

Olivia: It's Olivia FitzGerald on the 29th December 2014; and interview number 10, it's Ron Rudd; and, Ron, where were you born?

Ron: In London, before the war – 1928 in point of fact.

Olivia: Very good. And we are in the Kennedy Grant library at Halsway Manor. So we can get started. Ron, how did you first get involved with Halsway?

Ron: With Halsway, we'd just discovered folk dancing in the early 1970s and there were two clubs to go to – one was Bridgwater Folk Dance Club, which was then run by Robert Blackborough and still is. He got me into folk dancing and into calling as well. And we found out that there was Halsway Folk Dance group, where we could come and dance on a Wednesday night. It was nice and close, and I've been a member of Halsway Folk Group – and in fact to run it – for many, many years. So that was what got us coming here in the first place.

And we also got involved with one or two dance display group. Robert Blackborough had his own little group, which went locally to places like Burnham sea front and that kind of thing. And then in those days we came in at the tail end of the big Albert Hall folk festivals, and so we became part of the EFDSS South West area folk dancers; and we were members of that group for a long time and that began to get us about a bit as well as centring on here. And then coming back locally, a local man – well, he's Exeter – Peter Boskett, he set up a local display group called Isca dancers and one of my daughters and her husband were invited to join them first; and that gave us an entry, and my wife and I became members of that group – and stayed members of that group – until it finally dissolved; but that did have very strong links with the manor here – witnessed the chandeliers in the long room. And that gave us cause to be here more often and to display at the manor. And this was where a guy called Bill Rutter came who was responsible for this place being a folk centre in the first place. I got to know him and he got to know me, and he – the classic one was that we were having a practice for Sidmouth Folk Festival one afternoon down at Sidmouth at the bare Arena [?], on the concrete slab, and Bill turned up, watched us and said, "You can all come home for tea" – much to his wife's surprise, but she coped, she was good; and that made the links even closer. One day down at the manor here there were getting things going on, and I was getting a bit more deeply involved and I was part of the committee that ran the Folk Dance group, and Bill one day took me to the side and said, "Ron, I would like you to be chairman of the Friends of Halsway", which was a group he was just setting up; that was typical Bill Rutter – he didn't ask you, he told you and you went and did it. So that was how I really began to get in deep, because as chairman of the Friends there were all sorts of fundraising events and activities going on, but the principle one was Halsway Open Day, which the Friends were responsible for – for many years. And for something like nine, ten years that was one of my major activities of the year – and it was all centred on here, of course. And it used to take me some six to seven months to build up everything that came together for Open Day. And it was quite a part time job to be having considering that I was at the time plant manager for a factory which was running 24/7, so time off was sort of minimal, but we got there. It was lovely to do it all anyway.

The Open Day grew and grew and grew. And in those days – we're talking about the mid 80s – we would take £750 in the afternoon, and if you change that into today's money, that's thousands, you know, several thousands. We were not doing badly. It would be frowned upon today, but we even had little dog shows out there on the lawn. And to give you an idea of the extent of it...one of our members was a professional carpenter – he was the guy who built the

bar in the lounge from old church pews – but he constructed a whole set of collapsible stalls which covered the two lawns out there, and we filled those with stall-holders out there for the day. There were dance demonstrations; we had sides down from Bristol; we had a... one of the local schools had a keen master and he taught the maypole dancing, and they would come and do maypole dancing; and the Isca dancers of course featured fairly heavily in those days; and that was how it grew and grew and grew.

Olivia: So you must have known a lot of the people involved.

Ron: Got to know an awful lot of people, yes. Folk is...even the ice cream man who came regularly, he came down from Bristol every year. Yes, I was in touch with all sorts of folk group people – people like Bristol Fashion and that kind of thing, and Step Clog sides – there's a local one called Sweet Coppin , various Taunton sides, Taunton Deane Morris and West Somerset Morris; I got to know them very well, and I still do because one of them happens to be a son-in-law nowadays. It was all very close knit in those days and people turned up and gave there all, and we had lovely afternoons. We had the odd thunderstorm as well, which enlivened matters.

