

## **Waggoners (formerly Waggoners '50)**

Opening on Guy Fawkes Night, 1974, Waggoners '50 took its name from the pub that was the venue, and the entry programme that was then referred to as the basic 50 programme. It was formed by Pete and Beryl Skiffins, Eric Curtis and his late wife, Freda. The idea was to enrol only people from outside the square dance movement, and also to introduce Eric to the art of calling.

In November 1980, the club was handed over to a committee to run, and in 1984, the mainstream programme was adopted, and numbers gradually increased. This was helped by an annual beginners' course, which was held in a room adjacent to the main club hall with Eric doing the calling.

Over the years the club introduced social events such as dinners and coach outings. They also introduced dances that were suitable for friends who were not square dancers. This contributed to a very good atmosphere. A Saturday night birthday dance with a mainstream programme, held at Panshanger FC hall in 1982, became an annual feature, and then, a spring dance at basic programme level was added to the club's calendar.

A satellite club, the Oblongs, was formed at Coverack by Margaret Parks and her late husband, David. They retired to Cornwall in 1993. Visits to the club in the autumn have been rewarded by a return visit by the Oblongs in the summer. The club states that they have welcomed dancers from all over the world. They have danced with people who have physical disabilities and use wheelchairs, and also people with learning disabilities. They have even danced in a swimming pool and jacuzzi.

In 1995, the club celebrated its 21st birthday with a very special dance at Panshanger FC hall. Two beginners from the club, Simon and Trudy, became apprentice callers, and eventually went on to form their own club, the Activ 8'S. As an experiment, the club approached a couple of local clubs with the idea of holding a joint dance using club callers, rather than featuring a Saturday night caller. Activ 8'S and Badger Sets agreed to join with Waggoners, the callers being Trudy, Simon, Irene, Alan and Eric, and it was decided to donate the profits from the sales of the tickets to Harefield Hospital. Doubts about how the idea would be received by the dancers were dispelled when ticket sales exceeded 100. It was a great evening, with many experienced dancers commenting that it had been many years since they had enjoyed such a friendly atmosphere. There were numerous requests for a repeat performance, which prompted Eric to ask "Have we found a magic formula?" It would seem that the answer to that, Eric, is yes.

In 2006, Pete Skiffins made the decision to give up calling. Pete has been one of the country's top callers for many years. I remember him at the start of his career as a very young caller at Larry Sherman's Wagon Wheel Club, way back in 1957. I asked to be allowed to feature him in Hall of Fame, but Pete declined. That was his prerogative of course, but I always felt that it was a great pity, as he would have made an excellent subject. With the retirement of Pete, club members, Simon and

Trudy, who had formed the Activ 8'S, were invited to take his place as club callers, while Eric continued to call for the club beginners.

Waggoners celebrate their 33rd birthday this year. I believe that like most clubs today, they have their problems. Hopefully, they will survive for many years to come. Certainly, a warm welcome awaits all who wish to visit or join the club. As secretary, Pat Macdonald once wrote in the magazine "Being a member of Waggoners is fun all the year round, not just on a Monday evening".

Tony Pears  
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