



The Essex Tai Chi Academy Newsletter Five, January 2018



As many of you already know, Judy Lee-Fenton won the Maldon District Sports Volunteer of the Year award in October. And here she is receiving her award. Michael Baker Rogers (our co-founder with Mary Dann) would say it's a just reward. Congratulations, Judy, from all of us.

TEN YEARS OF CELEBRATION AT THE ESSEX ACADEMY

The Essex Tai Chi Academy runs classes in Tai Chi, Sabre, Lok Hup Ba Fa and Sword at Birchanger, Black Notley, Burnham-on-Crouch, Cold Norton, Felsted, and Mundon

Essex Tai Chi Academy history

Mary Dann

Essex Tai Chi Academy was founded in October 2008 by myself and Michael Baker-Rogers, both former Instructors with the Taoist Tai Chi Society of Great Britain. We felt we could achieve more in our own development, and could offer more to our students, by leaving the Society. The first class was held at Tolleshunt D'Arcy Village Hall on the evening of Wednesday, 17 October.

After some research, we put feelers out to other groups practising Mr Moy's Tai Chi, notably Dengie Tai Club, and Angus Tai Chi Academy in the UK; the Canadian Tai Chi Academy (CTCA); and Kin San Tai Chi Academy in the Netherlands. These newly emerging clubs had allied themselves under the umbrella of the International Association of Tai Chi and Lok Hup Academies (IATLA), founded by members of CTCA. We applied to join IATLA, and Ben Chung, the Chairman, designed our badge, following closely the design of the other academies. We also decided to use their club colour of golden yellow to show our links with this group. Michael and I bought a 'job lot' of polo shirts from M&S at Freeport, and laboriously stitched on the new badges.

We then visited our new friends in Canada to work together, and it was at this point that we were both formally accredited as IATLA Instructors.

Unfortunately a couple of years later there was a split in the ranks of CTCA and IATLA, and we are no longer members of the latter, though we retain strong links with the former. As a result of this we have been able to run and attend workshops led by experienced Instructors who had worked with Mr Moy. We also had the opportunity to learn the Lok Hup Ba Fa, Sword and Sabre Sets, which we can now offer to our students.

Our next visit to Canada was truly memorable. We spent two weeks staying with Peter Lambiris in Hamilton, practising, mainly lok hup, for many hours every day, often then attending classes in various locations in the evenings. I have to make a special mention here of Doug Nettleton, whose dedication is noteworthy. On several occasions, when Peter was unavailable, he would make the hour-long trip from his house to Peter's, picking us up and driving for another hour to the practice hall. He would work with us all morning, we would break for dim sum, and then spend the afternoon practising again, before making the two hour return trip. Both Peter and Doug freely and willingly imparted their knowledge and experience to us, and I will never forget their kindness. While we were over there, a newly accredited instructor, Nora, was to take her first ever class. Some members may have met here when she was over in 2015, or in Malaga last year.

So not only did she have her own instructor, Peter, in her first class, but Michael and myself as well! Quite a baptism of fire!

Since then, a number of other groups in the UK have emerged and we meet regularly to practise and for workshops and social events. Although all the academies are linked by their wish to make Tai Chi available to all, and to keep true to Mr Moy's form and his vision, they are run totally independently.

The social aspect of the club has always been very important to us, and we have tried to keep a relaxed and friendly approach in our teaching style.

Over the years, various locations were tried out for classes, some being more successful than others. For example, at our first class in Black Notley, no one at all turned up in spite of leafleting and advertising. However we persevered, and this is now one of our best attended classes.

Our membership is now approximately 80 and we have six instructors, with **nine classes in six locations**. In addition, although not members of our Academy, David Woollcott teaches two classes every week at Benton Hall Golf and Country Club, the Continuing class having 10 regular attendees and 14 in a Beginners' class.



Memories

Judy Baker-Rogers

I have been asked to write something for your newsletter, in acknowledgement of the ten-year anniversary of the Academy. I cannot believe that it has been in existence that long and alas, I have difficulty in remembering what I did yesterday, what hope for 2007?

However, I have spent some time thinking about this and find that I'm not without memories and inspiration. I well remember Michael's despair at his Tai Chi experience prior to this and his joy at finding a kindred spirit in Mary with whom he formed the Academy. At last he was achieving what he wanted, from a form of exercise and a philosophy for life in which he believed.