Olivia: So what did you do when those events happened? Were you taking part in the dancing?

Ron: I would occasionally take part in the dances, but mostly I would be the guy solving all the minute by minute by minute problems that always happened.

Olivia: What sorts of problems were there?

Ron: Anything from cars stuck in the drive to a collapsed stall, somebody having a hissy fit, or a shortage of something – you know, all the human problems that do crop up on a day like that, and you just have to deal with them.

Olivia: But there were they a success generally?

Ron: Generally speaking they were a great success and they helped with the funding of the manor quite considerably in those days, so yeah.

Olivia: Did people pay to come?

Ron: I think in those days it was something like fifty pence entrance fee. But there is a little field just over beyond the manor there, which we'd have a Morris side on car park duty; and they'd be out there and they would cram that field solid with cars; they'd be parked all along the bottom lane and even out on the bottom road – attendance was that high in those days, you know.

Olivia: Do you have that many people now? Presumably it's dwindled a bit?

Ron: It's dwindled a bit, but attendances are coming back up and that's a good thing.

Olivia: Why do you think that is?

Ron: It's the way life has gone, I think. People are looking sort of farther afield, less local event for their enjoyment. And also it's been a funny thing that so many people who live locally have no idea that this place even exists let alone what it exists for; and that ignorance is just being broken down and more local people are coming in. And we had a craft fayre a couple of weeks ago, and it was very pleasing to see the local traders from sort of Minehead and points east who are coming here to join in and display their wares, and it turned out to be a very good day.

Olivia: So are you trying to get people from a wider range of backgrounds?

Ron: It's getting people from a wider range, yes, yes, exactly that. Folk had always been to an extent a minority interest, but we've got a number of people who are ambassadors and always have been. There's one young man who was a – he'll forgive me for saying this but – a funny scruffy little boy when I first met him about six, seven years old; and his parents were colleagues of mine on the management of the society back then; and that funny scruffy little lad is now one of the leading lights. He's been to Newcastle University and done the folk music, folk dance course up there, and he's leading all sorts of activities – teaching and introducing young people to all aspects of traditional dancing. I came in here one afternoon and he had a gang of youngsters practising ballet steps; you know, that's as wide as it's spreading. You know, it's people like him nowadays who are really pushing the boundaries, waving the flag – whatever you like to call it.

Olivia: And what's this gentleman's name?

Ron: Will Lang.

Olivia: Ok, I'm sure that's good for the record!

Ron: Oh it's very good for the record.

Olivia: So do you think it's changed much over the years and it's kind of widening the net?

Ron: It's developed an awful lot. Yes, because the horizons were traditional folk and those horizons have been spread for all sorts of different reasons. Traffic across the Atlantic because there have been lots – and still are – lots of American influences on dancing and music, and from other areas as well; so it's spread and spread and spread, yeah.

Olivia: And for the better do you think?

Ron: If you don't change, you eventually dwindle and disappear. You've got to go forward. Sometimes it's a bit of a sideways step as well as forward; sometimes it's sort of small hoops and 'let's do that again'; but mostly it's been sensible progress. And the modern trend of letting young people do their own version of what we know is folk and encouraging them to do that and then cunningly blending them in with what we're doing ourselves is a very good

way of getting the young generation to carry on this lovely old tradition that's been mine and my family's life for many, many years now.

Olivia: And have you been involved in the young folk groups up here?

Ron: Not directly because if you look at my date of birth I'm a bit far away from them. But, yeah, I have done things...if there are often groups of youngsters here, because I'm local and easy to get at, I'm invited to do an afternoon's elementary country dancing with them, and that can be fun. There are groups who come from Austria every summer – couple of coach loads – and every year they come through, and I spend a whole afternoon in the long room with them, giving them the basics of English country dance; and it's fun because they have absolutely no idea at all when it starts; and the whooping and yelling and bouncing about and noise you get by the end of a couple of hours is quite wonderful to behold! But there are, you know, there've been other groups – we've had groups down from the London area. It was a little bit of a shock, but one of the people guiding that particular lot explained to me quietly that these were kids from the gun culture, you know, the depths of London, if I can put it like that as an ex-Londoner.

