

THE LIFE OF ELLIS

Ellis Albert Rogers, born in London, 6th July 1930

Ellis was born in Acton, London, but, his father being a locomotive engineer (train driver), he lived near a main railway terminal – a target for bombers during the war - so he was evacuated to relatives in Wales. Far from being safer there, he found the village a target for bombers who had lost their intended targets in Liverpool and dropped their bombs on any handy buildings on their way home. He was one of two evacuees in Gresford, Wales, and was known as ‘London’ to distinguish him from the other boy, who was called ‘Liverpool’.

When Ellis was 16 he was apprenticed to the electronics department at EMI in Hayes. His immediate boss was a narcoleptic cyclist who regularly fell off his bicycle when he fell asleep, and the head of the department was also the head of the British Esperanto Society. Other enterprising engineers made, in their spare time and for reasons of curiosity, a gun which fired golf balls by using liquid oxygen as the propellant. The gun worked very well and fired a golf ball through the ceiling of their room and the room above it. So Ellis fitted in very well. Read on...

The firm was working on the development of proximity fuses and, surrounded by boxes of detonators, it seemed a pity not to use them, so Ellis fitted one across the sparking plug of his colleague’s motor-assisted pedal bike. As the chap started the motor, the detonator went off and the chap fell off. It did not help that he was on a Ministry of Supply factory with an armed guard on the gate.

Ellis was into building model aeroplanes at the time and becoming interested in jet engines. He thought he would apply the liquid oxygen system to a rocket and, with the help of another apprentice, made the equipment and set up a makeshift launching pad. They lit the rocket with a very long taper. Unfortunately not long enough. The rocket went off rather too well and both young men ended up in hospital – Ellis with injuries to his right arm (he still bears the scar) and his accomplice with injuries to one foot. There was a Home Office enquiry into the incident and it was reported on the radio. Ellis’ boss merely told him that as an apprentice electronic engineer he should have been able to make an electronic firing system, which would have saved them all this bother.

While he was in hospital, Ellis listened to the radio - the Home Service - and tuned in to a series of broadcasts from the English Folk Dance and Song Society (EFDSS), when he heard for the first time an MC ‘calling’ a square dance. Bored and with nothing else to do, he copied down the ‘calls’ and tried to work out the dances; then he sent off for four of the Community Dance Manuals being issued by the Society.

At this time Ellis was the organiser of a local youth club. Being Ellis, he attended a course on how to organise a youth club and one of the speakers was Patrick Shuldham-Shaw, who spoke about English Country Dancing. Again, being Ellis he started to attend classes at Cecil Sharp House – one for Morris and Sword dancing, run by Miss Sinclair, and one for English Country Dancing, run by her sister. Both ladies were good dancers and brilliant teachers and thus was born Ellis’ love of traditional dancing and his success in both dancing and ‘calling’.

Ellis had once been to an Old Time Dance club. It was quite poorly attended and eventually Ellis effected a merger between that club and his, resulting in the Acton Old Time and Folk Dance Association, of which he became Chairman. The AOT & FDA lasted only a couple of years, however, because neither side would speak to the other, let alone dance with them!

At the age of 21 Ellis was called up for two years of National Service and went into the RAF as a ground electrician, servicing mainly Meteor fighters. The unit was visited by the Air Vice-Marshal, who chose to ask him "Do you enjoy being in the RAF?" The reply was an emphatic "No sir" and Ellis spent the next month as duty electrician, on call for 24 hours a day. Working on jet engines damaged Ellis' hearing permanently and his dislike of the air force was only mitigated by the opportunity to visit Cambridge at regular intervals and acquire a love of European and American classic films.

In 1957 Ellis married Iris, another dancer. Iris had a beautiful soprano voice and came second in the Folk Song section at the Llangollen International Music Eisteddfod. She sang with a local amateur operatic company, introducing Ellis to the wonders of Gilbert & Sullivan and early 20th century operettas, which had an influence much later in his life, when he bought a collection of CDs of (mostly French) early 19th century operettas, from a retiring monk who no longer had room for them.

