

STAT news

The Newsletter from the Society of
Teachers of the Alexander Technique

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Dusting off the past: STAT's archive sees the light



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- Norway (NFLAT)
- South Africa (SASTAT)
- Spain (APTAE)
- Switzerland (SVLAT) and
- United States of America (AmSAT)



Jamie McDowell, Editor of Statnews

FROM THE EDITOR

Our cover shows recent scenes at the STAT storage unit, in North East London. Recently, myself, Esther Miltiadous and John Hunter (pictured) spent a day and a half sorting through what was in storage. It was like going into the further reaches of a cupboard under the sink, or a dresser in the kitchen which had not been examined for a decade. We pulled it all out and had a look.

The reason I'm telling you this is to let you know that we put time and energy into tasks like this and because it's a metaphor for Resolution 5 at the AGM.

Items in storage fall into four categories to which we paid attention. 1. Office chairs, boxes of envelopes, obsolete tech equipment. 2. Multiple copies of books and pamphlets. We have no means of turning these into 'value' but they might be of interest to members who might come and collect them at some pre-arranged date in the future. Otherwise, they will be written off and disposed of. 3. Records with personal details which need to be securely shredded. 4. STAT archive, recent records and other gems which are part of our history. These have been moved to a secure space.

Resolution 5 is a similar process. Our 'Company Limited by Guarantee' is a cupboard full of items, some valuable, some irrelevant. It needs sorting out. That's what Resolution 5 proposes to do and then the results of the sorting out are brought back to the AGM the year after this, for your approval or not.

Nothing sinister in this process. But I need to point out that the current Articles are very specific in their purpose. No support for anything outside of the Alexander Technique of the writings and teachings of FM Alexander. Hmmm. Council will need to withdraw support from a variety of areas currently supported, or be in contravention some regulations. Goodbye to EDI, for example. Goodbye to neuroscience, hyper mobility training.

The Chair John Hunter is spelling this out in his report, 'From the Chair. Otherwise, I hope that this edition has many other items of interest.



John Hunter, Chair

FROM THE CHAIR

Taking stock

As we approach this year's AGM, I wanted to share a few updates on what has been happening within the Society, and to reflect on some of the conversations many of us have been part of over recent months.

As I have been writing this, I have realised that many of the issues discussed below revolve around a common theme: how we adapt to changing circumstances without losing sight of what we value.

Stewardship and practical matters

Not all of the work of a professional society is especially visible. Much of it involves quiet, practical decisions about how things are run, and whether long-standing arrangements still make sense.

One recent example has been a review of our storage arrangements. Over many years, the Society accumulated a large quantity of older publications, furniture and equipment. In several cases, the cost of storing these items had grown to exceed their replacement value. After a careful review, a substantial amount of surplus material is now being cleared. This will reduce storage costs and free up resources for better use elsewhere.

Changes like this rarely attract much attention, but they do matter. Over time, organisations acquire all sorts of things – publications, furniture, procedures and governing documents. Most arrived for perfectly sensible reasons. The fact that we occasionally take stock of them does not mean they were mistakes. It simply reflects a responsibility to ask whether they are still serving the purpose for which they were introduced.

Members supporting members

One of the things I value most about STAT is the willingness of members to support one another.

I was recently very pleased to meet with members involved in the mentoring programme to explore whether the wide range of experience within that group might form the basis of future CPD opportunities. It was a heartening reminder of how much knowledge and skill exists within the profession, and how generous many members are in sharing it.

The mentoring programme is just one example of the many ways members contribute to the life of the Society beyond formal roles or committees.

Training and qualification work

A great deal of time, care and thought continues to be given by members to training and qualifications.

I would particularly like to acknowledge the ongoing contribution of our training courses and those who run them. For many decades, the schools have played a central role in training new Alexander Technique teachers and sustaining the profession. The experience, commitment and accumulated wisdom within the training community remain an invaluable resource for the Society.

The Training Course Committee (TCC) has recently welcomed several new members. This strengthens the committee and reflects the principle of rotation set out in its Terms of Reference – bringing fresh perspectives into the discussion while retaining experience and continuity.

I would also like to thank members of the Assessors Panel for their professionalism and commitment. Assessment work involves careful preparation, thoughtful judgement and a significant level of responsibility. Whatever members' views on wider policy questions, those undertaking this work have consistently approached it with care, seriousness and a strong sense of service.

The Assessment Working Group continues its work and brings together an experienced and thoughtful group of members willing to engage with some challenging, and at times sensitive, questions on behalf of the Society.

Alongside this, Council has been developing the Terms of Reference for the Training and Qualification Working Party (TQWP), which will be circulated for feedback shortly. The aim is to create a space in which training and qualification matters can be considered in a broad, forward-looking way, bringing new ideas and established experience into constructive conversation.

More generally, it has been encouraging to see thoughtful ideas emerging from many parts of the Society about training, mentoring, CPD, assessment, member support and public engagement. I do not believe the future lies in preserving everything exactly as it is. Nor do I think newer ideas are automatically better

STAT

STAT Council

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the Assessment

Working Group or

the Assessors panel.

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than older ones. The challenge is to recognise what remains valuable, build on it, and stay open to new possibilities where they genuinely offer something useful.

Dialogue and consultation

Recent months have seen lively, and at times passionate, discussion about promotion, training, professional standards, governance and the future direction of the Society.

The facilitated meeting between Council representatives and training schools forms part of this wider conversation. Whatever specific outcomes emerge, I hope it will help build understanding and support more constructive dialogue.

Council is also planning wider consultation meetings for members following the AGM. These will provide further opportunities to share ideas, concerns and hopes for the Society's future.

Members engage in different ways — through committees and working groups, through meetings, through informal conversations, and through the members' forum. What matters is that there are genuine opportunities for a wide range of voices to be heard.

Looking ahead

One thing that has struck me in recent months is how often people who disagree strongly about particular proposals nevertheless want broadly the same things. Most of us want a thriving profession, successful teachers, strong training courses, public confidence in our work, and a Society that remains viable in the years ahead. Disagreements tend to arise when we begin to discuss how those aims are best achieved.

As I have listened to these discussions, I have found myself returning to a number of underlying questions. What sort of professional society do we want STAT to be? How should expertise be reflected in decision-making? What responsibilities do we have to members, and what responsibilities do we have to the wider public? How do we balance continuity with change?

These are not questions Council can answer on its own, nor are they questions for any single group within the Society. They are questions for all of us.

Good communication, consultation and mutual understanding are essential to the health of any organisation, and I hope the conversations currently under way will help strengthen relationships across the Society. At the same time, communication and governance are not alternatives to one another. Even with goodwill and open dialogue, organisations still need clear ways of making decisions, allocating responsibility and balancing different interests. These challenges are not signs of failure; they are simply part of the life of a mature professional body.

As the profession evolves, we are increasingly asked to think not only about what serves members' interests, but also about

what supports public confidence in our standards, integrity and accountability. These aims are often aligned, but not always identical, and one of the Society's continuing tasks is to find a sensible balance between them.

I have been surprised by some of the discussion surrounding Resolution 5, which is due to be considered at next month's AGM. The proposal is simply to review the Articles and Rules, not to change them, and in my view that distinction matters.

The Society's powers and responsibilities already exist within the current Articles and Rules. A review would not create new powers. What it would do is give us an opportunity to stand back and ask whether a set of documents that has evolved over many years still forms a clear and coherent whole.

Our governing documents began life as a standard charitable company template (why "charitable" I don't know) and have since been amended, extended and adapted to meet changing needs and circumstances. This has generally been sensible and well-intentioned. Over time, however, it has also led to overlaps, inconsistencies and provisions that reflect particular moments in the Society's history.

It seems entirely reasonable that, from time to time, an organisation should pause and ask whether its governing framework remains clear, coherent and fit for purpose.

The review proposed in Resolution 5 would not itself change the Articles or Rules. Any recommendations would be brought back for consultation, in line with the Society's Consultation Guidelines, and any proposed changes would ultimately be debated and decided by members at a future AGM or General Meeting.

The Society we have today did not appear fully formed. It is the product of many decisions taken by earlier generations of members, often in response to the circumstances of their time. We have inherited the results — both good and bad — and much of what we now take for granted was once new and sometimes controversial. In the same way, the decisions we make now will help shape the Society inherited by those who come after us.

There are real challenges ahead. Membership has been declining for some time, and the profession itself is changing. We hold different views on important questions and, if recent discussions have shown anything, it is that those differences matter.

At the same time, I have been encouraged by how many members care enough to engage. It would be easier if there were simple answers, but I do not think there are.

Some of the questions before us may require us to revisit long-held assumptions. Some may involve difficult choices between competing priorities. Others may show that there are things we value which cannot all be maximised at once.

These are not questions for Council, the schools or any one group to resolve alone. They call for the experience, judgement and participation of members across the Society.

continued on p6 >>



Esther Miltiadous, Development Manager

FROM THE OFFICE

Heather Penn, Committees Secretary



Latest goings-on

Looking forward to the Annual Conference and AGM

We are looking forward to this year's in person AGM and Conference on Saturday 4th of July at Birkbeck, University of London. There will be lots on offer, so take a look at the website (log in required) and register to come. It will be great to see you there. To date we have over 70 members registered to come, so it is all set to be a vibrant event. In the morning, after a welcome from the Chair, John Hunter, there will be a selection of workshops and workshare opportunities. After lunch, there will be the AGM followed by this year's Memorial Lecture given by Dorothea Magonet entitled 'On the Art of Teaching and Teaching in the Arts'.

All the information on Motions and Council Elections can be found on the members section of the website (log in required) and you will be receiving information about registration and voting, including proxy voting via email. Please see the lower down in this article for deadlines and dates for the AGM.

Office updates

The office has been busy this Spring processing new Student applications from a number of our STAT registered Training Course, along with applications for Teaching membership from graduates too. This is a great boost to the Society and to office morale!

We have been working with STAT Projects finalising a new digital way to apply for membership of the Society. This streamlines the process, cutting down on admin time and allowing data to be collected in a uniform way.

The office continues to help teaching members promote their businesses by adding courses and events to members' STAT website profiles and the monthly CPD Newsletter. If any teaching member would like help editing or adding new information to their profile please email stat@alexandertechnique.co.uk

Spring cleaning of the STAT storage unit

At the beginning of the pandemic STAT office was packed up and stored, since then the office has been working from home. Office staff have been working with Council to reduce storage costs by gradually going through everything which is stored. This spring John Hunter, Jamie McDowell and I spent two days going through everything, so see if we can reduce storage costs further by moving to a smaller unit. We carried out a GDPR audit of documents we should no longer keep. Great headway was made.

Assessment Working Group

This year's Assessor Training Forum took place in two parts: an in-person day at Birkbeck College (pictured) in late May followed by an online session in early June. As part of my role as Development Manager, I assisted the Assessment Working Group (AWG) with preparations beforehand and on the day. Each year, the AWG carefully reviews all the assessments held since the last Forum and all the feedback received from both Applicants and Assessors, looking to see what has been



Birkbeck College, London

working well and where any difficulties have arisen before deciding on the focus of the sessions.

In response to assessor requests, this year's sessions focused on what is the same and what is different when the person being assessed is already a qualified teacher (e.g. non-STAT trained teachers and re-joiners or someone who requires assessment to

Dates for the diary

AGM

- Registration for the AGM ends 21st June at 12.00 noon.
- Proxy voting is now open and the deadline for submission of proxy votes via email or post is 1.30pm on 2nd July.
- Annual Conference and AGM - Saturday 4th July - 9.30am - 5.00pm. Registration opens at 9.00am.

Inclusion in the CPD Newsletter

- The deadline for inclusion of CPD courses in the STAT CPD Enewsletter is the 17th of each month. Please note, advertising your events here is a member benefit.

“ [The Assessor Training Forum sessions] are fun and really useful because everyone contributes their own experience and insights and we all learn together

register with CNHC). Both sessions involved a mix of presentations, practice and discussion working on techniques of summarising observations, listening skills in decision-making, and preparing written feedback for Applicants that is meaningful, constructive, and ‘peer-to-peer’ in tone, especially when working with established teachers. All things that sound quite easy until you’re put on the spot in the moment! These sessions are fun and really useful because everyone contributes their own experience and insights and we all learn together.

STAT projects

Jane Morris and I are the STAT Projects team working under Council’s direction and have continued to offer support as directed by Council, including:

- Preparing for the Annual Conference and AGM;
- Updating the requirements of and processes for UK Teaching Membership Application;
- Assisting Council members to undertake scheduled policy reviews;
- Completing the admin review of the returned annual on-going approval forms from Training Courses and producing the associated summary

spreadsheet;

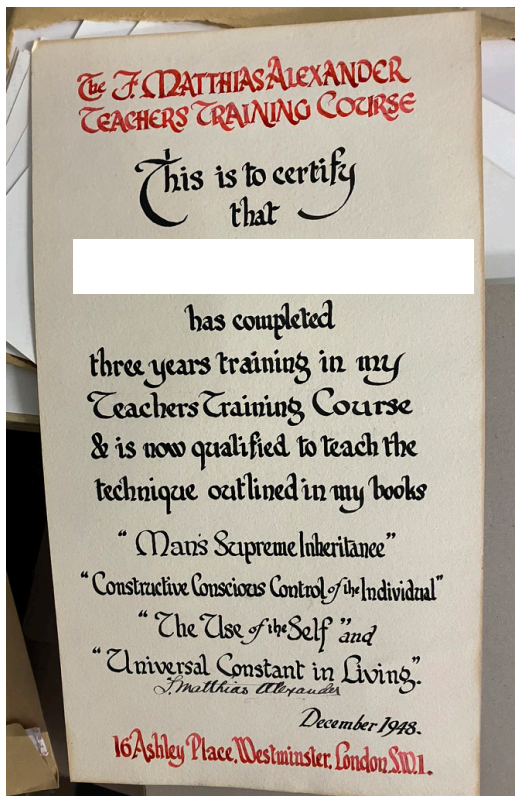
- Updating the information on the members section of the STAT website regarding CNHC registration; and
- Inducting new Council Members.

Improving other resources for members

- Produced an update organisation chart for STAT for use as part of the Council Induction Process. This is designed to be part of the Council Induction pack and has been shared with Council.

Esther Miltiadous
Development Manager

The STAT archive



A graduation certificate from the class of '48, one of a few items unearthed during a recent foray into STAT's Archive in North London (see this issue's cover, "From the Chair" and "From the Editor").

« continued from p4, From the Chair

If we can listen carefully to one another, draw on the considerable wisdom within the membership, and remain open to new possibilities as they arise, then I believe we have a real opportunity – not just to get through a difficult period, but to help shape the next chapter in the Society's development.

