

Foot N Fiddle

When Pete Sansom opened Foot N Fiddle on 22nd February 1954 he little realised that he was creating an institution that would last 43 years. Square dancing in the Southall area was nothing new. Southall Squares, under Charlie Hurkitt, had operated there since 1949. With Pete at the helm, the new club gained instant popularity. For the club to be complete however, it needed a band. On May 10th 1954 the Foot N Fiddle band under Stan Symmons exploded onto the square dance scene. The Southall community centre was packed that Monday evening. In addition to Pete, there was a whole host of guest callers and the atmosphere was electric. It was a great and memorable evening.

Throughout the summer of 1954 the club continued to prosper. There was another very successful dance on 13th September and the club finished the year on a very high note with a fabulous Christmas party.

1955 saw the club making great strides. Numbers increased and there was one very large bonus: international caller, Cal Golden, who was stationed in England with the USAF, lived in close proximity to Southall. Cal enjoyed enormous popularity and he and his wife were regular visitors to Foot N Fiddle.

Through the middle years of the fifties Foot N Fiddle continued to enjoy enormous success. Pete Sansom was one of the country's most popular young callers and with the Foot N Fiddle band now well and truly established, Monday club nights were often as popular as some of the Saturday night jamborees.

Many of the most popular callers of the day, Jimmy Morris, Jack Unwin, Wally Spratt etc. were regular visitors. By 1957 however, change was in the air. Pete Sansom, already involved with Circle & Swing and the plans for the 1957 winter festival, was also planning his wedding and making preparations for his planned departure to the States. It was time to groom his successor, or, in this case, successors. The successors were to become three of the country's most popular callers — Robin Rumble, John Smith and Tim Fitter.

In 1956 Foot N Fiddle changed their club night from Monday to Wednesday and a beginners' course dramatically increased the numbers.

1957 was a very successful year for Foot N Fiddle. In addition to a number of successful dances, the club won first prize at a carnival. The Foot N Fiddle band, by now recognized as one of the top square dance bands in the country, also enjoyed a highly successful year. In addition to club nights, they provided the music for the Welcome to Bob Osgood dance, and the Circle & Swing's winter square dance festival.

1958 was a memorable year for Foot N Fiddle. On Saturday, June 7th, a dance was held at the Albany Street Drill Hall, with Pete calling to the Foot N Fiddle band. Without doubt however, the highlight was the wedding of Pete to his fiancée, June Griffin. Although it involved the club, this was, of course, far more than just a club celebration. It was the square dance wedding of the year, and was a great and memorable

occasion. It also brought to an end an era, as the next day, June and Pete left for the States, where they live to this day. Foot N Fiddle was under new management.

With the departure of Pete and June Sansom to the USA in September 1958 Foot N Fiddle was now in the very capable hands of Robin Rumble, John Smith and Tim Fitter.

The long hot summer of 1959 was a very busy one for Foot N Fiddle, as demonstration teams were much in demand. In the Southall carnival that year the club won 2nd prize in their class. 1959 was also a busy year for Foot N Fiddle's three callers. Tim Fitter ran a club at Wraysbury near Staines, while John Smith and Robin Rumble were on the calling programme at both the Labour Day Round Up at Wiesbaden in September and also at the Paris Round Up in November.

Into the sixties and the club continued to thrive. Robin Rumble ran a beginners' club on Tuesdays, from which dancers graduated to the main club on Wednesdays, and the Foot N Fiddle band continued to be in great demand.

In the summer of 1961 the band, together with Robin Rumble and two squares of dancers, went to the Teddington branch of the Cheshire Homes Organisation. The dancers gave a demonstration and such was the enthusiasm of the watchers, that when Robin asked for volunteers, all those that were able crowded on to the floor. The evening was so successful that when the cars arrived to take the people home nobody wanted to leave. The organiser agreed to an extension, but, inevitably, of course, the evening ended and another event in this club's history came to a highly successful conclusion.

Square dancing, by its very nature, is one of the greatest marriage and friendship bureaus. Over the years hundreds of couples have met and married through the medium of square dancing. Foot N Fiddle can certainly claim its fair share. In March 1962 the late Bernie Goold and his fiancée Judy married. This was in fact, a club romance, as Bernie, one of the founder members of Foot N Fiddle, met Judy at the club.