Those of you that I have met, will know that I don't do Tai Chi. That's not to say, as an ex nurse, I don't recognise its health and well-being attributes. My time laden hobbies take me elsewhere. However, I supported Michael in his ambitions and in fact, it could be said that he picked my brains a bit on how to set up an organisation, having done just that with a local quilting group and earlier in my career as a nurse.

Michael, as you know, was a Master Mariner and, years ago, spent weeks at sea. So when he started travelling with the Academy, it felt like old times to me. No way did I feel neglected or left out as he always regaled me with descriptions of how Tai Chi was done in other groups and countries. Very much the outward looking Academy!

I miss him and I'm sure some of you do as well. I will never forget as I rode into the crematorium, on the day of his funeral, the scene before me.... a mass of yellow shirts! That sight lifted my spirits and set the seal on the celebration of his life that followed. And thank you too, for the lovely bench. It's a place I can go and remember.

But this is a joyous occasion! Michael would be so pleased with what all of you have achieved and for keeping very much alive, something in which he totally believed. Congratulations to you all and long may it last!

David Woollcott

In October last year I visited Kew Gardens. While walking around, I noticed a demonstration of basket weaving. Among the trees was a group of about a dozen 'treelings' made from willow in the form of tai chi figures. Note their position and see how well they conform (or otherwise) to our five basic principles. Incidentally, can you recall the principles off the top of your head?



Woody Fox is at:-

www.woodyfoxwillow.co.uk

The 'treelings' are inspired by trees and humankind's interaction with them (and influenced by faeries as well)... There are eight doing Tai Chi. Woody Fox Willow has been a willow sculptor for over 12 years, working to commission as shown here For Kew Gardens' Artful Autumn (now closed). He lives in North Devon.

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My nearly ten years with the Academy

Judy Lee-Fenton

Like many of us my Tai Chi journey started with the Taoists. It was nine years ago when we moved from a houseboat in Burnham to bricks and mortar in Goldhanger that I discovered Michael and Mary at Plantation Hall, Heybridge. Little did I know what a great Tai Chi journey I was embarking on.

For most of my life I have had a leaning towards the esoteric, and in the 1960s I started looking at the physical side by joining a Yoga group. This expanded my ideas into its many facets, from a health viewpoint through to the mental and spiritual aspects. I also joined a group – and stayed with it for 20 years – that studied the Ancient Wisdom, forming lifelong friendships and meeting amazing people. I also studied Aikido, which is a Japanese art using the other person's energy to make the moves, leaving yourself untouched. It was, too, my first introduction to swords – longer than the ones we use in Tai Chi. So another interest in energies and how they work was born.

My first marriage ended in divorce, although he and I have remained good friends. There followed a five-year marriage with a control freak who was manic depressive. I was in one of the lowest ebbs of my life, and it was only when my two sons collected me with a removal van and my ex-husband paid for me to have a small house in Beeleigh Road near to my parents that I managed to escape.

So very grateful was I for the background of the teachings I had received, and the back-up of family and friends, that I began again my journey of development. Following the death of my Father I went on holiday with my Mother to Malta. On the seafront I met an artist painting St Paul's Bay. He was also a sailor (ex-Royal Navy), who had been delivering yachts to different countries and was taking a three-month break in Malta. Well, Mike came back to the UK and we've been married for 22 years. In that time we have lived in many countries, sailing around many of them. We spent three years living on a yacht in the Med, visiting all the islands. Our families frequently flew out to join us. I met a wide variety of people from around the world, discussing the Ancient Wisdom, energies healing, martial arts, and practising Yoga.

One day, after the umpteenth storm, I decided enough was enough and we sold the boat in Majorca. We drove up through Spain and France to Mezeres Lez Clery near Orleans, where we house-sat a chateau for some friends until they sold up a year later. It was here I started writing. Anything that came to mind – our adventures, short stories, factual items on cosmology – selling them to magazines etc.

Then we were back in the UK. My Mother was ill and I became her main carer throughout her long dementia, and at this point I found Tai Chi. I had seen it many times on my travels, but was never long enough in one place to learn about the moves, so I'd read anything I could lay my hands on. Then I found Michael and Mary, both brilliant instructors. They had been trained by the Canadian Tai Chi Academy, who were themselves students of Mr Moy.