Iris and Ellis moved to Bromley and Ellis became a well-known 'caller' for barn dances. He and Iris became founder members of The Kentish Travellers, a demonstration team dancing English folk, Morris, longsword and rapper sword run by Keith Uttley and his wife, Maggie. They also auditioned for, and were accepted as members of Sunday Club, the demonstration team (of about 40 couples) for the English Folk Dance and Song Society, based at Cecil Sharp House in Camden Town, London. They danced at the annual Festival at the Royal Albert Hall, where Sunday Club formed the foundation of a programme of all types of folk dance, song and music which involved over 200 dancers and musicians and filled the Hall for four performances each year. Sunday Club danced the opening number, two other numbers during the show, and joined in the massed dancing of the finale. The Albert Hall became a well-known and loved venue.

On one occasion some of the Sunday Club were invited to meet the cast of 'The Way of the World' by William Congreve, and teach them how to perform a dance of the year 1700. They found (as has been the case on quite a few occasions since) that the cast were hopeless, so eventually performed the dance on stage themselves, at a theatre in London. As they were to be present anyway, the dancers were asked if they would take minor, non-speaking roles in the play. Ellis was given the part of a footman and dressed appropriately. However, the supply of stockings had run out and he had to appear on stage with his legs white-washed.

Ravensbourne Morris Men recruited Ellis and he served as their Squire for a couple of years, dancing as a member of the side and playing the melodeon as one of their musicians. He loved Morris and stayed with the team for years, attending Morris Ring meetings at Thaxted several times, touring Kentish villages each summer and joining the team pastime of making home-made wine. He was not as successful with the wine as with the dancing! He eventually left the team as he was playing more often than he was dancing, which was not what he wanted. He intended merely to take a sabbatical but other things intruded and he never went back, which was a pity as he was a very talented Morris dancer, performing superb solo jigs.

Ellis found a job with the Admiralty Gunnery Establishment, where he worked on guided missiles, and later for the Admiralty Scientific Service, working on anti-mine detection. He eventually ended with 20th Century Electronics, in Surrey. The work was interesting and required Ellis to design his own test equipment for a variety of tasks - at one time developing a method for checking the purity of atomic reactor cooling gases, producing boron enriched in the isotope B10 (for controlling the output of atomic reactors), building a fractional distillation cascade to produce chemicals enriched in the stable isotope of carbon 13, and assembling a neutron generator as a gift to Chile from the British government. He had a

narrow escape when he fell ill shortly before leaving for Chile to supervise installation of this generator, and a colleague was sent in his place. The colleague arrived to find that civil war had broken out in Chile and he had to run the gauntlet of machine-gun fire each morning on his way to the site.

Ellis dabbled in cryogenics and then worked to calibrate part of the guidance system for Giotto, the rocket that visited Halley's comet in 1986. He also calibrated and environmentally tested the photocells that ensured that the European Space Agency's rockets stayed stable at launch. Stability was also the aim when launching satellites and he recalls one which was reported as having reached a geostationary orbit, but rather lower than planned – on the sea bed, after a launch failure.

There were drawbacks of course. The factory caught fire; he had to deal with a poison gas leakage; and when he was working at the top of a tower, he was walled in by an over-enthusiastic bricklayer.

Ellis regularly ran barn dances for public participation at widely varying venues. On one occasion he ran a dance for a world confederation of nudists; they dressed for dancing but undressed during the interval to go swimming in the pool outside, which Ellis found distracting as some of them were young, female and quite shapely!. He also ran a dance for the servants' ball at Buckingham Palace; the Kentish Travellers gave a show and Ellis called for the general dancing. He talked briefly with the Queen, who told him that everywhere she went in the world, the first thing she ever got to see was the local folk dancing. Taking revenge for her lack of tact, when Ellis was playing for the sword dancing he included The Red Flag among the tunes he chose.

After a couple of years Jenny was born to Ellis and Iris but unhappily the marriage failed and the couple separated.

In 1969 Ellis married Christine and adopted Nicholas; Jay was born the same year.

