

Maureen Knight interviews Mike & Rita Courthold on 21 November 2015

Content

Mike and Rita have both been involved with folk dance since their student days, and participated in courses at Halsway since mid 1970s. Mike is a well known contra caller across the UK, and has been Dance Director for Chippenham Festival since 2003. Both their sons are involved in folk dance/music.

Rita enjoyed the folk singing clubs in the Liverpool area, encouraged by teachers, and when she started nurse training took friends to folk song and ceilidhs in Manchester and Cecil Sharp House, London

Mike went to University as a ballroom dancer and joined the FD club. Went to IVDF, and met Rita through the connection with Cecil Sharp House.

1973/4 peeped through the Halsway windows! and later came to an event as dancers.

Mike called at Halsway FDG by invitation of Alan Corkett

enjoyed Halsway walks on cold frosty days between Christmas and New Year, including when the heating failed and they had candlelit suppers and log fires

Mike intrigued by the custom of Wassailing, by hanging toast in the apple tree, singing and tipping cider on the ground to encourage fruitfulness.

2003 Contra Hothouse at Halsway with Airdance... a turning point in the UK contra scene fired ideas from each other, and made the UK contra scene like a volcano... influence spread all over the country from this event.

David Surette (guitar) very generous with his time coaching well known UK contra musicians
Anecdotes

Rita's bed was shared by John Stewart of Nottingham (neither could take a whole week off work) hot bedding at hot house

"Penguin reel" started by Meg Winters with Rita at this event, trying to put Mike off calling! (music March of St Timothy... M Knight didn't realise that it was the first time this happened and thought it was normal occurrence!)

Zesty Contra Weekends

highlight of the year for Rita and Mike- 2015 packed with regulars and newcomers who fitted in really well

(one Irish set dancer had never tried contra before)

Halsway Manor Experience encourages enormous socialising and a family atmosphere for the whole weekend so that dancers really get to know each other well. They also look out for each others (physical limitations)