

Huntingdonshire Branch Newsletter

May & June 2019

From our correspondents

Dance and Parkinsons

"I dance with Fenstanton Morris side, I also have Parkinson's Disease.

I have always been musical – a talent inherited from my mother- and have played professionally and semi-professionally for over 40 years. My tastes are quite varied and I have played in many different bands ranging from folk to rock, blues to worship bands and am fortunate to have been able to play a variety of different instruments. In 2009, I was diagnosed with Parkinsons and along with many other people it came as a big blow. Eventually, I began losing my dexterity in my fingers and sadly I had to step down from playing the fiddle and mandolin in an Irish folk band.

Soon after this I read an article by a consultant neurologist, who played in an Irish folk band. One day when playing in a pub, he noticed a man come in who clearly had Parkinson's, and was shaking and very unsteady. After a while the man started to dance to the music and to his amazement the man was completely co-ordinated and perfectly balanced.

He was so intrigued by this that the doctor decided to do some research into it. He discovered that dance could help the brain to compensate somehow – much as some people with a bad stammer can sing perfectly. It is very much to do with the beat and rhythmic movement of the body.

I was fascinated by this and asked the guys in the Irish band if I could come back as a dancer! They didn't take me up on the offer!

However, I talked to my consultant and he confirmed that dance and Tai Chi (which I also do) are very good for people with Parkinson's, helping with balance and co-ordination.

For me, taking up Morris dancing seemed to be an obvious choice with my interest in 'folk' and having played in ceilidh and barn dance bands. So, I took the plunge and joined Fenstanton Morris.

A few months ago, I discovered a Dance for Parkinson's competition organised with Parkinson's UK, asking for videos of individuals with Parkinson's or dance teams with people with Parkinson's in, to be entered into the competition. The purpose was to raise awareness of the condition and also, to demonstrate that it is possible to lead an active life even with Parkinson's and to show how dance could help.

With the side's permission, we took a video of us (me included) and which we entered.

We weren't short listed (no surprise there!) but it made a small contribution to the campaign.

It would be good to be able to say that I am now perfectly co-ordinated and well balanced - but that would raise a few quizzical eyebrows in the side! However, I can say that I have thoroughly enjoyed it and it has increased my confidence a lot".

Jeff Crow

More info:

www.parkinsons.org.uk



Paul Mayhew-Archer: “Laughing at my Parkinson’s”

INTERVIEWS

Author: Joe McAweaney Published: 4 January 2018



*We spoke to British comedy writer Paul Mayhew-Archer, creator of *The Vicar of Dibley* and *My Hero*, about living with Parkinson’s – and why it’s important to see the funny side of the condition*

“To ‘celebrate’ my diagnosis – and the fact I had been given an excuse to eat lots of chocolate – I took my family to Cadbury World. My wife has been trying to wean me off the stuff ever since.” Paul Mayhew-Archer discusses his Parkinson’s with the humour you might expect from somebody who has spent decades writing some of the UK’s most iconic comedy shows, including *The Vicar of Dibley* and *My Hero*.

Paul was diagnosed almost seven years ago, after noticing that his handwriting was getting smaller and his arm had stopped swinging as he walked. He says: “A friend told me their dad had experienced similar symptoms, so that’s when I went to see the neurologist.”

Despite the difficulties of living with the degenerative condition, he says having Parkinson’s has brought some unexpected positives. “At times I feel like it has given me a purpose. For the last 40 years I’ve written jokes to simply make people laugh. Now, by making jokes about Parkinson’s, I can help people deal with the condition.

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“Somewhat strangely, it’s given me a new found confidence. I’ve recently started doing stand-up, which I would never have done if it wasn’t for Parkinson’s. I’d also have never made my documentary – The Funny Side of Parkinson’s.”

In one sketch, he discusses his diagnosis: “When I was first diagnosed, my doctor, who is a lovely man, told me: ‘You seem to find it quite hard to smile’. Well, I thought, maybe that’s because you’ve just told me I have Parkinson’s.” Paul is adamant that laughter is, for him, the first step towards meaningful conversation on the topic. He says: “Laughing at my Parkinson’s has enabled me to start talking about it properly. It’s allowed me to have the kind of conversations that I wish I’d been able to have with my mother, who had cancer throughout my teenage years and died when I was 20.

