

Committee Report 2015 – 2016

Reflecting on the year's activities, it certainly has been an active and busy one. We have been pleased to welcome so many new members, who have entered into the spirit and joined in our dancing events with enthusiasm.

I recently read an article in which we are now being told that "brain stimulation is essential in preventing cognitive decline and the key to this is social interaction – chatting and being socially interactive ...lights up the brain...Evidence suggests that taking up new hobbies and interests that challenge us are more beneficial.."

I think our year's varying activities certainly meet these criteria.

The year began with our first public dance of the season on October 3rd, which saw us back at our regular dance venue St. Ippolyts Parish Hall for our 57th Anniversary Dance – so named as it marks the anniversary of Staplers' birth on Monday 8th September 1958 in the Guild Room, Paynes Park, Hitchin.

Ron Coxall gave us an enjoyable evening of dances with something to think about, made all the easier to dance to with good tunes and phrasing from the band Stradivarius.

We constantly aim to improve our standard of dancing, which makes dancing all the more enjoyable and satisfying in addition to widening our repertoire of dances, which we have aimed to do through running workshops. On a sunny autumnal afternoon in October, Frances Richardson gave us an informative insight into 'Dances from the Napoleonic Era' from 1790 – 1817 and how fashions in costume and dance changed as Britain lost links with France, but re-emerged after the Battle of Waterloo. Frances led us through some delightful dances incorporating circles, waltzes, hornpipes and squares at the same time showing us how relatively simple dances can be danced effectively thinking about deportment and the style of dance – with a bit of panache. All these were danced to the lovely music of Kelly's Eye.

In November Frances Oates, from Cornwall, made Staplers her first port of call on her tour of Hertfordshire and London. She gave us a fun and challenging evening of interesting dances all with something quirky or unusual in a familiar move.

Any opportunity for a themed evening has always proved popular so with St. Andrew's Day, 30th November, falling on a Monday, Hilary Andrews from Bedford led us through a mixed programme of English and Scottish dances at the same time endeavouring to teach us the step-hop and strathspey to lovely lilting music from Roger Nicholls.

Which brings us into December, and the Christmas season. For our Christmas Dance, we welcomed Kathryn and David Wright, well known on the dance circuit and at festivals. With their clear and precise calling, they gave us a lovely mixed programme of dances with a festive flavour accompanied by real foot-tapping and energised music, interspersed with Christmas carol and song arrangements from daughter and son-in-law Folkus Pocus. A real family affair with the occasional accompaniment of baby cries in the wings.

Christmas is nigh, time for a party and being on the 21st December, what better than to call it a Winter Sostice party – guaranteed to be full of fun and laughter when organised by the intrepid duo 'Lorraine and Ced' alias 'Elf and Sophie' with all the usual party elements – quiz, seasonal fun dances, monologue, instrumental spots, musical chairs, (which caused a

great deal of rushing about and hilarity), choir girls singing in Latin, and not to mention Elf and Sophie's pièce de résistance on how or more to the point how not to make a Christmas pudding.

On this happy occasion too, Ann presented David Millman with Life Membership of Staplers in recognition of his long years of service as treasurer and secretary.

And so to the New Year and yet another themed evening when out came the tartans to celebrate Burns Night, which conveniently fell on a Monday. Colin Hume, fount of all knowledge, rose from his sick bed to give us an informative and interesting evening on the link between English and Scottish dances, as we danced to the music of Spring Greens.

After the build-up of Christmas and often what seems a long January, our third and final dance of the season in February is always welcome. Our fears of how many people would turn up in view of the competition of the clash with other events, were soon dispelled as 80+ people thronged into St. Ippolyts hall for an excellent and delightful evening of dancing led by the 'bubbly' Carol Hewson. Carol is very much focussed on people enjoying themselves and her enthusiasm and sense of humour, with her quips and stories, certainly permeated among the dancers as they relaxed, laughed and enjoyed themselves, not only in response to the excellent calling, but to the superb, dynamic and lively music of The Ivel Valley Band, who very kindly stepped into the breach, when The Falconers, the booked band, had to withdraw due to illness.

To lift the gloom of a dull February evening, we enjoyed a Ladies' Night with a difference – not only the ladies inviting the men to dance, but Lorraine had put in a lot of effort to give us a lovely evening of dances written and tunes composed by ladies.

Chatting and socialising with friends is good for us and so a Sunday lunch on a sunny day in March fitted the bill as 32 Staplers, husbands and friends gathered together at the Green Man in Stanford.

And so to the summer term and our outdoor events for which the weather, this year, looked kindly on us, particularly on our return to the Chequers pub in Stotfold at the end of June. A successful and enjoyable evening with Nick Plum calling a selection of traditional dances accompanied by lively music from Derek, Chris and Michelle, which did come to a sudden halt as pizzas and chips arrived. After some sustenance and chat, we danced a Devil's Dream in the fading light to bid us good night.

However, in between outdoor events, the 4th July also fell on a Monday. Staplers really do enter into the spirit of a themed evening and there was no mistaking the enthusiasm at our American evening where stars and stripes, stetsons, checked shirts abounded as Lorraine, Ced and Denise skilfully guided us through squares and contras from across The Pond or dances with an American theme.