John Hunter
Chair of STAT



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SRG REPORT

Fighting against bad science

In 2024 the respected science journal, PLoS ONE published an article called ‘Effects of the Alexander Technique on pain and adverse events in chronic non-specific neck pain: A systematic review and meta-analysis’ by a team of academics based in China. It’s usually a cause for excitement when a new peer-review publication comes out because they’re so rare, with the Alexander Technique (AT) still being a niche area for research. However, reading the article left us horrified! The analysis methods were completely inappropriate, there were several factual inaccuracies and the conclusions were unwarranted and contradictory.

Researchers often go to meta-analyses as the main port of call when they want to gain an accurate overview of an area. As a consequence, it was likely that this article would end up being the most frequently cited publication on the AT and neck pain. As such, the findings of the gold standard study in this area, the ATLAS trial risked being over-looked, leaving researchers with an inaccurate and rather negative impression of the effectiveness of Alexander lessons. It’s fair to say that, because of the many misrepresentations in the publication, it represented a direct challenge to the reputation of the AT as a health intervention.

SRG member, Julia got together with Alexander research colleagues, Tim Cacciatore, Rajal Cohen and Mari Hodges to write a detailed critique of the publication which was sent to the journal requesting that the article be withdrawn. It is extremely uncommon for journals to retract articles, so we were pleased to receive a reply from the



Who we are

The STAT Research Group (SRG) monitors and supports current and planned research, as well as running Alexander Studies Online. We are: Lesley Glover, Erica Donnison, Charlotte Woods, Mark Vasak, Kathleen Ballard (Honorary Member) and Julia Woodman (Chair). To contact, contribute, or collaborate with the SRG, or if you become aware of any relevant new research, please send us a message at: alexander@julia-woodman.co.uk.

journal Editor saying they would look into it. However, for the next 15 months nothing happened and the journal did not respond to any enquiries on progress – we had more or less given up hope. Then, out of the blue, we received a letter from the Editor saying that they agreed with most of our concerns and had retracted the publication. This is a significant achievement in upholding the reputation of our profession.

If you’re interested, you can read the retraction notice here: <https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0345732>.

Holistic health questionnaire research project

In our last report for STATnews, we announced that we were beginning a small-scale project to test out the potential of a validated, online questionnaire as a means of providing useful data on the health outcomes of Alexander lessons. Rather than gathering data on a specific symptom,

or health condition, the purpose of the Warwick Holistic Health questionnaire is to capture changes clients experience in their wellbeing more broadly, including in their confidence, mood, mobility etc.

Though the study is small, and it is still early days, we are pleased to say that the results so far are encouraging. No less importantly, we are developing knowledge and experience of running a project that aims to be flexible enough to incorporate teachers and clients working in different settings. We look forward to offering you a sneak preview of what we have learnt so far at this year’s STAT AGM-day in July, with further reports to follow in STATnews and via Alexander Studies Online later in the year.

The latest from Alexander Studies Online (ASO)

Our last post of 2025 was our usual round-up of everything we have put



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Image credit: D Dental Office

Applying the Alexander Technique in Dentistry: A Conversation with Dr Anikó Ball

out on ASO over the year to give people a chance to go back to posts that they may have missed or re-live those they enjoyed the most. This year started with an interview with Dr Anikó Ball, a dentist and Alexander teacher who works exclusively within the dental profession, helping dentists and their teams cope with the pressures that they encounter as a result of their work. We followed this up in February

with a conversation with Anikó about how teaching the AT can be adapted for working with people with different learning styles and in particular the very practical nature of many in the dental profession. The March post was a change of pace. Mark Vasak interviewed Federico Pendenza about his research into how the AT is understood by students in UK higher education music settings. They reflect on what these findings may suggest for communicating

and integrating AT within music training. In April we posted another of our Connected Conversations, this time speaking with Rossella Buono about how she integrates her Alexander teaching with Smart Yoga.

To learn more, visit: www.alexanderstudiesonline.com

The Wikipedia project is underway
The AT Wiki Project is a coordinated

effort to improve the accuracy, balance, and quality of the English-language Wikipedia page on the Alexander Technique, aligning it more closely with current evidence and professional understanding.

Given Wikipedia's influence on how the public, and increasingly AI systems, encounter and describe the AT, the project addresses ongoing concerns about misrepresentation.

The project is led by Alexander Technique Canada (ATC), in collaboration with the American Society for the Alexander Technique (AmSAT), with research and process support from the STAT Research Group (SRG). Funding is in place, and policy-compliant editing with external support is underway!

The project is seeking volunteers with experience in Wikipedia policy-compliant editing to support ongoing monitoring and long-term development of the page. To get involved, contact Mark at alexanderwithmark@gmail.com.

«continued from p12, "Getting to grips with HM"

1. Encourage the pupil to connect and direct inward, rather than release out. This will feel much more safe and secure from their perspective and helps build a more reliable sensory awareness. There can often be a lack of muscle tone or strength in HM people, so don't encourage them to completely let go or do any traction that encourages limbs to move out of their sockets.

2. Teacher-pupil collaboration is more important than ever when working with an HM client. Regularly ask for their feedback on any movements or directions that you're working with to make sure they feel safe. Also be prepared for the lesson to go into a completely different direction than you may have been planning!

3. According to my physio, increasing evidence is emerging regarding correlation of neurodivergence and HM, something which can present barriers to progression if not explored fully with the client. In terms of practical working, she also encourages HM clients to pat and rub themselves all over their bodies for a minute or two (especially before exercise) to wake up muscle tone and help build a more reliable sense of proprioception.

« continued from p12, HM checklist in "Getting to grips with HM"

25) Mitral (heart) valve prolapse.

26) Aortic root dilation (z-score >+2).

27) Autonomic Dysfunction, POTS (paroxysmal orthostatic tachycardia syndrome), frequent feeling faint on standing up (but with a rapid pulse), orthostatic intolerance, neurally-mediated low blood pressure, bladder issues, sweating too much/too little. Poor temperature control.

28) Scoliosis.

29) Chronic headache with low cerebrospinal fluid pressure.

30) HSD is commoner in people of Asian and African descent.

31) (from the NHS Community Chronic Pain Clinic in Kent) Brain fog - a tendency towards muddled, scattergun thinking, perhaps corresponding to the dis-coordination people experience - too loose in one place, too tight in another, leading to making too much effort, lacking balance and postural support.

Fulfilling external obligations while maintaining our values: a balance

Alison Roper-Lowe responds to the Chair's response to her article, both of which appeared in STATnews February 2026

I agree with the Chair that we have to balance fulfilling our external obligations with maintaining our values.

In navigating this, it's important to distinguish between what regulation is essential, in terms of current government and legal requirements, and what is optional, such as registration with the CNHC, or future-proofing ourselves against possible legislation in years to come. Then, as a Society, we can decide how much we want to further regulate ourselves, in balance with our values and core aims. With the aim of understanding this, I have read the articles and letters by John, Malcom Williamson and others as well as following links to the legislation of 25 years ago and looking on the CNHC and PSA websites. (See Notes below for more detail on this)

I realise how long and fraught the history of these issues in STAT are. I can see that over the years, people have invested much time and energy in them, both in the late 90s and early 2000s and more recently in developing the SAP and in communications with CNHC. Especially among those who have been actively involved, there is a sense of weariness, which can easily translate to feeling that people with whom we may have disagreed in the past will never change.

My plea in the article was that we give "natural communication" a chance to work. We have not, as far as I know, previously tried the use of a professional Facilitator to help us find a way forward with issues in STAT. We have also not had an in-person meeting with Council for all those currently involved in training. My article referenced the need for consultation with key stakeholders to be before decisions are taken. All the examples John lists in his response are after the development and implementation of the SAP.

In a way, the issue of STAT's actual governance framework may be, as John says, a red herring. Even though Council has legal executive powers, it is their choice to what extent they use them, as with any organisation. The CEOs in the research by Frederic Lelage chose to step back from direct control and in the long term created more flourishing organisations. I imagine that if it was possible to move forward together without alienating or losing some of our most experienced trainers, Council would still much prefer this.

The Facilitator who has been suggested has successfully navigated other organisations with strong values through challenging issues, including the transfer of Riverford Organic to employee ownership. If his involvement is felt to be helpful in this meeting, this could be a useful way to navigate future issues and might alleviate the need for Council to wield their executive powers. This facilitated meeting could also have a beneficial effect of the process

of forming the new TQWP. How much more effective and inspiring this new group could be, if it is genuinely representative of all those with most experience in training and all those currently involved in training, as well as those who are interested in training in the future.

Notes on historical background

Twenty-five years ago, there was some attention given by the then government to increasing voluntary regulation of CAM (Complementary and Alternative Medicine.) This was linked to a wish from the EU to standardise qualifications across the Europe including the UK, an idea which was eventually abandoned as too difficult to achieve with divergent CAM professions. A House of Lords Select Committee Report (2000) noted that independent assessment for CAM trainings was desirable. Alexander Technique was included in this, despite being a self help technique rather than a type of Complementary Medicine, but was placed in "group 2" modalities for which it was not a requirement.

The 1999 Health Act clarified the CAM professions (such as Osteopaths and Chiropractors) that needed full regulation by the Professional Standards Authority. It also had a clause which opened the door to a future government introducing more regulation for CAM, (including the "group 2" professions, which included Alexander Technique) without needing a further Act of Parliament. As far as I know, though, no subsequent government has done this.

The requirement for "Independent Assessment" comes from the CNHC (Complementary and Natural Healthcare Council) with whom STAT has chosen to be registered as an organisation. However "Independent Assessment", and "Independent Assessors" can mean very different things, which is evident when you look at what is involved for the other modalities on the CNHC website, and even for the two other Alexander organisations which are given equal status with STAT. (PAAT is a small group of 10 Alexander teachers, trained by the same teacher who set up his own training course, who are at present advertising a hybrid online and in person training course. ITM is also an organisation of teachers who all qualified from the same training course, which was set up by one teacher and taught in large group weekend classes, with written work and online training.)

The present form of SAP with a staged final assessment watched by 2 or 3 people, at least one of whom must not have visited the training course, was a choice by those involved from STAT. If it is considered beneficial for STAT to be registered with the CNHC, there may be simpler, less onerous ways of ticking the "Independent Assessment" box.

Getting to grips with HM

Peter Buckoke offers impressions of the workshop “How to work with hypermobility in an Alexander lesson”, led by Julie Barber at LCATT on 10 May. Andy Smith’s personal reflections on working with hypermobile pupils were read out during the event, and are also included here.

Julie Barber gave a beautifully-presented talk on hypermobility to an enthusiastic gathering of Alexander teachers, trainees and students. Julie has devoted a great deal [of time] over the last 14 years to recognising, understanding and working with HM. Many of the attendees have experience of HM and working with the condition but I got the impression that Julie’s talk, demonstrations and PowerPoint images offered deeper insight than everyone else who was fortunate enough to be at LCATT for this event.

I am now more clear about the symptoms that include digestive issues, for instance – so it’s definitely not just concerning joints. Julie clarified that HM clients can have under- or over-developed proprioception, or frequent soft tissue injuries such as sprains, strains and tendonitis, or more serious conditions such as postural tachycardia syndrome, Ehlers-Danlos syndrome, or fibromyalgia. It’s no surprise to us that the issue is psychophysical.

I understand there will be a follow up to this presentation when we shall be guided through many examples of Julie’s repertoire of hands-on interventions that she has found most useful for dealing with hypermobility. I, for one, shall get my name on the list as soon as the date is released!

LCATT has an ongoing series of Interesting Talks and Workshops given by high quality Alexander and non-Alexander presenters. The atmosphere is always welcoming and mutually supportive no matter how much experience you have of the subject being explored. I find the workshops are reasonably priced and there are always comfortable opportunities to interact through discussion and hands-on experiments guided by the presenter.

Hypermobility and me: Andy Smith

Julie Barber invited me to share my experiences of being an AT teacher with hypermobility in her recent workshop at LCATT. Here is an amended transcript of my thoughts.

I was in my 30s and training to be an AT teacher when I first heard about hypermobility and realised that I myself was hypermobile, but of course I’ve had a lifelong relationship with the condition without really knowing about it.

Since a young age I’ve been a very active person and played a wide range of sports to a decent level, including county-standard badminton, but I’ve always been very injury-prone. Despite being fit and relatively strong, I suffered from more joint injuries than anyone else I have ever played sport with - you name it, I’ve injured it!

Ankle, knee, hip, wrist, elbow, neck and my two particular specialities: shoulder (a tendon injury that required surgery aged 26) and lumbar spine (a herniated L4/5 disc in 2007 which forced me to take time off work as a sports journalist and prevented me from playing any sport for more than 10 years).

All of my main injuries have been on my right side (perhaps not surprisingly for a right-handed player) and for a long time, I just considered it “one of those things”. Now I realise that a large factor in all of them has been my hypermobility.

Over my lifetime I’ve had more than 100 hours of physiotherapy - some of it with average physios that didn’t really help, but most with excellent, forward-thinking physios who enabled me to get back on track.

I scored an 8 out of 9 on the Beighton diagnostic scale for hypermobility (a score of 5 or above is considered HM for adults) and I discovered that my hips are particularly hypermobile and have roughly 40% more range than average.

I have also learned some valuable strengthening exercises that provide more joint stability and help counter that extra mobility I have.

Yet despite all this, it was only when I found the Alexander Technique that I was able to become virtually pain-free again and get back to doing the things I love.

After only a handful of AT lessons I decided to train at LCATT in London and was very lucky to have some brilliant teachers, including



Image credit: Sincerely, Media / Unsplash

“Several years ago I remember Dr Philip Bull saying that he could tell if someone was hypermobile just by shaking their hand... now I think I know what he means.”

Julie Barber, from whom I first learnt about hypermobility. Not only did she pass on a wealth of knowledge, but she also expertly applied this knowledge to her hands-on work.

During my training I learnt how to understand my body in a completely new way and look after myself better than ever. I stopped needing to do my daily strengthening and stretching routine; was able to be a very active dad to two young girls; and eventually started playing sport again. I've since done Malcolm Balk's training course and now teach AT-inspired running lessons in Kent and London, and regularly go to the gym and play golf, cricket and competitive badminton again.

These are all things I never thought would happen when I was in my late 20s and early 30s, and it was this magical combination of Alexander, good physiotherapy and an understanding of hypermobility that got me back on track.

Unsurprisingly, I still suffer from occasional injuries and I'm currently having physio for a recurrence of my old shoulder injury, but my recovery now is very different to how it was 20 years ago thanks to greater body awareness and a much better understanding of my body that AT has given me. I also have every confidence that my latest injury can be fully overcome, having been told by my current physio that HM bodies can achieve the same level of strength as what she calls "typicals", they just take much longer to strengthen.

