



Pioneer Women: early British modern dancers

June 2008-May 2010

Project Background and Aims

Funded through the Arts and Humanities Research Council's Resource Enhancement Scheme, the primary focus of this project was on two previously closed archive collections containing material representing forms of 'barefoot dance' that were prominent in early twentieth century Britain. The archives are specific to the work of Madge Atkinson (1885-1970) and Ruby Ginner (1886-1978) (the collection of Bice Bellairs), both pioneers of early British modern dance forms which embraced naturalism and neo-classical ways of moving. In addition, the project processed materials from two solo dancers working in modern dance forms influenced by European practice, Ludi Horenstein (also known as Ludmila Mlada or Rosemary Young) and Leslie Burrowes.

The project undertook vital cataloguing and preservation work to ensure the permanence and accessibility of the materials and records. However, the overall aim was 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 project was a collaboration between the National Resource Centre for Dance, the Department of Dance, Film and Theatre of the University of Surrey and an eminent Dance Historian based at Middlesex University. The project was guided by a select steering group and developed with the expertise of two key dance scholars Professor Rachel Fensham and Professor Alexandra Carter.

The opening and publicising of these collections, subsequent research into them, and a series of events aimed to re-establish the largely forgotten place of Atkinson, Ginner, Horenstein and Burrowes in dance history.

Project Team

Professor Rachel Fensham (Principal Investigator, Surrey)
Professor Alexandra Carter (Co-Investigator, Middlesex)
Helen Roberts (Co-Investigator, NRCD)
Emily Churchill (Project Archivist)
Laura Griffiths (Project Archive and Research Assistant)

Project Outcomes and Achievements

Through investigation in the archives and in-depth analysis of Atkinson's and Ginner's choreographies and teaching methods, the research revealed close alliances between early British modern dance and other art movements, the major contribution of modern dance pioneers to physical and women's education and that British dance constituted more than London-based metropolitan ballet and/or regional music hall. In addition, articles published during the early twentieth century demonstrate the extent to which the careers of these two women were deemed significant through a range of concerts, outdoor performances and education settings. The project's academic outputs have added to research capacity in modern British dance history through the publications and conference as well as opening up this field to dialogue with other scholars working in different disciplines or national contexts.

Specific outcomes are listed below.

Study Days – two study days took place at the University of Surrey, one relating to Classical Greek Dance (January 2009) and another to Natural Movement (May 2009). Both events included historical presentations and practical sessions, introducing each of the dance forms to both experienced practitioners and those who were new to this movement form.

Oral Histories – An oral history project has provided valuable supplementary documentation and additional resources to enhance the archives' content and usefulness. Six oral history interviews with previous students of Atkinson and Ginner were completed including:

Ann Cornford	(Revived Greek dance)
Rona Newson (nee Hart)	(Revived Greek dance)
Anne Hogan (Anita Landa)	(Revived Greek dance)
Susan Mitchell-Smith	(Revived Greek dance)
Jean Kelly	(Natural Movement)
Phroso Pfister	(Natural Movement)

(Please see the NRCD catalogue for more information regarding this material.)

Filmed Dance Reconstructions and DVD – Several dances from the Natural Movement performance and teaching repertoire have been reconstructed by Jean Kelly and filmed as an archive record. These dances, along with a documentary and archive content, feature in a DVD entitled *British Dance Legacies: Natural Movement*. This is available for purchase via the NRCD shop (insert web link www.surrey.ac.uk/NRCD/).

The reconstructed dances include:

The Seashell (Child's Solo)
Hoop Dance (Child's Solo)
Autumn (Child's Solo)
A Leprechaun Steals a Crock of Gold (Child's solo)
Vintage Rhythms (Student Group)

Exhibitions – to further promote the collections and engage with their visual content, several exhibitions of artefacts from the project collections were held. These were mounted at the Ekon Greek Music and Performing Arts Festival (June 2009), the Rudolf Steiner House (September 2009), the Lewis Elton Gallery at the University of Surrey (October-November 2009) and the Manchester Central Library (November-December 2009).

