

HOOK

Focus

80 pence

The Hook Village Magazine

Hook Scottish Country Dance Club



Fun Fitness and Friendship
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March **2018**



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Fun Fitness and Friendship



Won't You Join The Dance?

"Won't You Join The Dance?" is the title of a book written by Jean C Milligan, Co-Founder of the Royal Scottish Country Dance Society (RSCDS). The Society is dedicated to promoting Scottish Country Dance. It is a worldwide organisation, not limited to Scotland, or to Scots. At the Hook Scottish Country Dance Club, we have dancers who originally come from the USA, Finland, Ireland, England and even from Scotland.

My introduction to Scottish Country Dancing was in 2004, when I spent a holiday at Marlborough College Summer School. After five mornings spent dancing reels and jigs, I was hooked. I enquired about a group near my home that I might join, and was put in touch with the Hook Scottish Country Dance Club, and the rest, as they say, is history.

When I started, the club met on Wednesday evenings at the old Elizabeth Hall. During that time we were joined by two young Polish girls who were working as au pairs in the area. Their enthusiasm was contagious. They adored the dance Postie's Jig, and were so quick to pick up the basics of Scottish Country Dancing despite language problems. We took them to one of the Apprentice Dances at Fleet, for which they wore specially made tartan trews. We were very sad when they returned home after 1 year.



In 2008, we moved to the new Elizabeth Hall. Kate Blackman our Chairman and long-time stalwart of the club, was closely involved with the development of the new hall. We were one of the groups chosen to take part in the opening ceremony, performed by HRH Prince Edward, Earl of Wessex on 28th November 2008.

After our demonstration dance the Prince commented that, the music sounded more Tyrolean than Scottish. Our riposte; - that's because the dance is called Trip to Bavaria. We subsequently performed Mairi's Wedding, a more traditional dance.

Over time our numbers reduced, due to age, infirmity, and members moving away from the area, such that we decided to

move to a smaller venue, the Newnham Village Hall. From September 2014, we also changed our weekly dance evening to a Thursday. I began helping Kate with the organisation of the evenings. As a result of an article about her own dancing experiences published in this magazine we found ourselves overwhelmed with ten new dancers, all beginners. For a while, Thursday evenings were chaotic, to say the least. We all persevered with good humour.

The experienced dancers helping the newcomers. Today, four out of the ten are regular attendees. Sadly, many of the male dancers have dropped by the wayside. We have also lost Kate. Her untimely death in the summer of 2016 left us determined to carry on the club that meant so much to her.



Our website has proved a success in recruiting new members, some beginners and some more experienced dancers. We are not a teaching class, but we are happy to take complete beginners and show them the basics so that they can quickly join in with the dancing.



Scottish Country Dancing requires good teamwork, as more than one couple are involved in dancing a formation. Each dancer has his or her part in an overall pattern, and each couple take a turn as a "dancing couple" with the others in supporting roles. Dancing to a predetermined pattern is far easier than negotiating a path through a crowded ballroom. Men aren't required to lead, and ladies don't have to dance backwards in high heeled shoes.

Research has shown the value of dancing towards improving physical and mental wellbeing. Seeing the smiling faces and hearing the laughter and chatter at the end of an evening leaves me in no doubt as to the benefits. Scottish Country Dancing exercises the body and the brain. In 2004 when I started dancing, I was amazed at how out of breath I became, whilst dancers much older than myself, just took it in their stride. It is an enjoyable way to get fitter, far more enjoyable than the repetitive exercise regime of a gym, and much less expensive.



From Our Members

Maggie: 11 years ago I was persuaded to take up Scottish Country Dancing. It was something I had never done before, but I wanted to take up something that was active and would also be fun. It has proven to be both those things and a lot more. As well as getting the heart rate going, it's very good exercise for the brain as you do need to concentrate on what you should be doing next. Even so, we all often forget what we should be doing, but it all adds to the fun as we end up in a confused heap. I have made many friends and I look forward to my Thursday evenings amongst other like-minded people.

Catrina: My parents were keen Scottish dancers, at the Fleet, Camberley and Farnham branches. From the age of about 6, I was taken along. In my teenage years, I also went to the classes taken by Mrs Lashley at Calthorpe School. It was very sociable as there were several "daughters of dancers" all around the same age, but when I left for University, my dancing days stopped. Moving on 35 years, I wanted to get fitter, and I realised that I quite missed Scottish Dancing, so I found the Hook club, and joined up. At first, it was difficult, because, although I remembered the steps, I found it tiring and I couldn't remember a dance from one end to the other! Now, some 5 years later it has become much easier. Scottish Dancing is good physical exercise, keeps the mind active, and is an activity that you can attend on your own, as we all dance with each other. We do try to get dances right, but we laugh a lot when we don't!

Colin: There are RSCDS Branches in all sorts of places, mostly in English-speaking countries such as the Commonwealth and the US, and including Moscow [founded 2005, 43 members] and Tokyo (founded 1984, 228 members). If visiting another country you can contact the local secretary and see if there is an event that you can attend. I have done this in Singapore when on holiday there.

Marion: I first danced at primary school in Edinburgh. In later life having moved to the Hook area, I was encouraged to join the club. At that time, the dancing was on a Wednesday evening, which clashed with my Badminton. However, the change to a Thursday has enabled me to take up dancing again.

Freddie: I started dancing with my husband over 50 years ago, at an evening class in Lewisham. The very strict teacher insisted that we first learn the steps and formations. It was only after the first half term that she judged us proficient enough to join in the dances.

I'm glad to say that times have changed and here at Hook, we try to get new members dancing on their first evening. Miss Milligan was of the opinion that technique was more important than formations. In her book she states: 'All Scottish steps require strength, agility and endurance, with the addition of much grace and poise.' Much as we aspire to her ideals, we are not deterred from enjoying the dancing by our imperfect mastery of technique.

As far as I can ascertain, the club has been in existence for about 50 years, and I hope it will continue for at least another 50. To do this, there will always be the need to recruit new dancers regardless of age or experience and particularly to encourage more men to join us.

What more is there to say?

Get Hooked on Scottish Country Dancing.

Hook Scottish Country Dance Club meets at the Newnham Village Hall on Thursdays, from 7.30pm to 9.30pm. Beginners are welcome and partners are not necessary. Dress is informal; just bring some flexible soled flat shoes for dancing. For more details, contact us by email or through our website.

Valerie Gardner

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