

## THE BELINDA QUIREY MEMORIAL FUND

Velma Pursehouse

Before introducing the Fund, I should introduce myself and explain my relationship with Belinda and how it developed particularly during the last few years.

I first got to know Belinda in the late 1970s when I moved to London. A friend and I wanted to do something different and we saw this advertisement for an evening class in St John's Wood entitled Historical Dance, something we had never heard of – so we decided to try it. Little did we realize at that time what impact it would have on our lives. We met this amazing lady; we were encouraged – we were even complimented! – a rare accolade (how rare we came to realize later) – but we were hooked! line and sinker!

The years passed, work continued, personal circumstances came and went, but my interest in Early (Historical) Dance never diminished and we remained in contact. I didn't see Belinda for a couple of years, but when I did start to see her again, I began to realize how much she had slowed down. The everyday things in life were becoming an effort; her favourite phrase – 'Don't worry about me, dear, I am just an old wreck' – was beginning to ring true.

I started to give her lifts to and from various events and a different friendship developed. She suffered various setbacks, but despite the help of friends (when she would accept it!) she eventually could no longer cope on her own and her family found a place for her at Shenlebury House near her sister's.

I was one of the few who were able to remain in contact and visited her frequently. We went for drives through the beautiful Hertfordshire countryside, occasionally visiting a local watering-hole. Although physically she had slowed down, and people and places had become misted through lack of contact, her mind never lost that sharp intellect. She could still bandy literary quotations with Daphne [Watts], who often accompanied me; lecture you on the social and economic influences on life both past and present; and right up to that final week before her fatal stroke she was still talking of bony skeletons covered in tactile tissue that moved through space. Belinda was still that glorious eccentric that Phroso has described above.

During that last week, when I visited her every day, last seeing her (with Peggy [Dixon]) a few short hours before she died, I became acquainted with some members of the family. Following the funeral, and when things had settled down a little, I felt that I was now in a position to ask about

Belinda's squirrel-like habits – especially that of borrowing books and not returning them! I had been quizzed by several people on this matter, particularly by those who knew that I was in contact with Belinda, but we had never received a positive answer from the family, so I offered to look for them myself and help with the sorting of Belinda's books and papers. When I saw the mountain (and I mean mountain) of books and papers, I realized why the family had never been able to answer earlier queries. It was an horrendous task to contemplate. But – I had offered, so I gritted my teeth and set to.

Now came the problem of their disposal: apart from one or two personal mementos and, of course, finding those that had been borrowed, the family had no use for the rest – a vast library of books not only on Dancing and the stage, but also History, Art, Literature, Music, Mathematics, Philosophy, Psychology, Theology, not to mention biographies, autobiographies and other miscellanea like the odd book of crossword puzzles.

It would have been wrong for these to have disappeared into any old secondhand bookshop, so I offered to take some to Mollie [Webb] for the ISTD library. These she accepted with open arms, and that library has now been swelled by many volumes. After some discussion, and with the approval of the family, it was decided to sell the remainder and for the money raised to be used to further work in Early Dance.

So the Belinda Quirey Memorial Fund was born.

An account was set up with myself and Belinda's eldest niece, Sarah, as joint signatories. However, it was also felt that this should be put on a more formal basis and that a dancing organization with which Belinda had been associated should ultimately be responsible for its administration.

On behalf of the family I approached Phroso Pfister as chairman of the Dance Research Committee of the ISTD to see if the Imperial Society would be prepared to take this on. The council have agreed in principle to do this; but settling the legal details and the conditions of how and in what circumstances the money should be used will be an ongoing process for some time to come. We shall nevertheless, in the meantime, continue to raise money for Early Dance in Belinda's name.

I was able to announce at the conference on 5 April a further welcome development, that an anonymous donor had come forward and bought the entire remaining collection with the idea that it should be kept intact. This will now be donated to the Early Dance Circle as the basis of a library in the National Resource Centre for Historical Dance that the Circle is hoping to set up. Several organizations, including the ISTD, have already expressed their support for such a Centre. I am thus in the happy position of announcing that we not only have the Belinda Quirey Memorial Fund, but that we also now have the start of the Belinda Quirey Library.