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How lucky am I, and so glad they formed the Essex Tai Chi Academy, for I am sure that if I'd carried on in different groups I would never have had the quality of instruction or the chance of attending workshops here and abroad.

Then of course Michael died and we were all in flux for a while. I had the honour of becoming Deputy Chair and was accredited as an instructor – the pleasure this gives is well worth all the work it involves.

A year ago I was diagnosed with head and neck cancer, the source being the left tonsil, which had infected my lymph nodes. I became the owner of a long scar down the left side of my neck when surgeons removed 39 lymph nodes. Then six weeks of radio therapy, wearing mask that resembled a Sarcophagus. I'm now several weeks coming out of it all. Throughout I practised Tai Chi – in hospital wards, the radiotherapy unit, clinics – and talked to anyone who wanted to know about the health benefits, the mental and spiritual strength it endows you with – staff and patients alike. I met people far worse off than me, whose courage inspired me with more strength, and in return I helped those who had moments when everything seemed very dark.

I have come out of this with an every greater conviction that eventually we will be able to control our own health, as we understand the energies, the essences, the chakras, Tai Chi, and our relationship to everything and everyone.

For all this I thank Tai Chi from the bottom of my heart. We don't always appreciate what a gem we have in the Academy, for which we thank our founders in this, our tenth year – Michael Baker-Rogers and Mary Dann.

Many lives, in many days.

From one of our 'oldest' members ...

Jan Bishop

I joined the Academy ten years ago when Mike and Mary held their first class at Heybridge. I think this could make me one of its longest-serving members. At first I only went to Tai Chi, but after a few years progressed to Lok Hup Ba Fa, Sabre and Sword. I now attend three classes a week, and after attending each class I find my body and mind are relaxed and any aches and pains have disappeared. I have attended many workshops over the years, all of which are great fun, and the instructors are very patient at both workshops and classes.

I would say to anyone – think about coming to Tai Chi. Give it a try! I have met some fantastic people and made a lot of friends, as you will.

To one of our 'youngest' ...

Hazel Owen

I was introduced to the Cold Norton Tai Chi class in October 2016 by my dear neighbour Elaine Hampton, a long-time member of the class.

I was diagnosed with osteoporosis approximately ten years ago but slipped through the medical net and was not prescribed a bone-strengthening treatment until I took a tumble a couple of years later. Subsequently, an X-ray of my spine revealed several fractures in the 1–11 section of my neck vertebrae, for which I had a prescription of alendronic acid, colecalciferol and calcium carbonate. Once this treatment had taken effect in my system, exercise was recommended to build my neck, upper chest and shoulder muscles to support my torso. I was keen to retain a better posture, having lost 5" in height! The NHS physiotherapists provided me with a comprehensive set of exercises to practise each day and also recommended I join a Tai Chi class. Unfortunately, because of work and grand-daughter care commitments I was not able to take advantage of classes until last year.

I was welcomed very warmly to the Cold Norton class, and although I was initially daunted with the complexity of the moves, I was encouraged and reassured by Jacqueline that even long-term devotees of Tai Chi continue to learn something at each session. I felt so good, admittedly after several weeks of struggling, when I managed to complete the first 17 moves. I hasten to add – very rustic moves – no finesse, but practise will ultimately make perfect – won't it?!

I especially enjoy the foundation exercises. In particular, one week when we started the 'don-yu' exercise Jacqueline reminded us of, when we were children, our mothers' sharp comment on using a public toilet – 'Don't sit down!' [Thank you, Mary, for the original comment – Jacqueline] I was very pleased with myself for practising that particular move well, as en route to Australia recently we had a short stop in Dubai. Of course, being female I had to make use of the toilet facilities. In Dubai there's no toilet seat – just the floor pan and two foot-shaped places either side. Woohoo! With a smile on my face I performed the task perfectly. Thank you 'don-yu'.

I look forward to each class and hope that, in time, not only will my posture be greatly improved but those little grey cells will flourish, not deteriorate!

Tai Chi and Us

Norma and Richard Herriott

We spent our working lives in The Midlands, moving house several times, and eventually settled in Shropshire. Searching for an activity we could share, which would also have some health benefits yet not be too strenuous, Norma recalled trying a Tai Chi taster session at a health spa some years earlier, and so was keen to find out more.