HM and teaching

Since starting to teach AT in 2015, I've become increasingly aware of how many clients present with potential HM symptoms - whether they know it or not. In fact, very few people seem to have heard of hypermobility and even fewer mention it in a first lesson when we discuss their medical or injury history.

Over the years, I think my ability to pick up on the symptoms of HM has refined. Several years ago I remember Dr Philip Bull saying that he could tell if someone was hypermobile just by shaking their hand and at the time I thought that was quite a skill, but nowadays I think I know what he means. There's often a looseness to the joints and a general movement quality that can often (although not always) be different to non-HM people - a combination of being too loose yet also too stiff. One thing to bear in mind, however, is that it can become harder to pick up on HM symptoms in older clients given our joints tend to become stiffer as we age.

When I suspect someone is HM, the first thing I do is weigh up whether it would be beneficial to mention it to the pupil. For some people, it may cause worry that "another thing is wrong with me," however for many it can be the missing piece of information that answers a lot of questions. That was certainly the case for me. I've benefitted massively from knowing about my hypermobility as it has subsequently allowed me to understand it and manage it more effectively.

Case study

Over the last few months I have been working with a 13-year-old girl who makes a particularly interesting case study that I thought I would share. (For privacy reasons, her name has been changed.)

Anne hasn't been officially diagnosed as HM and her mum had never heard of the condition, however she immediately presented many clear signs in her first lesson.

Her posture was stooped; she had low muscle tone mixed with excess tension; she struggled with balance and coordination; had very flat feet; and always wanted to stand with her arms crossed. Interestingly, however, she didn't suffer from any pain.

Her parents were concerned about her posture, but also hoped I could help her improve her balance, particularly in relation to her ice hockey, the only sport she openly says she has an aptitude for. Her skating technique, however, was not as strong as either she or her coaches wanted, as she struggled to coordinate her limbs in a way that allowed her to skate quickly.

Early in her first lesson we did a control study to see how long she could balance on each leg. She found it tricky to do this for more than 10 seconds on her right leg and only managed 3 seconds on left side, while barely hovering her right foot above the ground.

When we moved on to working with AT fundamentals, it quickly became clear that Anne seemed to benefit a great deal more from direction-led work than inhibition, which can lead to lower energy and doesn't appear to pique her interest as much.

She quickly showed a great ability to direct effectively and one direction she has found particularly useful draws on her quirky love of pigeons. Rather than thinking about the conventional primary directions in sequence, she embodies them by having a bobbly pigeon head that's free to move in any direction. This instantly leads to greater lightness and



Image credit: LOGAN WEAVER | @LGNWVR / Unsplash

"Early in her first lesson we did a control study to see how long she could balance on each leg."

a stronger postural tone, as well as an improvement in her balance.

The idea of “connecting in” rather than expanding or releasing too much is particularly helpful for Anne, and she has also benefitted from some simple body mapping to build a stronger kinaesthetic awareness. Sit-to-stand chair work and monkey have been well-received, while long table turns are a favourite way to connect and quieten her thinking.

Over time, Anne’s posture has opened up, her knees lock less often than before and she doesn’t constantly cross her arms. She’s mildly autistic and, with that opening up of her posture, she has become more engaged and chatty with me and is able to look me in the eye when we talk, something she didn’t do early on. Fascinating stuff!

The length of time she can balance on one leg has also greatly improved to more than 30 seconds on each side (all while allowing the pigeon head, of course) and she embodies much more control and less muscular tension in the process. For a greater challenge, she has successfully balanced on thin pieces of wood and soft spiky domes and is even able to come into a one-legged monkey.

Tailoring our lessons to her skating has been especially useful and on several occasions we have mimicked the skating action in my teaching room. I’ve asked her to explain to me the key elements involved in good technique (I’m like Bambi on ice when I skate so had no previous idea!) and together we learned how to effectively shift weight from side-to-side in our one-legged monkeys, allowing our heads to lead and bodies to follow and shifting our centres of gravity towards the standing leg to minimise muscular tension. We have also worked on lengthening her spine while skating and getting her to transition from left to right with flow, ease and of course a bobbly pigeon head.

Anne’s mum sits in on the lessons and they have both been very open to trying out ideas, and their attitude is a big part of why Anne has done so well. There have naturally been lessons that didn’t connect quite so effectively, including when we explored walking in the passageway outside my teaching room when she got quite distracted and perhaps a little self-conscious.

Nevertheless, Anne’s story has so far been a great success, not only from an AT point of view but also from an ice hockey point of view, and even though I only see her once every few weeks now to check in with how she’s doing, it doesn’t take long for her to pick up from where she previously left off.

Round-up and tips

On top of all of the wonderful information that Julie’s workshop will provide, I’ll offer two tips that I have found useful for me when teaching, plus a little more insight from my physio:

continued on p8 >>

HSD checklist

The more a person answers “yes”, the more likely the person has HSD, although many of these items have other possible causes. Collagen and other connective tissues are present throughout the body (blood vessels, muscles, joints, ligaments and organs) so some or many of the body’s fundamental processes may be affected if the connective tissues are too stretchy/lax.

- 1) As a child, were they able to:
 - a) Do the splits and/or the “crab”.
 - b) Able to place their palms flat on the floor without bending their knees.
 - c) Able to pull one or both thumb nails back onto the forearm.
 - d) Touch their nose with the tip of their tongue.
- 2) Any history of dislocations or subluxations of joints.
- 3) Chronic constipation or “lazy bowel”, irritable bowel syndrome, acid reflux or diarrhoea.
- 4) Ineffective or poorly effective local anaesthetic response.
- 5) Low pain threshold of “The Princess and the Pea”.
- 6) Crowded dentition and/or high-arched palate.
- 7) Chronic back pain.
- 8) Fibromyalgia.
- 9) Chronic Fatigue Syndrome.
- 10) Easy bruising. Poor wound healing. Lax or very soft skin. Atrophic scarring – stretch marks (without weight gain).
- 11) Mast cell activation disorder.
- 12) “Banana legs”, i.e. one or both knees extend beyond 180°.
- 13) One or both elbows extend to over 180°.
- 14) Any fingers able to be bent back more than 90° with the hand flat on a surface.
- 15) Symptoms worse in pregnancy or on the progesterone-only pill.
- 16) Social phobia or agoraphobia. Anxiety, depression.
- 17) Hernia or history of hernia. Pieziform papules on both heels. (Hernias of fatty tissue through the connective tissue).
- 18) Flat feet.
- 19) Poor proprioception (“clumsy”).
- 20) Molluscoid pseudotumours (fleshy lesions associated with scars on pressure points such as fingers or elbows).
- 21) Subcutaneous spheroids (small round hard bodies) on forearms or shins.
- 22) Eyes – short-sighted astigmatism, cataracts, epicanthal folds (like people with Down’s Syndrome).
- 23) Hypermobile first degree relatives.
- 24) Pelvic floor prolapse.

continued on p8 >>

“Guitar Craft is not about the guitar...”

A report on Alexander Technique at Guitar Craft, Italy, April 2026, by Jessica Lee Morgan

Like the Alexander Technique, it is not easy to define Guitar Craft briefly. With my report running to thousands of words, I thought it best to take my hands off and submit a brief article now. My recent experience is too important to keep until the next *STATnews*.

Between 16th and 26th of April, eight Alexander Technique teachers, one Feldenkrais teacher, and a teacher of flexibility and movement joined the 41st Guitar Craft course in Lombardy, Italy. Conducting us was founder Robert Fripp, who had made such an impression on many of us at the Dublin Congress last year.

“The Alexander Technique was notably present in this course, both in the space itself and among the participants, who were able to take advantage of the opportunity to work individually much more often than in other courses,” says Ignacio Gracián, one of the Argentinian teachers, who discovered AT through Guitar Craft.

Guitar Craft teaches us how to work with each other and ourselves. It informs all interactions in a house of 100 people from all over the world. Languages include Italian, Russian, French, Spanish, Estonian, Polish, Dutch and Danish, but our common language is music. Courses are immersive. We live, eat, clean, play and perform together. Silence spontaneously visits on a regular basis... to regulate us. Guitar Craft is transformational for all concerned. It's like being put through a rock tumbler, where we smooth out each others' rough edges to emerge as glowing pebbles.

Some of us were concerned about the question of consent, particularly where there could be potential trauma in participants. Traditionally, Alexander teachers work around the Guitar Circle, putting their hands on participants as they play, with no prior explanation. Robert was keen that the experience comes first and the explanation follows. But



Participants with Robert Fripp (centre)

teacher Cathy Sommer commented, “In aiming toward group flow and freedom, clear communication can be one small but meaningful way of reducing unnecessary triggering, dysregulation, end-gaining, or performance anxiety.”

For my part, I welcome the visibility of Robert Fripp who embraces Alexander Technique as a central part of Guitar Craft and of his professional work. It is my personal mission to bring the worlds of Alexander Technique and rock ‘n’ roll closer together. I think they could both benefit.

I will be gathering more thoughts and contributions from participants and teachers for a longer piece in *STATnews* in the next issue and for other platforms.

In the meantime, my utmost and devoted thanks to Robert Fripp, registrar Mariana Scaravilli, the Alexander Technique teachers, the staff and participants of Guitar Craft, for making such a transformational experience possible.

“Body Buddies” (Alexander Technique): Jessica Lee Morgan (UK), Anna Goldbeck-Wood (UK), Daisy Cockburn (UK/Italy), Cathy Sommer (Estonia); Jacek Kaleta (Poland); Pia Honold (Germany); Ignacio Gracián (Argentina); Mariela Cárdenas (Argentina/Switzerland); Valentina Fusari (Argentina, Flexibility in Movement); and Marcela Diez (Argentina/Spain, Feldenkrais)
Honourable mentions: Luciano Pietrafesa (Argentina, t'ai chi); Lauri Peltonen (Finland, Movement in the Circle); and
Attending as a musician only: Cathy Stevens (UK/Germany, Alexander Technique)



Jessica Lee Morgan (seated) and Cathy Sommer

The individual

By Malcolm Williamson

Sweet is the lore which Nature brings;
Our meddling intellect
Mis-shapes the beauteous forms of things:—
We murder to dissect.
Enough of Science and of Art;
Close up those barren leaves;
Come forth, and bring with you a heart
That watches and receives.

William Wordsworth¹

There's a well-known story in Alexander circles of when *Constructive Conscious Control of the Individual (CCCI)* was to be published. John Dewey suggested that the title would sound snappier if the words “of the individual” were omitted. Alexander’s response was an emphatic insistence that that was the most important bit!

The word ‘individual’ (*individualis* = “indivisible”) originally described any singular, inseparable thing before it began being used to refer specifically to a person in the 15th-century. Today, referring to someone as an individual often means they express a different or exceptional personality – being a one-off. FM Alexander is said to have been just such an “individualist among individualists”; a “non-joiner” lacking what Dr. Johnson called “clubability” (Carrington 1969, 1, 7 & 9). He was scathing about people’s “herd-instinct” in his writing and in conversation (Carrington 1992, 154):

“The mass is made up of individuals, and reliable sensory appreciation cannot be given on the mass-teaching principle or by precept or exhortation. This can be done only by individual teaching and individual work. Moreover, people who are massed together are apt to be governed by the “herd-instinct” and we need to help man to evolve beyond that influence as soon as possible, and to this end we must have conscious and individual development” (CCCI, 97; Carrington 1969, 11-12).

We are used to seeing the Technique in contexts of personal health and performance, but it has been suggested that Alexander’s thesis is best understood in the context of man’s evolutionary growth and development (Carrington 1969, 10) and adjustment to modern living:

“[Mankind] has been and still is unable to adapt himself quickly enough to the increasingly rapid changes involved in that plan of life which we call civilization . . .” (CCCI, 4).

The clear message is that each individual must accept responsibility for the way they react and adapt to change –

cultural, technical, climatic or whatever.

In an Alexander lesson, the *connection between individuals* is paramount; teacher and student communicating with each other at the fundamental level of two organisms. Alexander introduced the concept of “the organism of the human creature” in *CCCI*.² The Technique is a way to self-prevent inappropriate tension habits from interfering with our functional integrity as human creatures! Carrington described the interaction in a lesson as a “meeting of minds” but it’s more (or less) than that. We can compare it with other close collaborations, say, between horse and rider or between dance partners. The connection is one of direct, non-conceptual experience between individuals.³

“Walter Carrington explained in class that an individual is a viable living entity that cannot be reduced without limiting or destroying its wholeness and capacity to exist.

Walter Carrington explained in class that an individual is a viable living entity that cannot be reduced without limiting or destroying its wholeness and capacity to exist. The zoologist, Julian Huxley⁴ defined the Individual as “a whole and no mere aggregate: it has an inner principle of unity” (Huxley, 11):

“It is the unity of [the individual] as a whole that is important: more than that, even if you want to consider a part of the system itself, you cannot do so, for it loses almost all its significance when detached from the whole. What is the meaning of the hand and its actions apart from the functioning of the whole body?” (Huxley, 9)

Recently, I’ve been introduced to science of Johann Wolfgang von Goethe (1749–1832) and his theory of the wholeness of organic life. The German polymath is renowned as a writer and philosopher but he considered his scientific work a greater achievement than his literary output. Goethe, as it were, stepped through a different doorway to nature than the one taken in the seventeenth-century scientific revolution (Bortoft, 323). Whereas mainstream science is chiefly reductionist in the study of parts to discover the causal order of nature, Goethe’s approach enables us to understand nature’s wholeness. Nature manifests in more than one way, the analytical (observing objects as separate) and the intuitive or participatory, experiencing

connectedness as part of the whole (Bortoft, xi). I think we can get a sense of these complementary approaches in our teaching. We can see our pupils as separate beings in need of adjustment or, alternatively, we can *connect* and convey a more integrated functioning through attending to the quality of our own manner of use.⁵

The concept of the organism and seeing comprehensively

According to the Goethean theory of evolution, organic life-forms develop as a whole governed by inner lawfulness – or organizing principle.⁶ Changes do not occur haphazardly:

“What rules here is not an additive accumulation of separate feature, but the opposite: law-conforming, harmonious interaction of the organs as parts of the whole. . . . The effects of one part are seen in the life processes of the other parts, while this same part owes its own life in great measure to those of other parts” (Kranich, 42–43).

