



The Essex Tai Chi Academy Newsletter – January 2020

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

By the time you receive this newsletter the general election will have taken place, Santa will be back home at the North Pole, and Brexit will be raising blood pressures as usual.

Thank goodness for Tai Chi which can provide us all with the physical and mental health benefits to help embrace the New Year positively. Has anyone made any Tai Chi based New Year resolutions?

Class Representatives' Forum

Forum members met at Olivers garden centre, Witham on October 19th 2019. Ably chaired by Liz Whyte topics discussed included:

The advantages of attending different classes and having visits from alternative instructors.

Workshops could be daunting for new members and it was suggested that experienced members should make an effort to support and encourage new arrivals.

Feedback from classes showed that members were reluctant to record comments in the "Yellow Book" and would prefer to discuss any concerns face to face. It was felt the book would be more useful for noting diary dates and other useful class information.

Gremlins were appearing in the birthday card system as members names were not being removed after leaving the Academy.

Members have commented that classes have become more relaxed and friendly following the restructuring of the Academy.

Bon Voyage James - Judy Lee-Fenton

When James Elser, our visiting Canadian instructor, arrived in June for ETCA's International Workshop, he decided to explore Maldon and was captivated. When we were all seated in



the Queens Head for an evening meal, after our teacher training workshop, he went missing. I found him on the Quay looking at the boats in the pouring rain. I dragged him away with a promise to treat him to a trip on the Maldon sailing barge Hydrogen before he left the UK.

Early morning of Sunday 29th September 2019 and it was raining cats and dogs so looking at the weather a phone call saying the trip was off was expected. But miracles do happen, the rain cleared and the sun came out.

So here we were waiting to go on board. Sun shining and a good breeze, with the promise that sails would be in full use. It was all very lovely and with a ploughmans lunch included we couldn't have asked for more to mark the end of James's first visit to the UK. He is now an Honorary Maldonian.

Tai Chi at Essex Golf and Country Club - David Woollcott

In attempting to spread the word, we explore other venues within our general area. However, from time to time, we receive requests to organise and provide a Tai Chi class at another venue or club. The Essex Golf and Country Club based at Earls Colne, who had heard about our success at their sister company, Benton Hall Golf and Country Club, contacted us in July 2018. Mary Dann, Jacqueline Twyman and David Woollcott gave a demonstration and a class was established in October 2018 with David as the Instructor.

From the first seven attendees, the class has grown to 17 regular members some of whom attended our International Workshop in June 2019. The first anniversary was celebrated with tea, coffee and cakes, one of which was a chocolate cake with a dusting of icing in the shape of our Tai Chi Hexagram which appears on our badge.

Researching our badge, I came across some interesting information about hexagrams. The history is too detailed to repeat here but briefly they have exerted a presence in china for about three thousand years. In brief, all parts of life and the actions of people are represented by 64 hexagrams made by combining the signs for Yin (a broken line with a gap in the centre) and Yang (an unbroken or solid line). There are eight Trigrams, each consisting of a combination of a Yin and / or Yang in threes. Each Trigram represents a basic natural force, heaven, lake, fire, wind, thunder, water, mountain, earth.

A Hexagram is a combination of two Trigrams. Each of the 64 Hexagrams has its own name and meaning ranging from creativity, conflict, union, fellowship, decay, family, gentle, etc. Our Tai Chi Hexagram consists of an upper Trigram representing Earth and the lower Trigram representing Heaven. How can Earth rest upon Heaven? How can Heaven settle under Earth? Yet there is a balance between them with the mighty force of Heaven being restrained by Earth forming a kind of stillness. This is the Peace Hexagram.

The slow movements of Tai Chi clear the mind, slow the breathing, reduce tension and foster relaxation. This stillness and a peace is also reflected in the ancient Tea Ceremony where we refresh and renew ourselves in relaxation and contemplation after our Tai Chi practice.



Lesson from a Workshop - Focus! - Toni Walsh

When I joined ETCA to restart regular Tai Chi practice, one of the things I really struggled with was balancing on one foot – even simple moves like Separate Foot to Left (or Right) had me wobbling; Golden Cock Stands on One Leg proved completely impossible. I tried all sorts of variations on how I made the move but all to no avail.

