RICHERS AND RESOURCES

THE NATIONAL RESOURCE CENTRE FOR DANCE, UNIVERSITY OF SURREY

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The National Resource Centre for Dance (NRCD) is the only archive exclusively dedicated to collecting materials related to the history of dance in the United Kingdom. There are other UK dance archives but these are either in collections that have a broader focus to their content or are specific to particular dance companies; the NRCD, on the other hand, solely focuses on collecting, preserving, and making available materials that represent a wide range of indigenous theatrical, educational, and theoretical dance development.

The Centre and its archives were founded in 1982 in response to a 1980 report by the Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation that identified the need for areas of support for dance research and education in the UK. The Foundation provided the University of Surrey with initial funding to set up a resource alongside its emergent post- and undergraduate programs and, since its inception, the collection has developed from a small batch of items to an archive that includes over fifty named special collections and a large core collection of materials.

The collection has been built up entirely through donations and bequests and it represents the life and work of dance companies, organizations, choreographers, movement theorists, artists, critics, arts administrators, and educators. The diverse holdings include personal papers, photographs, scrapbooks, periodicals, video and film, books, costumes and set designs, and many forms of ephemera.

Materials date back to the seventeenth century, the oldest item being a book about the English stage published in 1698, but the collection predominantly focuses on the late nineteenth century onwards. In some cases, clusters of related archives have been built up, the most prestigious of these relating to Rudolf Laban, the twentieth century's foremost movement theorist; the NRCD holds all the personal papers generated after his arrival in England in 1938 as well as many earlier items. Other collections linked to Laban include the Lisa Ullmann

Archive,^{*} the personal papers of Warren Lamb,[†] Geraldine Stephenson's collection,[‡] materials concerning Laban's methods applied to movement therapy and educational work, and official records from related organizations such as the Laban Guild and the International Council for Kinetography Laban.

In latter years, the NRCD has also enhanced its holdings of company archives, mainly mid-scale touring companies, covering a range of dance styles including ballet, modern, South Asian, and Afro-Caribbean dance. Indicative examples are Janet Smith and Dancers and Extemporaneous Dance Company, both key companies in the UK during the 1970s and 1980s, which spawned a number of important dance artists; V-TOL Dance Company (1991-2001), which incorporated the use of mixed media into its work; Shobana Jeyasingh Dance Company, whose contemporary dance performances are informed by the classical Indian technique of Bharata Natyam; Harlequin Ballet, run by John and Barbara Gregory during the 1950s and 1960s; and Green Candle Dance Company, which combines artistic excellence with access to dance by a wide range of communities.

In 2008, the NRCD and University of Surrey were awarded funding from the Arts and Humanities Research Council (AHRC) to carry out cataloguing, research, and dissemination work on its collections related to specific forms of dance that developed in Britain during the early decades of the twentieth century. The project *Pioneer Women: early British modern dancers* focuses on four archive collections relating to Madge Atkinson (1885-1970), Ruby Ginner (1886-1978), Leslie Burrowes (1908-1985), and Ludmila Mlada (1918-2003). The

^{*} Lisa Ullman was Laban's partner for the last twenty years of his life and with him co-founded the Art of Movement Studio.

[†] Warren Lamb practiced and developed Laban's system of Industrial Rhythm, which assessed personal effort and job performance on factory production lines. From this work emerged Action Profiling and Movement Pattern Analysis, which are used to assess and enhance management team dynamics.

[‡] Geraldine Stephenson's materials reveal how her training with Laban and his theories were used in a professional theater context.

primary objective of the project is to preserve and publicize these collections, which are of significant value to British and international modern dance history. In addition to a series of popular and scholarly events and outcomes, the overall aim is to increase awareness of these archives and the movement genres that they represent and to encourage research in this under-acknowledged area of British dance history. The foremost task is to catalogue and enable access to the records by means of the NRCD's online catalogue. The emphasis will be on two of these archive collections relating to the life and work of Atkinson and Ginner. These British dance protagonists founded their methods of Natural Movement and Revived Greek Dance* during a time when existing concepts of dance were being challenged and new, innovative approaches to movement emerged. Atkinson and Ginner's work is rooted in Greek ideals and parallels can be made with the work of Isadora Duncan and neo-classicism.

