Marjorie Fennessy: Gold Badge Citation

Awarded at the EFDSS AGM 14 November 1998

(N.B. some of the countries mentioned have changed borders and names since this citation was first published)

Marjorie Fennessy is a name known throughout the English country dance world.
She was introduced to country dancing before the War, by her mother, who took her to the Saturday afternoon Children's Dances at Cecil Sharp House, where she met, among others, Hamish Fraser.

From 1946 she danced in the Headquarters team for Douglas Kennedy, both in England and on trips abroad to Holland, Eire, Denmark, South Africa, Switzerland and Portugal. In 1947 she stood in for Helen Kennedy (sewn into Helen's skirt!) with Pat Shaw as her partner. That same year she gained the Society's Silver Badge (for Country, Morris and Sword), the examiner, William Ganiford, commenting as he handed it to her "Now you can learn to dance". She danced in the first Albert Hall Festival after the war in 1948, and for the next twenty one years her smiling face and joyful dancing were a part of the much loved, glistening occasions.

At the height of the square dance boom the demands for 'Show & Drag-In' became such that in 1951 she formed a demonstration group, whose members could be relied upon to dance to a high standard. The next year, needing a name for an occasion compared by Pat Shaw, they became "The Whirligigs", later regarded as the premier country dance demonstration team until their disbandment in 1973. Marjorie took them abroad five times, most notably in 1962 when they were the first English group to visit Czechoslovakia. They danced twice at the Albert Hall Festivals, twice at the Battersea Easter Parade (when they had to do a processional for 3,000 yards at three miles an hour!), demonstrated for Belinda Quirey at the Imperial Society of Teachers of Dancing, appeared on Welsh television and took part in the first Broadstairs Folk Show.

Pat Shaw used the Whirligigs greatly during his dance researches and composing, and Marjorie typed for him "New Wine in Old Bottles" (four revisions of it!) and proof-read "Between Two Ponds". After his death in 1977 it seemed inevitable that Marjorie should become his Dance Executrix. She now embarked on publishing his remaining dance and music legacy, issuing three records by the Kenton Ramblers of his material, followed in 1986 by "The Pat Shaw Collection", all his English dances in three volumes, and in 1987 by two volumes of tunes. In 1985 she had resurrected and reconstructed "Among the Pines", twelve more dances for Pinewoods, left in varying stages of incompleteness at his death. 1995 saw her collaborating on a new edition of "New Wine…", and in 1997 on a volume of dances to Purcell tunes. She is currently engaged in editing for publication Pat's "Another look at Playford" - the fruits of over twenty years' of his researches into the c17th, c18th and c19th collections of country dances.

Marjorie first taught in 1957 when asked to take some of Marjorie Sinclair's ("Sinner's") classes and has taught consistently from then on, for the Society and for groups around the country and abroad. She took on Pat Shaw's engagement at Dartington in January 1978, the first of many week and weekend courses she has taken. In 1983 she was invited to teach for three weeks at Pinewoods (no mean feat) and has been over to teach in Holland five times. She shews unfailing good humour and courtesy when teaching, whether it be the simplest of Playford dances or one of Pat Shaw's most complex, and when acting as MC and Dances and Balls. Her generosity of spirit and persuasive encouragement has been the making on many a country dancer.

After her move to Gloucestershire in 1987 she involved herself with dancing locally and served as [EFDSS] District Representative on the Area Council. She has recently formed a demonstration group who specialise in the period-costumed displays of Country Dance, choreographed in her own unmistakable style.

For her services to English Country Dance as Dancer, Teacher, Editor and Publisher Marjorie Fennessy is awarded the Gold Badge of the English Folk Dance and Song Society.

- Nicolas M Broadbridge