Throughout the sixties, Foot N Fiddle continued to thrive. In 1964, the club celebrated its 10th birthday. The first decade had been momentous. From its early beginnings in the back room of a Southall club, Foot N Fiddle had risen to become one of the country's top clubs. Without doubt, the first ten years had been ten very eventful years. The club's future was bright.

The 2nd decade saw the club continue to go from strength to strength. As is always the case in this ever changing world, Foot n Fiddle experienced change. Tim Fitter left the club, and after a while faded into complete obscurity. The club's other two callers, John Smith and Robin Rumble, also became involved with other clubs, Robin with Bushey Hoedowners and Lucky Cloverleaf, and John with 6T8. Foot n Fiddle however, was still very much in their capable hands, and throughout the seventies the club flourished.

The seventies opened on a very high note for the club, with the wedding, on 25th April 1970, of Anne Round and Robin Rumble. There was a pre-wedding dance at Acton Town Hall on April 4th 1970. The dance was by open invitation, and something like 500 plus dancers turned out to wish this very popular couple every happiness in their married life. It was a great and memorable evening in the club's history. Another very interesting evening occurred in May 1971, when the club attended a square dance on ice. While I understand that there were some budding Torvill and Deans, it was more a case of hands, knees and bumps a daisy. Nonetheless, great fun.

The history of Foot n Fiddle spans a great number of years, 43 to be precise. As with Circle & Swing, I must inevitably skip over a large part. From 1971, we jump forward four years. In 1975, Pete Sansom and his lovely wife and daughter visited England. A dance was laid on at Vyners School, Ickenham. Pete, as always, in great form, kept the dancers on their toes with a top class display of calling. 1979 was a year of great significance for Foot N Fiddle, for it marked the 25th anniversary of this great club. The anniversary in May 1979 was marked by a highly successful dance, and the club could look back on 25 highly successful years. Moving into the eighties, the club continued to flourish. The club's two callers, Robin Rumble and John Smith were at their peak, enjoying immense popularity. There were a number of successful functions in 1980, one of which was a coach trip to Littlehampton. A raffle was held on the coach and also a competition to guess the exact time of arrival. Littlehampton sports a funfair, which proved very popular. There was a picnic on a windswept beach, and of course, a square dance to round off a very successful day.

With a quarter of a century behind them and the eighties off to a flying start, the club's future continued to look bright.

Throughout the eighties, Foot n Fiddle continued to flourish. By the mid eighties, however, the ever blowing wind of change was again making itself felt. John Smith's work was taking him to the West Country with more and more frequency. Eventually, John and Hilda decided to move to Dorset, where they still live to this day. This left the club in the very capable hands of Robin Rumble. Unfortunately, Robin himself was experiencing health problems. As the club moved into the nineties, game as he was to continue, he was forced to retire. The club continued with a new caller, Ian Morgan, and also, Dereck Crisp.

By the mid nineties, unfortunately, this great club was in decline. I am reliably informed that, at times, they struggled to get a set. A far cry from the great days of the fifties and sixties and even beyond. After much debate, it was finally decided to close the club. The final night was on Wednesday, March 26th, 1997. Instead of an ordinary club night, a party was held. Although those who attended had a great night, it was a sad end to a truly great club.

In its heyday Foot n Fiddle was one of the country's greatest clubs. Aply supported by Stan Symmonds and the Foot n Fiddle band, many great callers came to the club to give the dancers many memorable and

enjoyable evenings. In addition to BAASDC callers, many famous international callers visited. Cal Golden, Mildred Buhler, B.P. Merritt, Lucky Beason, Major Moose Holland etc. and of course, the Foot n Fiddle callers themselves. In addition to Ian Morgan and Dereck Crisp, who called for the club in its final years, there was, of course, the club's founder Pete Sansom and that indomitable trio, Robin Rumble, John Smith and Tim Fitter.

It is always sad to see a great club close its doors in finality, but if one thinks about it, that's life. A club is born, it has its heyday and dies, but the memories last forever.

Tony Pears
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