“We never talked about it, and I didn’t know that she was dying. It’s for this reason that I choose to focus on the non-serious bits of my illness. I want to leave some joyous memories that my family can enjoy long after I’ve gone.” He is keen that others living with Parkinson’s understand why he is humorous about the subject. “People with Parkinson’s seem to enjoy my comedy, which makes me happy. I’d hate for people to think I’m trying to exploit anyone for comedy, because that isn’t the case. I’m getting at the illness.”

Paul recently attended a reception at [10 Downing Street](#) to mark the 200-year anniversary Parkinson’s. It was a significant day for Paul, one which left him feeling excited and inspired.

“I got to meet Billy Connolly, which was a real privilege. But the most amazing part of the day was hearing Parkinson’s campaigner Emma Lawton speak – she’s such an inspiration and an extraordinary woman. She embodies the indomitable spirit that a lot people with Parkinson’s seem to have. She’s also really funny – she could definitely do stand-up comedy!”

With a new romantic comedy in the pipeline, coupled with ambitions for a stand-up show, it’s clear Paul won’t allow anything – not even Parkinson’s – to stop him laughing.



Left-right: Gerald Scarfe, Pamela Stephenson, Billy Connolly, Prime Minister Theresa May, Parkinson’s UK President Jane Asher, Adil Ray, Paul Mayhew-Archer, and Steve Ford, CEO Parkinson’s UK. Image credit: [Parkinson’s UK Flickr](#)

Lead image credit: Parkinson’s UK

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EXERCISE AND THERAPY

Tuesdays 11.00 am at Pilgrim Hall, United Reformed Church, Moore's Walk, St Neots
Chair-based exercise with Gareth.

Alternate Tuesdays 1.00 pm: May 14th, 28th, June 11th, 25th at MS Centre, Mayfield Road, Huntingdon
Singing. A just-for-fun exercise with therapeutic benefit.

Thursdays 1.30 pm at Methodist Church, High Street, Huntingdon
'Love to Move' with Kim or Sarah-Jane.

Fridays 11.00 am, at Crossways, Ramsey Road, St Ives
Chair-based exercise with Becky.

SOCIAL AND SUPPORT

Wednesdays May 1st, June 5th 2.00 pm at Dolphin Hotel, Bridgefoot, St Ives.

Wednesdays May 8th, June 12th 2.00 pm at Rainbow Centre, Stocking Fen Road, Ramsey

Monday May 20th 2.00 pm at Old Market Court, Tebbutts Road, St Neots.

Monday June 17th at 3.00 pm at Waresley Garden Centre, Waresley.

ANNUAL STRAWBERRY TEA, JUNE 17TH

The Strawberry Tea will as usual be at the Waresley Park Garden Centre, 3.00 pm, consisting of scone, strawberries and cream/jam, with bottomless tea/coffee pots. Cost: £5.00 for members, £7.00 for non-members. For catering purpose, names will be collected at the Social meetings, and pre-payment will be appreciated then. If you want to book but can't attend one of the meetings, please get a friend to book you in.

LADYBIRD

A trip on the Great Ouse, starting from Hartford Marina has been booked for 11.00 am to 1.00 pm on Monday July 8th. *Booking is essential as numbers are strictly limited to 20 by the boat's license.*

Early booking is advised and some places have already been taken. There will be no ticket price, but you will be asked for donations during the journey.

Please book by giving your name to David Rudd as soon as possible.

CAMBRIDGESHIRE HEALTHWATCH

An opportunity to have your say.....

Healthwatch wants to hear your views about what your local NHS to help you and your community to stay well, and to improve available support.

Tuesday 30th April, 2.00 to 4.00 pm at Maple .Centre, 6 Oak Drive, Huntingdon PE29 7HN.

Phone Sharon on 0330 3551285

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