Goethe distinguished two complementary methods of study: the analytic and the synthetic (cf. ‘synthesis’). The analytical approach is characterised by reductionism and discovery by taking things apart whereas the synthetic approach is based on recognition and respect for the unity and wholeness of Nature. (Is this like what today we call left- and right-brain thinking, I wonder?) Alexander’s contribution is in the latter, neglected camp:

“Nature works as a whole and not in parts” (MSI, 34).⁷

Our greatest difficulty with this approach comes from our education and long-established habit of seeing and treating things in isolation from each other. The habit of selectivity overlooks the wider context; the way in which things already belong together. Because we overlook this, the analytical mind tries to make things *belong together* in ways that fail to appreciate their intrinsic belongingness.

The practice of Goethean (and possibly Alexandrian) science leads us to experience the wholeness of the phenomenon, so that we recognize it as part of the phenomenon itself and not something which is added on to it by the mind. Understanding something is not the same as explaining it. Seeing something in the context in which it belongs is the experience of perceiving it more fully as

“ In a similar way that Goethe’s science requires us to think differently - more inclusively - so, I think, the same is true of ‘a plane to be reached’.

itself. Thus, understanding is holistic, whereas explanation is analytical (Bortoft, 290–91, 307).⁸ Only when we begin to appreciate the intrinsic connections do we begin to understand the organism – the individual.

In a similar way that Goethe’s science requires us to think differently – more inclusively – so, I think, the same is true of “a plane to be reached” – Conscious Control.⁹ Working on ourselves with the ‘means whereby’ helps us to develop an intuitive, sensory-based way of perceiving and understanding. Hence, in spite of all these words I’m writing, I can never really say precisely what I’m talking about – just as Alexander remarked, “You can’t tell a person what to do because the thing you have to do is a sensation.”¹⁰ A teacher recently suggested to me that Alexander lessons require us to develop a non-verbal language whereby we “talk” to each other directly through physical contact and intention (i.e. ‘direction’).

It’s clear from the reported dramatic rise in cases of “mental unease” that more and more of us are suffering from the effects of living in an increasingly fractured world. However, the Technique can contribute benefits of potentially great value. As Alexander wrote:

“the establishment of a manner of use of the self as *a whole* ... provides the best conditions for raising the standard of the functioning of the various mechanisms, organs, and systems” (UCL, 8).

The restoration of an individual’s wholeness is fundamental to the success of treatment for any specific trouble. If we ignore this fact, then, the way we use ourselves will constantly act as a hindrance, not only *during* treatment but also *after* it is finished. We teach a technique for integrated functioning of the human organism and its connectedness to the rest of the world. So, should we not emphasise the importance of being an individual?

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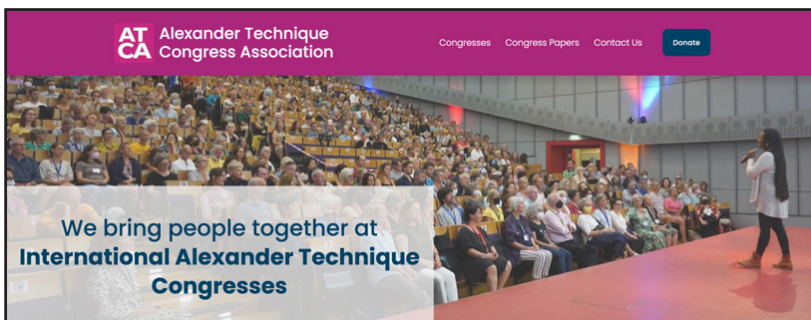
Notes

- 1 Last two stanzas of “The Tables Turned” (1798).
- 2 Though the concept of “whole organism” appears in previous books, in *CCCI* the phrase “human creature” appears 59 times and “human organism” 12 times.
- 3 A teacher said in a recent interview that a student reported back in a lesson that his wife had commented on the improvement in the way he kissed her!
- 4 See Williamson, M., ‘... of the Individual’, *STATnews*, vol. 9, no. 8. Sept. 2017, p. 25.
- 5 Just as a reader can convey more of the meaning of a text than they know themselves (Bortoft, 7) so, I think, teachers can convey a higher standard of functional integration for their students than they can achieve themselves.
- 6 The anticipated discovery of the laws of organic nature would be analogous to the discovery of the laws of physics. Note that, whereas the later Darwinian “doctrine of external finality” in which “exquisite adaptations” of the different

- parts relate to the end or good of the species, the older doctrine of “internal finality” related to the good of the organism – the individual. (Gertrude Himmelfarb, *Darwin and the Darwinian Revolution*. London: Chatto & Windus, 1959: 260, 283.)
- 7 There was often tension between how Alexander saw his work and the ideas of his medical-trained friends, such as when some of them tried to reify ‘primary control’.
 - 8 “The higher cognitive function which is experienced in seeing comprehensively in Goethe’s science is analogous to reading. The sensory particulars are equivalent to the letters, and the intrinsic connection which is their belonging together is equivalent to the meaning” (Bortoft, 295; see also p. 308)
 - 9 *CCCI*, 29 note and *UCL*, 11.
 - 10 *Aphorisms* (Mouritz 2000), 14.

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Frederick Matthias Alexander, part 1: his early years (1869 - 1890)

By Rosslyn McLeod

At the recent 13th World Alexander Technique Congress consideration was given as to the future of the Alexander Technique and how best to bring awareness of this work to public attention. As Alexander teachers this is a challenge we all must deal with and our teaching situations will vary.

It was just over fifty years ago that I ‘discovered’ the Alexander Technique. I was living in Melbourne, Australia, my music studies had been piano main instrument, viola second. Playing the viola caused me some backache problems which were only properly solved when I had lessons in the Alexander Technique. Subsequently I trained to become an Alexander teacher and after two years studying in London and a final year in Sydney, I qualified in 1984.

FM Alexander died in London in 1955. Until recent times, those students training to be Alexander teachers have had the opportunity to study with people who had trained with FM himself; these teachers were known as first generation teachers and there was much to learn from contact with them. Now learning about FM’s original work must be done by reading the writings of those teachers.

As time passes the discoveries by any individual that continue into the future become more about the technical side of the actual discoveries and less attention is given to how an individual made a discovery and formulated certain concepts. To bring Alexander’s ideas to the public today, we talk mainly about the technical aspects of this work or present his ideas more in story form; telling FM’s story about how and why he did what he did. So there is a more impersonal approach through the technical history, or there is a personal approach, which is to tell FM’s story. Each teacher will favour one or other approaches and explanations will change depending on the audience the teacher is addressing.

In Sydney 1984 when I graduated to become an Alexander teacher, I stayed there for a while before returning to live in Melbourne. I was familiar with this city, having done both secondary schooling there and music study at the University of Melbourne. This relocation decision led to unexpected pathways to explore. These gave me greater understanding of the work that F M Alexander developed here in Australia and the role his formative years played in the discoveries he made. This exploration of Alexander’s life in Australia from 1869 to 1904, led to ten years of research for me. The result: publication of my book *Up From Down Under; the Australian Origins of Frederick Matthias Alexander and the Alexander Technique and production of a seventy minute documentary Frederick Matthias Alexander, His Life... His Legacy...* (2015)

I settled in Melbourne in 1986. At that time there was no biography of FM Alexander, only a few snippets about his

life in the longer reporting of his work. I bought a book, *The Alexander Technique* by Edward Maisel. In the Introduction, Maisel wrote that FM was in Melbourne in the 1890’s teaching his work, including giving lessons to a “Roman Catholic College run by the Sacred Heart, a particularly well-known Order in Australia (and after classes (FM) was usually treated by the Superior to a warm comradely cognac and fine cigars).”¹ (*The Alexander Technique* by Edward Maisel 1974, pg. xvi)

This seemed an interesting, if somewhat fanciful, portrayal of these lessons. Was there more to this story, some hard evidence, details of the classes, etc.? I rang the Sacred Heart Order office to ask what record there might be of these classes. The person who answered the phone listened, then replied in a somewhat puzzled tone that these Alexander classes could not have occurred. So, a tale of fiction rather than fact.

Years later, well into my research, I found hard evidence that Alexander had, in fact, taught at a religious college in Melbourne, the Baptist Theological College for at least two years, 1897-98. *The College Principal’s Report 1897* states,

Our students have been under the training of Mr Alexander for the production of the voice and for breathing. Improvement has been noted both at the sermon class and by worshippers at services conducted by our men (*The Baptist Theological College 1897*).

Once the Sacred Heart Order story (above) was dispatched, I decided to delve for real evidence of FM’s Melbourne teaching. It was now the 1980’s and almost one hundred years since FM was in Melbourne, would any original material still be available? There was no internet then so what sources did I need to go to for finding information?

At this time around the mid 1980’s, I had been given a copy of FM’s unpublished autobiography about his Australian years. This had been circulating among a few Alexander Teachers for some years. FM had written this in London in the late 1940’s, over forty years since leaving Australia in 1904. So the years in Australia—from birth in Tasmania in 1869 through childhood, acting in Melbourne, then teaching elocution—that life would have seemed far away. Not only distant by time but consider all the changes in the world from the 1870’s to FM writing his autobiography in London in the late 1940’s. This autobiography is an interesting document, worth reading to see FM’s own thoughts about those Australian years rather than relying solely on learning about those years through the writings of later researchers. A copy of Alexander’s autobiography has been published in my book *Up From Down Under* (Mouritz 2017)².

I had grown up in Melbourne so was familiar with many

of the places FM mentioned in his writings. To fill out more detail of what FM wrote about, I found old city and country newspapers a great source of information. Of course, with no radio then (or TV!), news was very effectively spread through communities by the daily press. As my research progressed, I found other valuable sources for information. I did not want to only explore FM's Melbourne years – the developing acting career and problems – but I wanted the bigger picture from his birth in Wynyard, Tasmania until he went to England in 1904.

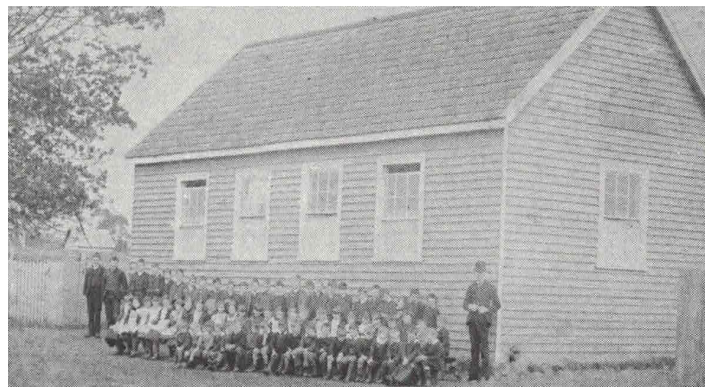
There are three main areas that influence all human beings: Heredity, Environment, and Use. Heredity, we can do nothing about – each one of us has our own ancestral stock. Environment, initially we have no choice as to the place where we are born; influences in this area include climate, the social norms of our community, food availability, and so on. As we grow up, we can have more choices regarding our environment. The third component of these three main areas is Use, an area given so little attention once we pass our early childhood years when we spent so much of our time exploring how to successfully do basic movements with poise and coordination. As adults we pay little attention to fundamental movements unless there is pain! Use is the area that FM needed to explore in such detail to solve his own problems.

Heredity and environment

Alexander's grandfather was born in the county of Wiltshire, England in 1810. As a young man he was convicted for taking part in riots concerning the poor living conditions at that time in England and was sentenced to Van Diemen's Land (now Tasmania) for a stay of seven years to work as a convict labourer. An older brother was similarly sentenced. The pair received pardons in 1836 then moved to the Northwest coast of Tasmania and settled in the Table Cape/Wynyard area. Here they cleared the extensive forests and became farmers. Conditions were harsh, food was basic, travel difficult.

Tasmania is an island State, south of the mainland of Australia and separated by the Bass Strait, at times quite a stormy sea. Crossing this by ship today would take approximately 12 hrs (from Melbourne, Victoria to Devonport, Tasmania).

As more settlers came to the Northwest of Tasmania, marriages took place, people had large families, populations grew; life became a little easier. Schools were established in the small towns, though often in the more rural areas parents needed their children to help on the farms; labour was scarce and expensive so school attendance was sporadic. Alexander's grandfather, Matthias, had a large family including a son John who became a blacksmith. John and Betsy's first-born child was Frederick Matthias Alexander, born 1869 in Wynyard. This summary gives some background as to the influences on the young FM. As in all families, he



Wynyard Primary School

would have heard stories about relatives (there were many), their lives, achievements, disasters. Most people then were very self-reliant, and many were suspicious of 'authority' as they had come to Tasmania as convicts, then were able to establish themselves in society.

When FM started school, he soon exhibited keen curiosity. He asked so many questions that the one teacher at the school found it difficult to respond to FM's inquiring mind as he had to handle other students of varying ages and abilities. This school, Wynyard Primary School, had composite classes. So the teacher, a Scotsman named Robert Robertson, told FM's parents that he would come past in the evening to coach FM personally and that in the daytime FM could explore the countryside. This meant FM did not have to sit for long hours in class but instead could roam in the bush and ride his horse. Great to be outdoors!

Several important gains for FM came from this arrangement with his schooling. Being outside most days was good for his physical health: exploring the countryside, observing nature, developing acute powers of observation, and riding his horse.

Learning about horse management would have begun his awareness of the importance of head/spine relationships when holding the reins of a horse. (Horse riders know how you hold the reins when riding greatly affects the gait of the horse.) As FM was schooled on his own, Robert Robertson could give special attention to areas of interest such as the study of poetry and drama, including Shakespeare.

FM made such good progress with his studies that in December 1883 he became a paid Monitor at the Wynyard School until August 1885. The Monitor's duties were to help the younger children with their learning, under the guidance of the schoolteacher, thus FM gained teaching experience in explaining ideas to others. Then it became necessary for FM, as the eldest of a growing family, to earn a proper salary so he moved south to Waratah to work as a junior accountant at the fairly recently established tin mine of Mt. Bischoff. Thus

ended the freedoms of childhood.

There is quite a contrast between the climates of Wynyard and Waratah that would have affected FM's health, given he did not have a strong constitution. Wynyard is on the coast and does not have such extremes of climate while Waratah is high up in the mountains. Waratah is one of the coldest and wettest places in Tasmania, not the healthiest place to live plus the air from the nearby tin mine of Mt. Bischoff would not have been the purest for breathing!

FM's three years of living in Waratah would have brought many new experiences because mining towns offer a great variety of people and activities. In 1885, Waratah had a population of 2,500 (today the population is 250) and the nearby tin mine of Mt. Bischoff was at one stage the richest in the world. Miners came from many places to work there. There were numerous social, cultural and community activities and the Mechanics Institute was the centre for many of these.



Image credit: Rosslyn McLeod

The Mechanic's Institute

FM took part in amateur dramatic performances and taught himself to play the violin. As well as performances by locals, there were visiting artists and no doubt FM would have talked with members of these touring companies and had his horizons widened. Being an accountant for his working life was not for him.

