

FEATURE

JOSIE STEPHENSON meets all manner of Jikishin experts in Ongar

# Who's game for nun chucking?

**A GOOD looking young man gazed steadily ahead of him, slowly tensed and with a swift jerk, launched himself into a spot of nun chucking which, let's face it, is not something anyone would expect to happen in Ongar.**

Before anyone calls up the Vatican, it should be pointed out that this particular pastime has absolutely nothing to do with flinging reverend ladies of the cloth around the place.

I had called in to see exactly what attracts groups of fresh-faced youngsters, hunky men and attractive ladies to Ongar Sports Centre, don

ill fitting pyjama-like tops and trousers, strike war-like poses and fling each other around to land with bone-shaking thuds onto a mat as soft as the average hospital trolley!

They are followers of Jikishin Jujitsu, a modernised form of Jujitsu and, in case you are still wondering, a nun chuka was originally a Japanese rice flail which in the hands of a Jikishin expert becomes a very effective weapon.

Jujitsu originated about 600 years ago during the Tokagawa regime when peasants were not allowed to carry weapons and so as a means of defence they adapted the flail to strike and block incoming attack.

Proving that nothing is new, including the much lauded new-style police batons, Japanese peasants were very familiar with

the originals. They were used for beating rice and, are known as tonfa, it is used in Jikishin, again as a block and strike weapon.

Everyone is familiar with the image of Little John defending Robin Hood with his old English quarter staff. The Japanese would identify that same weapon as a bo.

A sai is a lethal looking steel two foot long, three pronged little number originally used for planting rice, while the katana, or traditional Samurai sword is easily recognisable. All are used at the Ongar club by adult members who have attained their purple belt, which is only two grades below the coveted black, to learn how to defend themselves against an armed attacker.

The club was started

16 years ago by Brentwood Jujitsu master Terry Parker, who is very much involved with the club and the well being of its members, and is head figure of the Jikishin Jujitsu Association which has many clubs throughout the South East and indeed the country.

With a combined junior and senior membership standing at around 70 and four fully trained instructors led by Harlow man Earl Walker who, with fellow instructor Jackie (who just happens to be his wife), has been running the club for the past two and a half years, it is more than a pity that there is a very big question mark hanging over the club's future.

Meeting every Friday in the gymnasium which is part of the Ongar sports complex, it could be that the club will be looking for a new home. "The whole campus, including the sports centre is on the edge of a redevelopment scheme," said Earl. "Although there are rumours and counter rumours it is far from clear as to the future of the centre and its facilities which is unsettling to members who want very much to continue here.

"There is also a smaller club at the Castle Street hall, but it is very small, not much bigger than our workout mat so wouldn't be suitable for a club this size. We will just have to wait and see how things work out, but it looks as if the club's future is very much in doubt."

If that is so then it can-

not be too strongly underlined that facilities provided by the sports centre are superb and I would say essential for the well being of a great many people — the very young as well as adults.

Starting an hour before the senior group Earl's youngsters, who join the club as young as six and move into the senior group at 16 or a little older according to their ability, can't wait to get onto the mat. Sisters Kirsty and Sian are driven by their parents every week from their home in Cheshunt.

"We were members of a Waltham Abbey club which closed in 1996 and we will be shattered if this one goes," said Sian. "It is important that the club continues here."



• ON the mat . . . Jackie Walker takes on fellow instructor Tim Morse.

when street attacks are becoming common. We are taught to handle ourselves and any threatening situation and I tell you, nobody would mess with me or any of us."

Brown belt 13-year-old William Murley of Stanford Rivers is about two years away from gaining his black belt

have been keen members of the club.

Was it a case that Jackie Walker joined the club so as to see something of her dedicated husband, I wondered. "Not at all," she told me before calmly chucking a hulking bloke over her shoulder and telling me: "As you can see, I might be 50 but can still get to grips with the fellows!"

She and Earl love the sport as does their 19-year-old son Cole. "Not only that," she said, "but it keeps you in peak condition and the weight under control. It teaches the youngsters discipline and respect. It builds their confidence as well, you don't get our young club members being bullied in school."

Nodding toward the senior group which was limbering up for its session Earl said: "We get all sorts of people here with

about 30 per cent of members women and girls.

"It takes time and a lot of commitment, often many years, to go up the grades so you don't have time wasters come along.

"Anthony Kwok who is one of our senior members arrived in this country from Hong Kong in 1972 and comes out to Ongar every week from his home in Hammersmith and his fellow senior members come from all walks of life.

"We have four fully trained instructors, myself and Jackie and Tim Morse and John Philip and we have all been through a full instruction course."

With the customary bow a bright faced young lad came off the club's enormously expensive 'jig-saw' mat and, standing before Earl and giving a sharp nod of his head he said: "Sensei" which translates to "Teacher".

"You see" said Earl, "apart from anything else Jikishin teaches the young strict manners and that can't be bad can it?"



• STAFF men . . . Pete Wheeler, left, and Chris Harvey are poles apart with



• LETHAL weapon . . . John Philip, left, and Wayne Bowen

Sister Kirsty who has ambitions to gain a black belt told me: "This sport gives girls a tremendous confidence which is very important in these days

and came home with a silver medal from the National Championships held recently at Harlow. He is the youngest of five children all of whom