Ellis and Chris continued to dance with Sunday Club and performed each year with them at the Royal Albert Hall, on one occasion performing a ballroom minuet for one couple, as, usefully, they already knew the dance. He also appeared as Mrs Pankhurst at one of their parties. However, the chap running SC made a comment indicating that Ellis was a bit too old and Chris was a bit too fat for the image of the Club, so they looked around for something more sedate to do in their old age. Ellis was 38 and Chris was 29. They booked a place on the second annual summer school of the Dolmetsch Historical Dance Society (DHDS) - Dances for Shakespeare's Plays. It was twice as energetic as folk dancing and Ellis and Chris were hooked. They went to the Dolmetsch summer schools for some years, joined a demonstration group, learnt dances from 1450 to 1750 and started to teach - on the Dolmetsch summer schools and subsequently for the Nonsuch group as well - dances from 1400 to 1750, which was at that time the limit of the historical dance repertoire in this country. It was not the limit for Ellis, though; at one Nonsuch summer school he joined with four other gentlemen to dance an excerpt from the ballet Giselle, dressed in tights and a tutu, and at another he danced a 'newly discovered' Italian balletto – Mars – wearing a saucepan on his head and a row of Mars bars round his middle. Ellis and Chris also organised and ran for two years their own Easter School in Seal, Sevenoaks, at Dorton House, then a home and school for blind children. They had first come across Dorton House when, as members of the Kentish Travellers, they visited there each week to teach folk dancing to the children.

Ellis started to do some serious research and his library started to grow. He and Chris both learnt to read standard Feuillet notation, together with the modified version for country dances, and also Rameau's New Method. They spotted a problem with the teaching of baroque dance by DHDS and argued their point to the Chairman, Anne Daye, who agreed and made the necessary alterations to the Dolmetsch teaching style. They started the group Pastime in Orpington, and became 'residential' tutors of the Oxford Historical Dance Society – teaching dances from 1450 to 1750 to both groups. Both groups are still going strong, under different leadership. Ellis and Chris became founder members of the Early Dance Circle, and taught workshops for a number of groups throughout the country.

When teaching for Nonsuch one year in Matlock, Ellis was asked, at very short notice, to give a lecture on reading Feuillet notation. He hared into town and bought a roll of cheap wallpaper. This he hung over a screen; Chris gave the lecture in front of the screen and, at the back, Ellis quickly painted onto the wallpaper, upside-down, the symbol for the step she was describing and fed it over the top of the screen so that it appeared right-way-up for the audience. The lecture was very well received, but was never repeated although the wallpaper still resides in their loft.

A lecture Ellis gave at a Nonsuch summer school was a result of his boasting that he could give a lecture that included everything – pictures, wax figures, executions, fireworks – all without the use of Powerpoint. He proved his point and *The Death of the Minuet* received a standing ovation, although his pronunciation of the French dance terms caused general hilarity.

When teaching at Hengrave Hall for the DHDS, Ellis was again asked to produce an extra workshop at short notice, this time for those members of the summer school who did not want to watch the wedding of Princess Anne. He and Chris decided to teach the *Allemande à Deux*, as taught by Junella McKay on a recent Nonsuch summer school; but they did not know it terribly well. They had one night to become proficient and spent the evening, and well into the night, practising in their room. It was a warm night and they ended up dancing stark naked. The workshop was a success and the dance became a favourite. Indeed, in Ireland some years later they were asked to demonstrate it so many times that it became embarrassing, even though they were fully clothed.

In the early 1970s. Diana Porteous, chairman of the Oxford Historical Dance Society, told Ellis that she would like him to teach Victorian dances for their Christmas meeting. "I don't know any Victorian dances" Ellis told her. "You've got six months to learn" said the Iron Mouse and started Ellis in a new direction, which he has followed ever since. He went first to the Vaughan Williams Library at Cecil Sharp House and gradually his interest in and knowledge of 19th century dance grew until it took over his life and half their house; Ellis' library of 19th century dance books (and photocopies of dance books) grew to epic proportions. And he read them all! Some of them, several times. Holidays for the Rogers family were always spent camping in Shropshire, with one day each year spent in Hay on Wye, collecting books. All the family were prolific readers. Books on 19th century ballroom dance were few and far between but they did occasionally turn up and Ellis bought them. And read them. If they were in French he translated them. He doesn't speak French, which did not make it easy!