As tradition holds, Staplers never give up except on Bank Holidays and so August leads us to our very social and friendly garden evenings, for which we are very grateful to all our hosts for their hospitality. Our thanks go to Jill & Peter at Gosmore and for the use of their conservatory enabling us to continue dancing on a rainy evening, Lorraine & Ced in Stotfold, Val & Bernard in Hitchin and Joan & Chris in Langford, where, as the evenings become shorter, we danced in the Methodist Church Hall.

We are essentially a social dance club as all these activities show, but at the same time we aim to improve our standard of dancing – thinking how we move, how we interact with other dancers, think of the phrasing of the music, anticipating the next move, dancing with style and precision, all elements to help us enjoy our dancing all the more as we saw at our workshop and in our working towards and dancing in displays, all certainly make us think of these issues. Although we are not a ‘display’ club, we do aim to promote the club and the benefits of dancing to the wider community, particularly in our public displays as well as providing entertainment to people who enjoy watching the movement, music and colour of our costumes.

This year we have had so many requests that we have been unable to accept them all. Lunch clubs and care homes welcome us and often ask us back again. This year we entertained the Bethany Lunch Club twice, made a return visit to both Little Wynondley Nursing Home and Christchurch Lunch Club and in August we were invited to dance at The Sue Ryder Home, Stagenhoe.

A request with a difference came from the Tilehouse Street Baptist Church Beavers pack in March for a talk and demonstration of Folk Customs and country dancing for their “Folk Customs Badge”. Ann was in her element entertaining the Beavers with the help of music from Derek Boothby and a few other Staplers to demonstrate and encourage the Beavers to join in – do we have some budding future Staplers?

In April, we entertained the First Garden City Ladies W.I. In May we participated, as guests of Midnight Morris, in the Baldock Day of Dance for which we thank Kim and Denise for organising. Fine weather prevailed in July as we took part again in the Hitchin Festival Buskers’ Day, which proved rather amusing as we were in competition with a train near St. Mary’s church. Derek’s impromptu playing of “The Runaway Train...” caused a certain amount of amusement or amazement among the passengers.

The committee continually considers the needs of the Club and its members and the tuition sessions that we decided to trial at the earlier time on a Monday evening have been very successful and worthwhile. They have been an opportunity to concentrate on moves, steps and technique as well as going through a dance slowly followed by an evening of dances incorporating moves that have been practised. These we hope would be of benefit to those new to dancing and also as a refresher for everyone to think about and improve their dancing. Due to the response to these sessions further ones have been planned for this term.

However, none of the evenings and events would take place without our valiant band of callers, guest callers and musicians. We are very fortunate to have such a goodly number of competent regular club callers and our special thanks go to Ann, Barbara, Barry, Bernard, Ced, Denise, Jacqueline & Stuart, Jill, Joan, Kim, Lorraine and Nick; also to our guest callers Adrian Besant, Chris Turner, Colin Hume, Hilary Andrews, Jeannie Byron-Williams, John Green, Kevin Prigmore, Marlene Harrison-Jones, Paul Garner and Wendy Harrup. All our callers put in a tremendous amount of hard work, arranging programmes, researching facts about the dances, matching music to the dances, finding dances with a theme – all of which takes hours of preparation to give us such varied and sometimes challenging, but enjoyable and fun evenings.

Our thanks also go to our hard-working musicians. Staplers are very fortunate in having an accomplished in-house band, Derek and Chris and on occasions joined by Michelle and/or

Rachel. They too, spend a lot of time practising, finding the appropriate tunes, not to mention keeping an eye on the dancers and working out how many A's and B's to play – hope you have read Derek's wonderful piece in the latest newsletter. Our particular thanks go to Derek, who has patiently played for us at dance practices as well as for our displays. Our thanks also go to our visiting musicians – The Turnabouts, Barbara Burton, Roger Nicholls (sadly posthumously), Cloudburst and Spring Greens. Live music enhances our evening's enjoyment.

Just before I finish, the committee would like to thank Ann for all her hard work and leadership as Chairman. Ann puts in a lot of energy and thought to keep Staplers alive with new initiatives, calling, including arranging all the Monday night callers and musicians, leading the Monday tuition sessions, organising dance displays, which are very time consuming, and keeping us on track at committee meetings as well as bearing the ultimate responsibility for the club. Thank you Ann.

Of course, Staplers would not exist without you yourselves and so on behalf of the committee thank you for coming, thank you for all your help setting out chairs on a Monday, helping at dances, providing refreshments, your support when we are out dancing in public and your wonderful, entertaining literary contributions to the newsletter about our events.

Dancing is fun and exercises both mind and body. Throughout the year Staplers are also out and about enjoying dancing at festivals such as Eastbourne and Chippenham, other clubs' dances, tea dances, courses, workshops, dance weeks/weekends etc. and a number of Staplers regularly go to the local Unicorn Ceilidhs, Friday Folk and Cambridge Contra. These are open to anybody, whatever level of dancing you are at, so if you are interested or are a little unsure about any of these activities, do ask a committee member and look at the information at the back of the hall, it's free!

Staplers are well-known in the dance world and are thriving. Let's keep it so – so keep coming and bring your friends as we look forward to another year's dancing.