

Yvette Staelens recording Tricia Hamilton at Halsway Manor on 6th November 2014.

Yvette: Okay Tricia um can you tell me where you were born?

Tricia: Yes I was born in Northwich which is in Cheshire.

Yvette: and what did your parents do?

Tricia: My father was a plumber and my mother was in service.

Yvette: okay and what about your interest in folk music. When did that start?

Tricia: um when I was at school. I did some folk dancing in school but like a lot of my friends you, you leave school and other um hobbies, you do other hobbies um and in 1963 there was um, I heard of a folk dance group in East Grinstead and that's when I started and, and I've been dancing ever since and I just love it.

Yvette: Tell me about the East Grinstead group, what was it like?

Tricia: It was really lovely, very very friendly. um Francis Hawkins was a caller and although perhaps you don't know him down here but he was, he was really, really encouraging and he was just a wonderful man um and he, a fantastic caller um and it was through him that we came down to Halsway. in 1972.

Yvette: Gosh, so tell me more about that trip.

Tricia: Well I think Francis, um, well Brian Heaton, who was here and I am not certain the date, the years he was here but before he came down here, in lived in our, in Sussex and used to come to our club at East Grinstead and when he came down to Halsway, he encouraged Francis, um, to bring a group of dancers down for the weekend. So and that was, that was when we came and we had meetings in 1971, committee meetings, trying to get coaches and people put, you know, people put their names down, um, and that's when it all started. And like today, and I'm here in the mini fest and again we have long sword and bell ringing and crafts and rappers and we did more or less the same then in 72 when we came down.

Yvette: And what were your first impressions of the Manor?

Tricia: Just absolutely beautiful, absolutely beautiful. Yes, and, and it is just a lovely presence. It just gives so much, and I just can't say, it is such a wonderful place.

Yvette: So you say that, um, it was beautiful when you came here. That was your overwhelming impression. Did you meet new people here or was it just the East Grinstead group who came?

Tricia: It really was the East Grinstead club um the East Grinstead people that we um that came and um so we all knew each other which was really nice. We did bring another singer from Sussex with us because we had singing after the dancing in the evening and we brought um Eric Wilmot who again didn't belong to the East Grinstead club. He belonged to Claygate club but he, he again was a singer and with my husband um brought and my husband had a jig doll and so Eric and Jack used to do, used to um entertain us with a jig doll.

Yvette: Tell us more about jig dolls.

Tricia: I don't really, sort of know that.

Yvette: How did he get into interested in them?

Tricia: Well it was Eric, Eric actually made, Eric Wilmot made these jig dolls and um, he, he knew my husband Jack and Jack said "This looks really fun, could you make me one?" So Eric made Jack one and it's jointed, um, has double joints in the legs and double joints in the arms and it, you have a board that you sit on and um, the jig doll has got a rod in its back and as I say, it sits on the board and you tap the board and this jig doll dances. And Jack and Eric um did this together and it was very entertaining.

Yvette: Yes. And did Jack sing or play? What else did he do?

Tricia: Er, yes, he, he um he called, he played a double bass, he was in the Southerners band. He was on the sales and publications committee at Cecil Sharp House and and he was also awarded the gold badge.

Yvette: Wonderful. This is the English Folkdance and Song Society gold badge?

Tricia: Yes. Yes.

Yvette: Wonderful. And tell me more about the Halsway um experience um when you were here. What was it actually like?

Tricia: All I can say, it was wonderful. It's different then then it is now because we, there wasn't the individual bedrooms. There was the dormitories and we, when we were on the dance floor we were very happy but when we went up, because there were several people in the dormitories we still carried that en, that friendliness and entertainment upstairs.

Yvette: And what about the accommodation and the food.

Tricia: Well yes the food was very good um I, I don't think it was as good as it is today but it was very adequate um and I'm sorry what else did you ask.

Yvette: the accommodation

Tricia: the accommodation, well as I say it was dormitories and we didn't have all the bathrooms like we have today. There was just one basin in our bedroom but then we all, you know, we accepted it and we had a lovely, lovely time. And my daughter then, was four years old and although she was too young to dance, I shouldn't say that, but she was a little bit young to dance but she was quite happy just watching us and playing having amusing herself. Um, so it was just really a very very happy time and and um I just desperately wanted to come back so two years later the East Grinstead club again, um, we came back again. Um I just like to say that when we first came down in 72, we organ, Francis Hawkins, Francis Hawkins organised a coach and so the cost of the coach all the way down to Halsway Manor and it stayed with us for the weekend and took us back again. So that included the coach trip and the coach, the cost of the coach and all the food and accommodation at Halsway Manor and if my memory serves me right it was about £7.50.

