

# Nottingham Folk Dance Group

## Chairman's Report March 2021

Last year I started my AGM report by saying that unusual things had happened, meaning the asbestos causing us to move out of the hall at Lambley and how it dragged on for months with us having to use a different kitchen. Those problems pale into insignificance when compared with the things we have all had to deal with during 2020.

We were about to have our 2020 AGM when the virus seemed to be getting worse across the country and we cancelled the evening and put all of our reports on to the website. Here we go again!

2020 started off well with the usual first meeting of the year followed by the excitement of Mildred's 90<sup>th</sup> birthday party, when we had her favourite caller friend from Yorkshire, and some lovely dances, followed by cake and Mildred becoming an honorary member. We planned and held a dance in February. We supported Lauren and Josh in their endeavours for IVFDF Nottingham also in February.

The news in the media began to get worrying and so we decided to cancel meetings for a while. Everyone had been good about washing hands on our last evening, and we hoped that it would all be ok by Easter.

Malcolm and I as well as Victoria and Dave 'attended' a virtual dance evening held by a group in Sheffield, which was alright.... although it seemed a bit strange as we didn't know many people and there were a few problems with the quality of the sound. The four of us thought that NFDG could perhaps do something similar and we had a trial run with just the four of us. As Dave could play his accordion for Victoria there were no problems with zoom delays etc and we decided to launch it for our club members.

Meanwhile I had decided that as we are such a great friendly bunch of people that I would send out an email letter to NFDG members to help people to keep in touch. At first it was done by bcc emails, (if I remembered to bcc) and just when I had some news regarding the situation. Then Malcolm found out about sending newsletters in a safer way and the weekly newsletter you are all familiar with began. The newsletters included the link for the zoom meetings. I have relied on contributions from many of you especially Val, for which I am very grateful. We had to adjust the settings a few times because we began to

exceed the number of emails allowed to be sent out per hour when our numbers grew!

It was hard work adapting dances for home use and soon it became obvious that it would be good if we could use CDs and other callers. Gradually more callers asked if they could do a dance or two. Word got around to people not in NFDG and they asked to join us. Some of them are also callers and I asked them if they would like to contribute. Sessions with Malcolm, Victoria and others were held to iron out computer and technical problems. We now have 11 callers, each doing half an evening on a rota. Malcolm started to add information to the website and we have an open invitation to anyone who finds us by web searches to 'come along'. So, we now have visitors from all over England but also France, California and Canada. We usually have about 36 screens with over 50 dancers. Many of them are not from NFDG and many of our members don't join us. They are missing a good evening with music and chat even if they can't dance. It's hard to dance on carpet or on your own or with very little space or even all three, so we understand.

A word about Zoom- something most of us had not heard of at this time last year. What a great innovation it has proved to be. There have been improvements and tweaks made along the way, as well as changes that made things worse and which were reversed. We have learned how to mute ourselves and what 'break out rooms' are. We also discovered that when a new PlayStation was launched our evening was interrupted by poor internet connections and that sometimes echoes can wreak havoc. But overall, it has been a necessity for our continued get togethers.

In the summer I made enquiries of several places about the idea that we could dance outside in accordance with the COVID-19 rules at the time. I found out that Kelham Hall just outside of Newark were more than willing to let us dance there and after we visited for a reccie we found a large tarmac area, picnic tables and the car parking only cost £3. We had some Tuesday evening dances but when the evenings began to draw in, we had a few Sunday afternoon dances. It was wonderful to see people again. Malcolm set up a battery powered speaker and ran the music from his computer to it. The sound was pretty good. We continued to do the dances which had been devised for dancing at home so we didn't interact with anyone from outside our home. Malcolm, Victoria, Lauren and Josh all called.

We cancelled our Ball to be held in April and then the September contra dance, with reluctance. However, when it came to November, we decided that we would be able to do a Zoom dance. (See Secretary's report)

In July we had our summer party with special acts including the world premier of Lauren playing her accordion, which she had recently begun to learn. As the party was such a success, we had our Christmas party via Zoom. Another success. As none of us had anywhere to go we even had a session between Christmas and New Year.

We await the government pronouncements about the pandemic, and the jabs in our arms with eagerness and I hope that we will be dancing back at Lambley within a few months.

Helen Jowett