

Staplers' Committee Report 2016 – 2017

As we approach our 60th year and reflect on the events of the past year, Staplers continues to thrive and be as active as ever.

We have continued to hold our 3 public dances during the autumn and winter months. At our first dance, the Anniversary Dance, in October, we welcomed a new caller to Staplers – Ray Goodswen, from Devon. Ray gave us an evening of interesting and varied dances, many unfamiliar, but with his clear and concise calling we danced away to the lively music of Kelly's Eye. It was an enjoyable evening with a good atmosphere.

Our Christmas dance is always well attended. Mark Elvins made a return visit and gave us a mixed programme along with squares and his patter call. He called some challenging dances, but Mark with his 'eye on the ball' and delightful music from the accomplished Deo Volente – what could go wrong! – a wonderful evening.

February saw us back at St. Ippolyts with Colin Hume and the dynamic duo Folkus Pocus. Colin in his indomitable way gave us an eclectic mix of challenging dances or in his words 'more difficult dances' and some less brain taxing. There have been comments that some dances involved too much walking through such as in a 3 couple set, giving each couple a chance for a walk-through – the theory being that there is less likelihood of it going wrong!

Of course, our Monday evenings form the 'backbone' of Staplers when we aim to provide variety, both in the format of the evening as in our Monday 'specials' as well as drawing on our many callers from the club and guest callers. This enables us to enjoy and become familiar with a wide range of dances and music composed from the 17th century to the present day and we have had some memorable evenings.

Significant dates in the calendar give us an opportunity for an evening with a difference. Staplers always like an opportunity to dress up and the ghoulies, ghosts, witches and Dracula were all to be seen on Hallowe'en as Lorraine gave us an excellent evening of dances, which she had meticulously researched with titles associated with Hallowe'en – Witch Hazel, Demons Rant amongst others.

November saw a return visit of Frances Oates, from Cornwall with the Turnabouts. Frances likes dances with a twist and creates a good atmosphere with her clear calling.

December brings us into the Christmas season and to put us in a 'feel good' mode, Denise, Joan, Kim and Ann gave us an evening of dances on the theme of peace, joy, happiness and merriment.

The following week was certainly an evening of merriment as true to tradition, we ended the year with an evening of fun, full of delights and surprises conjured up by Lorraine and Ced in the guise of Mr. & Mrs Claus – what a lot of thought and time they had put into it. A challenging 'pitcherwits' quiz; a poem "The Night Before Christmas"; a great deal of hilarity from our dramatic members with their brilliant performance of a one-act play "A Lighthouse Keeper's Daughter"; an energetic Swedish flirting and snuff-taking dance, Sadala Polka, from Estonia; a humorous interpretation of the "Edith Weston Mummings' Play" – one of the many

versions of this 1.000 year old mummers' play and of course the traditional party game, all interspersed with dances to seasonal, singalong melodies by club callers.

And so to the New Year when about 38 people turned out on a bitterly cold evening as Ced celebrated his birthday calling a selection of his favourite dances.

This year you will frequently have heard mention the name Pat Shaw. This year celebrations have been and are taking place to commemorate the centenary of his birth, his legacy of dances, his research and teaching of folk music, song and dance.

In March we had our own Pat Shaw celebration with Colin Hume and Spring Greens – a superb evening with a good atmosphere and 40+ attending with visitors from near and far swelling the numbers. An energetic evening as we were encouraged 'to dance' dances mostly 3 couple and 4 couple dances as Pat Shaw wrote few longways dances. As our contribution, our Monday evening callers have been asked if they would include a Pat Shaw dance in their programme this year.

April saw us having another fun evening. An "Easter Eggstravaganza" with requested dances chosen by lottery, a monologue "Ruby's Knees", the massed band making their debut, led by Derek, playing for a few dances and a revised version of a Pace Egging song. We welcomed Phil and Daksha from Rainmakers as they shared their birthday celebration with us. Jill and Phil danced in 'Strictly' style as number 139 – the total number of years they had known each other and been dancing.

July saw the end of the season as St. John's with a return of the massed band for a 'Come All Ye' evening.

The pub/barbecue evening is always an annual event. This year held at the end of July. After having to withdraw our arrangement with the Chequers, Stotfold, Ann did stalwart negotiations securing an evening at 'The Cricketers' Weston. Unfortunately after a sunny June and start to July the heavens decided to open. Staplers, never to be deterred by a 'drop of rain' or maybe the fact that pizza had been ordered and Ann emphasising that it would be a pleasant social evening and much to the amazement and bewilderment of the diners in the restaurant, Staplers continued to dance in wet weather gear on a convenient paved area. Joan's calling kept us on the move to music from Chris, Derek and Michelle, fortunately under shelter. Pizza in the restaurant was much appreciated and a friendly occasion with time to chat.