International Academic Symposium – Moving Naturally: Re-thinking dance 1900s-1930s took place on 31st October 2009. The event was exceptionally well attended by delegates from a broad cross section of dance academia and public. It included the following presentations:

- Ideas of nature, the natural, and the modern in early twentieth-century dance discourse. (Ramsay Burt & Michael Huxley)
- Orthodoxy and heresy: the codification of Natural Movement. (Maria Salgado)
- From the artificial to the natural body: social dancing in Britain. (Theresa Buckland)
- Constructing the natural. A critical appraisal of selected forms of British theatre dance in the early 20th Century and how they construct and contest notions of the 'natural'. (Alexandra Carter)
- Helen Tamiris: re-visioning modernism in modern dance. (Diane Wawrejko)
- Nature moving naturally in succession. An exploration of Doris Humphrey's *Water Study*. (Lesley Main)
- Reviving the Greeks in Australian dance. (Amanda Card)
- By the light of a lantern: dance's first steps at the University of Michigan. (Jessica Fogel)
- Margaret Morris: 'pioneer' of natural 'movement' in dance. (Anna Muthesius)
- Art Nouveau, Hellenism and Madge Atkinson's Natural Movement. (Lorna Sanders)
- Movement, poetry and Dionysian Modernism: Irene Mawer's experiments with 'dance words'. (Charlotte Purkis)
- Dressing and undressing: Madge Atkinson and Natural Movement's life in costume. (Rachel Fensham)
- Classical Greek Dance Lecture Demonstration (Susan Mitchell-Smith & Dancers)
- Natural Movement Dance Reconstruction Performance (Jean Kelly & Dancers)

Edited Book – a selection of papers from the *Moving Naturally* symposium, along with other invited contributions, will appear in an edited book (Fensham & Carter) titled *Dancing Naturally: Nature, neo-classicism, and modernity in early twentieth century dance* to be published by Palgrave Macmillan in 2011.

Online Catalogue – on completion of the project, all four collections which were included in the project, plus some additionally donated materials, are preserved and catalogued; their contents are searchable in the NRCDC's online catalogue via this website (insert weblink).

Publications

In addition to the above outcomes, the articles listed below have been generated as a result of the project and its collections:

Ball, K. Classical Greek Dance. *ISTD Dance* no. 447, Apr-Jun 2009, pp 51-55.

Carter, A. Archives of the Dance - Pioneer Women: early British modern dancers. *Dance Research* (Vol 28, 1, Spring 2010).

Churchill, E. & Griffiths, L. 'Archives with meaning'. *ARC, the Society of Archivists newsletter*

Churchill, E. Griffiths, L. & Roberts, H. Riches and Resources: Archive collections at the National Resource Centre for Dance, University of Surrey. *Dance Chronicle*, Nov 2009.

Kelly, J. Natural Movement. *ISTD Dance* no. 449, Oct-Dec 2009, pp 30-32.

Nicholas, L. The Dance Centre: Finding a Place for Laban. *Laban Guild Magazine*, Jan 2010. (Included research on Leslie Burrowes)

Mylona, S. *Moving Naturally* Symposium. *Society for Dance Research Newsletter*, Jan 2010.

Collections Overview

Madge Atkinson (1885-1970) and Natural Movement

Madge Atkinson was born in Manchester at a time when the arts in the region flourished. From a young age she had dancing lessons and was a member of the Manchester Amateur Dramatics Society. She was a talented performer and hoped to pursue a professional acting career having worked with her father, the actor James H. Atkinson, as a child. A period of ill health left her unable to follow this ambition but she continued to dance. During the early 1920s she developed a system of dance which she called 'Natural Movement' and taught the technique in schools in Manchester and London. During the 1920s, she choreographed dances for productions at the Gaiety Theatre in Manchester and arranged several of the ballets for Festivals at the Opera House in Manchester. During this time she was appointed to teach movement, mime and gesture to the student singers at the Royal Manchester College of Music.

In 1925, she was invited by the Imperial Society of Teachers of Dancing (ISTD) to form a Natural Movement Branch, which still exists today. During the War, the Madge Atkinson School of Natural Movement was evacuated and continued to operate in Newquay, Cornwall. Later, Atkinson and her close friend and colleague Anita Heyworth were among the founding members of the London College of Dance and Drama which was established in Maidenhead in 1944 and later moved to London. Sadly, Madge Atkinson suffered an accident in 1954 resulting in her withdrawal from active teaching; however, she continued to teach children until her death in 1970.

The Natural Movement technique emphasised a harmonious use of the body in which simple actions such as running and balancing created a lyrical style. Dancing barefoot enabled freedom and flow in the dance. The technique highlighted the natural lines of the body through these basic actions. Atkinson also favoured the use of accessories such as scarves and hoops to emphasise the lines and patterns made by the dancing body. Rhythm is an important element of the technique and improvisation to music was especially important to her work. She provided creative and artistic opportunities for the children that she taught to perform in dramatic dance concerts. Like her British contemporaries Margaret Morris and Ruby Ginner, she is responsible for the development of a systematic and strong technical training to serve the art of dance.