FM was one of just over seventy grandchildren descended from the three Alexander brothers – Matthias (FM's grandfather), his older brother Joseph, and younger brother John, who all arrived in Van Diemen's Land in the 1830's. From amongst these many members of Alexander families, FM would have heard stories of such a variety of adventures. Further, he had relatives living in Melbourne which, thanks to the discoveries of gold, was now a wealthy, progressive and culturally lively city of almost 500,000 people. It was no wonder FM was drawn to thoughts of travel, to follow his dream to become an actor. The Melbourne experience as an

actor, the voice/breathing problems and solving them, led to many new pathways for his life; first in Australia and New Zealand, then in 1904 in England and America until his death in London in 1955.

Tasmania in the 1800's

Researching Alexander's early life in Tasmania gave me much pleasure as I had visited the island many times, including going on a 'Historical Homes of Tasmania' tour. Some of these homes in many areas of the countryside are magnificent, built mainly by convict labour. Even a few of some of the adjacent horse stables could be easily converted to very comfortable living quarters for people! On a number of occasions, I went to Tasmania for bushwalking trips. A variety of scenery along the East Coast had many quiet inlets and inviting beaches; such a contrast to the wild and rugged West Coast with magnificent bush reaching right down to the ocean and wild, strong flowing rivers.

In the late 1980's, I made several trips to Tasmania to obtain more detail about FM Alexander's life there in the late 1800's. Around Wynyard, on the North Coast, were many descendants from the original three Alexander Brothers who had come as convicts to this island in the 1830's. I was fortunate to meet Ken Alexander, who had researched the Alexander family tree very thoroughly and he generously imparted this knowledge with me. I have memories of Ken unrolling an extensive sheet of paper that covered the large dining room table and listed Alexander descendants from those original three Alexander Brothers.

Not only was I given detail about the Alexander Family Tree, Ken also gave me a copy of an article written by Richard Hilden in 1927 for the local media. He had been told this story by a person who had witnessed a tragic event in 1873 concerning the memorable deeds of FM's uncle, Matthias Alexander; younger brother of John Alexander, FM's father: A harrowing journey was undertaken by Matthias, with his horse, cart and a young assistant, to go from the coastal town of Wynyard to the Mt. Bishop tin mine; 80 miles inland. In order to bring back to the coast the body of a dead miner so there could be a decent public burial.

I wrote the details of this challenging event in an article printed in *The Alexander Journal*, issue 26, Spring 2017. It is also printed as appendix 6 in my book *Up from Down Under*. The article is titled *Self Reliance and Perseverance: An Alexander Family Story*. This is the story in summary:

A miner at the Mt. Bischoff tin mine, became ill with a serious lung problem. The mine manager sent a young man to go for a doctor from 65 miles away. This journey took one and a half days. The doctor doubted the miner would survive, but travelled anyway. The miner was still alive and the doctor did what he could, before returning home.

A few days later, the miner died. His mates wanted to bury him nearby, but mine officials wanted the body to be taken to the coast for proper burial. A heated argument ensued, and the mine officials won. They sent for a carrier to convey the body to the coast and Matthias Alexander was the carrier. The macabre and nightmarish journey took three days (*Up From Down Under*, Appendix 6, 2017).

A brief extract from the original Richard Hilden article is as follows:

With hurried farewells to the mournful gathering of miners, Matthias started his team for Knole Plains and arrived there safely by nightfall. Unfortunately bad weather set in and the rivers rose tremendously, the Hellyer River was very difficult to ford. Matthias Alexander and his young helper were compelled to sleep in the covered dray for protection from the elements and had the corpse for company.



Image credit: Rosilyn McLeod

Central Tasmania

When this event occurred in 1873, FM Alexander was 4 years of age. Hearing relatives retell this tale, probably time and time again, of his uncle's self-reliance and perseverance would have impressed a 4 year old.

As well as my meetings with Ken Alexander, I looked at the writing of various people who had visited Tasmania in the 1800's. I quote from the writings of one of those people, a British Quaker (The Religious Society of Friends), James Backhouse. Backhouse travelled to Van Diemen's Land in 1832, visiting the North Coast of the island near Table Cape/Wynyard (where the Alexander Brothers settled 20 years later). Backhouse wrote:

The ascent of some of the hills was as steep as a horse

could climb, and in some places little but bare rocks. Some whitening human bones lay by the side of one of the paths through this dreadful country, in a situation likely for a person exhausted by fatigue to sink down and die. Sometimes we had to lay hold of the manes of our horses, to retain our seats, sometimes to leap over logs in awkward situations, and sometimes it was impracticable to ride. In some places the scrub was so thick that we could not see each other, and when we came upon Table Cape a fern, *Pteris esculenta* (bracken fern) was so deep as to obscure us from the view of each other (Backhouse 1843).

Over the years, an education system was established in this colony. Though local communities were not always welcoming to a newly arrived teacher. An education board report of 1860 stated:

2. The objection to the schools as more or less proceeding from or connected with the Government. This almost instinctive aversion is very powerful with the still considerable section of the people who have been prisoners. They have an antipathy to the Schools because the Government supports them (Tasmania Southern Board of Education 1860).

Then there were the Education Department School Inspectors whose job it was to travel the countryside and check on school life; both for the teacher and the students. A report from the Department in 1875, (FM Alexander was a 6 year old), stated:

An Inspector's profession is chiefly to be learned by experience, and personal qualifications are those which are most required. He ought to have a practical knowledge of teaching and school management, but above all things it is essential that he shall have had such a liberal up-bringing as will enable him to judge fairly and treat with respect the views which may happen to differ from his own, and to understand that all Teachers are not intended to work in exactly the same groove. An aptitude for bush travelling, and an unlimited capacity for roughing it, are very necessary qualifications for Inspectors, though the facilities for travelling are much improved, and they will be exempt from the necessity of swimming unfordable rivers, which used formerly to be a common incident of my North Coast journeys (Tasmania House of Assembly 1876).

Financially, Tasmania had its good and bad times. Food exports to the Australian mainland contributed, such as grain and potatoes, to much profitability. But then there were times when prices of various exports dropped for various reasons



Fossil Beach, Wynyard looking to Table Cape

and boom times gave way to stagnation.

When British author, Anthony Trollope visited the colony in 1871 he commented, ‘it was sad to have visited a British Colony that had seen it’s best days.’

The above quotes plus much more about Tasmania, the birthplace of FM Alexander, are to be found in my book, *Up From Down Under. The Australian Origins of Frederick Matthias Alexander and the Alexander Technique*, 4th edition, publisher Mouritz2. Original sources for quotes have been found, however, and referenced as such.

My seventy-minute documentary film *Frederick Matthias Alexander His Life... His Legacy...*, gives the visual aspects relating to Alexander’s Australian years then has much material about modern day use of the Alexander Technique including interviews with: Professor Paul Little who is the leader of the UK Research Team into back pain and the Alexander Technique; Professor Lucy Brown, Neuroscientist, Albert Einstein Medical Centre, New York; Professor Galen Crazz, Professor of Architecture, Berkeley, California, and author of book, the Chair; James Galway, flautist; three Choral Scholars, members of the King’s College Choir, Cambridge.

Conclusion

The above is a summary of Frederick Matthias Alexander’s early years, and the potential influences contributing to his curiosity and decisions which aided in the development of the Alexander Technique. In Part 2 of this article, I will cover the rest of F M Alexander’s life in Australia and New Zealand, up until his departure to England in 1904. This will include details of his momentous times in Melbourne, Australia, when as a young actor, he was faced with the devastating possibility that his dream of becoming an actor was perhaps unattainable. So many people setting out hopes for glorious careers in a chosen field for example, as performers in the

arts or sport, face this type of crisis. Dealing with it is never easy. Sometimes challenges are overcome, sometimes not. A summary will be made of the influences on Alexander’s life and the skills he developed during his Australian years, 1869-1904.

Rossllyn McLeod, Adelaide, South Australia.

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View from Table Cape to distant Wynyard

The editorials of issues 1 and 2 of *The Alexander Journal*

Introduced by Diana Devitt-Dawson

In light of concerns about the growth in styles of teaching and presenting FM's work, the time seems right to publish the editorials of the first and second issues of STAT's *The Alexander Journal*, from 1962 and 1963. These were written by three first-generation teachers who outline what STAT's responsibilities are, as a professional society, in relation to protecting FM's "authentic form" of teaching, and the responsibilities of members who claim to teach the work. Today, teachers' concerns include, among other things, a general decline in interest in learning the technique. Not unrelated is surely the fact that the general public, medical profession and others do not know what Alexander teachers actually teach.

FM's first principles are either not being taught or are misunderstood, causing confusion. A useful outline of these principles can be found in *UCL* in the section titled "Procedures Involved in The Technique: First Principles In The Control Of Human Reaction". Here, FM clarifies what he meant by "the variations in the teachers art", "the indirect approach" and "the new means-whereby."

It is no surprise that many get confused when beginning to study a complex teaching such as FM's that involves total mind/body integration and developing conscious awareness along these lines. This can happen because the pupil is taken into the "unknown", a new experience in their manner of use, which can be perplexing. But it can also be "enlightening", "enjoyable" and "life-changing" to experience being free from harmful, habits of reaction. The Alexander teacher's ability is to heighten the kinaesthetic sense by educating the pupil in applying these first principles, to stop, not 'do', and think directions to the NH&B, and so on.

Editorial, issue 1 of *The Alexander Journal*

The decision to publish *The Alexander Journal* follows logically from the considerations that originally prompted the formation of the Society of Teachers of the Alexander Technique.

F. M. Alexander's teaching was a tour de force on the part of one exceptionally endowed man. Now that he is no longer with us, all those who are convinced of the value of his work share a responsibility for ensuring that his unique contribution to human health and happiness does not suffer neglect or distortion.

One object of this Society is to do everything possible to preserve Alexander's teaching in its authentic form. Not only can it be all too easily confused with quite different methods by people who have no practical experience of it, but even those who regularly teach and employ the technique can be greatly helped by an association that seeks to uphold recognised professional standards.

Our second main purpose is to promote the application of Alexander's principles in all the many different fields of activity affected by them, such as medicine, education, physical training, sport, music and dramatic art. And this is no easy task, for Alexander's discoveries represented something so new in man's understanding of himself that they must inevitably be disturbing companions for established and accepted schools of thought.

While, for example, there has been a steady nucleus of medical men who recognised the fundamental importance of "the influence of use on functioning", and who have given wholehearted backing to Alexander's work, the profession as a whole has remained sceptical of an approach that breaks so radically with traditional views of illness and its cause. Yet, if the 19 prominent medical men who some years ago wrote jointly to the *British Medical Journal* are correct, diagnosis and treatment can never be complete so long as Alexander's factor of "the use of the self" is ignored.

Again, take the vexed question of the relationship of body and mind - a subject one sees much discussed nowadays in all kinds of contexts. To thinkers such as Prof. John Dewey and Aldous Huxley, one of the most revealing aspects of Alexander's teaching was that it demonstrated the unity of body mind in actual experience, leading them to fresh insights that thinking alone could probably never have achieved. Today, certain schools of medicine and psychology have come much closer to Alexander's conception of body-mind unity - partly, perhaps, under the direct or indirect influence of his work. Nevertheless, the notion of body and mind in continual interaction is still far away from an understanding of the self as a living psycho-physical whole, demonstrably devoid of the divisions conjured up by thinking. Until this conception of wholeness has penetrated more deeply into medicine, psychology, education and many forms of physical and spiritual training, meaningless and unanswerable questions will continue to be asked.

One of the functions of this journal will be to show how Alexander's discoveries can be applied to problems as apparently far apart as indigestion and education, breathing and artistic creation, golf and the search for God. At the same time, we do not intend to lose sight of the fact that, whatever the field of application, the genuinely Alexander approach must always begin with, and be rooted in, individual experience.

The essence of Alexander's work was that he first of all observed, in and for himself, certain profoundly important facts about his use of himself as a human being; only afterwards did he apply those discoveries to the wider problems of life. People who attempt to apply Alexander's ideas without practical experience of the technique (and

many have tried) are likely to go very far astray.

It will therefore be our editorial policy to print articles only by those who write from personal experience of what Alexander's teaching means. Within this framework, we hope to be broad-minded - and on occasion adventurous in our choice of material.

We cordially invite the comments of readers on this first issue and shall welcome suggestions as to how the journal might be developed and improved. We shall also welcome letters for publication, dealing either with points raised in our columns or with the practice and application of the Alexander technique generally.

Editorial, issue 2 of *The Alexander Journal*

Discussing the purpose of the journal in our introductory editorial, we observed that one of the Society's objects was 'to do everything possible to preserve Alexander's teaching in its authentic form'. Some readers took us to be referring to FM Alexander's particular style of teaching his technique - rather than, as we meant, to the principles underlying it - and concluded that the Society was growing conservative and suspicious of innovation or individuality of approach. Let us make clear at once then that no one in the Society is against experiment in teaching methods or in favour of any sort of standardised teaching procedure. What we had in mind, as we said above, were the principles on which the technique is based and the need to ensure that these are not blurred or lost as the work develops and spreads.

There are many ideas and methods current today in the fields of medicine, psychology, education, physical training and so on that look superficially rather like Alexander's teaching - and have in some cases almost certainly been influenced by it. The Alexander technique itself, however, embodies principles that are not, as far as we know, present in any other system of education or form of treatment; and these principles constitute by far the more important part of FM's discovery, because without them we should perhaps have a method of alleviating bodily strains and stresses but certainly not a method of re-education. It is surely one of the responsibilities of Alexander's supporters, then, to deepen their understanding of these principles, so that as the application of the work widens it can have the profound influence on human health and happiness that FM himself hoped for.

Through his remarkable feat of self-observation, Alexander came to recognise that there was such a thing as a person's 'manner of use'; in other words, he saw that most of us do not employ our bodies as nature intended, but in a way peculiar to ourselves that 'feels right' but in fact is objectively wrong. Through experiment on himself, as described in his book *The Use of the Self*, he arrived at a clear idea of what was objectively right, and then went on to work out a method of

exercising a conscious form of self-direction in place of the instinctive feeling that had shown itself to be so unreliable.

Strictly speaking, we have put these discoveries in the wrong order and one needs to take them chronologically to appreciate how much more there was in Alexander's achievement than simply noting that there was a wrong way of using the body. To recapitulate, then, Alexander first decided that it was something he was doing to himself that was causing his throat trouble and identified this as a tendency to 'pull down'. It was only when he tried to check this tendency that he came up against the real difficulty inherent in one's habit of use, i.e. that it is an unconscious general mannerism, a quasi-instinctive pattern stamped on nature by individuality, a hidden persuader that imposes its will through the medium of feeling. He was forced to recognise that it was this acquired and impaired sense of self-regulation, as represented by what 'felt right', that was the effective doer of his actions. If he had failed to find a way round this barrier of conditioning, Alexander might perhaps have succeeded in preventing himself from 'pulling down' as he stood before the mirror, but he could never have employed his discovery in normal daily activity, let alone have attempted to re-educate other people. He - and we - would have been left in the unhappy situation of knowing that all our psycho-physical responses were affected by our manner of use while having no means of changing this for the better.

