

The St. Hugh's Foundation Fellowship Award Executive summary report by Liam Robinson

Dancing the Small Halls

Liam Robinson was awarded the fellowship award in January 2008 and commenced his project in April 2008.

Project outline – “Dancing the small halls” is an examination of regular social community folk dance events in North America, UK and Europe. It looks at modes of organisation, transmission and the sense of community and identity embodied in the event. The aim of the project is to improve Liam Robinson's knowledge and working practice and to act as a catalyst to inspire others to become proactive in the field of community social dance.

Methodology – Liam visited dance events in New England (USA), North Carolina (USA), Estonia, Shetland, Cape Breton (Canada), County Kerry (Republic of Ireland) and Lithuania. At each event, case studies were carried out to establish how the events ran and were organised, including details about financial arrangements and the demographic of people attending. Dancers and organisers were interviewed and video footage recorded.

Video blogs and an online blog were also kept to record Liam's thoughts about the events he attended. This information is available on-line, through presentations and seminars and through written articles

Outcomes –

- The information is now being uploaded to the project website www.dancingthesmallhalls.net . As well as the basic case studies and location information, this site also hosts essays and interpretation as part of the ongoing process of expanding and interpreting the research. The project has also been regularly blogged on <http://folkdance.livejournal.com>
- As a practitioner Liam has, through this project gained a massive amount of experience and new methods, relating to teaching, performing and researching traditional social dance. He has come into contact with many different styles and ideologies related to the subject area.
- He has successfully expanded his work base through the research visits and has secured future work in North Carolina, New England, Estonia and Lithuania.
- The research has already inspired the development of new regular dance events. Notably in Spalding, Lincolnshire (Rose Lane Ceilidhs) and in Dunstable, Beds (Chiltern Ceilidhs). The dissemination is still in its early phases so this represents a promising return.
- As part of the dissemination phase Liam has delivered a series of lectures to dance students at University of Lincoln, he is currently in discussion with Bishop Grosseteste University College Lincoln, The Sage Gateshead, University of Nottingham, University of Huddersfield, East Anglian Traditional Music Trust and SOAS London about research seminars and lectures.
- Discussions are also ongoing with BBC Radio 3, English Dance and Song magazine and The Living Tradition Magazine about articles.
- Liam has appeared regularly on Radio Lincolnshire, providing updates about his research visits. The project blog was used by the production team of BBC Radio 3's World Routes when planning their program Appalachian Road Trip which was broadcast in October 2009.

Future – Although the Fellowship Award has now finished, the project is an ongoing piece of work, studying, analysing and interpreting community folk dance events. The dissemination process is in its infancy and the information collected has opened up many new avenues of exploration for Liam, including the possibility of publishing a book on the subject and carrying out further field work. The links that Liam made with communities around the world have provided a vast base for future work which can be used to enhance the practice of folk dance in Lincolnshire and also to raise the profile of Lincolnshire's traditional music and dance around the world.