

Tudor Squares AGM 8/11/18 – Section reports

Beginners

From the students who began square dancing in September 2016 ten graduated, having spent 15 months learning the Basic and Mainstream programmes. At their graduation on 14 December, where the students were presented with their certificates by Debbie and a complimentary copy of Let's Square Dance, everyone was encouraged to keep square dancing alive by promoting it to friends. Almost a year on seven are still dancing, attending Mainstream evenings, dancing at club socials and RCA friendship dances, and supporting the next group of students.

Following a successful recruitment drive, from the Nash Mills free taster sessions and local advertising, a new Beginners' course started January 2018. By springtime there were about 10 students attending regularly at Gadebridge Community Centre aided by the 'angels' from Mainstream and under the expert tuition of our patient caller Debbie Peel. Michael Ginger organised the weekly sessions, ably assisted by Daphne who collected the money before handing over to Cathy and Roger during the later stages. The Beginners were offered the opportunity to carry on with their lessons at Nash Mills through August as the Mainstream dancers normally like to take a break then. Becky Peel coached us in August and also whilst Phil and Debbie Peel were on holiday, and our thanks go to her.

By September of this year Beginners had covered most of the moves in the Basic and Mainstream programmes and joined

Mainstream at Nash Mills. Dancing started half an hour earlier than usual, at 7.30 pm, to enable Phil Peel, assisted by Becky, to teach the students the last few remaining moves whilst another Beginners' course started at Gadebridge.

We are very grateful to both Phil and Debbie Peel for their teaching. It has been fun learning to dance and we are settling into the Mainstream evenings and are looking forward to graduating soon. In addition to the weekly training sessions the students have had the opportunity to go to a couple of dances held at Kings Langley and Warners End where Beginners' tips were available and this was much appreciated by those who were able to attend.

Out of the 10 Beginners there are seven remaining who attend most weeks. One moved away and two others decided to go back to re-take the course with the September 2018 recruits. Unfortunately, the viability of this new course is very doubtful.

Mainstream

The main feature of Mainstream dancing at Nash Mills is the sociability and cheerful attitude of the participants.

We average 20 to 24 dancers who enjoy seven tips each evening. Our numbers are rarely higher although we have occasionally risen to 4 squares. In August our numbers were much lower, even with the student and mainstream dancers combined at Nash Mills. We have a number of members who prefer to take the month off and of course we were adversely affected by the very hot weather. With numbers ranging from 9 to 17, neither group would have been financially viable on their own. Teacher Debbie Peel called with Phil

in August; they do sing some lovely duets. During their holiday Beck Peel was our caller.

Our regular caller is Phil Peel ably supported by Beck Peel who calls as her work shifts permit. We have enjoyed Andrew calling on one occasion. Switching callers between Andrew, Phil and Becky is something we enjoy and would like to see more of in the future.

Having the students with us has added to our enjoyment, they are typical square dancers already, very friendly and happy people and a pleasure to be with.

Our 7:30 starts from September, to allow for the completion of the students' Mainstream training until 8:00 pm has only been partly successful, not all the students are able to attend at the earlier time. The programme from 8:00 to 9:30 of a tip for everyone followed by a tip for Mainstream only until 10:00 pm has quickly become redundant as the students have virtually completed the programme and are keen to try it all. Their only problem now is building up speed when dancing.

The decision to get Paul Bristow to give a workshop at Nash Mills specifically for the Mainstream group was an expensive failure. Very few regular Mainstream dancers attended and the most notable absentees were those dancers who would have benefitted the most from attending. Paul's reputation as a caller did not prove an attraction to our Mainstream group but it did attract a number of Plus and A dancers who were very happy to dance to his calling.

In general, the Mainstream group are very happy to dance at Nash Mills on a Thursday evening but for many their interest does not extend to dancing on other days or at other venues.

I would like to once again thank Alex Matthews for his support. He always arrives early to set out chairs and take the money. I would also like to thank those who regularly volunteer to make and serve teas, those who help Phil to unload and set up and pack up again after 10:00, and those people who opened and closed the hall in our two weeks absence earlier this month.

The Mainstream group is sound for another year but new blood is needed to secure our future.

Plus

It seems that on average we have 22 people attending Plus. Lowest number was 11 people, twice we had above 30. From this you can see that mostly we have 2/3 squares with some people sitting out. Not everyone feels they can dance every tip.