Olivia: When was this?

Ron: About four years ago now. But they were down in Somerset...these people were a charitable group, and they'd gather up twenty or thirty of these youngsters and bring them out of London just to show them that there is a life and what it looks like. They were amazed at things like cows in fields, and I'd spend an afternoon with them.

Olivia: What do you think they thought of the place? Do you think it changed them?

Ron: Usually stunned, I think it...without a doubt it changed them. This place changes everybody.

Olivia: In what way do you think?

Ron: It's such a welcoming house that it softens people's perceptions, and you reach out to people that much more easily. People come in here with closed faces that they open up. I had a big birthday party some years ago, and a lot of my family are Irish folk-inclined as I am. But on my brother's side, they live on the Essex side of London, and he lived with his wife up in Norfolk and they came down here with this big birthday party. It was twenty years since I'd seen any of them; they had no idea what they were walking into, and, after the initial shock, it was wonderful to watch them and the way they relaxed and opened up and simply enjoyed themselves in a way that, as they told me, in a way that they never expected to do; and that's what Halsway does do people.

Olivia: Do you think that's the nature of the dancing, the building itself, or the people, or something else?

Ron: It's both. The building's at the bottom of it because it is such a welcoming house, you know. Everybody who comes here – whatever motive – says that this place is welcoming,

and it is. And everything's done through that [?], because you walk in and begin to feel relaxed and welcome and comfortable, then it's easier for you to join in and do things you've never tried before; and it all just goes from there.

Olivia: And why do you think people come from so far away, like Austria?

Ron: The reputation has spread now – Austria, Germany, the States. I was down here for a weekend with my eldest daughter last October, and it was a zesty culture weekend. And yes, there were people from America, a lady from Austria who had come across specially for the weekend, determined not to miss it, you know. Particularly country dance, because it is more international, it gets abroad more widely and it's fairly energetic, it's quite a demanding dance. It's huge fun to do, and it's things like that that are spreading the reputation of this place; and of course the very careful management that that goes on nowadays, because the management themselves know how to spread the word, perhaps we didn't in the olden days; we were all amateurs, and doing what we'd see fit to do and thinking what we might do next. But there is a much more professional attitude on the management and the publicity side, and it has had a huge amount of benefit so that people come here from not only from all over this country, but from Europe and the States as well.

Olivia: Do you think they're using social media to get people from afar?

Ron: Absolutely, yes. Even I'm finding out about Facebook and things like that.

Olivia: Very good! You're not involved in the management any more?

Ron: No, I've done my share. I was, as I said, I was chairman of the Friends for about nine years, and I was on the Halsway council for two separate sessions. And with my wife I helped to run Halsway Folk Dance Group for many, many years. We would take a session and take a couple of years out, and then be dragged back into it because nobody else was willing. So there's an awful lot of record back there. I figure that, you know, I've put in my two-penneth on that score, and I let other people do the work. I'm still happy and willing to help in all sorts of ways, but I let other people do the management things.

Olivia: How often do you come up here nowadays?

Ron: Two, three times a month I suppose, something like that. I mean it used to be literally every week – Halsway club twice a month and other events going on, so yeah.

Olivia: So it's close to home; how far did you say it was?

Ron: Eleven miles away, you know. This is my other home. Simple as that!

Olivia: So would you say it was a family for you, the people here?

Ron: Oh yeah. I mean, I walk in the door and they just say, "Oh hi there Ron! Not even you again!" – you know. "Oh he's back, that's alright."

Olivia: And what about the people that you've met here over the years, do they tend to stay local or do they come back?

Ron: Oh people always come back. If they don't come back we begin to wonder when the funeral was, you know. People always come back. Other people's careers take them away from here. It's a sad business that we're losing Paul, but it's very understandable and he has to weigh the odds and it's an advantage for him; and it's better for his family and he's done an enormous amount of good here; and that sort of thing always happens. You know, people, they have their domestic lives and they have to make this place fit in with everything else they're doing, and if something doesn't fit we lose them. But, you know, they're still around, we still get contacted every so often; they'll show up out of the blue perhaps.

