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THAMESIDE
WHEELCHAIR DANCING

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THE HISTORY OF WHEELCHAIR DANCING

Like so many other things, Wheelchair Dancing, commenced in the UK. It started in the late 1960's at a rehabilitation centre in Scotland, where people committed to wheelchairs would attend to learn how to operate and manoeuvre their new appliances. It soon became evident that the movements such as rolling backwards and forwards, rocking, twisting from side to side and rotating, could be done to music. Because it was in Scotland the movements were easily related to Scottish dancing, including Reels, Sets and Fours. Because it was a more pleasant way to introduce people to using wheelchairs, it spread rapidly south in England. The Wheelchair Dance Association (WDA) was set up in the early 1970's and soon, because of its initial and anticipated growth the Association was reorganised to include a National Committee and Regional Committees. It was intended that there would be a Regional Committee for England, Scotland, Wales and Ireland. The expansion did not materialise and Scotland and England were the only Regions to develop. The Scottish and formation team dancing was maintained until quite recently. This was probably because the committee's, adjudicators and organisers were not qualified in the skills of Ballroom and Latin American dancing.

In early 1980 a Corrie van Hugten, committed to a wheelchair, came to England to check out the WDA. She took the ideas back to Holland and adapted them to standard Ballroom and Latin American and social dancing. It quickly developed in Holland and with the help of her close friend Ondine de Hullu, it spread throughout the world. Holland has now in excess of 140 clubs, providing social and therapeutic activities to hundreds of disabled people. Wheelchair Dance Sport is now under the umbrella of the International Paralympic Committee (IPC) and popular in many countries, spread over several continents.

The WDA in the UK would not affiliate or accept the rules of the International Dance Sport under the IPC and a new association, the Wheelchair Dance Sport Association. UK (WDSA.UK) has been formed, to allow people in the UK to take part in world wide events. With support of the Dutch and Malta Associations and IPC, the new association has Charity Status. This year (2007) under the guidance of Corrie Van Hugten and Ondine de Hullu, both members of the IPC Wheelchair Dance Sport Committee, 14 people qualified as instructors in the UK.

At the moment there are only two clubs affiliated to WDSA.UK, one in Devon (The Beacons) and other in Essex (Thameside). Both are currently striving to develop and promote this new activity.