

DUPUK website report Jan 2016

This report was prepared by Chris Granger, for the AGM on 31st January 2016.

Since my last report, in November 2014, there have been major changes in the DUPUK website.

Development of the new website

The old website had been running for several years, and used a database for the Events and dance leader records. The website connected to the database through a set of nearly 50 custom-designed pages of computer code called php. As time passed, the code became out-of-date and started to fail. The programmer was no longer available to bring the code up to current standards, so the old database-driven site had to be replaced with something that did not require a php programmer. Wordpress was chosen, as it is mostly free, is kept up to date, and is extremely versatile. A Wordpress website is made using the core installation plus specialised components (called "plugins") to achieve the less common functions such as handling an Events Calendar and keeping membership records.

I continued testing ideas using Wordpress in the Spring of 2015 and by June I had found enough promising components to make a start on building the site. After long hours of development during the following months, the new site finally went 'live' on 15th September 2015.

It does most of what the old site did, and a bit more, and within a fresh new design that is also compatible with small-screen, mobile devices, which is vital now that nearly 1 in 5 visitors to the site use tablets or mobiles. It continues to provide information about the dances, the dance leaders, dance events and news. I also has a private area just for dance leaders, where they can access documents and resources helpful to leaders and, of course, where they can add and edit entries about their own dance events on the Events Calendar.

The introduction of a new mass-emailing facility, Mailchimp, which had been introduced already in 2014, is now ready to be fully utilised by dance leaders to maximise the effect publicity emails to their mailing lists. It already serves as the main medium for broadcasting news to leaders and the general dancing public who have joined the list, but now it remains to be seen how many leaders will take up the opportunity to improve on the way they have used mailing lists in the past.

With both the new Events Calendar and Mailchimp systems, there is a learning curve. Several leaders have already successfully made progress up that curve, so I hope others will follow in due course.

Wordpress was originally made famous for its use in creating blogs. It makes publishing your writings and pictures and sounds and movies on the web extremely easy. So, using it as the basis for the DUP website made that a core feature of the site, and the "News" section is where that happens. This section is divided into three areas, for news from dancers, leaders and the DUPUK organisers. Dance leaders are encouraged to contribute articles about anything they are passionate about in their DUP work - reports of past events, stories from dance camps, visits to special places like the Mentorgarden, and so on. Regular contributors may have their own account and publish directly to the website. Dancers can also send in material to be published in a similar way, but through the 'News' email address.

The new website is now open and ready for business - let's make the most of it!

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