

**Glen Heaton interviewed by Diana Brand on 22 December 2014 at Halsway Manor**

**DB:** So Glen, um, could you tell me how you got involved in Halsway?

**GH:** Well, we had decided shortly after we were married that we wouldn't stay within the reaches of London and we actually lived in Nutley in Sussex which is halfway between London and Brighton and Eastbourne and with a family we felt very strongly that we wanted to remove them from the influences if you like of the city and the town because drugs were just beginning to come in and we thought, well, Somerset was a place that we liked very much, um, we decided that Somerset was the direction, really the West Country was the direction to go in. Umm

Brian had a meeting at Halsway in, oh gosh, I think it was about 1966/67 and I came down with him, and it was only just for a couple of days, the meeting was here at Halsway and after that, I mean, we were quite smitten with Halsway, , it was homely, it was lovely, a real country residence which confirmed our ideas of moving to the South West and about, how we were actually contacted, it was a bit vague really, but about 1968/69 we decided because we'd heard that managers were going to be required for Halsway and it was just up Brian's street so to speak because he was working for the South East area of England for the folk dancing. organising and so on...so we sort of came down, I'm just trying to remember a logical sequence because things have been compacted really, but anyway, we decided to come down and we arrived here in 1969 and Brian came up to the manor here to work and be involved in sort of, with the thought of taking over from Marjorie and Donald when they were due to retire sort of in about a year's time.

We had a bit of gentle pushing I think one would call it in the direction of Marjorie and Donald, because, having made the decision to retire obviously they needed to move on and it was obvious that they weren't ready for retirement at least we certainly felt they weren't and we refused quietly not to do any pushing because by then Marjorie and Donald had become very good friends of ours and um gradually we decided that really with accommodation that was offered that we could not cope with two children in an adult household and our animal population as it was and we looked for a house that was sort of local to Halsway and we were lucky to find Brambletye which is just literally a mile down the road which meant that I would be at home looking after the children, I had to opt out because I just refused, I felt that my place was with the children, and sort of the home at that point in time.

**DB:** Why wasn't Halsway appropriate for you?

**GH:** Well, the accommodation was just too small um. I did on, as many occasions as I could (cough) come up to support Brian and generally to help and do whatever, up here, but obviously with two children, one just starting school, one just nine months old, learning to walk, I mean during the day for a couple of hours whilst Richard was at school that was fine here but not with adult company all the time.

**DB:** What can you remember of the activities here at that time?

**GH:** Oh yes, I mean Halsway was just full of music, dance and song. It was an amazing place and over the latter years it's become a quieter venue should I say. But no, the whole place was vibrant, it was alive, it was fantastic and it was everything we ever wanted or sort of had dreamed of. We sort of had dances Saturday nights, people locally would come in and it was

well supported by the local people too. People would travel far and wide across England to come down to Halsway. Christmas was a big time. If you decided you wanted to come to Halsway for Christmas you really had to get your booking in very early indeed and Marjorie and Donald loved Christmas here, as indeed everybody did and there were a few traditions really to keep things moving slowly and one of which at Christmas was that after Christmas dinner the men would do the washing up and the clearing and I know I was sort of in the hall and the call went out, 'Where are the men?' so I came into the library to chivvy them up and I was met by a sea of bodies asleep in chairs (laughs)...a vision I will never forget.

**DB:** Did you wake them up?

**GH:** We did, but you know that was just one of the fun traditions. And after Christmas, Marjorie and Donald would make sure that all the greenery – the house didn't have any tinsel or anything of that sort, it was green decoration – and January 6th arrived and all the greenery had to be collected and brought into the hall and it was gradually burnt on the fire in the hall and we all stood around enjoying a glass of wine, um, and it was a lovely family grouping of staff together – it was really great.

And there were other traditions. I mean, there was Open Day, um, which was sort of obviously mid-summer when the weather was good, there were dances mid-summer evening, some were held up on the tennis courts there, some down below here, and generally, you know, that sort of tradition existed, which was lovely. Another one which was quite sort of domesticated I think you should call it is the candelabra in the — well we used to call it the lounge, before the bar was fitted — that would be taken down very carefully with a step ladder in the middle of the room and Donald climbing up and Marjorie handing the bits down and the staff were all allocated a bit of the chandelier. And we all had to clean it up and it was gradually reassembled and put back again at the end of two or three days and it was great because, again, we were all working as a team it wasn't just fragmented bodies, in and around.

Um..and really, I mean we lacked a maypole which I felt strongly ought to be here and later on, over the years, when I was sort of helping to run the Friends of Halsway we sort of managed to raise the funds and we had a maypole put up and we also bought the wassail apple tree which is in the grounds at the moment so at least those sort of traditions go on. Um..I can't think of anything....

**DB:** Are you a dancer yourself?

**GH:** I was a dancer, yes, but, unfortunately, I've got various back troubles so I just can't put my back in hazard I've had to give up all sorts of things (laughs) which I find frustrating..

**DB:** But you used to dance here at Halsway?

**GH:** Yes, yes, yes, yes. The room was always full of people, full of noise, magic umm – and the house was just alive and it was lovely, and during the week, we called it the bread and butter days, when conferences would come in which financially supported other things that went on here.

**DB:** Are we talking about the '70s now?

**GH:** Yes '70s and into the '80s, yes

**DB:** And what happened during the '90s? Were you still involved with..?

**GH:** Ugh, well I went back into full-time teaching when the children started school, um, and it was a job at least that fitted into school hours and I can do a lot of my school work at home, very early in the morning, so really from my point of view it suited me fine. Umm..so my involvement really with Halsway became less and less and again, because of the lack of babysitters at the time and Brian was in and out, umm, I was the chief sort of home sitter in the evenings.

But, um, things changed when Marjorie and Donald actually left, we had a succession of managers, they may have stayed for two or three years, but they didn't have the same depth of feeling, I think I would say for Halsway umm..you either love this place or you hate it as it were and somehow, you know, they couldn't really make up their minds whether they liked it, I think probably because for the most part they weren't folk dancers born and bred, you know, they weren't into it in any depth and I think that made a difference.

**DB:** And nowadays?

**GH:** Nowadays, well it's lovely because over the last four or five years things have begun to look up here, and certainly with a new manager again, umm, folk dancing and music and song, is beginning to come up the ladder and suddenly you begin to hear Halsway being talked about again, which is great because it's a marvellous little jewel this in the sort of local area, umm, and it just needs to be promoted which is being done and it's good...so..

**DB:** Ok, well I think that's it probably.

ends

Summary of interview with Glen Heaton, December 2014

Glen speaks about deciding to move to Somerset with her husband, Brian during the 1960s. when their children were small. They were at Halsway when Marjorie and Donald Hunt were still running it and she describes some of the traditions such as Christmas and cleaning the candelabra. She explains why they decided to move out of Halsway but has fond memories of the early days as vibrant, magical and full of activity. She and her husband were very involved in dancing and she mentions that later managers didn't seem to have the same passion. She is very optimistic for the future as she feels that Halsway Manor is now returning to its former glory and is better known than in former decades.