Olivia: Do you think there's a particular type of person who comes here, or is it anyone?

Ron: They are all people who have an interest in singing, dancing and music; that's what brings people here in the first place. Although occasionally the manor runs courses for subjects which are perhaps remotely associated with those three things; that brings fresh faces in. And, as I said just now, when they're in here the manor exerts its influence, and they simply enjoy being here. And you'll see some kind of an excuse for coming back!

Olivia: And which part of the folk arts, would you say, is your favourite aspect?

Ron: I'm a dancer basically; that's where it all started. I do other things as well. But when Robert Blackborough got my daughters, who are Girl Guides, they did their Girl Guides badge in folk dancing; and that's what Robert did for them, and he just never ever let go. And the whole family ended up dancing – we still are. I lost my wife some time ago unfortunately, but there are three grown-up daughters who are all totally committed dancers; two of them run their own step dance sides, and the other one is a dancer doing a variety of American dancing, which fits in with the bluegrass type of music that her and her husband play as members of the band. So it's all there, the whole family is totally committed, and...I've lost the thread of it now – but yeah, that's us as dancers. There was another thing that became very popular: there was a wonderful craze for the Cajun jive dance.

Olivia: What's that like?

Ron: That's something else! That really is. It was one of those things, you know. Frankie and I always enjoyed our dancing. Other people said that we danced well together. And we were up at Matlock in Derbyshire – they have a spring weekend festival there; and one weekend there was a little band that turned up that played this wonderful music; it just went whoof! It got right underneath you and lifted you. And we went into the workshop and thoroughly enjoyed ourselves. There were no problems; it just happened; we did it. And afterwards, we were not allowed to leave the room because we were surrounded by other dancers who said, "Right, now show us how you did that!" You know, it was just something that hit the pair of us; and that went on for a long time and we brought it down here, and for many years there were demands for little Cajun dance workshops down here and almost any other place we went, including Sidmouth. I did Cajun workshops at Sidmouth for two or three years, and that kind of thing; so that was all part of it. And because we were part of Isca Dancers, which was quite a display team in its time, we

were a big enough group to put on a complete two-hour performance without anybody else's help, thank you! And we danced basically eighteenth century dances, but we would let our hair down and do other things every now and again.

And there was always the Playford dancing. My eldest daughter and I are still going to the Bristol Playford ball every year, and will come to Playford whenever it happens, you know. So if it's dancing, we'll do it.

Olivia: Two hours is quite a workout – has it kept you fit over the years?

Ron: It's kept me fit, yeah.

Olivia: And have you been into competitions as well then?

Ron: No. The competition thing has just never come into it, because, you know, our kind of dancing isn't really competitive. It's not like Strictly [Come Dancing], although I think that's one of the best bits of telly! But no, it's not competitive. If you're in a display team, alright, you are in a sense competing there because you are trying your hardest to give the most perfect performance, because what the people looking at you want to see is the movements and patterns and style and everybody doing it together, and you must get it right, and you must really work at it. But mostly it's pure enjoyment.

Olivia: How do you remember all the moves? Is it just practice?

Ron: Practice – the moves just begin to stick after a bit. Everybody meets this [?]. That's it, you know the basic moves, you begin to learn the language of the callers. American Contra, American Square, Traditional English and Playford, they all have their terms and their language and that's what you learn. The dances are what the caller is telling you to do next. You don't necessarily need to know the dances, although they do stick; they come with the rest of it. It's learning the basic moves, and the most basic move of all is walking to the beat of the music. You know, if you can do that you can be a dancer.

Olivia: So it's intuitive in a certain way?

Ron: In a certain way it is. You are anticipating – I have to watch myself sometimes because in an American Square dance I am so much into that that I am actually almost beating the caller at times, which will confuse other dancers if I'm not careful!

Olivia: Are you ever a caller yourself?