Erratic attendance is attributable to a number of factors: health issues; lots of snow and ice, then a very hot summer; dancing elsewhere, at Activ 8's, learning Advanced and dancing weekends. More regular attendance by dancers would increase the number of dancers each session, improve dancers' competence and make for a better atmosphere.

It is good to see the return of Ken and Shirley Steadman. However, we've lost more dancers than we've gained. And there are a few who can come only intermittently.

Last December it was decided to teach Plus to a few people from Mainstream who were interested in learning. These lessons began at the end of March, starting half an hour before the main Plus group joined in. The students' progress, supported by 'angels' from the main Plus group, has been very good and we are glad that they will boost our numbers.

I would like to thank everyone for their support in organising/helping at the Plus dance in September, where we had Paul Bristow calling. This dance proved very successful, with a large attendance, a great atmosphere and people keen to dance from the start of the evening.

I would like to thank Grant Thorne for keeping the register, collecting the money and paying the caller each week. I would also like to thank those who have contributed to the weekly tea rota, those who've brought cakes and especially those who've brought their own mugs, so we can reduce the use of polystyrene cups!

We've appreciated the alternation of callers between Susie/Simon and Andrew on a fortnightly basis. Also, we enjoyed our dancing when we swapped callers, Andrew with Phil. It was good to hear a different caller and get more experience of dancing from different positions, with different choreography. We will repeat this exercise a few more times each year.

Advanced

It's been a year of mixed fortunes for the A section. While a small number of dancers have joined the section, some returning after absences, the overall attendances have been down. Some members have health issues which prevent them from dancing, others are not attending as frequently as they used to and a few have simply stopped coming altogether. As a consequence, the section has been losing money over the past year – something over £100. While this is not presently a huge problem to Tudor Squares overall, it's become a worrying trend that's a reflection of the state of Square Dancing as a whole.

With the above in mind, the decision was made to introduce a number of A1 dancers to the section. These are primarily dancers, about eleven in all, who have just completed the A1 programme with Kevin Lovell and who are very keen to get as much practice as possible. As the section has been dancing full A2 for some time, this constitutes quite a change and has had to be carefully managed. While we are keen to get new dancers into the section, it's also important to allow the existing members to practice their A2 moves as well. There has been a certain amount of disagreement within the section regarding this process, but hopefully that has now been resolved. It's still early days as this report is being typed, but the initial reaction to the new format has been encouraging. Nevertheless, it's important that all section members remain flexible as the Friday evening format may still require some 'tweaking'.

The section has also been experimenting with the Triangle Squares Square Rotation software. The existing 'card' system seemed too inflexible, given the number of dancers opting to sit out some tips and the frequent belle/beau imbalance. The alternative free-for-all seemed little better. The software has been on trial for a number of weeks and has performed quite well during the A2-only meetings. The A1/A2 mix presents a rather different challenge and some adjustments will be required to provide the best performance. Nevertheless, one solo A1 dancer has already commented that they really liked the system as it saved them the, sometimes awkward, task of finding a partner for each tip!

A number of section members travelled to both Aberdeen (SquareFest) and Amsterdam (European Convention) this year and had a thoroughly good time at both events. Everyone was made to feel very welcome and it was great to see so many people from around the world united with one common language – that of Square Dancing.

Challenge

We dance at Kings Langley Community Centre on a Tuesday evening. There are currently 10 dancers in the group, most of whom dance at other Tudor Squares sections. We have to close when we cannot muster a square and thank Daphne Smith who sometimes organises a social evening on those occasions.

Sadly, our Tape Leader Alan Jackson was unable to continue due to ill health. We are grateful to Michael Ginger who has taken-on the role, enabling us to dance to a variety of Callers via computerised recordings. Chris Gill takes over occasionally so that Michael may dance.

Lack of numbers and hall costs means that finances are always crucial for our Group; therefore, from November 2018 the Challenge dancers have elected to pay £5 for each dance session. Our thanks to Nancy and Angus MacIver who rarely accept a financial contribution for the refreshments they provide.

For the past two years we have been unable to attract dancers from the Tudor Squares Advanced section or elsewhere. We hope this will change as lack of new members could signal the demise of the Challenge section.