Then we had the Cambridge Workshop this year... we were doing (I think) Brush Knee and Twist Step and working on standing tall as the rear leg came through ready to step. A comment made by the workshop instructor, Doug Overholt, struck a chord with me. “Focus”, he said, “find something to focus on and focus on it”. Prior to this I’d been generally looking ahead but not at anything in particular and my balance was not steady. After Doug’s comment, I chose a fixed item on the wall or on the floor to focus on – not stare, focus. Eureka! It was a revelation. My balance was restored; I could stand tall, bring my foot through, sit and step out without any balance problem at all.

When we stopped for a break, I was able to think about it and I remembered an item that I’d read some time ago on the internet. Our sense of balance has three components: the obvious

one is the balance organs in the inner ear, another is simply the sensation in our muscles and, importantly, the other is vision. As our eyes deteriorate with age we can get glasses, but we can't do anything about the inner ear. This is why us older folks have great difficulty balancing on one leg with our eyes closed; you can try it for yourself, but make sure you have someone ready to catch you! By focusing on a fixed object it allows the sense of balance to use vision to make up for the deterioration in the inner ear.

So now, I add an extra mental step in any of my balance movements; step up, *focus*, foot-through, sit, step, etc. I'm still a little bit unsteady sometimes coming up for Golden Cock, but it's so much better now thanks to Doug's single word, "FOCUS".

A story that I heard - Cait Goddard (26 Sept 2019)

During a tea break at class, we were discussing the establishment of our Academy some ten years ago. There were eight of us, seven ladies of advanced years and John, an ageing Country and Western star, sitting in a circle in the middle of the Church Hall. Viv had had us in stitches with her impersonations of men buying ladies underwear, bras and suspender belts, in the old department store in town – 'What size?' she asks 'Oh... er... she's about my size'. There's something of the Music Hall routine about it.

Then Trudi, usually a quite reserved group member, tells us a story about the origin of the Birchanger Tai Chi Class. She is a member of BAGS – the Birchanger All Girls Society who meet monthly in the Church Hall. BAGS invited Michael and Mary from Essex Tai Chi to give a demonstration of Tai Chi for Health which emphasises the physical benefits of this form.

Michael was of advanced years and an experienced practitioner – he had seen it all. BAGS use a small brass hand bell to call the ladies to order. Someone had bought it in a car boot stall and it stood on the stage at the head of the hall. The set takes one up and down the room with turns, chops, punches, sits, stand ups, cloudy hands, snakes, cockerels and storks cooling their wings. All one hundred and eight moves are performed in silence with intense concentration. It is a slow and graceful performance. Towards the end of the set comes the most complicated move, Sweep Lotus, which involves turning through three hundred and sixty degrees and then slapping a raised thigh.

It was at this point that Michael noticed the sign attached to the handle of the bell which reads 'ring me if you want a screw'. Michael finished the final moves with some difficulty – trying hard to suppress his laughter.

The demonstration was a success and Mary started to teach a weekly class which has now been running for over five years. Mary retired in July to spend more time with her grandchildren and I now take the class. Trudi was the only person in the class who was there to tell the story. It is good to know our foundation story.

(Sadly since submitting this article I have learned of Trudi's passing. ETCA send sincere condolences to her family, friends and Tai Chi colleagues).

Workshop News

Thank you to all those who have shared their experiences of workshops attended since the last newsletter.

Lok Hup Ba Fa (part 2) Workshop

Sunday 13th October

The Corn Exchange, St Ives (Cams)

Hosted by Eastern Counties Tai Chi Academy this workshop looked at the end of part 2 which, like the end of Tai Chi, doesn't always receive as much practice in class in an understandable keenness to finish the set.

Led by Dorothy Cowley and supported by Steve Alsop and Jeff Moody the 32 attendees started with a mixture of warm up exercises from Tai Chi, Yi Jin Jing and Bagua Jin instructed by Mo. This was much appreciated as the large hall was noticeably cool until we generated some warmth.

A show of hands identified that some had completed the set, some had a knowledge of part 1, and some were total beginners. To accommodate such diverse abilities the workshop focussed on linking Tai Chi moves into Lok Hup and recognising a common structure.