The Rogers' range of dancing extended to 1420 - 1920 and fellow dancer Brenda Bamford suggested that Ellis should start a regular club for 19th century dancing, since no-one else was teaching this period. So in February 1984 (or thereabouts) Quadrille Club was born. Ellis decided he would teach the 19th century dances he had researched so carefully, exactly as they

were described, with the steps also exactly as they had been carefully described by M. Gourdoux-Daux in his books dated 1804-1823, to the music published for them. The club would have monthly meetings, August excepted, on a Sunday, all day to make it worthwhile for dancers travelling to the club from outside London. He could not have foreseen that dancers from Canada, Germany, New Zealand, Italy and Japan would organise their holidays in London around Quadrille Club dates, nor that regular attenders would travel from the south of France, from Belgium and from Norway.

19th century dancing had taken off!

By 1998 Ellis was full to overflowing with all the information he had gained from his reading, and he decided to write a book about his favourite aspect – The Quadrille. This was the title of his book and he set out to put down all his new knowledge for the benefit of posterity – or anyone else interested enough to buy it. He started to write, longhand, in a big notebook and had done about 100 pages when Chris started to read it. “I’m sorry to say this honey,” she told him, “but it won’t do. It’s too disorganised. You’ll have to start again.” He was stunned but after some argument he had to agree that she was right, so he worked out the chapter titles first and then began writing again. He wrote the whole book in longhand and Chris typed it. They researched the benefits and problems of involving a professional publisher for this very niche book, and decided to do it themselves. Friends Stuart Marsden and Jeremy Procter offered encouragement, friends Jo and Chris Saunders, Diana Campbell and Joan Flett proof-read and gave constructive criticism, and the book was finally completed after five years of work. Pictures were added, the whole thing was photocopied 100 times and it was put together by a local book-binder. Ellis’ pride and joy went on sale in 2003. Several reprints later it has sold in hundreds, rather than thousands – but this is as expected for it is, as mentioned above, a niche interest – but to Ellis’ satisfaction it has sold in, currently, 25 countries, to quite a few national libraries, and to universities specialising in dance. It has enhanced his reputation as an (if not the) international expert on the subject and it still involves him in e-mail correspondence with enthusiasts and other teachers throughout the world. In addition, the British Library asked (and of course gained) permission to put the Quadrille Club website into their archives “in perpetuity”.

Oliver Davies, a teacher (at the Royal College of Music) and performer on keyboard instruments, heard about Quadrille Club and approached Ellis rather cautiously regarding a ball he was helping to organise for the Victorian Society. Ellis co-operated with a Scottish dancing master to run rehearsals and the ball took place in Chelsea Town Hall. It was lively and well-attended. Oliver, an enthusiast for C19th dance music, became a good friend.

Another opportunity to work with Oliver came when the National Portrait Gallery mounted an exhibition of portraits by Winterhalter from the 19th century and asked Oliver to organise a Winterhalter Ball. Oliver spent some months travelling through Europe, collecting dance music connected to portraits in the exhibition, and Ellis provided the dances. Two rehearsals were held, so that everyone could relax and enjoy the dancing on the day. The ball was held at the Reform Club in Pall Mall, London. Oliver led a 26-piece orchestra and everyone was superbly dressed in correct Victorian costume. One young lady confided that she was wearing her great-grandmother’s crinoline, which she had found in the attic, and had borrowed the family diamonds for the occasion. The Reform Club had produced an authentic Victorian spread and it was a memorable evening.

The following year Ellis was approached by a couple who had attended the Winterhalter ball and wanted to organise a repeat. He said yes, but it was a disaster. The organisers decided, very late in the day, to shift the period from 19th to late 18th century, and to dispense with

dance rehearsals. The musicians, all classical musicians who were friends of the organisers, had no wish to practise in advance and, as it turned out, no talent for playing for dancing. Ellis was taken ill and Chris had to go alone; the dancing took place in the tiny, marble-floored vestibule instead of the much larger, wooden-floored dining room; the MC was drunk as a skunk, as the saying goes, and so were most of the guests; the dinner lasted so long that most of the entertainers and some of the musicians went home; the microphone did not work and the whole evening dissolved into chaos. When it was over, Chris dashed out without changing, caught a taxi to Victoria and took a train home – still dressed in full 18th century costume with side panniers and a white wig.

