

The Bill Ranscombe Award is presented by  
Hertfordshire Folk Association  
for valuable services to  
English Folk Dance, Song and Music  
in Hertfordshire

To: **Lynda Swaine**



**Citation for the  
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Presented 3<sup>rd</sup> November 2019**

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Lynda has had a lifelong interest in country dancing, her first love being Scottish which she used to teach using records played on a portable gramophone, modified so that she could vary the speed according to the progress of her dancers.

When Lynda met Roger he introduced her to the English tradition and they joined English Miscellany soon after it started. The EM women decided they would like to learn North West Morris; however, they had several children and no obvious childcare for Sunday mornings. Lynda stepped forward, volunteering to look after the children instead of learning North West herself. When the children were a little older, Lynda thought they might learn a dance to display when on an up-coming EM trip to Belgium. 'I want to be near you' was one of the first dances she taught them. After success in Belgium, Lynda continued with the dance sessions at Park Hall, Harpenden, equipping herself with cassettes and a 'ghetto blaster' which she had modified for variable speed. Word about the children's group spread and soon non-EM parents were asking whether their children could join.

Suzanne Farmer enrolled in EM so that her sons were eligible and she helped Lynda with the group before deciding to join one of the EM groups herself. When Fran Beak took her daughters along, she found Lynda was taking the children all on her own so stayed to help by operating the cassette player. When there was an odd number of children, Lynda would ask Fran to dance, rather than leave a child sitting out. Lynda welcomed all comers to the group, whatever their abilities, encouraging them to do their best. Soon she started teaching different dance traditions from her experience in EM. In 1992, Lynda asked the members what they'd like to be called and the name 'Young Miscellany' was adopted, providing the group with its own identity.

The children of EM parents continued to accompany their parents on EM exchange visits, and several of the original members have great memories of displaying in California under Lynda's direction. Lynda also looked for local events for all the children to participate in and chose the annual HFA Children's Festival in the grounds of Hatfield House as a regular venue until 2009. She made costumes for everyone and taught them all the dances on the programme so they could dance confidently alongside the school teams. The festivals provided an opportunity to get to know YM parents and siblings, and for them to see what the dancers could do.

Jan Guyatt comments *'At the same time as keeping the traditions alive in an enjoyable way for the children, everyone was given a chance to flourish and develop. The musicians became accustomed to public performance, as did the dancers. Lynda chose dances suitable for the children while giving them a challenge.'* Both Jan's children were members, Anthea as a dancer and Edwin a musician (he now plays in Pilgrims' Way and other bands). Anthea says: *"Lynda helped me to learn more, and establish my love of folk and I still love going to folk festivals and dancing the night away! I remember clog dancing in America in front of a large crowd and taking part in the Harpenden procession and days of dance at Hatfield. YM gave me the opportunity to meet new people, see new places and learn new things. Later on Lynda guided me to help lead some of the dances and teach the younger children; the confidence I gained from this helped me to work as a youth folk leader at Sidmouth Festival for a number of years. I want to thank Lynda for her calmness and passion for passing on the folk traditions to the next generation. At times we didn't make it easy!"*

For several years Lynda entered the group into the Carnival Parades of both St Albans and Harpenden. The group won cash prizes a couple of times in Harpenden - a boost for the group's morale and its funds. Another early venue was Mill Green Museum. In 2007, Mill Green's invitation clashed with the HFA Festival; nothing daunted, Lynda prepared the group to do both, the morning in Hatfield and the afternoon at Mill Green.

After the refurbishment of Park Hall, the mid-morning break was taken in the new kitchen, allowing the members to chat about anything and everything. One morning, some of the girls commented that the paisley patterned skirts were childish. Taking note of their feelings, Lynda set about sourcing different material and re-designing the costume, consulting them along the way before making all the new costumes. Little did she know that, further down the years, Rhona French would be prompted to join YM by the appearance of the girls' long billowing blue skirts. On her first dance-out in Harpenden, Rhona's Dad, Joe, was inspired to learn to play the accordion when talking with Roger who lent him the HFA teaching accordion, and eventually her brother Marius was persuaded to join and became an enthusiastic and skilled dancer.