By evolving his technique of 'constructive conscious control', Alexander achieved something of great significance in the field of human self-direction. He showed that conscious control could be applied to levels of behaviour that had hitherto been regarded as instinctive or constitutional, and hence beyond the reach of the mind. As is clearly brought out by the small symposium on Alexander and Habit published in this issue, the method of re-education he worked out was nothing less than a technique for freeing ourselves from the conditioning grip of habit - and, as such, a contribution to human liberation the implications of which have hardly begun to be explored.

It is surely apparent then that one can speak of an 'authentic form' of Alexander's work, as opposed to forms that do not get to grips so fundamentally with this problem of habit - for a diagnosis that does not go deep enough is always liable to create further problems and ills. While there is everything to be said, too, for our watching any similar developments sympathetically, and where possible exchanging ideas with the people concerned, it would be sad indeed if Alexander's teaching were ever to be submerged in and confused with methods that are altogether less profoundly based. Whatever individual differences may emerge in styles of teaching, there is an authentic form of the technique - a form derived from clearly reasoned-out principles - which all teachers and pupils must do their utmost to safeguard.

Universal injunction

Dear Editor,

Apparently there is a prominent training school for teachers of the Alexander Technique in the UK wherein “directions” are not part of the teaching. This is surely a denial of one of the three basic pillars of the Technique created by Alexander which include conscious inhibition and the primary control of use. If AT teachers are not trained to teach directions then surely they are depriving themselves and their pupils of an essential aspect of the Technique. Pupils will not have the means whereby to be able to apply the Technique independently in all circumstances. They may successfully inhibit, they may avoid head retraction but by not energizing the forward and upward aiming of themselves they will surely lack the vitality that the AT provides.

From outlining the three ingredients in his Technique in his Bedford Lecture Alexander never wavered in his teaching of all three aspects throughout his life. In his 1946 statement to Walter Carrington he might have momentarily stated that in future all directions should be expressed in terms of prevention, but in Goddard Binkley’s diary entries of lessons FM gave in the 1950’s it is clear Alexander was continuing to teach the three aspects and also practice them himself to the end of his life. He never abandoned the giving of directions.

I am told that Alexander once said that “if you stop the wrong the right thing does itself”. This remark was clearly an instruction for a particular pupil at a particular moment in their learning the Technique – as were all his “aphorisms”. It was never a proposition to be applied universally. And if “letting the right thing do itself” is actually attempted as a “method”, it becomes meaningless as the “right” thing will certainly not “do itself” because up directing requires energization. It is far more likely that the pupil’s habitual responses will reassert themselves. The result will not be a “natural” up as without clarity of direction the “natural” response could be anything depending upon the pupils’ habits of a lifetime.

“ This remark was clearly an instruction for a particular pupil at a particular moment in their learning the Technique - as were all his ‘aphorisms’.

Without conscious directing, AT pupils will be short-changed and will not be taught what Alexander distinguished as his Technique. All three aspects of the Technique need to be taught to all pupils or otherwise what is being taught is not the Technique of FM Alexander as taught by Alexander throughout his life.

Robin John Simmons
Lesvos, Greece

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Malcolm Williamson

Paws for thought

Decoding the Hand

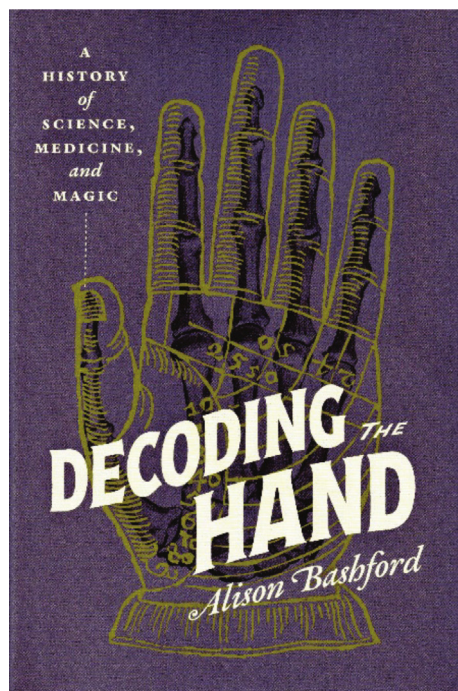
By Alison Bashford

University of Chicago Press, 2025.

Hardback, 446 pages including index

What connection does a book about the history of palmistry have to do with F. Matthias Alexander? Well, a print of Alexander's hand was included in a book about reading people's character and inner life from studying the appearance of their hands. The book, *Studies in Hand-Reading* (1936) was written by German doctor and psychotherapist, Charlotte Wolff. Medical historian, Alison Bashford, was fascinated when she came across Wolff's archive in the Wellcome Collection.

Wolff turns out to have been a fascinating person. Long-lived, she experienced both 1920s gay culture at the height of Weimar Berlin and sexual liberation in 1970s and 1980s London. Her many books include *Love Between*



Women, published in 1971. As well as medicine, Wolff studied literature and philosophy at the universities of Freiburg and Tübingen where she was taught by Edmund Husserl and Martin Heidegger, just then developing “phenomenology,” how the phenomena of the external world are lived experientially through one's body. She escaped Nazi oppression to France in the early 1930s. While in Paris, Wolff befriended Aldous and Maria Huxley and it was through their influence that she sought sanctuary in London as the Nazis threat moved ever closer.

As a refugee, Wolff was forbidden to practise as a doctor. Bashford writes, “The social round of palmistry in Sanary, in Paris, and later in London was dissatisfying even ‘humiliating’ for Charlotte Wolff, but it proved a necessary and relatively easy income for a constrained German Jewish refugee” (p. 311). Huxley was one of the celebrities included in the book as was his brother, the zoologist, Julian Huxley along with such luminaries as Bernard Shaw, Virginia Woolf, T. S. Eliot and Maurice Ravel. It is highly likely that Huxley suggested Alexander as a likely subject for her “hand-reading.” Through her introduction to Julian Huxley who was Secretary of the Zoological Society of London at the time, she not only took palm prints of human celebrities but also chimpanzees and gorillas. Thanks to BBC television demonstration footage, we are still able to see and hear

“ It is highly likely that Huxley suggested Alexander as a subject for [Wolff's] ‘hand-reading’.



F. M. ALEXANDER

Wolff read hands.

The rest of the book is equally enjoyable and informative tracing the significance of the hand and the origins of palmistry in the East to the arrival of the “Egyptians” (gypsies) in England during Henry VIII's reign. Chirolgy is identified in all its various guises from main-stream science and medicine, Galton's fingerprinting, fraudsters and rogues, fairground entertainment and high-society fad.

Illustration: *Studies in Hand-Reading* (Chatto & Windus 1936, opposite p. 113)
Malcolm Williamson



Photo by kind permission of Philip Johnston

Functioning fluency

Alexander Murray
1929 - 2026

By Malcolm Williamson

Alex Murray, flautist, innovator, Alexander Technique teacher, trainer, author and co-creator of the Dart Procedures, was born in South Shields, South Tyneside on 13th May, 1929. Age 11, he was one of three hundred children evacuated to Cape Town, South Africa where his musical talent was shaped by independent endeavour as much as by formal instruction. On his return to England a scholarship took him to the Royal College of Music in London where he studied the flute for a short time with Robert Murchie. He was then drafted into the Royal Air Force band. Later, he studied flute with Gaston Crunelle at the Paris Conservatoire where he also attended classes in composition given by the legendary Nadia Boulanger.

After his studies, he was appointed principal flute with the orchestra of the Royal Opera House, Covent Garden and then the London Symphony Orchestra (LSO). In 1954, he married Joan Elvin, a dancer, forming a lifelong personal and artistic partnership. They began studying the Alexander Technique in the mid-fifties with Charles Neal. Alexander was still teaching but, Alex explained, "Charles Neal dissuaded me from visiting Alexander, saying that he had gone on from him. I had no way of knowing whether it was true, but accepted Charles at his word."

Joan was a member of Neal's training class along with Rivka Meshoulam (later Cohen), Graham Fagg and Shirley Zinken. After Neal's unexpected demise in 1958, they went to Walter Carrington on Irene Tasker's recommendation and found Walter's teaching very different. Walter moved from Staffex House in Bainbridge Street (near the Dominion Cinema) to 18, Lansdowne Road in Holland Park, where Alex and Joan completed their teacher training while both performing – Joan in *My Fair Lady* at the Theatre Royal, Drury Lane and Alex playing with the LSO.

In 1959, Alex collaborated with flute

makers and physiologists to develop the "Murray flute" which aimed to solve some of the intonation and fingering problems of the traditional flute.

In 1965, Alex was invited to teach at the National Music Camp at Interlochen, Michigan. He and Joan spent a fruitful summer there with Alex being offered a position at Michigan State University, from September 1966 (delayed till 1967). Alex recalled they were offered a large faculty house for the eight weeks and invited Walter and Dilys Carrington to visit, which they did for a month. American teachers Marjorie Barstow and Kitty Wielopolska also stayed as visitors at the campus hotel for a week or two.

In 1967 Alex changed career path to teach the flute at Michigan State University. Then, in 1974, Joan and Alex moved to the Netherlands at the invitation of Frans Vester where he was Professor of Flute at the Royal Dutch Conservatory. He also taught at the Royal Northern College of Music, Manchester.

In 1977, Alex was appointed Professor of Flute at the University of Illinois, Champaign-Urbana. Here, Joan and Alex co-founded the Urbana Center for the Alexander Technique in the basement of their home at 508 West Washington. Over the years, they trained several hundred Alexander teachers creating one of the largest training lineages in the Alexander community.

Alex retired from the university in 2003. On their retirement in 2018, they were presented with the Legacy Award by the University's College of Fine and Applied Arts. It was the first year such an award had been given. The Dean of the College, Kevin Hamilton, gave a generous tribute to their long and dedicated service in Urbana: "All around us is the walking archive of your work, forms of movement stored and transferred. What a legacy!"

They moved back to their house in

Blackheath, South London in November 2018.

The Dart procedures

Alex and Joan are known for developing “Dart work” an important contribution to the Alexander work. In the summer of 1967, they were back in London from Michigan. While visiting Walter Carrington, Alex mentioned that he had been thinking about how jaw tension affected the balance of the head. Walter said that that sounded like something the South African anatomist, Raymond Dart, had written and disappeared to his basement returning with Dart’s paper, ‘The Postural Aspects of Malocclusion.’ It so happened that Dart was visiting London on a stop-over to the States and was in communication with Carrington. The timing was not convenient as the Carringtons were planning to be away on holiday. So, Walter asked Alex if he

“ They were researching developmental movement and using it to ‘pattern’ the movement of brain-injured children...

would meet Dart at his hotel and, as it is said, the rest is history.

The meeting was an obvious success as it led to Joan and Alex making a series of visits to Professor Dart in Philadelphia at the Institutes for the Achievement of Human Potential. The Institutes was founded by Glenn Doman and Carl Delecatto whose work was based on the evolutionary insights of the neurosurgeon, Temple Faye. They were researching developmental movement and using it to “pattern” the movement of brain injured children to stimulate their neurological development.

Joan and Alex took one of the Institutes’ week-long Intensive Orientation courses as did Walter and Dilys Carrington who introduced the aspect of crawling (cf. ‘creeping’) on all-fours into their teacher-training programme.

With Dart’s full approval, Alex and Joan developed the programme to a new level incorporating Alexander principles. On their visits, Joan and Alex were able to present their sequences recapitulating the human baby’s early exploration of selfhood and to receive Dart’s feedback and corrections. Alex also visited Dart for three weeks in Johannesburg, South Africa. The collaboration between Dart, Alex and Joan led to the creation of what became known as “The Dart Procedures.”

In the 1990s, with the help of his trainee students, a selection of Dart’s

papers relevant to the Alexander Technique was published, entitled *Skill and Poise*. Alex also published his own book – *Alexander’s Way: In His Own Words* and in the *Words of Those who Knew Him*, dedicated to his wife Joan and published in 2015. Alex explained that we all step onto the way with different baggage, and different guides. Once seen as a journey, we cannot do better than consider Tennyson’s words, beloved by John Dewey:

“... all experience is an arch
wherethrough
Glams that untravelled world,
whose margin fades
For ever and for ever when I move.”

Alexander Douglas Murray died 24th March 2026, age 96, after a short stay in hospital. He is survived by his wife Joan and daughter Fiona.

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The October issue deadline is 1st September. Please send submissions to: statnews@alexandertechnique.co.uk.



For my friend Alex Murray

By Philip Johnston

In 1995, I was studying for a Master's Degree in Dance at the University of Illinois, Urbana-Champaign. I was writing a paper for a kinesiology course and decided to explore the Alexander Technique for my paper.

This led to a meeting with two extraordinary people, Joan and Alex Murray, who lived just two streets from my home in Urbana. I had expressed an interest in exploring the Alexander Technique for my paper and contacted Joan and Alex. They invited me to their home to discuss the Alexander Technique and The Dart Procedures. This meeting with Joan and Alex became life-changing for me as my friendship with them grew over the next 25 years in Urbana.

A few days after our meeting, Joan and Alex asked if I would like to join their Alexander Technique training course in August 1995 when I had then graduated with my Master's Degree. I was planning to leave Champaign-Urbana to move to Santa Fe, but this plan changed rapidly and led to pivotal changes in my life. In order to remain in the US for an extended period I needed to continue on a student visa. Joan and Alex had already spoken with the head of the Theatre Department, a good friend of theirs, to arrange a meeting with the director of PhD studies in Theatre History. I began a three year-training course with Joan and Alex coupled with a six-year PhD programme in Theatre History. One year later I was offered a faculty position at Illinois State University and six years later a faculty position at the University of Illinois.

Throughout all of these challenges Joan and Alex became central to my life in Urbana as we developed a close friendship. We often had dinners at my home and in local restaurants. We also shared many wonderful evenings together watching movies in my basement movie theatre as it was just a five-minute walk from their home.

Alex cycled around Urbana until

his late 80s to the university campus and to his favourite whole food store, Strawberry Fields. I was treated on a regular basis to Strawberry Fields soda bread that Alex would bring to my house.

