

Mary interviewing Cynthia Sartin on 16.01.2015

Mary: Right, Cynthia – Thank you for participating in this interview. Um. Can you start by telling me a little bit about yourself?

Cynthia: Ah, well, um, I had no knowledge or a particular interest in Folk music until I met my husband. I was born in Leeds in 1944 and lived there for twenty years and things we used to do was go to Jazz Clubs, (laughter) and nights at the pub and things like that. So in...when I was twenty-seven/twenty-eight I moved down to Dorset as librarian of Sherborne Library. And it was soon after that I met Bonny, who was a member of The Yetties, and began to be aware of Folk Music. We married after about four years and I still had not come into contact with Halsway Manor at all, but when our children were four and six, in around 1983, the Yetties were invited down to do a weekend at Halsway. And we all...including...to bring the family, so we all came to Halsway and were amazed at what a wonderful place it is. (laughter)

Mary: Can you tell me a little bit about what it was like then?

Cynthia: Well, from the outside it looked very similar to today, and inside it's not that different except, um, because it's got the basic structure hasn't it; it's got the stone walls and panelling inside. The rooms upstairs are a lot more up to date now. A lot of them are en suited and in the Mews they're all en suited and I suppose it's all become a little more professional and probably well run. But it was always a very, very friendly place, you were always very welcome here. And it's like coming...it is a Manor House but it's a rather special Manor House; I mean it has a lot of history and it's very beautiful and you just get absorbed...um...just settle into it, really (laughter) and you're very well...were very well looked after and we had a lovely weekend and the children were all a lot younger and everyone who came to Halsway seemed a lot younger (laughter). We had a great time and the children found it fascinating. The library is actually in a secret room off the lounge. Now it has a label on it saying Margaret Grant Memorial Library but in those days it had nothing on the door. There's the little gold clip and that's ...you pull that/push that up and...

Mary: Yes, 'cos it looks just part of the panelling.

Cynthia: Yes, and there's a second door and you go, yes, it's all part of the panelling, and you're through into what is a secret room, so, and that is the library with the most amazing ceiling. So, not that I took much interest in the library to be honest; I was a librarian but I think there was so much else going on that I never really gave it a thought.

Mary: So what kind of things were going on, that you might have been involved in?

Cynthia: Oh, well, there was the Dance and the Song. I mean Yetties' weekends include music workshops – I presume they were music workshops then, I can't really remember – and you would be dancing outside on the lawn and on the front here, the terrace, and we just explored the Manor really and just fascinated by it I suppose. Yes.

Mary: Yes, it sounds fascinating.

Cynthia: Yes, and was a very family orientated place. You know, the people who were running it had children and we were just made to feel very at home and people would wander down to the Carew Arms at lunchtime and (laughter) wander back. It was all very, very informal. I really can't remember an awful lot about those weekends apart from the fact that we enjoyed ourselves. And we came for about three or four years and then The Yetties were booked to celebrate the 21st Anniversary and I remember we were here. 'Cos we were in rooms that ...I don't know that every time we were in room 3 but that's the one I remember 'cos that's the one with an arched/domed ceiling that has an echo, and has windows looking towards the Quantocks, to the side of the Manor and to the front of the Manor. And it has a window seat so you can sit in the window seat and read your book (laughter) and look at the view. It is, it's gorgeous, so those were my impressions. I really loved it, so.

Mary: That's great. But then you got involved with the library here at Halsway. Tell us about that.

Cynthia: Yes, well that wasn't for a long time because after those three or four years of doing weekends here The Yetties weren't asked back because Management changed and we weren't asked back until 19...it would be about 1986...no, no, sorry, 1996/97 to do a weekend and we came...and by this time our children were grown up so it was just, you know, The Yetties and their wives. Part of the deal was that they could bring their wives along 'cos normally we didn't travel with them at all. We didn't go to any of their bookings but we did come down for the weekends and that started a series of weekends which have lasted up until, um, 2000 and uh... where are we now,, 2011...when The Yetties retired in 2011. And Bonny's done – with Pete – has done three or four weekends since/years since, when the last one will be in March but, uh...

Mary: So how did you get involved then, in the library.

Cynthia: Well, it was because, I mean, Geoff Rye was always here at the weekends – he was the librarian and he was really a driving force for Halsway. He and his wife – I don't think Halsway would be here if it wasn't for him and his wife Bessie – and he was the librarian here for thirty-four years.

Mary: Gosh.

Cynthia: Yeah. He had been chief librarian of Weston-super-mare and when he retired he went to Africa and advised in the libraries there. But he was always involved with Halsway and he was also on the committee at Cecil Sharp House, the English Folk Song and Dance Society, on the council there. But he talked to us, to people about taking over the library but he never arranged anything and then suddenly he...he'd lost the sight of one eye during the war, and he lost the sight in the other so he was blind and he couldn't continue. So it was looking for someone who...and we were the ones who in the end took it over because...(laughter)

Mary: Well done you!