The smaller of the two collections belonged to a former pupil of Ruby Ginner's, Beatrice Bellairs, who, with Pauline Grant, founded the Grant-Bellairs School of Dance and Drama in 1935; it became the Guildford School of Acting (GSA) in 1964. Named after its original donor, the Bice Bellairs Collection was donated to the NRCD by the GSA in 1997. Ginner passed much of the material in this collection to Bellairs directly and as such it contains personal items collated by Ginner herself. The records are explicit in their representation of the popularity and influence of Ginner and Revived Greek Dance. There are thirteen beautifully crafted scrapbooks of press cuttings documenting Ginner's career (1901-1954), many issues of the Greek Dance journal (1924-1955), approximately fifty theater programs, photographs, posters, and other publicity material, annotated music scores, manuscripts, several books on dance and Greek history, and papers relating to summer schools, festivals, and examinations. In addition, Ginner was a devotee of her contemporary Anna Pavlova, and the collection contains several scrapbooks dedicated to the ballerina and a signed photograph of Pavlova dedicated to Ginner, dated 1922.

* From 1984 known as Classical Greek Dance (Ruby Ginner Method).

Ginner's Revived Greek Dance drew on athletics, drama, and dance with an allegiance to modern perceptions of ancient Greek culture. The method developed from Ginner's artefact-based study of dancing figures from the ancient Greek arts, which she carried out at the British Museum. Ginner's references to the athleticism that was prevalent in such artwork ensured that her technique embraced Greek ideals and Hellenism. The method explores various styles: lyrical, athletic, bacchic, pyrrhic, tragic, and choric. The use of props such as spears, swords and shields, cymbals, tambors, and thyrsi was common to several of these styles (see Figure 1). The literature held in the collection emphasises Ginner's commitment to the authenticity of her method as "Revived Greek" dance, particularly in her manuscript, "The Gateway a survey of the Hellenic Dance" and the book that ensued, *Gateway to The Dance* (London: Newman Neame, 1960).

<Place Figure 1 near here.>

During the 1920s and 1930s, Ginner, Mawer, and pupils (known as 'Ginner-Mawerites') performed at various venues and events in and around London. These included the New Scala Theatre, the Rudolf Steiner Hall, and other more unusual places such as Hyde Park, Regents Park, and a fete in the grounds of Ham House, Richmond-upon-Thames. The many outdoor performances given by the Ginner-Mawer Company, most of which occurred in Hyde Park for the League of Arts Hyde Park Entertainments, are represented by programs and newspaper cuttings which provide a record of performances in almost every year from 1926-1939 (Figure 2). Newspaper photographs from the performances in 1933 demonstrate the vast number of spectators attending; articles suggest there were between 8000 and 13000 people.

<Place Figure 2 near here.>

Another key event is acknowledged in a scrapbook clipping from the *Radio Times*. It highlights the appearance of the Ginner-Mawer dancers on BBC Television in December 1936 in a live recording from the BBC studios at Alexandra Palace in London. This is particularly prominent in the Ginner-Mawer history as it was only a month earlier that the world's first regular high-definition television service was established from Alexandra Palace.¹

A notable achievement, amongst many others, was Ginner's founding of the Association of Teachers of the Revived Greek Dance which later became the Greek Dance Association. This was affiliated with the Imperial Society of Teachers of Dancing (ISTD) Greek Dance Branch, which still exists today[§]. Furthermore, Ginner was awarded the Gold Leaf commemorative medal and a diploma by the Hellenic Red Cross in 1951 for services to Greece in World War II and an MBE in 1968. She was still examining for the Greek Dance Association at the age of eighty.²

The collection relating to Madge Atkinson was donated to the NRCD in 1989 by Anita Heyworth, a family friend, pupil, and long-time colleague of Atkinson's. The collection, forty-two linear meters, consists of material collated by both Atkinson and Heyworth. Spanning most of the twentieth century, the archive contains programs and publicity for Natural Movement events and performances dating from 1909-1939, theater-related ephemera, including a poster for Marie Taglioni's retirement performance in 1845, several thousand photographs, 180 books, fifty boxes of dance notations, 2000 music scores, newspaper cuttings, and examination papers and personal papers such as correspondence. There are also over 200 items of original costumes representing at least twenty-five dances from the Natural Movement repertoire. These materials, which portray Atkinson's life and work, are enriched through Heyworth's annotations in books and music scores and on photographs.