Ellis was invited by the BBC to participate in a 15-minute radio programme teaching the 19th century waltz to ballet dancer Deborah Bull (now Baroness Bull). It seemed odd to teach dancing through the medium of radio but the programme went well although Ellis found that to dance with a ballet dancer was to dance with a solo dancer, rather than with a partner.

The Rogers' first experience of teaching abroad was a week in Canada in the town of Brandon, where a daily temperature of 94°F slowed them down somewhat. Since then Ellis has taught several times in Italy, Germany, Denmark, the U.S.A, and in Japan by the invitation of Professor Ikema of the Folk Dance Federation of Japan, whom he had met at a Dolmetsch summer school, and who became a valued friend.

On his first trip to Japan, Ellis was accompanied by Chris. They started with a 3-day course in Tokyo, where they were privileged to have in their class Prince Mikasa, uncle to the Emperor and a keen student of dance. At lunchtime he invited them to have lunch with him. They wanted to change but were told there was no time, they could change their shoes but otherwise must come as they were. They were packed into the 'dicky' seat of the Prince's little sports car, together with their host, Professor Ikema; the Prince took the main passenger seat, his (young and beautiful) partner took the wheel and off they went to what turned out to be the best restaurant in Tokyo, in the middle of a well-groomed park.

A red carpet had been rolled out from the car door to and through the restaurant door. The Prince alighted, his partner alighted, and the other three struggled out of the 'dicky' seat, accompanied by showers of the audio tapes that had been stacked on the back shelf. They straightened themselves and followed along the red carpet to the restaurant door, where the Prince had stopped to speak to someone. He spoke to Professor Ikema and waved Ellis and Chris on; they went through the door and stopped. The restaurant was packed with businessmen in extremely smart suits and ladies in full Japanese costume. Chris was wearing M&S trousers, a home-made top and had her hair tied up in a scarf. Ellis was wearing brown shoes, white stockings, black knee-breeches, a white open-necked shirt, and a windcheater that had suffered some damage the previous day and had been stuck together with sticky tape. They paused. Then Ellis took a deep breath and, radiating confidence that English Was Best, he marched along the red carpet (which was lined by waiters standing at attention), followed timidly by Chris and watched curiously but courteously by the well-dressed clientele who were waiting for them to pass.

The rest of the trip went very well, including a visit to Osaka. Here two students had been provided to take Ellis and Chris to visit the large temple complex. Unfortunately, the government had decided that priests must pay taxes, and as a result the priests had all gone on strike and the temples were closed.

The Japanese are attentive students who learn quickly - which is as well, as on his last trip there, in 1993, Ellis found himself with a class of over 1300 on a dance floor formed by boarding over the Olympic swimming pool in Tokyo.

Ellis' experience in the U.S.A. was rather different. He was invited to Wilmington, North Carolina, for a weekend to teach a 2-hour class and attend a Victorian festival there. The organisers were also willing to pay for Chris to accompany him, but she could not go, so he was chaperoned by members of the Sherlock Holmes Society, whom he knew well as they were also members of the London Minuet Company. He taught his 2-hour class, was inveigled into becoming commentator for the Saturday evening concert, and was tricked by the Sherlock Holmes Society into dancing the can-can on the public stage, in the bible belt of the U.S.A., in blond wig, full skirt, black stockings and dancing shoes! Despite all this, his over-riding memory of Wilmington is of going into a second-hand bookshop and asking for anything they had on dancing in the 19th century. "Don't have anything" he was told "I get anything like that, I burn it!"

Quadrille Club flourished for 35 years. Well, perhaps 'flourished' is the wrong word; in the first six years, they made a loss of £4,000 as they were determined to keep down the cost to members. But Ellis never missed a meeting although Chris did once or twice, due to ill health. 19th century dancing in this country was transformed. Regency balls began to consist of Regency dances instead of 18th, 17th or even 20th century dances, and Victorian dances began to gain a following.

Ellis and Chris organised a Victorian ball early in QC days but in England it was Regency dancing that became overwhelmingly popular. The BBC television productions of Jane Austen books helped with this and professional choreographers began to consult Ellis, (although film and tv directors often preferred their own ideas of Regency dance). Nowadays you could go to a Regency ball at least 12 times a year, somewhere or other in this country. Mind you, they would not all consist of Regency or Jane Austen dances! Playford dances in Regency costume still abound.