Cynthia: Well, I didn't realise what it would entail. I just thought it would be a question of keeping stuff in order and tidying it up from time to time, but it turned into something far

more than that. So that's how, and that was about 1988/89 So this is our sixteenth year of doing it.

Mary: Gosh.

Cynthia: And we're looking now...because thinking of what happened when Geoff died...um, I'm looking for someone to take it over from me. And we have people who help us, you know, there's someone doing...putting cataloguing records and Bidy does the Archives and I've got someone ... oh yes, and there's another lady who worked at the V & A and looked after photographs there; she's cataloguing our photographs 'cos we found some wonderful black and white photographs from the '60s and she's amazing 'cos she can look at a photograph and know who took it. You know, if it's someone of any merit.

Mary: Gosh

Cynthia: Yes. So, we've almost got a team in the library now, so we're moving that way. Bt what we need now is someone with a lot of IT knowledge who can do the ...the next stage. I've always felt that we've salvaged what was here 'cos there was an awful lot of stuff in the basement, which is quite damp down there though. An awful lot of records – you know, the 78s and LPs – oh and all sorts of bits and pieces. And then, once we took over things started coming in from other people. And so we sorted through all of that and kept what was useful.

Mary: I suppose that's ongoing, really.

Cynthia: Yes, and the big thing was that as I said, Geoff was a brilliant cataloguer and he, oh I'm saying it again, he catalogued so thoroughly and you realise, but it was on cards and really it needed to be computerised so what we eventually did was we created a data base and put all the records on to the computer. But we had to... when we first took over, because Geoff had grown old with the library and he hadn't, I think for about eight or ten years probably hadn't done an awful lot in there, it had got very dusty and the labels were falling off the backs of books, and he was very frugal and magazines were kept in cereal boxes, Kellogg's boxes, and he used two sides of a piece of paper, er, you know, the Archives have got bits of information and you're not quite sure which side is the bit you...is important because he always used the same, he never threw anything away you see. So, we've gradually worked our way through the library that was there. Bonny put new labels on the spines of the books and I repaired and repaired them. There were multiple copies of some things and we cut that down to three. We decided to keep three copies 'cos we didn't know how it was going to be used. And gradually worked our way through that and someone kindly donated a computer and the first one we were given was...was condemned (laughter). It was totally useless but then someone very generously paid for a new, brand new computer.

Mary: Wonderful

Cynthia: And we had a manager at that time who was very supportive of us and he organised it all and so we started putting new things... I had a friend who created the data base; she had done one for Somerset and Dorset Family History Society and I realised that that would suit us very well and we created it together, you know, we refined it for this library. I had thought we would use the same system as at Cecil Sharp House and the Vaughan Williams library,

but they're using quite an outdated, cardboard system and there was no one to actually show us how to use it or set it up. So...

Mary: You don't want any more cereal packets really...(laughter)

Cynthia: No! (laughter) So, Delia created this database for us which has been absolutely brilliant and we started putting the books, book stock and records that we had here on to the computer and we'd just finished that, and we were donated the Kennedy Collection, which was a library of eleven thousand items; (I mean, what was here already I would say was about eighteen hundred) but it consisted of around 3,000 books, supposedly 6,000 LPs and 78s and other non-book materials, CDs and so on. Well, that was a huge, huge task that we had, and we had no room for it really. But, we, um, it went to the Somerset and Dorset Family History Centre in Sherborne as they had just moved into new premises and they had a big loft space and we were able to put it up there. And I worked through it in Sherborne and brought it here and we gradually catalogued it and put it into stock. That was the book stock. All the records; the LPs and 78s came here and were stacked in cupboards and corners around the Manor. So we ...gradually worked our way through, that was in the end of 2006 and I think it took us about six years, about 5 say, to get all the materials, all the book material onto the computer. The library – it wasn't 3,000 because it was his own personal library so it had non-Folk material and we, so we actually sold quite a lot of it after we had...because it was given to us on the understanding that we had to keep everything, unless we already had two copies. So we negotiated with the Kennedys, David Kennedy, his son, and we were allowed to sell it so, unless it was very valuable (laughter) and then I think he thought we should give it back to him, but there was nothing that was so excessively valuable and so we...we raised quite a bit of money that's gone into the library fund.

Mary: Oh, that's excellent.

Cynthia: Yes

Mary: What about of all the things that you've come across in the library, what has any sort of special resonance for you? What have you come across that for you has been really interesting?