Ron: I've been a caller for many years, yes. That goes back to Robert Blackborough. We'd been to his weekly club about a couple of months, and he took me aside at the end of one Monday night and he said, "Ron, next time I want you to call a couple of dances." That was frightening!

Olivia: Yes, it must be difficult at first. Is it quite a leadership role to be taking on?

Ron: Yes, it is. You...first of all, just from being familiar with moves and responding to what the caller has said, you are suddenly in a very different position. You have got to learn dances; you have got to know how the whole dance goes; you have got to know how it fits with the music; you have got actually to anticipate; you have got the music coming in one ear and watching your dancers, and you are in the middle keeping the dancers with the music, dragging them round corners when necessary, and not being distracted when they do something extremely unclever, which does happen – and that kind of thing. But, I mean, that was really hair-raising, but it wasn't many months before I went out and did my first full evening with a live band; and I can still remember where that was, and I have been calling ever since.

Olivia: Where was it?

Ron: Down at Tiverton. There is a hotel just outside and it was a wedding reception thing, and I had a rather fancy shirt on which I was pleased with at the time – but that went quite well, and it encouraged me to do another one. And then, of course, with Halsway Folk Dance Group, once I began to get the hang of it I could do an evening's calling at the group, and it all went from there.

I have collected a repertoire of dances, and there's a whole set that even now I have got more or less by heart, which is the ones I do for the sort of Saturday night wedding barn dance or anniversary celebration, and there is a whole lot of others that I can pick and choose from in one of our local dance clubs. And there are...until recently there was Tiverton, and I get invited out to Weston, to Wells, and there is another one as well. But, you know, two or three clubs who like to have me come and call for them once or twice a year.

Olivia: How are these dances passed down to the next generation and how do you know them, because some of them are centuries old?

Ron: Some of them – everything has been written down, hence this library or a great part of it. Yes, it used to be...particularly the...what are truly the country dances because, like folk song, like the music, they were passed down from hand to hand or mouth to mouth. The villages had their own dances, and there are a lot of old village dances which bear the same name, but they are quite different in content because they have been used traditionally in different parts of the country, and the traditions have wandered apart. People have changed and done them different ways and that kind of thing. And then there have been all the society dances, which arose out of the big formal balls in country houses, and they were formally written down and they were formally taught.

We had a wonderful experience at Bath one year when my oldest daughter was 18 and – she'll forgive me, she is 60 now – but it was...Bath was celebrating a thousand years of the monarchy, and in the Pump Rooms the whole big group of us were invited to dance the formal minuet, and that was quite something because we had some real learning sessions to do there. And you just, there was one way to do it and only one way; you did it right or you got severely told off! And that was an amazing evening, and but that is the other extreme because, in society...it was...you know, young ladies spent an awful lot of their time learning these dances; it was what they did – that and sewing were the permitted occupations. And the dancing was the wonderful thing that enabled them to a) get some exercise and b) meet young men. Because in those days the protocol was very severe, and young ladies were not allowed contact with young men except in the dance. And various dance movements were cunningly contrived so that girls and boys could hold hands and look at one another fairly closely, if

only for a few seconds during the course of the dance and get away with that. All those things contributed to that side of dance.

And its apocryphal, but it is said that when the big ball was on at the manor house in the village, the locals would be outside the windows watching, and the cleverer ones would see what was happening and take away some of those moves and do them at their next barn dance. So there began to be a bit of a changeover like that. But all those society dances have been written down. They are what we generically know as the Playford dances nowadays. And there is, you know, quite a difference in style in the way its done and they're much more formal. You can't be casual with a Playford dance, if only because the music leads you in such particular ways.

Olivia: But if these dances were a way for young men and women to meet each other, was there all sort of naughtiness going? Are there any, over the years, any stories of, I don't know...excitement at Halsway?

Ron: It's always been, in that respect, it's always been a pretty well behaved sort of place. It has its stock of ghosts and then some.

Olivia: Good friendly ghosts or...?

