

Lazy River

In 1997, Lazy River square dance club celebrated their 50th birthday. At the same time, they also celebrated 50 years of square dancing in the Southwick-Shoreham area.

The Southwick Community Centre, founded in 1945, hosted a number of events, one of which was barn dancing. Taking a very keen interest in the barn dancing was a young boy who was later to become caller for Southwick square dance club and, at a still later date, caller for Lazy River which the Southwick club became.

On Whit bank holiday Monday in 1955 John Chatfield held what was billed as his first public dance. It was at this dance that John met up with a young man who was also to make a name for himself as a caller, Gordon Brooks. Like most young men in those days John had to do his national service. On leaving the air force in 1958, he ran monthly dances at the Red Triangle in Southwick. Gordon Brooks was a regular guest caller. John later made contact with BAASDC after meeting with Tommy Cavanagh and Viv Canon. Following this meeting the newly formed Southwick club became a member of the Association in the early sixties with John as caller.

It was in the summer of 1962 that I first met Gordon Brooks at a callers club meeting. I moved to Brighton in October 1962 at which time, Gordon ran a club at the RNA building on Brighton seafront. Gordon very kindly invited me to guest call there on a fairly regular basis.

In 1965 John Chatfield, due to work commitments, was unable to continue as caller, so Gordon Brooks took over. That same year the club moved to Shoreham, where it is located to this day. It was at this time that a change of name was decided upon. With the club now located at Shoreham it seemed inappropriate to retain the name of Southwick Square Dance Club. Club member, Janet Ferrigno, produced a very interesting booklet at the time of the club's golden jubilee celebrations. In it she states that her young son (3 years old in 1965) always accompanied his parents to dances and demonstrations. A popular call of the day was set to the tune of Up a Lazy River. The little lad asked his parents "Are we going up a lazy river?" and the name stuck. As the river runs through Shoreham it was decided that it was a very apt name so Lazy River it became.

Although I had visited the Southwick club on a number of occasions, I didn't actually visit the Shoreham club until very late in 1965. Present club secretary, Jim Shrimpton and I worked together at the time and it was Jim that persuaded me to visit Shoreham. I became a member on 1st January, 1966, and retained membership for almost 4 years. One of the first major events held by the club was the Seaside Swing Thru, held in collaboration with Rocking 8s of Hillingdon. The event, held at St Mary's Hall,

Shoreham, on Saturday, June 18th, 1966, was a huge success.

Christmas 1966 saw the club celebrate in style with an event described as an arresting evening at Brighton Police HQ. Club members gave a demonstration and quickly had everybody joining in. In addition to this the club held their own highly successful Christmas Party.

1967 was another highly successful year as the club continued to go from strength to strength. The annual Seaside Swing Thru was held in June, with Al Green as guest caller. Unfortunately the club suffered a major setback in 1967 when Gordon Brooks resigned as club caller, although he was often around to help out Lazy River continued to dance to called records and reel to reel tapes. The Seaside Swing Thru had, by now, become an annual event and in 1968, Robin Rumble was invited to call the event. At that time Robin was at the height of his career and the dance was a huge success.

The club continued without a regular caller until January 1969, when I was invited to take over the reins. I was more than happy to accept, and continued as caller for a year, until other commitments forced my resignation. 1969 was a busy and successful year for the club. In March they held their annual dinner and dance and in the same month attended the Association dance at Wandsworth.

The annual Seaside Swing Thru held on June 14th, 1969 had originally been planned with Tommy Cavanagh doing the calling. In the event Tommy was unable to accept and Ron Vizard was hired, with Gordon Brooks and myself giving support. The evening was a great success.

Sunday, August 10th saw the club take a river trip to Beaulieu. On Saturday, October 4th I performed my last dance as club caller. My forthcoming wedding and the fact that we were moving away from the area necessitated my resignation as club caller. Following my resignation Lazy River drifted loosely for a while, dancing to (called) records and tapes. In March 1970, Gordon Brooks returned as club caller, calling on alternative weeks. The club, at this time, was experiencing difficulties as membership had slumped to 23.