With performances, it was different. Victorian dancing was overwhelmingly more popular – well, look at the frocks! Ellis and Chris started a demonstration group – The English Quadrille. The eight couples comprising this group changed a little from time to time but all were sufficiently committed to attending plenty of rehearsals, to providing their own costumes, to giving ideas and support, and to travelling wherever necessary. Jean and Pawel Nowak, long-time members of The Costume Society, gave advice, information and practical help on costume, and also found contacts who wanted the EQ to perform – most importantly, English Heritage. EQ danced at English Heritage concerts in the grounds of several historic houses, to the music of full professional orchestras. A wonderful experience, always, although at Kenwood House the fireworks accompanying the finale nearly set fire to the ladies' crinolines. The team expanded their repertoire to include the Regency period and also Ragtime, giving a 1910 performance at Bolsover House, again for English Heritage. With these dances they also started World War I for the 1993 Early Dance Festival, an annual event arranged by the Early Dance Circle.

Their old friend Oliver Davies arranged for the EQ to perform with him at Apsley House, the London home of the Duke of Wellington. Oliver was playing, accompanied by harpist Rowena Bass, and members of the re-enactment groups Histrionix and the Napoleonic Society provided extra authenticity. The public were amused and interested and the day was repeated the following year. Going home afterwards, carrying costumes, wigs and other equipment, Ellis and Chris took a taxi to Charing Cross Station. By Tottenham Road tube

station the taxi driver told them he could go no further, as the road was blocked. They got out and, loaded down with this and that, walked round the corner into Trafalgar Square, straight into the middle of the poll tax riots! Mounted police were charging, people were throwing bricks through windows and fireworks at the police! Ellis and Chris quietly backed away and walked to London Bridge Station.

The EQ also performed with Oliver and Rowena at the National Portrait Gallery, supporting the Gallery's exhibition of portraits including a portrait of the talented "slave" Ignatius Sancho, who had composed the dances and music being performed. Oliver has a wicked sense of humour and in one dance he gradually increased the speed of his playing until Rowena was plucking away frantically and the dancers were flying up and down the set, panniers flapping and wigs teetering, much to the amusement of the audience!

EQ travelled to Anglesey to perform at the Beaumaris Festival, where they were made welcome but given only a very narrow strip of floor to dance on, and they danced for the Strauss Society in The Café Royale, Regent Street. They also danced at Finchcocks, in Kent, a Georgian manor house and keyboard instrument museum owned by Richard and Katrina Burnett.

The Café Royale was the first venue for the Russian balls for which Ellis was the Dancing Master for several years. Music for these balls was provided by the band of one or another of the Household Cavalry. One year, due to disturbances abroad, the Life Guards had been sent abroad to fight, with their band; they were to be replaced by the Irish Guards but they too were sent abroad and replaced, at the very last moment, by the Welsh Guards. Fortunately all these musicians were extremely professional and coped with the unexpected music without fuss. At this same ball, Ellis was told that a certain Count might have to leave early, with his repertoire, as he was expecting to be called back to Russia to take the throne. He didn't leave though, and Ellis added a third royal family to his list of acquaintances.

As so often happens, the English Quadrille folded as members moved away, had children, or simply grew older, but in time their place was taken by a demonstration team from Quadrille Club, who performed at the annual Dance Around the World for several years. They performed at a number of other venues and occasions, including the Wallace Collection and Ham House in London, for the Jane Austen Society at different venues, at the annual Early Dance Festival organised by the Early Dance Circle (when QC started the first World War), for the Armstrong and Miller show for BBC television, and at the Royal Pavilion in Brighton. The television programme was better forgotten, but Brighton Pavilion was a wonderful place to dance and an experience definitely to be remembered. Adding to the magic of the venue, the music was played (as well as being researched and arranged) by the wonderful group Green Ginger – Meryl and Ian Thomson and Cas Sloan – who had helped and supported Ellis through many years already. Meryl also kindly re-organised the Quadrille Club website and gave it a more professional finish.