The Natural Movement Archive

The archive was donated to the NRCD in 1989 by Anita Heyworth, Atkinson's friend and professional partner. It is a large collection and contains a wealth of information in a variety of formats. Dating from approximately 1905 to 1990 the content and extent of the collection reflects the commitment Atkinson and Heyworth had to the preservation and development of the technique throughout their lives.

The archive consists of over 1000 music scores, many of them annotated by Atkinson herself; dance notes in both written text and Atkinson's own system of notation; over 2000 photographs, including some beautiful studio shots of Atkinson and Heyworth taken by Thomas Longworth Cooper, a prominent Manchester photographer in the 1920s and '30s; several scrapbooks of newspaper clippings (1911-1938); several hundred programmes and playbills (the oldest relating to ballerina Marie Taglioni, 1848); various manuscripts giving insight into Atkinson's training methods; posters and leaflets; periodicals (including *Dancing Times*, 1911-1990); and over 200 items of original costume from the 1920s and '30s representing at least 25 different dances.

The archive is enriched further through the annotation that has been added to programmes, books, music scores and photographs to supplement the information provided. Many of the costumes have name tags stitched in to them revealing by whom they were once worn. Great attention to detail was applied to the materials as they were generated and collected, and this meticulous approach is invaluable for researchers interested in this collection.

Ruby Ginner (1886-1978) and her method of Revived Greek Dance

Born in Cannes, Ruby Ginner moved to England when she was eleven. She studied ballet whilst also playing many juvenile dramatic roles under the direction of Elsie Fogerty and Frank Benson. Working with Fogerty on Greek choruses she began research at the British Museum to learn about ancient Greek dance and movement. After founding the company Grecian Dancers [1914], who performed in London, she established the Ruby Ginner School of Dance where she was later joined by the mime artist, Irene Mawer. The school was renamed the Ginner-Mawer School of Dance and Drama [1915].

Ginner also founded the Association of Teachers of the Revived Greek Dance (ATRGD) which later became the Greek Dance Association and was affiliated to the ISTD Greek Dance Branch. During the late 1920s to early 1930s, Ginner choreographed performances for the Greek Festival of Drama, Folk Song and Dance in Athens and outdoor performances in Hyde Park and Regents Park, London. In 1936, with the ATRGD, Ginner also presented a Greek Dance Festival (featuring 400 performers) at the Royal Albert Hall.

Ruby Ginner's Revived Greek Dance (subsequently renamed and known today as Classical Greek Dance) drew on athletics, drama and dance with an allegiance to ancient Greek ideals. The movements arranged by Ginner originated from her artefact based study of dancing figures from the ancient Greek arts. 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. There is attention to opposition and symmetry and angular designs which are layered onto steps such as walks, skips and runs. The athletic work came from images of athletics in Greek art and echoed its archery positions and javelin hurls. Dramatic expression and its emotional resonances were also features of this form. Ginner was awarded the Gold Leaf commemorative medal and a diploma by the Hellenic Red Cross for services to Greece in the Second World War. She was also awarded an MBE in 1968 and was still working at the age of 80.

The Bice Bellairs Collection (of Revived Greek Dance)

In 1997, the Bice Bellairs Collection was donated to the NRCD by the Guildford School of Acting which had acquired it after Bellairs' death in 1991. Bellairs was a young pupil of Ruby Ginner and with Pauline Grant she founded the Grant Bellairs School of Dance and Drama in West London, which relocated to Guildford in 1945 and became the Guildford School of Acting (GSA) in 1964. Coincidentally, the GSA relocated to the University of Surrey campus in 2009.

Although smaller than the Natural Movement Archive, it contains equally important and revealing material. There are 13 beautifully crafted scrapbooks (1896-1954) which contain material covering not only Ruby Ginner's and Irene Mawer's careers but also the performances of the Ginner-Mawer Company and the career of Alexander Dyer, Ginner's husband. Some of the scrapbooks also relate to Ginner's friend, the famous ballerina Anna Pavlova. There are over 100 photographs of Ginner and

students, including an album documenting the Ginner-Mawer's trip to Greece in 1930; in addition there are two signed photographs of Pavlova, one dedicated to Ginner; programmes of performances in and around London (1924-1937); books; manuscripts, and many annotated music scores.

