

**NORMAN SELKRIG WHITSON**  
**(5 March 1933 – 5 March 2017)**

*From Bronwyn Maysmor and Charlotte Williams*

Eastbourne Club's former long-time tutor, Norman Whitson, died on his 84<sup>th</sup> birthday on 5 March 2017. Norman, a Glaswegian with a very distinctive accent, started his dancing in Australia and met Coral at a summer school here. Coral followed him back to Australia and the rest is history! Together they had two sons and a daughter (who died aged 5 years), fostered countless numbers of children and babies, and became legal guardians of their lovely Sara. He started his teacher training at the Kelburn Club under the guidance of Betty Redfearn, and subsequently at the Eastbourne Club under Susan Turner. Susan was a little reluctant at first, thinking that she was being replaced, but soon became very grateful that Norman was there to step in when required. Norman gradually took over more of the teaching when Susan became ill, and he gained his teacher's certificate in 1982, which we celebrated at an end of year "Mad Hatter's Tea Party".

From then on, Norman was fully committed to the Eastbourne Club and was for a few years, also taking the Wainuiomata Club. Nothing stopped him from travelling from Petone and later from Wainuiomata every week – not high wind warnings on the hill, not waves and debris washing over the Eastbourne road, and not even when he had a broken leg. He turned up to dancing wearing his kilt with his sock and dance pump on his good leg, and his garter flashes stuck to the plaster on his broken leg!

Norman was great on theme nights and we had a very imaginative committee who encouraged him with ideas – we had colour, farming, nautical and matrimony nights, spectacularly spectacled, spotty and fancy feet nights, Halloween and mid-winter Christmas nights, family nights and a couple of dishwasher hops when we were raising funds for a dishwasher for the hall. No matter what the theme, Norman always devised a fun programme.

All those attending the Eastbourne annual dances will be familiar with the unique tradition Norman followed of telling sometimes appallingly bad jokes in his thick Glaswegian accent, sometimes hard to understand, but he always got a good laugh and even at his retirement party, a joke was expected and delivered.

Norman was given life membership of the club at the 45<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Dance on 11 July 2001 – his 20<sup>th</sup> year of tutoring the Eastbourne Club. At his retirement party on 9 October 2010, under the theme "A Touch of Glasgow", he was thanked for his fun, for his loyalty and his continued support over the latter years when Club attendance was down, never knowing whether he would have a full set,

three couples or even only two couples. Coral's support over the years was also acknowledged, particularly for the beautifully iced cakes when the occasion called for one.

It was very special to have Norman, Coral and Sara present at the Eastbourne's 60<sup>th</sup> anniversary dance in October 2016. On entering the Hall Norman announced that he was "at home" and enjoyed the night totally immersed in the dancing, meeting old friends and being a treasured member of the dancing family. By special request from Sara, we danced his dance *A Gift from Heaven* referred to below.

At Norman's funeral, his eldest son Peter (who has Norman's likeness and stature) wore Norman's red kilt and tie, his youngest son Cameron wrote and sang a lovely tribute to his father, sung in quieter tones than his normal style which Norman did not appreciate, and Sara sang a beautiful song with such a strong meaningful voice. Charlotte Williams, also a life member of the Eastbourne Club, gave a moving tribute and spoke of the many dances Norman had devised but specifically of the one dance which meant so much to him and Coral – *A Gift from Heaven* (published in *Scottish Country Dances from the Harbour City 1986*), devised in memory of their daughter Shona, born with spina bifida and paralysed from the waist down, but with a mind of sharp observation, perception, humour and love. The dance depicts heart formations with hands touching briefly and finishes with a diamond all round poussette. The music, written by Tom Barnes, was titled *The Girl with the Deep Brown Eyes*.

Gary Stratton who, with his wife June, usually played for the Eastbourne annual dances, devised a tune which he played to open the funeral service. It featured steam trains and bells and whistles to commemorate Norman's working life as a fitter and turner in the Railway Workshops at Gracefield.

Our thoughts are with the Whitson family.



Eastbourne SCD Club Life members, cut the 60th anniversary cake in October 2016 – Charlotte Williams, Norman Whitson, Bronwyn Maysmor and Ian Taylforth.