

Discussion on four-man dances - James Butterworth

Over the last few years we have slowly lost more and more dancers; one at a time due to all sorts of circumstances. Our recruitment of new members hasn't kept up. I believe others are submitting motions around publicity and this is desperately needed. However, recruitment takes time – time to advertise, find people, get them to come along, and then at least six months of practice before most are ready to dance out. In the meantime, we need to survive.

Directly connected, the other thing that's been happening over the last few years is more and more cancelled bookings. Poppleton now seems to have permanently gone to Acorn, and who knows if we'll be invited back to the beer festival. Each cancelled booking is not just a missed opportunity to earn money, it's a missed opportunity to dance out for those who wanted to, to get our name out there, to recruit new members and sends a message that we are unreliable to the event organisers. Having to get seven dancers plus a musician to go ahead with a booking is clearly a limiting factor here.

So, I propose that we adapt as many of our dances as we can to four-man variants, and practice them to performance standards. We may need to be creative as to how we adapt them. We could also look for specific four man dances, which I'm sure exist, as long as they fit within our existing style. If we're successful in doing this, the minimum number to go ahead with a booking would shrink to five dancers plus one musician, giving us much needed breathing room, and the opportunity to go ahead with bookings that would otherwise be cancelled.

To reiterate, this isn't instead of a publicity drive. I don't want the side to shrink and to compromise on the dances we already do. If we have six dancers, this isn't an invitation for two to sit out every time. But it will hopefully give us some flexibility to get out of the current downward spiral, recruit new members and return to healthy numbers in the near future. This is also not necessarily a change that would need to be permanent. Whilst it would probably benefit us to always keep a few four man dances in our back pocket, the goal is to return to a situation where our six-man (and more than six-man) dances are still the standard, and can be reviewed at future AGMs.

James Butterworth