In addition to the above material the NRCD is fortunate to have a film in the collection showing the Ginner-Mawer dancers in performance. The film shows Ruby Ginner, Irene Mawer, and Nancy Sherwood giving outdoor performances in Hyde Park and Regents Park in 1933. It was filmed by Grace Lindo and includes excerpts of mime and dance such as *The Lady of Armor* and *The Corn Harvest*.

Leslie Burrowes (1908-1985)

Leslie Burrowes was an English dancer/teacher whose career bridged the British Hellenic-influenced dance styles seen in the Atkinson and Ginner archives and the predominantly German modern dance (*Ausdruckstanz*) imported into Britain from the 1930s. Burrowes trained in Margaret Morris Movement from 1924, becoming a performer and assistant teacher for Morris. In 1928 she became the first dance teacher at the progressive school and community at Dartington Hall in Devon. Dartington's philanthropic owner, Dorothy Elmhirst, subsidised her dance education in Dresden where she began training at the school of the famous German dancer Mary Wigman in January 1930. This proved to be a breakthrough period in her development when she could fuse the strong, formal technique she gained from Margaret Morris with the inner feeling and expansive outward expression of *Ausdruckstanz*.

In the summer of 1931, she was the first British woman to receive the Wigman School's teaching certificate. In line with the Wigman ethos, Burrowes' dances encompassed a range of expressions from serene to grotesque, but she excelled in the vigorous and ebullient dances that came directly from her character; *Primitive Joy* being a signature piece. She also embraced the Wigman School's musical atmosphere with a range of percussive instruments integrated into performance.

In 1933 she opened the Leslie Burrowes Studio of the Dance in the Chelsea home she shared with her husband, the oboist Leon Goossens. An expansion of activities in dance education and performance was conceived in 1938 when she opened The Dance Centre with Louise Soelberg, an American dancer formerly with Ballets Jooss. The outbreak of war closed the centre yet Burrowes continued to teach and perform. She became an important link to later developments in the educational strands of modern dance in British schools, originating from *Ausdruckstanz* then generally attributed to Rudolf Laban (Wigman's teacher) and Lisa Ullmann from the 1940s. Finding the Laban work too formal, Burrowes remained true to the more fluid approach that she had encountered with Wigman in developing dance expression.

The Leslie Burrowes Collection

The collection, donated by Burrowes' daughter in 2003, contains annotated photograph albums; scrapbooks containing news cuttings, photographs and programmes; and letters from Mary Wigman. The NRCD received a second deposit to this collection in 2009 which contains many more letters from Mary Wigman dating from 1931-1966, a selection of books and some beautiful sketches and paintings by Burrowes of both still and moving bodies.

Ludmila Mlada (Ludi Horenstein) (1918-2003)

Born Dorothy Rosemary Olga Ludmila, Ludi Horenstein made a lifelong contribution to British modern dance throughout the twentieth century. Typified for her comic and dramatic solo recitals her legacy was lived out under three names, Rosemary Young, Ludi Horenstein and Ludmila Mlada, the latter being the most well known.

Ludi studied at Marie Rambert's school in the late 1930s and performed with Ballet Rambert on tours to Belgium (1946) and Canada (1947). She also danced with the Ballets Jooss in the 1940s and trained with Sigurd Leeder (1947-1950). She went on to perform with the Studio Group and teach at, amongst other places, the Leeder School and the Webber Douglas School of Singing and Dramatic Art.

Many of Mlada's solo recitals featured dramatic characters including Lucifer and the Priestess, and Leeder choreographed a range of dances for her such as *Galop*, *Nocturne*, and *Figura Tragica*. Also, Buddy Bradley and Jane Winearls were among the choreographers who created dances specifically for Mlada.

Leeder photographed Mlada in performance, capturing the drama and expression in her work, examples of which can be seen in her archive collection.

The Ludmila Mlada Collection

The Ludmila Mlada Collection was donated to the NRC in 2003 and consists of photographs; correspondence, including letters from Sigurd Leeder; hand drawn programmes; over 200 music scores; over 100 gramophone records, including non-commercial recordings of music composed specifically for Horenstein by pianists Joseph Brand, Thomas Henderson and Anthony Bowles; hundreds of news cuttings with reviews of her performances and also dances scored in Laban notation by Mlada.

For further information about the collections please contact nrcd@surrey.ac.uk

Project funded by:



Arts & Humanities
Research Council

www.ahrc.ac.uk