Ron: Yes. You can't have an unfriendly ghost at Halsway – it just doesn't work. There are one or two, we had a manager here once, Mr Green and his family. They lived in what was then the manager's flat on the third floor above here, and they had two young lads. And one day Mr Green came from the hall into the lounge there and found his little son as white as sheet, and he said, "Daddy, there is a grey lady just gone through the wall!" I mean, he had been entirely unaware that there had been anything of that sort, and he'd seen her, and the little heart was pounding away. Dad was quite certain the boy wasn't carrying on, you know. And there are all sorts of little stories. People have stood in here and suddenly glanced down because they felt an imaginary...you know the way an animal will just walk past you and just brush the back of your leg – they felt that kind of thing. And there was one night – this is one of those things again when the hall has been between managers; we would never like to leave it completely empty overnight, so pairs of us would literally babysit the manor – and one night, Frankie and I were in bed in one of the big bedrooms – I was actually dozing, and she thought Ron was snoring very loud, only it wasn't me, it was an empty bed on the other side of the room that was snoring!

Olivia: That sounds terrifying!

Ron: Oh, she packed up reading very promptly that night. But there are stories of a little peasant girl; it was a case of thwarted love. She was buried that way, and her lover was buried down in the village cemetery. And she would actually walk through the manor on the way to see her lover, you know and that kind of thing.

And there was a bishop, because there was an old barn out at the end where apples were stored, and it had been a chapel. And the Bishop was absolutely furious and he hasn't been seen for a long time, but the stories exist that he used to turn up and throw apples around the place – all sorts of tales like that.

Olivia: So do people who work here generally tend to know all these tales?

Ron: They know most of them, yes, and some of them might quietly admit to having noticed something a little bit unusual, you know, particularly members of staff who are concerned with operating the bar, because if they are running the bar they will actually stay here overnight. Because when this place shuts at midnight you can't get home anywhere, so they will do that and be a member of staff here.

Olivia: And have you stayed over here much in the past?

Ron: Oh, many, many times, yes. As I say, once or twice we would babysit the manor when it was between managers, but we've been here for many, many weekends of all sorts of dancing – traditional English and contra and that kind of thing, square dancing, so yes. And we would stay over for open days too. And nowadays when we have the Annual General Meeting that turns into a weekend, so we come and stay for the weekend. Oh yes, I have been a resident here for many, many years on and off.

Olivia: And are you looked after well?

Ron: Oh very!

Olivia: We've got biscuits here today.

Ron: Only I'm too busy talking aren't I!

Olivia: Actually I've just got one more last question for you...

Ron: Oh go on then.

Olivia: What do you think the future holds for Halsway?

Ron: I think that if we keep our courage screwed up to the sticking point – Shakespeare! – that the future can be tremendous. We are facing a huge single step forward with this expansion programme, but if it can be achieved – and I think it will be – then the manor will be able to offer much more facility than it does at the moment, to expand every activity **that it does because the new place up in the woods there will be a craft centre, and we do craft courses:** violin-making, instrument-making, generally that kind of thing; and it can expand those and it will be given much more facility for groups of youngsters to come and learn about country dancing and camp for the weekend or as they may see fit. But it will eventually enlarge the whole facilities of the manor, because one thing that has been a major problem for many, many years is that the way hotels generally provide facilities has advanced tremendously. What was once a pleasant situation twenty years ago is just not acceptable now, and the manor is running to keep up with all those things so that we need these physical alterations to the buildings to provide our visitors with the kind of facilities that they have become used to, so that they are as happy here as they would be anywhere else. And we can then offer them as well all the other things that I have been talking about – the dancing, the music, the singing, the exercises – in a much better way and for larger groups of people. And I think that is the way it's got to go, and more and more young people coming in, a wider range of people, and I am sure that the future is bright and will stay that way.

Olivia: Thanks. I think that is a good way to end it. Actually just a couple of last things – I have forgotten to set some context at the beginning about your background. So you were born in Stockwell, was it?

Ron: Stockwell in London.

Olivia: And your parents – what were they called and what did they do?