Over the years, Lynda has expanded the YM repertoire from country dances to various forms of Morris dancing – North West, Border, Cotswold and Molly – and other dance traditions using brooms, clogs, garlands, hankies, maypole, ribbons, staves and rapper swords. Lynda has invited more experienced dancers to teach YM, on a regular basis or at one-off workshops. In the 1990s Lynda decided YM could tackle clog dancing and, without an expert to help, she started to learn and was literally one step ahead of the group in the first few sessions of teaching it. She encouraged members to go to Reading Cloggies annual workshops to improve skills and learn new routines; this was also where YM learned the Devon Broom Dance which has remained a favourite ever since. Member Heidi Faulkner remembers that Lynda went out of her way to provide extra clog practice in her own home, laying clog boards on her kitchen floor. In 2000, Lynda hired a minibus to drive a small group, including a couple of parents, 'up north' to a clogging event in Oswaldtwistle. She was overjoyed when member Lauren Brooks won the Best Newcomers Trophy, whilst all of them

learnt steps for 'Ossy Jig', a dance included in the YM repertoire to this day. Lynda subsequently recruited Janet Jones and Jane Johnson to help with clog.

Lynda was teaching country dancing, including Maypole, in a local primary school. So when there was a chance for a 'paid gig' for a maypole display in Luton's St George's Day event, she grabbed the opportunity and borrowed the school maypole to teach YM three or four figures. Luton had asked for maypole but Lynda also gave them a set of dances from the group's growing repertoire, rightly judging that this would promote YM better, and indeed the displays in Luton have brought in several new members over the years.

As parents became more involved with YM activities and could see the huge amount of work that Lynda was doing, in 2005 a committee was formed. Husband Roger had always provided the live music and now Alix Hazel shared the role of Musical Director; Alix also started work on a YM website. Occasionally paths crossed with EM, and with Janet Jones as EM/YM liaison officer, in 2006 the two groups shared four events. In 2010 liaison broadened to include links with sides other than EM.

YM has performed at so many events and Lynda has persuaded parents to travel quite long distances for some: Ely, Winchester, Chippenham, Nottingham, Whittlesea, Carshalton, to name but a few. The first time YM went to Rochester Sweeps Festival Lynda hired a minibus and drove the members there, with two mothers, Sandra Brooks and Heather Faulkner, to help. The organisers had allocated a drama classroom for YM, so that the children could have an earlier bedtime, undisturbed by late night festival goers. Undisturbed? After settling down that first night, a small voice announced the need to use the toilet - realisation came that the nearest one was outside and across in the main building. Torches out, shoes and coats on, and the mums did sterling work escorting members on several night-time trips that weekend, while Lynda decided to insist on accommodation in the main building should YM ever return. And YM did return, year after year, and the members enjoyed themselves so much that they convinced their parents to come too. So, Lynda's venture laid the foundation for many happy family weekends built around YM displays in Rochester, and then Hastings for the May Day Bank Holiday weekend; and, from 2011, a second weekend away by the sea for the Potty Morris Festival, Sheringham. Participation in this led to YM members taking part in the successful attempt at the largest number of Morris Dancers dancing simultaneously for the Guinness Book of Records .

The members love dancing with different pieces of kit and were delighted when Gareth Ford started to teach rapper to the older ones. They went several times, the only young people's side present, to Thrales Rapper's get-togethers for rapper sides to enjoy each other's dancing without the pressure of competing. They also competed in the DERT Rapper Tournament three times. Lynda supported the YM rapper side enthusiastically, attending all these outings and backing up Gareth's comments and those of the DERT judges. As a parent, Gareth says *"Both Emily and Harry got their first taste of performing in public with YM which has boosted their confidence in moving to other folk dance groups – EM North West (Emily) and NYFTE/Chiltern Hundreds (Harry). YM has no barrier as regards age for any child who wants to dance, which was certainly the case for Harry when he picked up a broom and did the broom dance – he was 2, I think! He also did a star turn at a DERT in Bristol with favourable*

*comments from the judges.*" Other YM dancers went on to join Tower Ravens and Thrales Rapper sides.