In 1971 it was decided to move to another hall in Shoreham, and to meet only once a month. On July 29th, 1972, Gordon Brooks achieved a record, calling a mixture of patter and singing calls non stop for 100 minutes. It was a marathon effort and £156 was raised for leukaemia research. Gordon was mentioned on the local Brighton radio station and on Radio 2.

By 1973 Gordon was much in demand as a barn dance caller, and called frequently at Butlin Holiday Camps. This necessitated his resignation as club caller. The club carried on dancing to (called) records.

In 1976 Keith Lovegrove joined Lazy River and became club caller for a while. The club also moved to

Shoreham Community Centre where they remain to this day. In 1980 former Southern Star members, Rose and Ted Rogers, retired to Sussex. They joined Lazy River and Ted became caller. In 1983 Rose and Ted were joined in retirement by two other former Southern Star members, Queenie and Jack Higgins, who also became club members and Jack was also invited to call.

The eighties were an up and down time for Lazy River. At its lowest ebb membership slumped to 8 members. In 1983 Janet and Terry Bartlett joined the club and they took over the running of the club in 1987. In the mid-eighties, Eileen and Robert Hurst joined Lazy River. Robert later became and remains the club caller to this day.

In the mid-eighties the club's revival received a great boost by the return of a number of former club members, including Janet and Ray Ferigno, and Janice and Jim Shrimpton. They returned to the club after meeting up at a charity dance, organised by Gordon Brooks's first wife, Brenda. At the time Brenda was very ill with cancer. The dance was organised to raise funds for St Barnabas Hospice, where Brenda was being cared for. The event raised £1,200. Sadly, Brenda died shortly afterwards.

Lazy River received a boost in the mid eighties, by the formation of Worthing Squares, who gave their support on club nights, and at Saturday dances. During its long history, the club has had a number of callers at the helm. One very popular young caller who started his career there was Les Lansley, who later became caller for Sunny Allemanders at Broadbridge Heath in Sussex.

As with all clubs with a very long history, it is not possible to write the history in full. Much of it has to be glossed over.

On 11th October, Lazy River SDC had two celebrations in one. First and foremost was the club's 50th birthday celebrations and secondly it was a celebration of 50 years of square dancing in the Southwick, Shoreham area.

The day in question was, unfortunately, very wet but that did nothing to dampen the spirits of the 275 dancers that attended. The afternoon session of dancing was opened by Neil Whiston and Lazy River caller, Robert Hurst. Dancing was in two halls, and dancers had the choice of AI, plus, mainstream, and rounds, which were cued by Ron Yard and Eileen Hurst. Other guest callers included Keith Lovegrove, John Killeby, Haydn Hammond and Sally Osborne. The event was covered by the local press and television. The day was broken up with a buffet dinner at 5.30 pm during which everybody was presented with a commemorative bone china mug. The mug was inscribed with a Lazy River Golden Jubilee emblem.

The evening session of dancing commenced at 7.30 pm. The evening went with a swing, the highlight of which was the introduction of Lazy River's original two

callers, John Chatfield and Gordon Brooks. Dancers were taken back to the fifties, with the calls of Red Wing and one of the most popular of all fifties dances, I Wanna Say Hello. This great and memorable evening was brought to an end with Neil Whiston and Robert Hurst calling the last tip.

Veronica and I had received an invitation, and unfortunately it was not possible for us to attend, but we were certainly there in spirit. It was a great disappointment to have to miss such an important event of a club that had played an important role in our lives. Although we were absent the club very kindly sent us a mug, which has pride of place among our square dance souvenirs.

During its long history Lazy River has been fortunate in having had a long line of very capable callers, some of whom are sadly no longer with us. In the current caller, Robert Hurst, they have one of the finest young callers in the country. Robert is, I understand, researching the history of square dancing. I have no doubt that when it is completed, it will make for very interesting reading.

This year marks this great club's 60th anniversary, and I have no doubt that will continue to flourish for many years to come.

Tony Pears
Feb – Apr 2007

My thanks to club secretary, Jim Shrimpton, for the help he has given me in producing these articles. In particular, I would like to thank club member Janet Ferringo. Janet produced a very informative booklet, giving a potted history of Lazy River. Besides my own personal memories, and with Janet's permission, I have used her booklet as a very useful source of information in writing these articles on Lazy River. Thanks Janet.