

# **SWORD DANCE UNION**

## **Minutes of the annual general meeting of the Sword Dance Union**

**Guildhall Theatre, Derby**

**Saturday 13<sup>th</sup> October 2007**

**In the Chair:** Aubrey O'Brien

### **Teams represented:**

Redcar, Sullivan's, Stone Monkey, Grenoside, Barnsley, Southport, North British, Lamb and Flag, Whip the Cat, Carlisle, Durham University, Kingsmen, Sproughton, Maltby Phoenix, Smutt, Sallyport, Snark, Mabel Gubbins, Sandbeck, Triskele, Gift Rapper, East Saxon, Wype Doles, St Harry's, Ryburn.

**Apologies:** Brian Tasker, Ian Davies, Trefor Owen, Mike Everitt, Ricky Foster, Pete Coe, Chris Cartridge.

The meeting opened at 17.40.

## **I Reports from Officers**

Reports were given by the Chair, Secretary and Treasurer.

### **I.1 Chair – Aubrey O'Brien**

Aubrey welcomed everyone to the meeting, then gave a synopsis of what had been done in the last year. The intention of the SDU was to bring together longsword, rapper and other hilt and point sword dances. The Union was starting to take form but it was slow and had been a struggle, mainly due to the lack of response and feedback from teams. It was also intended to publicise and uplift the image of sword dancing, and to create links to other organisations.

The Union had a good relationship with EFDSS, from who it had obtained four cups and two shields. Aubrey said that he would like there to be a competition in the future for rapper, if people wanted it, although there were already links with DERT.

Some longswords had been found at Cecil Sharp House and Jeff from Southport was trying to get them into a useable condition so they could be made available for use.

Festivals were keen on having sword teams but did not want to hire swords. Aubrey felt this was wrong and that festivals should be willing to pay for swords, in the same way that they hired PA. This was a bigger problem for rapper as they were more likely to break. He had had one break and two sets disappear recently. If the SDU had its own collection of swords, then these could be hired out.

He announced that two people were leaving the SDU committee: Kevin Hall (due to work commitments) and Don Ratcliffe.

## **1.2 Secretary – Phil Heaton**

Phil started by asking for comments on the minutes of the inaugural general meeting (22.10.06). There were none, so they were therefore accepted by the meeting.

He then gave his report on the 'state of the Union'. Chris Cartridge had published two newsletters. He informed the meeting that Paul Davenport would be taking over the SDU website, replacing John Asher. If anyone had any information for the website, they should send it to Paul. He expected the website to be up and running soon.

Risk assessments had been prepared for longsword and rapper, and they had been used for today's event, as the venue had requested them. He thanked Sally Wearing for preparing the risk assessments. He had been asked for risk assessments by the venue today. Ron and Jen Day, and Sue Coe had also been asked for risk assessments for other events. He expected this to happen more and more in the future.

Aubrey commented that Councils were using the requirement for risk assessments as a reason for not allowing teams to dance, so it was important that they were available.

Phil reported that he was working on a best practice document for workshops. Anyone working with children or vulnerable adults needed CRB checks.

He knew that some people did not like sword competitions, however it had always been competitive. Four weeks ago, Wype Doles had been due to pack up, but they had practiced and competed at Derby. He felt that competitions could be hateful but did have a function.

SDU Logo – he had had early ideas from Sally Atkinson and a student at Runshaw College, but the final logo had come from Kevin Hall.

There had been a brilliant donation from Whip the Cat to the SDU, of £578.17, which would be used to buy swords.

There was then a round of applause for Linda Hewing and Whip the Cat.

EFDSS had donated a youth trophy for the longsword competition. The Whitby trophy would be re-designated. The badges on it would be moved to the back. Ian Davies had found the women who had them (in a bag under her bed...) and he was pleased that they were back in use. He was now looking for the Darlington and Durham trophies, although he had no idea what to do with them.

Insurance – he did not know how good the insurance was for workshops at festivals. The insurance organised by the Morris Federation, the Morris Ring and Open Morris was acceptable for normal practices, but it was not clear what the position was for workshops at festivals. This meant that there were lots of uncertainties.

DERT – the SDU was not involved in this per se, but there had been discussion about the judges list in the Nut.

Ron Day said that the SDU could compile a list of independent judges, to help take this burden off the organisers.

Phil said that Jeff from Southport appeared to have it in hand for DERT 2008.

Youth Trust – Phil was trying to apply for money, but it was difficult as it fell into 3 or 4 different categories. Andrew Kennedy was planning to take a bus load of children to the continent for a weekend of dancing/workshops, which would need financing.

Morris Ring – he and Aubrey had been invited to a Ring Meeting, and had spent the day with the Ring Officers, who were good contacts.

Phil said that many morris teams who did longsword were dreadful. The SDU needed to promote excellent performances as had been seen in the competition today.

Andrew Kennedy asked if anything had been done about co-ordinating dates with other organisations to prevent clashes. Phil said that the SDU needed to be involved with the three morris organisations, and that Aubrey had volunteered to do this. The SDU needed good communications to keep informed of what was happening.

Olympic Games London 2012 – Sally Wearing had attended a meeting about this, which was organised by Steve Heap of Folk Arts England. Phil said that there may be a joint venture that only involved morris, but he was intending to get sword included. It was important to show the real tradition.

Ivor Allsop commented that the government wanted to concentrate on children performing at the Games. There had only been one young team here today, but there were a lot more and the SDU needed to include these.

Sue Coe said that she had been unable to get any children's teams to be participate this year, but they were doing more festivals.

Andrew Kennedy said it was OK to take a bus of children to the continent, but events like today were not going to interest 12 year olds. Phil commented that it was important to get them involved.