In 2005 the Quadrille Club team were asked to represent the Dolmetsch Historical Dance Society at a dance festival at the Royal Albert Hall – just like old times for Ellis and Chris! EQ presented a programme of 19th century dances which had remained popular throughout the century; one half of the team, wearing Regency costume, performed the early version of the dances, and the other half performed the later version, dressed in Victorian costume. The programme was very well received and QC were asked to appear again at the RAH five years later, when they presented a programme of Victorian waltzes. On both occasions, one member of the group was kept busier than the rest – Diana Campbell, who was also the commentator for the whole evening's entertainment.

A late 18th century ball was the subject of an enquiry from the York Civic Trust in 2007, who wanted to arrange such an event for the sixth-formers of seven York secondary schools. The main movers in this were Derek Chivers, music master at one of the schools, who was to provide the orchestra from his pupils, and Darrell Buttery, recently-retired history master from another of the schools and current President of the Trust. Lucy Graham-Adby had originally been asked to take this on but was not available and had suggested Ellis and Chris. Three rehearsals were held and Ellis and Chris took advantage of their trips to York for these, to explore the town and fall in love with it. They approached the evening of the ball with high hopes, as the rehearsals had been well attended, and the sixth-formers, equal numbers of young men and young women, had approached the cotillions and country dances willingly, if rather cautiously. Wigs were hired en masse and costumes were hired or made for the occasion. One young man proudly displayed the costume he had made for his partner. Better, Chris admitted, than she could have produced!

York Assembly Rooms (normally a restaurant, taken over and cleared of tables for this event) looked suitably 18th century and had provided equally suitable refreshments for the supper. The evening began with a minuet performed by Ellis and Chris, and the general dancing began. The student musicians played with panache and the 70 dancers crowded onto the floor with verve and enthusiasm. Parents and journalists watched from the sidelines for the first hour, were allowed to take part in the supper, then were banished from the building and the young dancers were left to enjoy themselves without critical eyes on them. Enjoy themselves they did! They cavorted and leapt, cheered and chatted, swung and flirted. “A superb success, the best ball we have ever had” Darrell Buttery pronounced, “They enjoyed it so much! Just the way I thought it should be.” “And all without cigarettes, booze, or drugs” replied Chris. Darrell’s letter of thanks is one of their treasured possessions.

A year later Ellis gave a free C19th dance class as part of the Big Dance in London, at the Royal Academy of Dramatic Arts. One young man welcomed them with gusto; he had been one of the York dancers – the one who had made his partner’s dress - and he was now attending RADA as a drama student.

2008 brought an invitation for Ellis to act as MC for a ball at Chawton House, once the residence of Jane Austen’s brother Edward. Jane herself had lived nearby, in the village. Chawton House had been bought by an American lady and now houses an important library of women’s literature. The House itself remains very much as Jane would have known it and the owner was determined that her ball should be in keeping. A carriage brought the guests to the door, the whole house was candle-lit, Green Ginger came to play, the Hampshire Regency Dancers (HRD), who knew the house well, sent a contingent to help the paying customers, Stuart Marsden (musician, professionally trained dancer, charming and good-looking) was the perfect partner for the American lady hostess, and Miss Bennet and Mr Darcy attended (Elizabeth Garvie and David Rintoul from the 1980 BBC2 *Pride and Prejudice*). Dinner, consisting of authentic Regency dishes, was served on silver borrowed from the modern Austen family..... the only thing missing was paying guests! The American lady had over-estimated her friends’ courage and they had stayed away from fairly-recently-bombed London in their entirety. Never mind. There were especially invited guests, there were HRD, there were Green Ginger and there was Ellis. They all had a wonderful time.

In 2009 Ellis and Chris organised another Victorian ball. Finding a venue they could afford was the biggest problem. This, and all the other organisation, was Chris’s headache. The biggest joy for Ellis was the opportunity to work with the wonderful Green Ginger to produce an evening of authentic Victorian music for authentic Victorian dances that could be enjoyed

by everyone. Stuart Marsden and Jeremy Procter found a venue – York House, in Twickenham – and the ball was presented under the aegis of the Dolmetsch Historical Dance Society (now the Historical Dance Society) charity. The tickets sold like hot cakes, the evening was a wonderful success and everyone enjoyed themselves. So they did it again the following year, and again the year after. Then it was 2012 and 100 years since the Titanic disaster, so of course the ball changed from Victorian to 1912. This proved to be spectacularly successful, culminating with the sinking of the Titanic. The tickets once again sold like hot cakes, with a considerable waiting list, and dancers came from 12 countries, most of them especially for this one event!