Yvette: Wow, gosh. And tell me about personalities. Who were the personalities you engaged with at that time? You mentioned the Southerners

Tricia: Oh yes well, the Southerners, that was a band we came down and although I wasn't married to Jack at the time um we, sorry, can we turn it off?
Okay so could you ask me that question again?

Yvette: So who were the key people, the key personalities?

Tricia: Well obviously as I've mentioned, Brian Heaton was here and Margery and Donald, Margery and Donald, I th, their surname, I think was Hunt.

Yvette: Yeh.

Tricia: Um, they were here and they were really very accommodating. Um, made sure we were all very happy and comfortable and and obviously helped the weekend to run very smoothly. Um, so yes um it um.

Yvette: And Brian Heaton was he around?

Tricia: Yes, well I knew Brian before he came down here. Um he was around but I guess he was quite busy so we didn't really see much of him and then we didn't have a bar and there were some of the men in our, in the East Grinstead club who do like a beer so we telephoned or got in touch with Brian before we actually left and told him roughly how much we want, how much beer we wanted so Brian was able to get this in for us.

Yvette: Excellent. And what about any stories of that visit. Can you remember anything that happened that was funny or?

Tricia: Well I can tell you one funny, funny thing um it didn't happen the time I came down this is my friend, can I say about my friend? Um she came down and again it was when the time of the dormitories and there was several ladies in one room and one particular lady was so frightened that she wouldn't be able to sleep um that she brought because perhaps other people snoring and so she brought a tea cosy and um that she would put that on her head and

then, you know, she wouldn't hear the other people snoring. So they had a lovely evening of dancing, came, went up to the bedroom and put, proceeded to put this tea cosy on her head. Well, you can imagine, all the other ladies roared with laughter but this lady she was intent on getting her night's sleep and she certainly did, she was the one that was snoring and all the other ladies stay, had to stay awake all night.
(Laughter)

Yvette: And tell me about, um, you mentioned meeting your husband.

Tricia: Yes, um, that was a time, although I knew Jack and the Southerners Band very well um the second time, I should mention that the first time the band, the Southerners came down under their own steam, they didn't come down on the coach and the second time, Jack came down on the coach with us. And um so we conversed, you know, with everybody and over the weekend I just don't know but we, I'd just been up to check on my daughter, make sure she was asleep, um, that was my previous marriage, and Jack met me at the top of the stairs and he kissed me and the rest is history.

Yvette: And did you come back again after, you mentioned two visits was that the second visit.

Tricia: That was the second visit but I didn't come back until I think it was 2010, when I came back with the Guildford group. And again, I didn't belong to the Guildford Group but, um, Cole Charles was in charge and I knew Cole, um, and Carole Huson was calling and I know Carole very well and her husband Ted. Um, so I came down again and again had a wonderful, wonderful week. We did more or less the same but we did have afternoons free so we walked on the Quantock Hills and which was again lovely. This was in the month of August so the weather was absolutely beautiful and we went outside quite a lot and it was just, just wonderful. And then I came back again last year to the mini festival and although there were very, very few people we certainly had a wonderful time. Again dancing, crafts, music um and as I say we were very small party but everybody joined in and I met some lovely friends and I'm very very pleased to say that most of those friends have come back this year so we've been able to pick up where we left off and and getting our friendship, making our friendship much stronger. So much so that already three, six people have said they will come back next year. So we are going to meet again this time next year.

Yvette: So Tricia, what do you think makes Halsway so special? What is the key ingredients you think?

Tricia: Um, heh, it's just hard to say really because its the people, the staff down here, the staff are just so wonderful. You've only got to mention something and they immediately do it. I needed a plaster yesterday for my, for my thumb and immediately, you know, I think it was Lyn, from the desk, shot up and was going to get me one. They don't mind what they do, um, and that goes a long way to help the weekend run smoothly.

Yvette: Hmn, fantastic.

Tricia: No I don't think so, I mean, I can't think of anything, sorry.

Yvette: No it's okay, it's okay. Um, so you've come back to Halsway, you've rekindled your love of Halsway and its obviously a big part of your life.

Tricia: It certainly is because, you know my romance started with Jack here and so therefore it, it is for me a very very special place and as soon as I just sort of turn the corner and coming in to see the beautiful building I'm back here as I was in 72 and 74.