Cynthia: Well, there was the William Winter manuscript which was...that...Geoff Rye had bought it, and it is our most – apart from the Ruth Tongue Collection, which we've got her unpublished manuscript – it's our only other original manuscript. And it was... we knew we had it, and that during the time when Geoff gave up, it sort of...it had disappeared (gasps) and someone said they'd put it somewhere safe but they couldn't remember where!(laughter) And we eventually found it in a cupboard on the back wall of the Manor, under the book-cases, on the back wall of the Manor. So,..in the library, so we retrieved that after a number of years someone came along and wanted to transcribe it and we've published it and sold, ooh, about fifteen hundred copies of it. I'm not sure it's that many to be honest but a lot of copies have been sold and it's the song, the tunes from the eighteenth...which century is it? (leafs through pages) Yes, "Country Dance and Popular Tunes from the Manuscript of a Nineteenth Century Somerset village Shoemaker". (Pages being turned) From the nineteenth century. So...

Mary: Mmmm. It's wonderful, I know, I've come across it before.

Cynthia: Yes, yes, and the musicians really like it. And it's been published with a CD so that was a very successful...

Mary: And special.

Cynthia: Yes, yes. I mean I'm not, I'm still not a Folkie. (laughter)

Mary: Sssssh! I won't tell!

Cynthia: I enjoy folk music and I loved dancing but I'm not very good at it and I can't sing but I love hearing other people sing, but...

Mary: But I think your contribution to the library has been absolutely incredible.

Cynthia: Yes, well I sometimes think I actually got through all this, particularly the Kennedy stuff, because I haven't got the specific interest and I just look at it as a book that has to be dealt with and someone else would never have finished because they'd have kept being side tracked.

Mary: Yes, that's true!

Cynthia: You know, the people with the real...and Bonny does all the cataloguing because he knows the subject. I classify them, which is the Library of Con...it won't really interest people but it's not the usual Dewey that comes up in libraries; it's the Library of Congress classification scheme which is used in academic libraries. They use it at the Vaughan Williams library as well. So, it's quite...it takes you a while to get your head around it.

Mary: Yes, well, I think your contribution to the folkies (laughter) comes second to none.

Cynthia: Oh, I actually enjoy it. One of the great things is that when you're working in the library you can, I mean, there's nothing on this afternoon but there's often music playing. I suppose a memorable time...er, the Northumbrian Pipers, you know, you get fifty of those, and they're playing in the Long Room, so the music sort of echoes through the Manor and it's lovely. Yeah, and all the musicians really; it's lovely to have them, hear them singing and then it's very satisfying when you find songs or tunes that they...we've helped at 'Give Voice' weekend a few months ago and we found a song for someone that she'd been looking for – a particular version of a song – that they'd been looking for for years and that's really, it makes it all worthwhile, really. And it is so much part of our heritage and you do feel it's important because we're preserving and conserving it, hopefully people are using it to support the courses all the time. And the Folk, the Folk Lore, which Bidy is particularly interested in, we have in the Mardon Room, and we have story tellers; we have courses here now and they use that a lot. And the Folk Lore Society's Library has been moth-balled and so they find that our collection is one of the best that they can access, so...

Mary: Really?

Cynthia: Yeah, so it's... again, that makes it very worthwhile.

Mary: Well, I was going to say, could you, you know, explain the importance of your Folk interest to you personally but you've just done that.

Cynthia: Well, I do think it's very important, don't you.

Mary: Absolutely

Cynthia: Well, my generation were brought up on, you know, maypole dancing at school and singing the songs and the current generation doesn't have that and it's really important I think that they're still...that they are available. I mean, Folk is an oral tradition but because people are not passing on these songs from grand-parent to child, you know, and so on. It's...it has to be preserved in libraries I suppose, to make sure that it's preserved, in the libraries.

Mary: Absolutely.

Cynthia: So, yeah.

Mary: Have you got a particular song that's a favourite for you?

Cynthia: I quite like 'Linden Lea' actually. It would be quite interesting to see Biddy...that's...I was brought up in Primary school in Leeds and at my last year at school we had, the last two years, we had a teacher who played, we had a piano in the classroom and we sang songs and one of them was... well, the three that I most remember were 'Men of Harlech', 'Waltzing Matilda' and 'Linden Lea'. (laughter)

Mary: World-wide spread there!

Cynthia: Yeah, that's right. Well, I think 'Linden Lea' will always...I like the idea of, you know, you're free to roam and come back.

Mary: Yes, that's right.

Cynthia: Yes, so I've always liked the sentiments of 'Linden Lea'. And so I suppose, that's why it's one of my favourites. But then there's another one called 'Farewell She' that Bonny sings and there's the one 'The Ladies who Dance at Whitsun' which is very, very sad because it's the ladies who were left single because of the First World War and it's about the ladies who kept the Folk Dance traditions going because, uh, there were no men about. You know there are songs that I...

Mary: Yes, that touch you in a particular way, yes. Well, thank you so much for giving this interview. (laughter) It's been really interesting for me to hear your side.

Cynthia : Are you sure?

Mary: Yes! Absolutely! It's been lovely. Is there anything else that you feel that you, you... feel pressed to tell me?

Cynthia: No, not really. No.

Mary: Well, again, thank you very much.

Cynthia: That was fairly painless!