I taught an 8:00 a.m. Alexander Technique class three mornings each week for the Dance Department, a course that was open to students from across campus. This class became a focal point for students from all disciplines with many PhD students returning each semester. Third year students from Joan and Alex's training course would assist in my class as we had sixteen students each semester. For many years Alex also assisted in the Alexander class. I remember him cycling to the class at 7:45 a.m. to begin working with the students until 9:00 a.m. and then cycling back home to teach the students on the Alexander training course. His energy was boundless and he was by then in his mid-eighties. We would devote a number of classes during the term to the Dart Procedures when Alex would talk to the students about the importance of this work to Joan and himself. Many PhD students in Engineering and Physics became more and more fascinated with Alex's work and often dropped by the training course to augment their understanding of the Alexander Technique and the Dart Procedures.

Alex was a voracious reader. I have known no-one who read as much as Alex. He would devour books and listen to audio CDs on a variety of subjects. He often passed many of these books, audio CDs and videos on to me. Listening and watching the Great Courses series was one of his favourite pastimes. While working on my PhD Alex would arrive at my home with invaluable books on theatre history, all of which helped me in my completion of the PhD. My bookshelves are still full of this extensive library given to me by Alex.

When he had finished a book that really interested him, he would pass it on to me and a few days later would return to discuss it with me. I was teaching full-time and could not possibly have kept up with his phenomenal curiosity. Alex also passed on many books to the students on the Alexander training course.

Alex often performed with *Sinfonia da Camera* at the university. He decided that over two seasons the orchestra should play six works that would be danced and that I should choreograph them. These were major pieces that challenged me and the dancers. His choices included works by Claude Debussy: *L'Après midi d'un faun* and Aaron Copeland's *Rodeo*. It was a non-stop year for me choreographing these works, but I was so grateful to Alex as it gave me the opportunity to work with the orchestra.

In 2011 during one of his visits home to London Alex began to write a text to retrace Alexander's steps in the development of his Technique. Alex initially titled his book: *FM Alexander: In His Own Words, And In The Words Of Those Who Knew Him*. When he returned to Urbana, he shared his work with me and asked if I could help him to produce a book. We published with an online publisher. Alex was happy to have his compilation of writings in book form, but it wasn't great as my skills in this endeavour were severely lacking. The book was later re-published in 2015 with professional editing-design and titled, *Alexander's Way: Frederick Matthias Alexander In His Own Words and in the Words of Those Who Knew Him*. He dedicated the book: "To my wife Joan and her continuing search for Alexander's way." Joan gave Alex lessons regularly, usually when the training course ended for the day. I remember watching them in awe as Joan would take Alex in and out of primary and secondary curves, usually finishing his lesson with a deep squat. For a man in his late 80s Alex was very

spritely. It was always remarkable to watch both of them enjoy the work together.

During my years in Urbana, I was able to stop by the training course on a regular basis to have lessons with Alex and Joan. Because of the many students, from across the globe, who studied with them, the basement of their home became an incredibly international space and many friendships were forged there.

Joan and Alex were known, by many in Urbana-Champaign, through their Alexander teaching and Alex's long tenure at the University of Illinois. They were regular visitors to the local Krannert Centre for the Performing Arts. We were fortunate to have many of the great orchestras and musicians from around the world perform at the Krannert Centre. Alex had also performed there many times. On one occasion Alex's good friend Sir James Galway was performing a solo concert. Both had been Principal Flutists in the LSO. "Jimmy" as Alex and Joan called him had played at the Krannert Centre many times but his first stop in Urbana was always to see Joan and Alex for an Alexander lesson. Jimmy dedicated the last concert he gave at the Krannert Centre to Alex and Joan. I attended the concert with Alex as Joan was in London. Jimmy told Alex he would see us after the concert at the reception, but Alex declined as he didn't enjoy the post-concert euphoria with the

“ The basement of their home became an incredibly international space and many friendships were forged there.

sponsors and others. Jimmy said if Alex wasn't going to attend the reception he wasn't going to be there . . . so under pressure, we joined Jimmy for the post-performance reception. When Jimmy decided it was time to leave, he asked Alex how he was getting home and Alex replied I was driving him home. Jimmy cancelled the booked limousine and we travelled together in my car. It felt like no time had passed since Alex and Jimmy's London friendship in the 1960s as they laughed and joked as two young friends would do. Jimmy called Alex "old-boy" but there was only eight years between them!

Our neighbourhood in Urbana was never the same for me when Alex and Joan returned to their London home in 2018. I stayed for two more years before leaving my position at the University of Illinois and returning home to Northern Ireland in 2020. I am sure many of the neighbours still miss Alex playing his flute at 8:00a.m., when the windows were open on warm spring and summer days, delighting anyone who passed by the Murray's home.

I visited Joan and Alex in London last year (in 2025) and found them as curious about life and the Alexander Technique as ever. Joan talked me through a brief lesson on "pulling to the elbows." Alex still had that wonderful sparkle in his eyes. They changed my life and I will always be grateful for their friendship and the gift of the Alexander Technique that I continue to teach in Northern Ireland. We had the time of our lives in Urbana and the memories of my time with Joan and Alex are indelible.

I said a few words to Alex in his final hours before he passed away, it was profoundly moving for me to do so. His daughter Fiona held the phone to him, but I could only utter a couple of incoherent sentences. I have thought about Alex so much these past weeks and of dear Joan to whom Alex was utterly devoted.

Remembering Alex Murray

By Dorothea Magonet

In the late '80s I came across an article by a flautist at the Royal Opera about his invisible breathing. The opening flute solo of Debussy's *Prélude à l'après-midi d'un faune* is technically demanding and requires exceptional breath control to create a seamless, sensuous phrase apparently played in a single breath.

That was my first introduction to Alex Murray, but it was in the autumn of 2001 at the Conference for Teaching Alexander Technique in Music Conservatoires at Trinity Laban College, London that I first met Alex and Joan Murray. They introduced their work bringing Darts' developmental aspect into Alexander teaching. They met Raymond Dart in 1967 and spent time with him at the Institutes for the Achievement of Human Potential. This work excited me, so in 2004 I spent a month as a postgraduate student at their training course in Urbana, Illinois. Both were wonderfully welcoming and I had a great time learning, gaining understanding and experimenting under their tutelage of how

“ Alex's work had such an uplifting and delightfully springy dynamic and quality of lightness and movement, as well as simplicity...

to integrate Dart's insights into my Alexander teaching.

Being a student there gave me the opportunity to have regular lessons with Alex and Joan. Alex's work had such an uplifting and delightfully springy dynamic and quality of lightness and movement, as well as a simplicity that was based on his understanding of human evolution and movement "patterning". I was impressed by his ongoing curiosity and phenomenal knowledge of human development, and his memory of the history and stories of generations of Alexander Teachers and teaching. And he would love to share these at great length, too! He loved an audience. After a while, with a smile, Joan would quietly say, "Oh, let's just do a little work." We would go to explore practically how to integrate the Dart work with Alexander Principles, and Alex would eventually join us sharing his observations. It was always a rich time of learning.

Later colleagues and I used to meet Alex and Joan during their visits to London and when they moved to London permanently in 2019 a group of us would visit them regularly. Sadly, this stopped during the pandemic.

Even though Alex could at times be naughtily dismissive

about teachers and trainings other than Walter Carrington's, I very much appreciated his enquiring mind, his knowledge and recall, and his teaching. It broadened my approach to practising and teaching the Alexander work hugely and I am very grateful to have had the chance to meet and learn from him, and of course from Joan – my thoughts are very much with her at this time. We have lost a great teacher, and he will be sorely missed.



The opening phrase of Debussy's *Prélude à l'après-midi d'un faune*

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Alex Murray our friend, who for us made the Alexander Technique more accessible

By Neil and Julia Roberts

Neil first met Alex Murray when he was preparing his Inaugural Lecture at the University of Edinburgh. He had originally intended to include a demonstration of the Alexander Technique and had sent Elisabeth Walker a list of questions to help prepare an accompanying narration. Elisabeth kindly arranged a meeting with Alex thinking he was better placed to answer them. Alex advised Neil to have lessons with Joan, and he invited Neil to visit the Urbana Center for the Alexander Technique at their home in Illinois, USA. It was a profound experience and while it would take time to obtain real understanding, he knew his questions were being answered. We both attended a further two Refresher Courses with Alex and Joan and visited them many times at their home in Blackheath, London where they spent about one month every year before eventually retiring there in 2018.

We remember Alex as generous and wise, how he loved life and was loving of people. Alex was a masterful musician and in playing the flute he demonstrated the skill and poise that was the title of a book he wrote [1]. We observed an additional quality in Alex's actions that is especially pertinent to the Alexander Technique. This quality can perhaps best be described as a springiness or bounce which Alex understood needs to be present in movement and which he embodied. Furthermore, not only did Alex 'think up', but the spring allowed him to jump up and see over the walls that hem others in. In general, as with directing, the quality is expressed more subtly. Joan describes it as the way the teacher can spring off the student, and whereby the student also springs like in leapfrog [2].

Alex had a great interest in people who asked questions about life. He had favourite music composers, but it was F. Matthias Alexander (FM), Raymond Dart, Alexander Pope, Jan Morris and



Marjorie and Raymond Dart, Alex and Joan Murray (courtesy of P. Johnston)

so many others who were focussed on understanding the human condition, and were represented in the library he shared and distributed to friends and those he met, that Alex was most occupied in seeking to learn and obtain understanding.

A thousand years ago there was a pronoun for referring to ourselves and one other person. One would have said "wit" to refer to this "twoness" [4], this closeness, and the term particularly applies in the case of Alex and his wife and lifelong partner Joan, to whom Alex was devoted. The book which Alex wrote summarising all that is known about FM's work [3], and which he dedicated to Joan, is only part of what they have created together. Alex wrote "that by 1930 FM was so good at working on people that you could not see how he did it. He was like a conjuror doing tricks" [2]. In other words, while there was much to inspire from what FM left behind – the teachers he trained and their legacies, his writings, the film of him working (narrated by Walter Carrington) – this was perhaps not quite enough as Alex and Joan sought to develop their understanding and proficiency in teaching the Alexander Technique. The catalyst for them finding a way forward was meeting

Raymond Dart.

Dart showed the Murrays what the human body is naturally equipped to do. By antagonistic action of muscles in flexion and extension the foetus progresses to the baby reaching, turning and crawling with their tummy on the floor, to the infant creeping on hands and knees, and onward to squatting, sitting, standing, walking, running, running on toes, jumping and even to pirouette. All occurs innately and expectedly. In collaboration, Alex, Joan and Dart worked to expand and connect together experiential sequences of movements originally developed by Dart into a continuous whole repertoire named the Dart-Murray Procedures, although usually referred to as the Dart Procedures. However, although performing the Dart Procedures provides awareness and helpful stimulus it does not provide an immediate means to learning the Alexander Technique.

The genius of the Murrays is to use the Dart Procedures as the basis for understanding what FM had done in developing his skill and the Alexander Technique. They gained understanding of the relationship of FM's so-called 'position of mechanical advantage,' the breath and the floating ribs (a favourite

of Alex's as a flautist), FM's evolving work with hands on the back of the chair, his door exercise, and including the pirouette (a favourite of Joan's as a dancer), to the movement progression that had been shown to them by Dart. Accordingly, they could understand what is happening when, in the short movie referred to earlier, FM the 'conjurer' has one hand on the top of his student's head and another on their shoulder and, with a springiness, guides him as though floating into standing.

The Murrays achieved a wonderful way to help understand and learn the Alexander Technique and to learn how to teach it. In a nutshell, the steps of progressing to standing upright from sitting in a chair (i.e. going from an intermediary to more advanced stage in the evolution of upright posture) can be

carried out more easily by connecting with the antagonistic action of the muscles that was naturally established in our development, but which unfortunately may have been degraded or lost, as a result of the formation of unhelpful habits.


Importantly, the Murrays could impart the insights they obtained [2]. In our view this is the reason so many people chose to train with them at the Urbana Center. We are forever grateful to Alex for his friendship, and for sharing with us so that we could appreciate and learn from what he and Joan developed together and have given to the world in terms of making the Alexander Technique accessible.

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Tribute to Alex Murray

By Merrin Poplar

I have been enjoying reading tributes in these recent weeks to Alex Murray, who led such a long and rich life, and to whom our Alexander community has so much to be grateful.

Just now, I find myself wanting, above all, to express my gratitude for his kindness and generosity—as a person, as a teacher, and as a friend.

I was just 24 years old when I arrived in the USA with a six-month tourist visa to study on Joan and Alex’s training course. I was then in my second year of training. Later, when I went to London to complete my final year, I lived in their home in Blackheath, and so we were in close contact. During some holiday periods we lived together, and in some way our relationship at times came to resemble more that of a parent and daughter than simply teacher and student.

As such, it was entirely natural that Joan and Alex might have opinions about my choice of boyfriend, for example. I remember Alex asking me, “Well, he may be brilliant, but is he kind?” As life goes on, I have an ever greater appreciation for that question.

It was not in any way unusual for Joan and Alex to take an interest in all aspects of their students’ lives; indeed, we were all recipients of their care in the widest sense. I remember Alex saying, in the context of conversations about “professionalism” and how we ought to conduct ourselves as Alexander teachers, that the first thing that ought to happen when you work with your student is that you befriend them. For Alex, this was part and parcel of the Alexander work. It is certainly how he lived it. He wasn’t always agreeable—just as one would expect from a true friend.

When I moved to Argentina to open a training course, I would speak fairly regularly with Joan and Alex, who were always curious about who my students were—what they did, what interested them. It was the whole person, in the

widest context of their life, their history, and their direction, that they wanted to hear about.

Alex was generous with his thoughts, ideas, and insights. He would not only recommend a book he was excited about—he would get you a copy, or photocopy the passages he found most important, highlight them, and send them by express international post.

Alex was able to talk at length—often being told off for doing so! I used to enjoy his particular way of weaving together a web of interconnected thoughts, stories, and ideas. Over the years, through the retellings, the different interweavings, and the making of new connections, I became more and more able to appreciate his creative mind.

As well as Alex, there was Joan and Alex—the pair that they were—how they nurtured each other, and the devotion that Alex clearly had for Joan. Some years ago, when Alex was unwell in hospital, he said he would have been happy to go, acknowledging that he had had such a good life. But then he thought how it could be helpful for Joan and his daughter Fiona if he stayed around a bit longer—and so he did.

The Covid pandemic enabled us to have weekly lessons and catch-ups again, now via Zoom. The way Alex was able to adapt to the new technology that many of us were struggling with at the time was yet another example, to me, of how he lived the work.

In so many ways, Alex has been part of my support structure for the last 35 years. There is sadness at his passing, but more resounding is the enormous gratitude—and a recognition that this



Merrin Poplar with Alex and Joan

support is still very present.