Public liability – Phil informed the meeting that it was important to carry information on this. Snark had been asked to show this.

Licensing exemption – if licensees didn't realise that sword was exempt from the licensing requirements, there was a certificate available to show this.

Swords from Cecil Sharp House – they were in a bad state. It had taken three journeys to collect them all. The longswords were now with Jeff (Southport) who would restore them. The short rappers (with dolly pegs for handles) had been mounted in a display box.

Lottery – there were lots of problems with getting money because of the Olympics. He was talking to a woman based in Nottingham, but she was only interested in what could be done locally. However, he wanted money to run the organisation.

Medals – Phil wanted to pursue the idea of medals (e.g. for Ricky Foster, Ivor Allsop, Trevor Stone, Mick Atkinson, etc. Life membership of the SDU was not enough. The organisation was getting towards having enough money.

Sword Spectacular – SDU had been asked to contribute. Jeff Lawson was suggesting that the SDU should run the conference. The local library/museum wants a display about sword dancing. Phil was looking for volunteers and got:

- Sue Coe said that she had a small display that included old photographs of Grenoside.
- Ivor offered to provide display materials.
- Grenoside had their old jackets dating back to 1895 and were willing to allow them to be displayed as long as they were looked after well.
- Ron Day offered Tyzack display.
- Trophies.

Andrew Kennedy asked what people wanted to hear about at the conference. Phil recapped on what was included at the last one and asked for volunteers.

Phil said he had been asked by one member why the Beamish museum didn't include anything about sword dancing. Nor was it represented in a colliery museum. This was something that he thought the SDU should try to rectify.

Propping up the tradition:

- 2010 would be the 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Sharp collecting Grenoside and there were plans to hold a celebration, including the other four traditions (including Royal Earsdon, either reformed or represented) in Vol I of the sword dance books.
- Royal Earsdon did not exist now. High Spen had been 'propped' up in the past and it may be possible to do the same for Earsdon, via the Kingsmen.
- If there were any longsword traditions that were going to die, it should be one of the SDU's functions to help keep them going.

### **1.3 Treasurer – Don Ratcliffe**

Don presented the accounts and membership list. He reported that there were 16 teams and 12 individual members. He had found it tough to get money out of people.

His view was that the SDU was intended to bring rapper and longsword to the fore and be a voice for sword dancing, not to provide insurance, which he was against.

He had found it difficult to contact sword teams and was disappointed by the low membership. Some teams had promised to join but had not paid any money. He felt that the Union needed to include other teams, especially longsword.

He was also concerned about the lack of communication within the SDU.

Aubrey commented that they had been able to get money in. Today's event was a major financial commitment. But it was difficult because of the poor response by teams, and at one point it was not certain that it would go ahead. The SDU needed people to be proactive and to evangelise.

## **2 Election of Officers**

### **2.1 Treasurer**

Jenny Day was proposed by Sue Coe and seconded by Chris Davison. She was returned unopposed.

### **2.2 Longsword Technical Officer**

There was some discussion as to what the Longsword Technical Officer did. Aubrey said that it was up to whoever holds the position to decide. Phil said that the SDU needed someone to involve/contact longsword teams.

Don read the responsibilities that were in the constitution.

Richard Bojanowski was returned unopposed.

### **2.3 Other officers**

All the other officers were willing to stand again and were returned unopposed.

## **3 Website & emails**

Paul Davenport was willing to take this over, as John Asher was no longer able to maintain it.

Ron Day said that the rapper.org.uk website was good and he didn't see any need to reinvent the wheel. However, concerns were voiced about when this site was last updated. Don felt that it needed to be kept more up-to-date and that the SDU needed to take ownership of it. Aubrey said that the SDU needed its own website, which must be kept up-to-date.

Phil said that he found it difficult to keep in touch due to changes in email addresses. A sheet was passed round at the meeting to record current email addresses.

## **4 Other business**

### **4.1 Committee**

The Rapper Technical Officer, Chris Cartridge, was reported to be very busy. Phil said that he had asked Linda Hewing to act as Chris's assistant, although the role was unclear. Linda was happy to do this.

### **4.2 Communications**

Ivor Allsop felt that there were negative vibes around, mainly due to the lack of communications. Although this problem was not unique to the SDU – it was the same for the Morris Ring, the Morris Federation and, no doubt, Open Morris. There was not enough communication between people and this needed to be improved. He had about 7,500 longsword and rapper items, but he was only rarely asked for information (about once a month). He had envisaged that the SDU would ask for information. People needed to use the existing lines of communication and talk to each other.

Frank Lee had supplied swords to over 200 teams and had their addresses. He could contact them to find out whether they minded being contacted by the SDU.

Aubrey suggested that Frank should ask new customers whether they minded being contacted. Frank pointed out that a lot of his customers were not involved in any organisation. Aubrey said it was up to the SDU to make the first move.

#### **4.3 Archive**

Ivor informed the meeting that he had put everything that he had on rapper in his archive onto CD. He was now doing the same for longsword. Films were also available on DVD. These were not generally available (i.e. they were not for sale) however if anyone wanted a copy, they should get in touch with him.

### **5 Date of longsword competition and SDU annual general meeting**

These were due to be held on 18<sup>th</sup> October 2008. It would be organised by Sullivan's Sword. However, Sue Coe pointed out that this was the date of a big national ceilidh and she was already booked to do this.

The date was therefore altered to 11<sup>th</sup> October 2008.

**N.B. After the meeting, the date was changed to 4<sup>th</sup> OCTOBER 2008.**

Sue Coe said that she would prefer it to be later in the year. Aubrey suggested that there could be a youth tournament later in the year. Brian (Redcar) said that it was better to include the youth teams in the same competition as adults.

The meeting closed at 19.00.