The most ambitious YM trip away was to Salzkotten, Germany in 2010, for which Lynda hired a coach. The hosts were really surprised when Lynda told them how many adults would be in the party. The other foreign sides travelling to the festival were accompanied by their leaders, just like a school trip. Lynda has created a truly different experience for both the children and their families.

In 2013 Lynda was keen that YM respond positively to an invitation negotiated by Joe for YM to go to Folk By The Oak. A return to Hatfield House, but now the only dance side performing and continuing to do so annually. EFDSS staff spotted YM and were so impressed that Lynda received an invitation for YM to display at 'May in a Day' at Cecil Sharp House in 2016. She considered it the highest accolade and a wonderful experience for the members, especially as they were among the first to dance in the refurbished Kennedy Hall. And EFDSS followed up with an invitation for YM to come again, three years later.

Wherever YM has danced out, Lynda has received appreciative comments, from passers-by and other dancers. Other sides and festival organisers have been keen to invite YM to their own events, so that nowadays YM has to deliberate as to which to choose in any one year. Lynda has done a phenomenal amount of work for YM outings, negotiating with the event organisers, collating dance programmes based on a detailed understanding of each child's abilities and experience, liaising with the band and marshalling everyone on the day itself. Over and above the dancing days, Lynda has arranged New Year parties and End of Year picnics for the members and these have become lovely family events.

Always looking for ways to promote YM, Lynda has managed to have the group filmed for TV twice. The first time for CBBC, when a film crew came to a practice in Park Hall and also caught the dancing in Rochester; the second at the JMO Day in Peterborough when the members were all given Blue Peter badges.

Lynda started with recorded music and co-opted Roger to play accordion for YM displays, along with a few of the boys who preferred not to dance, including sons Andrew and Peter. When Alix Hazel contacted Lynda with children Katherine and Tom all wanting to play folk tunes on their instruments, Lynda welcomed them into YM. The children were diverted into dancing when the numbers were low but Alix played regularly for practices and was joined by other musicians, both adults and children. Katherine went on to study folk music and she has played with YM on various occasions after moving away. Lynda was delighted that Katherine met up with YM in St Neots this year, husband and new baby in tow, but still planning to keep playing her fiddle for folk dancing. The YM band has gone from strength to strength, and it is years since Lynda abandoned her cassette player to work with live musicians who respond well to her requests for changing the speed of the music. Joe French, who first played out during the 2005/6 season, has led the band now for many years, relying on Roger to assemble YM's musical repertoire; Joe says:

*"The YM band continues to be a lovely opportunity for parents to learn and practise new musical skills alongside their children practising their dancing skills. YM is therefore a rare*

*thing - a children's activity group in which parents can also take part in learning new skills. Lynda has always greatly encouraged the live band, and always asks for a round of applause for the musicians at the end of a practice.*

*Our children had a 12-year association with YM. Both benefitted from the support and help provided by older teenage members when they joined. I am very proud that they both paid this back towards the end of their YM careers. It is to Lynda's credit that she has managed to juggle the conflicting requirements of 6-year-olds and 18-year-olds, sometimes in the same group!*

*My own addiction to YM did not cease when my last child left, as I continued to lead the band. I think it is a brilliant institution which breaks down generational barriers and promotes English traditional music and dance, without taking itself too seriously. It has provided some life-enduring memories for dozens of children and their parents, and continues to be a very important part of many families' lives."*

To finish, here are some memories from Lynda and Roger's elder son, Andrew.

*"When mum started to teach folk dance to her group of EM children, we were already all good friends and enjoyed it greatly. One of the strengths of the group was that despite the age range, we all danced together and the older children supported the younger ones. Somehow the age range never mattered, in part because we were always learning something new. I've had many years of dancing since, and teaching dancing, and the foundation of it all has been those first few years when I was taught how to dance at a point in life when learning this was so easy. Lynda has pulled together an amazing group of people who help run the club, and they look well placed to continue to make the group a success into the future."*

Lynda, Young Miscellany has made its mark on the folk scene and you have every right to be enormously proud of it. This Award is well and truly deserved.