A small insert in a local paper advertised a new Tai Chi class starting in Wellington and so we went along to receive a warm welcome from instructor Alistair Hannah and meet a lovely group of like-minded people. A full set demonstration appeared daunting at first but we were determined to have a go, and here we are 11 years later – still learning of course.

We attended various workshops and social events and took part in demonstrations, the most memorable of which was in a busy high street where we were 'accompanied' by a group playing Peruvian pipe music and were harangued by local youths.

An annual highlight on New Year's Day was the climb to the summit of 'The Wrekin', a local hill and Shropshire landmark 407m high - in Essex this would be a mountain. A Tai Chi set on the summit overlooking A.E. Housman's 'Blue Remembered Hills' was followed by mince pies and mulled wine. Tai Chi in climbing boots is challenging!

In 2014 following retirement, and having spent much time travelling down to Chelmsford visiting our daughter and family, we decided to move to Essex to see more of our grandchildren and support their activities. Our property search finally ended in Burnham-on-Crouch. Amongst our criteria was the availability of Tai Chi classes. Prior research on the internet drew us to the Essex Tai Chi Academy, enabling us to continue our interest and meet a new group of friends. Moving to a new area and not knowing anyone is a challenge but we have been made very welcome at all the classes we have attended. We enjoy the various social events and workshops both locally and in other areas. Our visit last year to the Tai Chi Sin Fronteras workshop in Malaga and meeting international instructors remains a highlight.

Keeping fit and mobile is important for us both. Norma is keen to maintain bone density and flexibility, while Richard focuses on balance and muscle strength having suffered since birth with leg and hip problems. Our minds continue to be stretched through learning Sabre and Sword, and we are now getting to grips with Lok Hup Ba Fa.

Some days it's hard to rise out of the armchair and get ready for Tai Chi. The first few foundation exercises produce some groans but at the end of class the feelings of being energised and of wellness make the effort worthwhile.

Elaine Hampton, who recently moved to Lincolnshire to be nearer to her family.

The Tai Chi class I went to was nothing like the Academy. We just did exercises in a room about the size of Cold Norton kitchen! The people were very friendly and I will go back next week but then they close until February. I think I was one of the fittest there (and that's saying something). There were about 17 people in the class.

I went to my class again ... was early, and walked into a get-moving class! Anyway I joined in and everybody made me welcome ... Bit more energetic but they don't mind if you sit down.

I would like to wish everyone at Tai Chi a very happy and healthy Christmas and New Year.

Lorraine Jordan

We continue to miss Lorraine, a stalwart of Black Notley classes and a willing corner when some of us started Tai Chi and the other martial arts the Academy offers some years ago. A lovely, helpful person, and very nice to know.

Reminders

- Subscription fees are due from 2 January.
- Any stamps? Please hand to your instructor. The suggested charities are: the RNIB, Farleigh Hospice, or the Bone Cancer Research Trust.
- Chinese New Year falls on Friday, 16 February. We will be celebrating with a workshop/lunch and our AGM on Saturday the 17th. Details to follow, but please 'hold the date'.
- A training morning for corners/those interested in instructing will be held early in the year depending on feedback to your instructor/s.
- World Tai Chi Day is on Saturday, 28 April.

Thought for the quarter

For all of us struggling to learn the moves, thinking 'I'll never remember!' – a positive thought from Chungliang Al Huang:

Tai Chi does not mean oriental wisdom or something exotic.

It is the wisdom of your own sense, your own mind and body together as one process.

Born in 1930s' Shanghai, he grew up with a rich background in the classics, fine and martial arts, and the Beijing Opera techniques. He moved to the US to study architecture, cultural anthropology and choreography. He subsequently became a taijiquan teacher.

On a more contemporary note, Mohammed Juhel Miah, a Muslim maths teacher in Wales, was taken off a plane in New York in February returning from a school trip. To this day he has had no explanation as to why. Here are a few of his teaching aphorisms which well apply to all of us.

Perhaps not 'I can't make this any better'
but 'I'll always improve. I'll keep trying.'

'I'm not good at this!' – 'I'm on the right track!'

'This is too hard.' – 'This may take some time and effort.'

HAPPY NEW YEAR

May peace, happiness and good health
be with you and yours in 2018