

Wheeler & Dealers SDC of Stoke Mandeville.

It was on Monday, September 20th, 1982, that Alan Covacic and his wife, Terry, founded Wheelers and Dealers S.D.C. The venue was the archery unit at Stoke Mandeville spinal unit. Club nights consisted of student classes for new dancers, with occasional tips for wheelchair patients from the hospital. Some bedridden patients were wheeled from their wards to the archery unit, so that they too could enjoy the dancing. Alan states that because of the active involvement of the club with the spinal unit and the patients who were in wheelchairs, the name Wheelers and Dealers SDC of Stoke Mandeville was decided upon. The club badge was designed to reflect this involvement

The wheel represents the spinal unit and its use of wheelchairs. The playing cards represent the helping hand of square dancers, and the handshake indicates the close relationship between them. Although the club no longer has any direct links with the hospital, the badge serves as a reminder as to how and why the club was founded.

For several years, the club enjoyed a steady period of growth, and a new student class was started every year with varying degrees of success, and club membership also rose year by year. After two years at the hospital, the club decided it was time to move on, and they met at various venues in the Aylesbury area. For a while, they also had two club nights, one for regular club dancers, and the other for new members. Eventually, the club moved to the memorial hall at Wendover, where they are to this day.

The club was also active in other areas. Marathon dances, carnival floats, demos, coach trips to Europe and other activities. All of the things, as Alan says, that 'successful clubs do'. Unfortunately, it was the very success of the club that also caused problems. Alan found that he ran into a problem that has haunted square dancing for decades, that of keeping beginners and more advanced dancers happy. Back in the fifties, when square dancing was in its infancy, an inexperienced dancer could go to a club and join in the dancing. As the movements became more intricate, this became more and more of a problem. Alan states that imbalance was also a problem, there being too many ladies on their own. These various problems resulted in a fall in numbers, and with less people and no new members, club nights became a drag.

At the end of 2001, it was decided to suspend club nights indefinitely, but fortunately, the loyal members of the club refused to let the club die. They decided to continue the successful Sunday afternoon tea dances on a regular basis, and this proved very successful and became a way of life for the club.

In late 2005, Alan felt that the time was right for another attempt to recruit new members, and the club started a Tuesday evening student class. This proved to be a great success. Eleven dancers graduated in October 2006, with a further eight already enrolled in a new class.

With membership increasing and providing plenty of enthusiasm, Alan states that the club is buzzing again, and this time hopes are high that it will continue to be successful for many years. I visited Alan's club about

five years ago, and found it to be a very enjoyable evening. He struck me as being a very pleasant person, and a brilliant caller.

I believe that Alan's great work with the spinal unit of Stoke Mandeville hospital is deserving of the highest commendation. His time there brought a great deal of enjoyment and purpose to the lives of the patients and staff at the hospital. The club is now planning for and looking forward to a European style special, to celebrate their 25th birthday in September 2007. As Alan says "Wheelers and Dealers are back."

Tony Pears
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