Our garden evenings continue to prove popular and are always very sociable and relaxed occasions. We are very grateful to all our hosts for their hospitality. Our thanks go to Gill & Barry in Hitchin and Barry for calling; Jill & Peter Bransby in Gosmore, for whom unfortunately rained again, but kindly let us dance in their conservatory. Thanks to Jill for calling and adapting her programme as people arrived from a Polka Dot for 5 people to a longways for 12. Thank you also to Val & Bernard in Hitchin and Denise and Ann for calling and finally Joan & Chris in Langford, where we enjoyed a combined evening with Fine Companions in the Methodist Church hall, with callers from both clubs.

We are essentially a social dance club, but do aim to improve our dancing. Callers encourage us to think about: listening to the music, how we move, to dance and not necessarily walk

everything, to be aware of our partner and others in the set. With a little effort and attention to detail helps us to enjoy our dancing all the more. – encouraging that ‘feel good factor’.

Due to their success, Ann has continued to provide further tuition sessions on a Monday evening, which have been helpful to newcomers and as revision to the more experienced dancers.

Practising for displays is a good discipline and again we have been invited to give a number of displays, not all of which we have been able to honour. This year we have entertained Letchworth Garden City Ladies group, the Bethany and Christchurch Lunch Clubs in Hitchin on 2 occasions and Ann gave a talk with demonstrations by a few of us for the Letchworth 50+ group – though we did outnumber the audience! However, all our displays have been well received and appreciated.

Again we participated in the ‘Hitchin Festival Buskers’ Day’ in July, though unfortunately heavy showers interrupted our performance several times. Thank you to Denise for organising this display.

In August Benslow held a “John Playford in the 21st Century” course for musicians and to give them practice at playing for ‘real’ dancers’ a number of Staplers obliged at Benslow’s request.

Throughout the year club members have enjoyed extending their dancing at folk festivals, tea dances, workshops, dance weeks/weekends, events/dances run by other clubs – locally Unicorn Ceilidhs, Cambridge contra, Friday Folk – do look at the literature, on the table or speak to any committee member if you are interested and would like to know more about any the events.

Our Monday evenings would not be so enjoyable without a great group of club and guest callers and bands. We are indebted to all of them for all their hard work, time, effort and research to give us such varied and special evenings, sometimes with a particular theme, but each bringing a diversity of styles, tempo, pace, formation and maybe an unexpected twist in their choice of dances and music.

Our thanks go to all our club callers, Ann & Denise, who made their debut working with a live band, Barbara, Barry, Bernard, Colin, Jacqueline & Stuart, who gave us a fun evening of dances from the other side of the pond on Independence Day, Jill, Joan, Nick Plum, Lorraine and of course Ced, who is greatly missed. Sadly we weren’t to know that the evening he and Lorraine called, introducing us to a new band Carousel from Stevenage, would be his last as ill-health took over. The great number of people, from the dance world, who attended his memorial service certainly showed how highly he was regarded. A very talented and skilled person with a quirky sense of humour and will be remembered for his valuable contribution to Staplers as a club member and committee member and, not to mention as a caller and the wonderful, fun special evenings that he, with Lorraine must have spent many hours organising.

An evening in Ced’s memory will be held at some time in the New Year.

Our thanks also go to our guest callers, Adrian Besant, who, in January, paid tribute to Roger Nicholls with a lovely programme of dances to Roger’s playing, the Orange & Blue and including dances and music, which Roger had composed; Bob Lilley, who shared an evening

with David Capron, new caller to Staplers, Ken Judd, another new caller, Frances Oates, Kevin Prigmore, Jeannie Byron Williams, Marlene Harrison-Jones and John Green all making return visits.

Music is an essential part of the evening and to dance to live music is always a bonus. We are very fortunate to have our own in-house musicians – Derek and Chris, who are, on occasions joined by Michelle or Rachel. We have also welcomed Carousel, Spring Greens, the Turnabouts, Cloudburst or the duo Adrian & Martin, who are adept at multi-tasking – dancing and playing Dorset Four Hand Reel simultaneously. Our sincere thanks to all of them for their hard work and enjoyment they bring to our evenings. A special thank you to Derek, who has played for our dance displays and patiently played for practices, when he is very accommodating as he can stop, start, change speed at Ann's request – much easier than using a CD.

Well, Staplers would not be without you yourselves, so on behalf of the committee thank you for all your help on a Monday with chairs amplification equipment, help at dances, providing delicious refreshments at special events, your support when we dance in public and entering into all our activities with enthusiasm.

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

Dancing is good exercise, therapeutic and it's fun, friendly and, though not quite free, good for the price

We now look forward to a new season of dancing and celebrating our 60th year for which preparations are in hand for a number of special events.

We are thriving at a time when clubs are sadly closing, but we need you to keep us alive – keep coming, bring friends and spread the word.