

Newton 8 SDC

Opened by Jim Lees in 1952, by 1955, Newton 8 had grown to become one of the country's leading clubs. 1955 was that rarity, the long hot summer. Newton 8 took full advantage of the weather, taking square dancing into the parks and various open air venues. Their stated intention was that they were not giving shows, but holding dances. It proved to be a very effective way of gaining new club members.

Throughout 1955 the club continued to thrive, with both Jim Lees and Alan Sherriffs becoming two of the most popular callers and leaders in the country.

The club's Christmas party that year was delayed until January 1956, the reason being that Jim and other club members had been laid low with flu. The party, when it came, proved well worth the wait. Fun and games were the order of the day with musical chairs (or should that be musical squares) and club members acting out nursery rhymes. Jim Lees, ably supported by Alan Sherriffs, Huw Sprig and other guest callers, gave the dancers a great evening's dancing with the accent very definitely on fun.

In May 1956 the club celebrated its fourth birthday. Just over 100 dancers turned out for what proved to be a highly successful evening. A lady by the name of Mrs Faulconbridge of Wollaton (who was said to follow dancers round the city) was invited to cut the beautiful birthday cake, and small gifts were made to the original Newton 8 members present.

Jim Lees introduced an American caller, dressed as Davy Crockett, and the group danced the Davy Crockett round dance. Summing up things during the evening, Jim Lees stated that square dancing in Nottingham was rapidly gaining ground. His two open clubs were rapidly reaching saturation point, and only time prevented him from opening a third.

Today, I understand that square dancing is badly in need of new dancers. Dancers, it has always been said, are the lifeblood of the movement. In 1956, the cry was for callers. Writing in Club News in 1956, Jim Lees stated "The cry is callers, callers, callers. We have the dancers, we have scores of interested folk, just waiting to dance." How times change.

Throughout the fifties, Newton 8 was one of the country's leading clubs and its caller, Jim Lees, was one of the most proficient and popular callers. As we entered the sixties there seemed little to suggest this would change. One of the main events of 1960 occurred on Saturday, February 13th. Relations between London and Nottingham were unfortunately at a very low level at that time. Despite this, there was no lack of London support for this dance, and certainly no lack of warm feeling in the way Jim Lees and the Nottingham dancers received us. One of the highlights of this memorable evening was the introduction of the 'Sheriff of Nottingham' and his lady. It was also stated that Robin Hood sent his

compliments but regretted that he was unable to attend on this occasion. We left the dance hoping that this heralded an era of better relations between London and Nottingham. Unfortunately such was not the case, and relations remained strained for some considerable time to come.

As many people may remember, one of the features of the sixties was the presentation of the friendship barrel to the club considered to be the most deserving of this honour. At the Newton 8 dance on Saturday April 24th, 1965 the barrel was awarded to the Lucky 13 club of Nottingham for having brought with them 29 people. The featured caller at this dance was Al Green, then resident in London. Al was supported by Steve and Eleonor Mathias from the Leicester Gaytimers. Jim Lees called for the first time since February, due to convalescence following an operation. One surprise item during the evening was a 15 minute appearance by Dave Ford and his folk music group. Dave had played in Newton 8's own trio about 3 years previously.

On July 26th 1965, 2 coach loads of dancers from all five Nottingham clubs left for an afternoon at Skegness, followed by an evening dance at the church hall, Winthorpe. Squares were called by Jim Lees and Ron Vizard with our old friend Alan Sherriffs presenting the rounds. Jim Lees retired in the summer of 1966, handing over the reins to a man who was to become another great and very popular caller, Ron Vizard. Ron was very ably assisted by another hugely popular figure (then and now), Alan Sherriffs. The club continued to be known as Newton 8 for a further year until it changed its name to Rainbow Squares.

With the retirement of Jim Lees, there is no doubt that both the Association and Nottingham had lost one of their great driving forces. It was my pleasure and privilege to present Jim in the Hall of Fame series in Let's Square Dance. Sadly Jim died on November 17th 2001, but he left behind a great legacy. One of the great pioneers, his name will ever be linked with Newton 8 SDC.

Tony Pears
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Footnote: My thanks to Alan Sherriffs for help and information which has assisted me greatly in producing this article.