A team was entered into the Galloway Music Festival. Scottish Country Dancing was an important part of local community life.

On leaving Primary School, I moved with my family to East Lothian and went to the Knox Academy in Haddington. Stanley Wilkie was the P.E. teacher and we did Scottish Country Dancing at the Annual Christmas Party. There was a Music Festival in Haddington, but I wasn't allowed to take part as the rehearsals clashed with my Latin Class. The Head Teacher didn't allow me to miss that!

On leaving school, I went to Moray House (Teacher training) Moray House was linked to Jordanhill College in Glasgow where Miss Milligan was a tutor. All trainee teachers had to learn how to teach Scottish Country Dancing. We were taught by Mima Corson and (I think) Allie Anderson.

I started teaching in North Berwick., where, with Elsie Thorburn, we ran an after-school club, training children for the Haddington Festival.

Round about that time, the 1960's, I started going to a class in North Berwick. It was a big class, taught by June Scott and was held in the High School. I liked the dancing and went to the monthly dances organised by RSCDS East Lothian Branch. You were expected to be a member of the Society if you went to these dances, so I joined then.

In those days, classes and dances were more formal, with much more attention to 'doing things correctly'. The classes started with warm-up exercises followed by step and formations practice. You were encouraged to dance as a team, paying attention to the position of the other dancers in the set. I don't think that style of class would go down very well today, but we didn't know any other way. I enjoyed it. I think everyone enjoyed it. Although it was quite formal, I don't remember it being stressful.

Scottish Country Dancing has always been a big part of my life. I've been on the Committee of East Lothian Branch since 1986 and the Co-ordinator of our Annual Week end, now going each April to the Atholl Palace Hotel in Pitlochry, since 1988. I've been the East Lothian delegate to the Society AGM for over 10 years.

What do I like about Scottish Country Dancing? I like taking part in an activity with others. It's great when you all get it right! I like the social side - meeting lots of different people with a common interest, going to different places. We've been to many places all over

Scotland to dance. I love the music and to different bands.

Over the years, there has been a lot of changes. There used to be classes all over East Lothian. Not now. There are fewer dancers in this area and most are in an older age group. There is much less emphasis on technique, but the classes and dances are less formal, more friendly. A number of people, particularly the newer dancers, come to the classes, but won't come to the monthly dances and won't join the Society. I'm not sure of the reason why. No one seems to aspire to be in a demonstration team.

In the 1960's, you were expected to learn the dances before the event. There were no crib sheets, the dances were not called, there were no 'walk throughs, and you couldn't watch the dance on UTube!

Also, we no longer have homemade sandwiches and cakes at the interval!

What about the future for Scottish Country Dancing? It is our tradition, but younger people don't seem interested. It is Ceilidh dancing that attracts them. But our tradition must be kept alive. It's not taught in schools at all. There's a shortage of qualified teachers. It's more difficult to learn formations, etc. in later life, and that presents a conflict for people - to learn how to do it well without becoming stressed, and, at the same time, enjoying it.

Perhaps there are too many new dances, some of which are very complicated.