

Bonny Sartin Interview #24 by Mary Reece 01.05.15

Summary

Bonny gives brief description of early years in rural Dorset farm cottage where he was born with his twin sister, during the war. Moved to Thornford at age 4. Sang at school to radio 'Rythm and Melody' and then , when the family moved to Yetminster, the WI ran fortnightly folk dances which he joined to meet girls and also became friends with Pete, Mac and Bob at Scouts – later to form the Yetties dancing and singing formation team.

1961 they went to Sidmouth Folk Festival. Discovered his father knew songs too and then an ancestor, Marina Russell, nee Sartin, had sung and had over 100 songs collected by Cecil Sharp. Also related to Paul Sartin, singer and fiddle player. In teens joined up with Morris team and out singing and dancing every other night. Nicked songs from Cyril Tawney among others and loved discovering old songs. Started Yeovil Folk club in '74. Yetties turned professional in 1967 and travelled all over England, away for weeks at a time, sleeping on floors sometimes.

Bill Rutter, at Halsway, invited the Yetties to run concerts and dances and to lead the WI who were celebrating 50 years ago by singing on the highest places in Somerset – they even printed the leaflets for this during the night off duty at the printworks. 1969 did first Halsway Yetties weekend with song, dance and craft talks, (including the 78 year old thatcher from Dorset)and instrument making. It cost £5 8s 0d cost for a whole weekend in 1967 for 4 people. Halsway was a hub where they could pop in en route to other gigs – there was a family feel to the place and those who used it.

Rudimentary accommodation in those day – bring your own sleeping bag and Bessie Rye would find a bed in a dormitory. Much like a very lively 70's commune and the Wessex Folk Song Federation would meet to organise tours and they still have reunion weekends now.

Bonny now works on the Halsway library catalogue, now putting the catalogue online, with key words, (now over 6,700 key words) and has been doing this for 16 years. This has grown exponentially as people continue to bring items in. Bonny considers this a wonderful way of giving something back, as his career in folk has been such a happy one. Reflects that as things go in cycles, at one point Halsway became very dance orientated but is now returning to include all sorts of old traditional things. Children are an important part of this and the current energy apparent in the organisation with lots of young talented folk singers coming up who are amazing.

Bonny has written a couple of folk songs about Halsway Manor and sings 'The White Lady' about the resident ghost, and 'Noisy Neighbours' a song from the viewpoint of the rookery about the folk music below.

In 2006 made a DVD of Halsway and all the larks that go on. The Yetties weekends became President's weekends when he was President of Halsway as the Yetties retired. People bring the songs they've collected over the whole year and still have a lovely time although hard work. After concerts they usually go on to the bar for a sing song at 11:00pm and have to sing again the next day. Today Bonny had been teaching the children a Broom Dance but when

not at Halsway he gives talks to various clubs about Folk, Dorset history or sailing. However, Halsway has been tremendously important to him, and the uniqueness of it is also apparent. Bonny thinks it is so important as a one off venue to keep Folk traditions alive.