Commencing at Hide Lotus Under Leaf (move 55) and working onwards, the Tor Yu and feet positions including half steps and pa qua steps featured strongly, together with maintaining the body line and ensuring that the body leads the arms. Pull Ox by Tail (move 59) challenged everyone even though as Dorothy explained it is only Parting Horses Mane in reverse.

Somewhere in between we were able to catch up with friends over lunch. The afternoon then seemed to fly by and sadly we ran out of time, only reaching Morning Dove Flies Through Forest (move 62), but by then brains were getting scrambled. Everyone agreed it had been a most worthwhile and enjoyable day.

Norma Herriott

Tai Chi Workshop

17th November 2019

The Corn Exchange, St Ives (Cams)

Back to basics

“Without a strong foundation you will not progress to a strong form of Tai chi”.

Jeff Moody used these words as his emphasis to lead an excellent workshop with the support of other instructors from Cambridge Tai Chi Academy.

Using “brush knee to twist step” he broke the move down into 5 parts:

1 - Foot turns 45 degrees with hand at the same time. Hand and foot work together.

2 - Stand up, a head move, turning the body 45 degrees. Turning further than we all have been doing, opening arms wide to the correct height, expansion.

3 - Place the foot, empty step.

4 - Bring the arm through, dropping the elbow and lining up the thumb with the shoulder as you turn. Moving the body completely around as you come ensuring a centre line with both hands.

5 – Both hands move equal and opposite to finish in settle position, ensuring you do not lean to far forward.

Following this pattern should encourage us to find the centre line in all moves.

As the workshop progressed two students with varying levels of competence then demonstrated the move. Adjustments were shown to educate and build on their form. Everyone was later split into 2 groups and the twist step was practised being broken down into the smaller sections by counting.

Further analysis of this method was discussed in smaller groups and the value we had obtained shared by all.

Judy Lee-Fenton and Liz Whyte

Christmas Meal

3rd December 2019

Lian's Witham



Around 50 members of the Academy gathered together to enjoy a splendid evening of food, drink and Tai Chi friendship in the lovely atmosphere of Lian's restaurant.

In recognition of their hard work taking over as Chair and Vice-Chair plus guiding the Academy through its restructuring this year, beautiful bouquets of flowers were presented to Judy and Lisa during the evening.

New Instructor

We are pleased to welcome Viv Crowley who has been accredited as a relief instructor to provide cover, by arrangement, for holiday and other absences.

NEW MONTHLY SWORD AND SABRE CLASS

An improved form for beginners and continuing students.

Saturday mornings 10.00 – 13.00

Langford Village Hall, Maldon Road, Langford, CM9 4SS

Jan 18th. Feb 8th. Mar 14th. Apr 11th. May 9th. June 13th.
July 11th. Aug 8th. Sep 12th. Oct 10th. Nov 14th. Dec 12th.

DIARY DATES:

Saturday 25th January 2020 - 10.00 – 13.00

Chinese New Year and AGM followed by a sharing lunch.

Venue: Flich Green School, Tanton Road, Little Dunmow, CM6 3GG

Saturday 25th April 2020 - 9.30 – 12.30

World Tai Chi Day.

Venue Gt. Totham Village Hall, Maldon Road, Gt. Totham, CM9 8NH

Perform a Set at 10.00 followed by Tai Chi practice.

Lunch at The Bull pub opposite, subsidised for members £5.

***** News flash *****

Friday 15th to Sunday 17th May 2020

Tai Chi Workshop lead by Peter Lambiris from Canada, supported by Darren Pryke.

Lower Plume School, Mill Road, Maldon CM9 5JA.

Further details will follow.

Note in your Diary now please.

REMINDER: Quarterly subscriptions of £60 are due 1st January.

Please give these to your Class Representative.

From your Editors

Thank you to everyone who has sent in contributions and supported our efforts.

Please continue to send in items which it is felt will be of interest to others. As editors we might sometimes tweak the comprehension but we will always ensure that the essence of any article is maintained. Any feedback will be appreciated.

We hope everyone had an enjoyable Christmas and on behalf of ETCA “Happy New Year”

Norma and Richard.