Atkinson was born in Manchester in 1885 and soon followed in the footsteps of her father, the actor James H. Atkinson. She became involved in the Manchester Amateur Dramatic Society and the Gaiety Theatre repertory company, under the direction of Annie Horniman. In 1910 she began to study with Annea Spong, who had studied with Raymond Duncan. As a result of these encounters she developed her own system of dance which, borrowing terminology from Spong, she called Natural Movement. The technique emphasised a harmonious use of the body in which simple actions such as running and balancing created a

[§] Known today as the Classical Greek Dance Association.

lyrical style. She also favoured the use of accessories such as scarves and hoops to emphasise the lines and patterns made by the dancing body. Rhythm and musicality were key features in the practice and performance of the technique.

During the late 'teens and 1920s while running the Madge Atkinson School of Dancing in Manchester, Atkinson choreographed dances based on the Natural Movement system for productions at the Gaiety Theatre and several of the ballets for opera festivals at the Opera House, Manchester. She was appointed to teach movement, mime and gesture to singers at the Royal Manchester College of Music. In 1921 she was joined by Mollie Suffield and the school was renamed the Atkinson-Suffield School.

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Common themes in the records are health and dance education. Figure 4 indicates the importance of dancing in the open air, an activity consonant with international trends for health, fitness and the natural environment. Atkinson lectured at hospitals across Manchester and devised exercises for women and children to improve posture, as well as presenting her pupils in demonstrations at several health-related exhibitions. During the 1920s and 1930s Atkinson, along with fellow teachers of Natural Movement, provided classes in many state schools in Manchester. She also worked with the Manchester Education Committee, and, in 1925, formulated the first Natural Movement children's examination. These efforts are represented by teaching notes and programs of recitals performed by school students. The Atkinson-Suffield partnership came to an end in 1936 when the school relocated to London, where a new and long-lasting partnership was established between Atkinson and Heyworth. In 1944, along with Grace Cone, they founded the London College of Educational Dance.**

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Atkinson's commitment to providing creative opportunities for the children she taught is highlighted in the collection: many dance performances feature children and some programs explain that works were arranged and chosen by the children themselves. In addition to nature,

** Subsequently the London College of Dance and Drama.

fantasy, and the ethereal, childhood stories and nursery rhymes were also common themes of dance performances and studio work. An unusual object found in the archive is Mr. Elf, a doll used by Atkinson as an aid for teaching young children the names of musical notes such as “Mr Crotchet.”

The accumulated material in the Natural Movement Archive allows rare insights into Atkinson’s and Heyworth’s life-long work. For example, there is an abundance of material relating to the *Mother Goose* ballet, with music by Ravel. In the ballet, Mother Goose tells children fairy tales, including the stories of Beauty and the Beast, Sleeping Beauty, and Laideronette. The full story of the ballet is included in a Natural Movement brochure and is listed in several programs, which reveal that Atkinson played the role of Mother Goose. The collection contains a music score for the ballet and notes in Atkinson’s own method of recording dance. Atkinson’s costume design book includes a drawing of the Laideronette costume, which is identical to its physical counterpart housed in the collection. These forms of historical evidence enable elements of the work to be pieced together to create a more complete picture of the dance.

Other highlights in the Natural Movement Archive include a diary of classes that Atkinson attended at the Mary Wigman summer school in Germany, Atkinson’s honorary diploma from the Annea Spong School of Dancing, a scrapbook of cuttings relating to Atkinson’s visit to Cape Town, South Africa in 1938, and a copy of an unpublished and undated manuscript entitled “Dancing Based on Natural Movement,” written by Atkinson and Mary Johnstone. There are also items that trace Atkinson’s personal life, including family photographs, a scrapbook providing evidence that Atkinson performed alongside her father in the early 1900s, her Red Cross certificate and armband from World War I, and cards and letters of support sent to Atkinson following an accident in 1954. She continued to teach until her death in 1970.

The project at the NRCD and the University of Surrey aims to increase interest and scholarship in these previously overlooked areas of British dance and, more specifically, the

practitioners who contributed to the expansion of the art form. The *Pioneer Women* project concludes in March 2010, when all catalogues will be available to search online at <http://www.surrey.ac.uk/NRCD>.

The NRCD archives are open by appointment only. For further information on any of the collections or the AHRC project please contact the NRCD on nrcd@surrey.ac.uk.

¹ The British Broadcasting Corporation website

<http://www.bbc.co.uk/pressoffice/keyfacts/stories/keydates.shtml> (accessed July 16, 2009).

² "Obituary Ruby Ginner," *Dancing Times* (May 1978): 464.