One more ball at York House was all QC could manage, as the cost of hire was raised substantially. This remains one of the two big problems when one is looking for a ballroom: many charge a very high price and many are carpeted and unsuitable for dancing. Both these problems are caused by the demand for wedding venues. But again Stuart and Jerry came to the rescue, finding the Normanton Theatre at the Langdon Down Centre in Teddington. This is a small and beautiful Victorian theatre in what was a private house but is now used as a centre for Down Syndrome children. Most importantly for dancing, it has a very well-sprung floor. This venue is still, happily, used for Victorian balls, now organised by Libby Curzon and her group Mrs Bennet's Ballroom.

Quadrille Club has given Ellis and Chris some very good friends. Diana Campbell, Genevieve Kergoat, Jo and Chris Saunders have supported them in every possible way. Stuart Marsden's support has been mentioned in several places above, and he was also kind enough to make a number of rather special ball gowns for Chris, in Regency, Victorian and Ragtime styles. Felicity Mankin, Tony Latham, Alison and David Lawrence, Jenny and Peter Taylor, Dalbor Sudwell and Libby Curzon have attended Club meetings with notable regularity, Celia Marne has frequently appeared from Belgium or Italy, Beth Harris has come from New Zealand (not just for QC!), and David Powell has astounded and fascinated everyone with his knowledge of the 19th century toy theatre; his occasional talks and performances have been a delight, and Chris in particular has become an addict, following toy theatre productions wherever she can.

Ellis had been a good barn dance 'caller'. He turned out to be a superb 19th century ball dancing master. In 2018 he was invited to Cincinnati – "I was at one of his balls at York House" said the enthusiastic American, "He was so good, we had a wonderful time. We've been to balls all over, but he's the best." Unfortunately, he was also the oldest and felt he had to decline the invitation.

Well, old age catches us all up at some time. It caught up with Ellis and Chris and in 2019 Quadrille Club met only four times – in spring, summer, autumn, winter. The Very Last, Final Quadrille Club was held on 15th December and attended by over 60 people in the smallish room normally housing 3-6 sets for QC. It was a terrific day and Ellis and Chris were showered with cards, good wishes and gifts. These included a nicely framed picture of a quadrille being danced at a State Ball in Dublin Castle in about 1860, from the (Dolmetsch) Historical Dance Society, represented by Professor Anne Daye, and a stained glass window(!) of themselves, in Victorian dress, with *Quadrille Club* in a banner underneath, which came from QC members, planned and organised by Libby Curzon.

Ellis started Quadrille Club with his aims firmly fixed: he would teach dances of the 19th century with the correct steps, the correct figures, the correct format and, as far as possible, the correct music. He would give background information to help the dancers understand what they were doing and why. He would give help to anyone who wanted to become C19

dance teachers themselves. And he would make sure that people who came to QC or to his balls, enjoyed the dancing. He succeeded magnificently.

In 2020 Ellis was surprised and pleased to receive an official letter asking if he would accept, if he were to be invited to a Royal Garden Party. He replied in the affirmative but unfortunately the coronavirus intervened and the Queen's garden parties were cancelled. Such is life!

And now, who knows? At the very least, Ellis can look back at wonderful times, and can watch the progress of the groups and teachers that have followed in his footsteps. Diana Campbell, Stuart Marsden, Libby Curzon, Suzy Nagy, Andrew Rawe, Elspeth Reed, Barbara Segal, Philippa Waite, Fabio Mollica, are all teaching 19th century dance after attending Quadrille Club or using Ellis' research, help and advice. Many others have improved and refined or extended their teaching, have started their own groups, and are running regular balls, in this country and others, for similar reasons. What would they have done without him?

Ellis and Chris have a favourite phrase they are often able to use - "We've danced there." The list of venues is considerable.

Currently Ellis spends even more time reading than he did in the past. At a careful and conservative estimate he has read 12,000 books. Pity he doesn't have an eidetic memory; nowadays he tends to bring home five books from the library and find out that he has already read three of them.

Chris Rogers
March 2020