Ron: My parents were Philip and Connie; and Mum was a housewife; Dad – this is a little bit of something – Dad was the head cellar man at Claridges Hotel for many, many years. And so I was actually allowed and taken round once because, as I say, we lived in Stockwell, and I went to one of the local schools and I was extremely fortunate that the school I went to had a very special master – schoolmaster – and he had a special job in that school. His job was to look out for the bright kids and nurture them, and I became one of those. And it was entirely because of him that I won a scholarship, and went to a school called Christ's Hospital.

Olivia: I know the one – the one with the funny outfit.

Ron: Don't you dare! As an outside, about four years ago, they had a vote thought-out all the pupils in the school, and the pupils were 87% in favour of keeping that old Tudor uniform, so don't mock it! It's great! But that is where the story is going because Dad took me up to Claridges in my school uniform, and I was treated like royalty up there – it's amazing how that works.

But so that was it, and we moved out to the suburbs just before the war. And there is another little funny thing too: the street where I was born had a nursing home at the end of it, and what I found out many, many years later that when I was about three years old my wife's mother was giving birth to my wife in that nursing home; and I didn't meet her in London I met her in Rugby where I was taking, I was undergoing an apprenticeship at the time.

Olivia: I can see you were fated to meet later on.

Ron: It was one of those things. The labels were tied on us and that was it.

Olivia: Fascinating. And were your parents dancers in any shape or form?

Ron: No, they were very nice people, and they brought us up very, very well indeed, but they were not in any sense musical or dancing kind. There was... I don't remember music being played at home. We listened to the radio and that kind of thing. We had people in and were sociable, but there was no music at home. I didn't get music until I went to CH, and then it started with the classics. It started with brass band music, because that was how they got 800 boys into one dining hall in five minutes flat for meals – we marched up to music. And so there was the brass band music and then there were choirs – two choirs in the school and all that kind of thing; and jazz was there by the way. And I came away from school with a lot more knowledge and interest in that kind of music.

And life got very busy after that. I was working hard just being a young apprentice, because it was a very full time occupation in those days. You were doing a 48-hour week and part time course at the college in the evenings and weekends, so there wasn't a lot of spare going. But I

met this pretty little girl, and suddenly realised that I had to take her out. Cinema wasn't always going to work, so I rushed around found a dance teacher, did some ballroom dancing lessons and we started dancing like that, and enjoyed that; and that all got blown away when family arrived, and it wasn't for a number of years – there and now we are back to the beginning again – when the girls were Girl Guides who wanted to do the Guides badge and the whole story began from that point; that's the way it has been.

Olivia: And how did you end up down here from London?

Ron: I worked at a company called BTH Rugby. I did my apprenticeship there, got my degree there, worked there as a junior engineer for a number of years, had a tiny part in the Festival of Britain; and I was happy there, but we weren't getting anywhere. It was time to be somewhere else. And I looked up adverts and found a company called British Cellophane, at a little town called Bridgwater, who were looking for young research engineers, and I applied and got the job, and we came down to Bridgwater in 1957, and I became a research engineer for about 18 months. I took a particular project out from the research labs into production and ended up as Plant Manager of the Plastic films factory, so, you know, there's 30 years' of hard work for you in 20 seconds flat!

And I took an early retirement from there, and literally the day after I retired I picked up a little part time, one day a week job as Secretary as something called the Somerset Guild of Craftsmen, and that little one day a week job blossomed into a full time job, and lasted me for the next 12 years; and I made an awful lot more friends there. And it developed my own craftsmanship too, because I had been...there has been woodwork at the back of everything ever since I had been a tiny kid. Dad would make wooden toys, and so I watched him doing it, and started making wooden things myself. I started by making things like radio sets with their own little boxes. And it's been a thread everywhere and whatever else I have been doing there is woodwork in the workshop somewhere in the background. And in fact this place has my paw prints all over it. You know, upstairs piping that has been blocked off and made neat and tidy so its not dust collectors. There are three or four tables in the next room there that are all mine; and various other things that I made that are part of it. And every so often someone says, "Ron, this is broken! Can you mend it?" And..."Oh, alright."

Olivia: So the Ron Rudd legacy is definitely entrenched here at Halsway.

Ron: I'm afraid so!