Training with David Gorman: Reflections on my time at CFT

By Carolyn Simon

How I came to CFT

Having been inspired to train as an AT teacher, the question was: where? My first teacher, Richard Brennan, was clear that the place to go was David Gorman's school in Holloway, north London. My aunt, who had studied Cranial Sacral Therapy alongside Margaret Edis, recommended that I should seek out Margaret. Luckily for me, it transpired that all roads led to the Centre For Training (CFT), where Margaret was at that time David's Assistant Head of Training.

I phoned David to arrange to visit his school. Our conversation reminded me of the joke about how a dog hears human language, recognising only its own name: "Bla bla bla bla Rover bla bla Rover". Except that what I heard, as a Canadian accent summarised what the Technique was about, was: "Bla bla bla Change bla bla Change". The Technique, I understood from this, was not about Posture. It was about Change.

The following week, I spent a day at CFT. It was a great space, on the second floor above M&S in the Holloway Road. A pillar that supported the ceiling had been transformed, using tissue paper, into a colourful palm tree from which paper bananas and a toy monkey hung. In the kitchen area was a poster of an egg balancing on the palm of a hand, captioned with the single word: POISE.

The trainees seemed very bright. Once they had left for the day, David gave me a 1:1 lesson. This mostly involved my walking round the room, with David's hands and his words inviting my attention "up and out, up and out". The experience was transforming, and I remember saying to David, "I don't understand why EVERYONE doesn't want to do this".

CFT 1993-1995

I started training in January 1993. During my first year, Margaret left. She explained that the gap between her and David's takes on the AT had become

too wide. I began to understand that David was experimenting with a more stripped-back approach to teaching the Technique, which Margaret feared might lead to 'throwing the baby out with the bathwater'.

Ann Penistan took over as Assistant Director. Ann came from a theatre background and had worked extensively as an AT coach at the Shaw Festival and the Stratford Shakespeare Festival in Canada. As with Margaret (although minus the 'Walter' anecdotes), I liked her and her teaching a lot.

I was told that in my first year, the main work was simply to become more AWARE. The pitfall here was that, at first, checking in to notice what I was doing/feeling led my attention inwards - disconnecting from the world around; focussing on a part rather than the whole - i.e. exactly the opposite of the 'unified field of attention' that was the goal. Gradually, this paradox resolved itself, helped by plenty of work on recognising when one was narrowing in, and NOT doing it.

Structure and function

The school ran from 10.00 a.m. until 3.00 p.m., Monday to Friday, with a week's break every fourth week. Two mornings a week David lectured on 'Structure and Function', using coloured marker pens to draw on the whiteboard. His graph plotting resistance vs length in relation to muscle and connective tissue was a particular favourite, as were his illustrations of muscle structure. The key learning point: 'Use affects structure affects function'. Sometimes David would get out his suitcase containing a disarticulated skeleton. Whichever part of the anatomy we were studying, e.g. the foot, would be passed round the semi-circle of trainees for us to handle and examine. 'S&F' was considered David's 'strong suit'; he ran weekend workshops on the topic for teachers from other trainings. David had, after all, hand-written and

illustrated 'The Body Moveable: Blueprints of the Human Musculoskeletal System' - a deeply impressive achievement. The legend was that, as an art student in Canada, he had sneaked into the medical school at night to study and draw the dissected cadavers.

Books

One morning a week we would study 'the books'. Primarily this meant working our way through Alexander's writings (no, I don't remember *Man's Supreme Inheritance* getting much of a look-in). However - and for this I am eternally grateful - Frank Pierce Jones also received a lot of attention. At the time, FPJ's book - which was then titled *Body Awareness in Action* - was out of print. Undeterred, David photocopied and spiral-bound a copy for each of us. (It was subsequently republished by Mouritz as *Freedom to Change*).

We also studied *Reforming Education* by the American philosopher Mortimer Adler. David wanted us to appreciate that the best attitude for learning was 'docility'. This was a state of open-mindedness, being receptive to new information, rather than the closed-mindedness of thinking you know already. For me, the ability to stay open in the face of a strong stimulus - rather than reacting to it - has been another great gift from my time at CFT.

Teaching aids and equipment

For those interested in the physical paraphernalia, I can recall the following: an abundance of wooden stools from Habitat; two or three teaching tables; a large Calor gas cylinder (for practising lifting a heavy object without undue effort); a balance board; a couple of physio balls; a tensegrity model; a filing cabinet containing dissertations written by students past and present; a tape deck (also used for recording David's lectures) and a collection of cassettes; a piano.

Visiting teachers

I lucked out here. One of the attractions of training at CFT was the programme of guest teachers. David's great friend Tommy Thompson - with whom he and a small group of others had set up ATI in 1992 - joined us for a week each year, as did the remarkable Juilliard Professor and teacher of Dalcroze Eurhythmics, Bob Abramson. Barbara Conable and Bruce Fertman also came for a week each. Barbara



(Front row, left to right) CFT teachers Penny O'Connor, Jane Saunderson, David Gorman and Ann Penistan with (back row) CFT's "class of 1994" at their graduation picnic in July 1995.

shared her body-mapping wisdom. She was touched by our appreciation of her poetry but was dismayed to find us so pulled down and less focussed than she was on freeing our necks. Whereas David avoided endgaining at all costs, Barbara made it clear that if she was working with a musician, she was happy to prioritise giving them the information that would most quickly help them. Why wouldn't you?

I have never been able to emulate the magic of Bruce Fertman's hands (I remember watching a shoulder widen before my eyes) but I was

moved by the spiritual dimension to his teaching and (from the sublime to the mundane!) have adopted his interest in exploring our use in everyday applications such as doing the washing up.

Other overseas visitors to the school while I was there included Mio Morales, David Mills and Malcolm Balk. Home-grown but just as much of a treat: Lucia Walker joined us once a week for a whole term.

Regular teachers

Most of the regular teachers were themselves alumni/ alumnae of CFT, including the recently graduated Penny O'Connor. Invaluably, we also benefitted from the presence of Jane Saunderson who, like David himself, had trained with Walter and Dilys Carrington at CTC in Lansdowne Road. I say 'invaluably' not only because I loved her calm clarity and her method of framing our explorations as 'an experiment', but also because - when I needed to prepare for an external STAT assessment - Jane was the person who could teach me 'hands on the back of the chair'. David was not into 'games' or procedures. I never saw him teach HOBC or Whispered Ah. Ann Penistan prepped me on the latter, presenting it as a 'Communication Exercise'.

Turns

We trainees worked informally with each other and with whichever teacher might be available. There was a chart on a side table, along with a couple of highlighter pens, which David and Ann used to (in theory) ensure an even distribution of turns with them.

Space

On day one, David gave each new trainee an A5 spiral

notebook for recording our insights and experiences. On the back cover of mine I stuck a card by Charles Schultz. It depicts Snoopy lying on his back (fully rather than semi-supine!) on the roof of his kennel, looking upwards at a starry sky. The caption reads: 'Lately, I've been thinking about space'. We did a lot of that with David – including the space above and the space behind. During a turn he would stand with me at the window, looking out at the panoramic view of London's rooftops and spires. and invite me to expand my visual awareness "not inches but miles". I learned that this widening one's field of attention was a powerful way in to becoming more present and connected, more "whole, free and choosing".

Groups

Once a week, in a trio with other trainees at a similar level, we would have a 'group' with David. This took place in the kitchen area and involved a single chair. One of us would be 'the student', sitting in the chair or standing in front of it; one would be 'the teacher'; the third would 'observe'. This was all quite serious and a little intimidating. The 'teacher's' default contact (after a moment of stopping, of course) was with their hands on the student's upper chest and upper back. How to get 'the student' to come to sitting/standing without doing too much? From time-to-time David would get us to casually plonk a hand on the wall, the point being that this was how little effort was required.

'Downstairs'

David's lease included the use of a vast space on the first floor of the building, immediately below our school. Once a week, the third-year students would use this room to give (free) lessons to members of the public. This was also where the STAT external assessments took place. I remember discreetly 'going into reaction' when Karen Wentworth, without so much as a by-your-leave, undid a fellow student's belt because his trousers were too tight. He, however, was used to this and was unfazed.

Master classes

By end of my time there, the school was winding down. David had been stung by a STAT investigation and stopped taking on new students in order – once the trainees below me had



"My graduation in December 1995": (left to right) Penny O'Connor, Carolyn Simon, Ann Penistan, and David Gorman

graduated – to close the school and move abroad. There was no longer a budget for visiting teachers. One thing David did more of, though, was Master Classes for musicians. We would sit in our semi-circle and watch as he worked with an individual musician – perhaps an oboist, pianist or viola player. Through a mixture of observation and questioning, David would help the performer notice ways in which they were using themselves unconstructively – be it by disconnecting from the audience, tensing

during a difficult passage or some other pattern of misuse. As ever, Awareness became the forerunner of Change – of consciously not doing the habitual thing to 'let the right thing do itself'. Thrillingly, even I, a non-musician, could hear a profound improvement in the performance, particularly in its emotional power.

After CFT closed in 1997, David focussed on this hands-off style of work, which he called Learning Methods. <https://learningmethods.com> Personally, I was saddened that he was no longer using his hands in his teaching, as he was so good with them. Many a time he had put soft knuckles against my ribs and seemed to psychically know what I was thinking.

The Gorman way

Many years ago, Peter Nobes (who was 'head boy' - i.e. the most senior male trainee - when I arrived at CFT) suggested that he and I should create a CPD session on David Gorman's approach to the AT. I declined, not least because at that time I didn't feel confident that I understood the difference between David's approach and any other approach. In the intervening years, I have worked with many other teachers. I am now clearer about what is quintessential about David's take on the AT. I would describe it as 'broad brush' – focussing on holistic principles, rather than directing specific parts; identifying endgaining and then not doing it; having faith in the primary control to organise you if you just let it, by removing the interferences. Two of his sayings I haven't yet quoted were:

"Know where you want to go and just go there"

"Get out of your own way"

I also want to mention an image he frequently used to convey the relationship between intention and free, co-ordinated movement: as if we were wearing a perfectly fitting

rubber wetsuit, with hundreds of little tailors who, in every moment, let the muscular suit in or out by the perfect amount in order to effortlessly ‘boing’ us to where we want to go.

Parting thoughts

Even though our paths have not crossed for many years, David remains my teacher. I have turned out to be a true disciple! I am still teaching the Technique as it was taught to me by him, albeit filtered through my own personality, values and experience. Even though I am aware that his/my/our way is not a perfect match with other UK teachers, and being different is not always delightful, I have never felt inclined to jump ship.

I do confess to one significant difference. David disapproved of giving the student praise or encouragement. I think he believed that would corrupt their experience in some way, as they would be on the lookout for the teacher’s approval. That goes against the grain for me. Rightly or wrongly, I

am an encourager. If I feel joy at someone moving well, or successfully inhibiting, I will express that. Words like “excellent!” and “super!” do cross my lips. I have on more than one occasion been so moved by a change that has taken place that I have needed to ‘take a moment’.

At the Dublin World Congress in August 2026, I was shocked and saddened to learn from Tommy Thompson that David was in the advanced stages of a neurological illness akin to Parkinson’s. It seemed the cruellest irony that a man who understood so much more than most about the body moveable should now be at the mercy of a neurodegenerative movement disorder.

David’s dedication at the front of *The Body Moveable* has stayed with me as an apt metaphor for AT lessons:

“...to whoever invented the screw, which is a very good way of going around in circles but still getting somewhere.”

• *Carolyn Simon teaches the Alexander Technique in London.*

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Local Contacts work on an entirely voluntary basis. They act as a point of contact within their local group and will forward any emails from STAT. They have also agreed to act as a contact for teachers living alone who may be in need of short-term practical assistance (i.e. in case of injury).

For the record

Rosslyn McLeod writes

AT teachers often quote famous people who have had or are having AT lessons. Few know about athletic coach Percy Cerutti and fact he had many AT lessons. Cerutti was coach of Olympian runner Herb Elliott. People into athletics know Cerutti was Elliott's coach but not much more.

Celebrities in various performance areas are often referred to as having studied the Alexander technique. An athletic coach, Percy Cerruty, said that the Alexander Technique was a must for all athletes. Cerutti was known as the coach of Olympic athlete, Herb Elliott. To see the full story of Cerutti's association with the Alexander Technique and who he studied with go to my YouTube channel "Alexander Technique-Rosslyn

“ There was far more to Cerutti's training methods than just [running up and down sandhills] and the fact that he had many Alexander lessons is testament to this.

McLeod”.

On the channel I talk about my knowledge of how Percy Cerruty came to have Alexander lessons with Alexander teacher Alan Murray.

I also explain that the material I used to gather this information is now in the State Library of Victoria.

Many people who know a little about Percy Cerruty mainly have heard of the fact that his athletes used to train at Portsea, Victoria, Australia and some of the training was running up and down the sandhills. There was far more to Cerutti's training methods than just this activity and the fact that Cerutti had many Alexander lessons is testament to this.

If you see my you tube channel you will hear the facts and evidence.

Thank you
Kind regards,

Rosslyn

“ ... we received a letter from the Editor saying that they agreed with most of our concerns and had retracted the publication. This is a significant achievement in upholding the reputation of our profession.

See SRG Report, p7

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For sale/rent

BEGINNING FROM THE Beginning is a conversation with Alexander Technique teachers Joan and Alexander Murray about their collaboration with Alexander Technique student, anatomist and

renowned anthropologist Raymond Dart on the "Dart Procedures." The Dart Procedures and related procedures are based on the observation of the natural coordination of infants, young children, and animals from an evolutionary perspective. This conversation is a fascinating exploration of how the Procedures and other developmental work can be used to increase understanding of the Alexander Technique, from clarifying key principles and concepts to improving "hands-on" teaching skills. The book also covers less well-known information about the development of the Procedures and addresses common misconceptions. For more information, contact Marian Goldberg, info@alexandercenter.com. *Beginning from the Beginning: The Growth of Understanding and Skill* is available for purchase from the Alexander Technique Center of Washington's website, www.alexandercenter.com/beginning.

MOURITZ HAS PUBLISHED new editions of *The Philosopher's Stone* edited by Jean Fischer, and *Authorised Summaries of FM Alexanders Four Books* by Ron Brown. www.mouritz.org/shop



The cover of the STAT news newsletter features the title "STAT news" at the top, with a subtitle "The Newsletter from the Society of Teachers of the Alexander Technique". Below the title is the question "Is it all about the hands?" and a photograph of a hand. At the bottom of the cover, there is a small copyright notice: "© 2014 Society of Teachers of the Alexander Technique".

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