

## Yvette Staelens interviewing Andrew Shaw on 2nd March 2015

**YS:** Andrew tell me a little about yourself. When you were born and a bit about your family. Your Mum and Dad.

**AS:** I was born in 1948 and I have always lived in the Manchester area. One side of it or the other you can probably tell from my accent. My mother was a nurse and my father worked for Esso Petroleum Company in some clerical fashion or other. We moved from the East side of Manchester when I was about 10 years old to Hale near Altrincham in Cheshire which is about 10 miles south of the centre of Manchester and apart from University I lived there ever since. I started dancing when I was a teenager.

**YS:** Why was that?

**AS:** Well, my first girlfriend. Um her whole family danced her mother, father and the two girls attended two local dance clubs. One in Sale and the other in Bowdon which is just outside of Altrincham and as the boyfriend I was dragged along to the class in Bowdon where I steadfastly refused to dance for quite a long time, um and eventually I was given an ultimatum you know the sort of thing well if you are not going to dance then you might as well not be here. So (chuckle) I started and um and I've been doing it ever since. I was at Grammar School then I can't exactly tell you when but I suppose I've probably been dancing for 50/60 years.

**YS:** Tell me about the sort of dancing you do.

**AS:** Well it depends. Depends on the club that you end up going to. I mean the club that I was going to at that time um was basically um er an English country dance club. A playford style dance club and the people running it were using Cecil Sharps country dance books. His interpretations of playford dances. Um had an old lady playing away on the piano – you know. That's what attracted me to the dances really. The music is just amazing. You never get tired and you keep finding new tunes that are just absolutely wonderful – you know. So I have always been an historian at heart. That's not what I did at University because I could never get good enough grades for exams. I ended up doing a language degree but I've always been an historian at heart so I was always interested in the backgrounds of dances where they came from etc. um and I mean for a long time it was just an interest a hobby you know. Um I met Tom Cook who again, you won't have heard of, but he was, he interpreted dances. He was interested in the origins of the dances and he did an enormous amount of research on the background to the Playford style dances um he amassed an amazing archive in the days when you could get photocopies of these original books without huge expense, you know. And he amassed copies of practically every English country dance that was published between 1651 and say 1730 and quite a lot of material er after that um and he analyzed this material and he produced these two volume manuscripts called the Assembly um which is an analyze of all these dances and the background to them and the history of the books

they were published in. I mean this was never published – it was not in a form that could have been published, but there is a copy in Vaughn Williams, a copy in America, I've got his original. So I met Tom Cook he used to run an annual English Country Dance course at Burton Manor College which is on The Wirral in Cheshire. It belonged to the Gladstone family. The Prime Minister or one of his family anyway and it was one of these adult education colleges. So we used to run a weekend every year and his was on dancing interpretation so he would present dances that he had been working on during that year. And he would get the people there, those that were interested, to have a go at it themselves. Um that's what – that was the turning point for me that's what turned the hobby into the all consuming passion, you know. Um I suddenly found this, well I don't know, passion, yes it was a passion because what had been in there had suddenly developed in a way and I mean I had been called dances, teaching dances. I started just at my own club and then you get asked to do a dance locally and then you get asked to do a dance regionally. What made the difference to me in my calling was being invited Litchfield Folk Festival and by Ken Alexander um and er suddenly I was getting asked to call over the country because people all over the country at Litchfield said "Oh we danced with Andrew Shaw at Litchfield". He was quite good get him at one of our dances. So I mean I was quite a well known as a caller at that time.

**YS:** When was that do you reckon?

**AS:** Oh gosh I can't remember I've got a terrible memory for dates and ages and names.

**YS:** Was that the time you came to Halsway roughly. What brought you to Halsway?

**AS:** What brought me to Halsway was Tom Cook basically because his club. He belonged to a club called The Neston folk dance club on the Wirral. That's where he lived and they ran a club weekend here every year. This time of year, February half-termish, um so we, Sally & myself we started. We were invited to come along. They got as many as their club dancers who wanted to go signed up and if there were places left they opened it to anybody else who wanted to come. So we became regulars at The Neston group weekend here. So that's how I came to Halsway in the first place. Then when Tom got too old to travel and was not wanting to call as much they asked me if I would take over running their weekends. Which I did for two, three or four years, I can't remember. um and then when they decided cos the club was getting older and the number of people coming every year was dwindling they decided enough was enough and they were not going to run it any more. um I said I would take over the weekend so that's when I started running these things under my own name and I did the first series of six um and I then took a break. I kept the date and I then gave it to Philippe Callon he did a year and then I've just done another series of eight weekends and I've just told them that this is the last of that particular series. I am hoping to be back here next February to be doing something else with the date.

**YS:** What makes it special?

**AS:** What makes it special, well it's the location, the building, I mean when you've got people living in on site you get a completely different atmosphere than if they are out in bed and breakfast or whatever like at a festival. Completely different because you become like um well you know you are sleeping together, in some cases. We are always sharing with another couple because the weekends are always full it has always been oversubscribed so those people who come from my club, you know, have to share rooms so we always share a room um so you are like a big family. It is just makes for a completely different atmosphere. People keep saying to me, people who come for the first time, oh it's so friendly everybody was so friendly, you know. We were really quite concerned before we came we were trying to work out whether we would be happy or whether we would fit in but everybody was so friendly with us it was wonderful. So, you know, you are in a different world when you are here.

**YS:** This is having to be my last question for you Andrew. I would love to talk to you again and I might well do that there is a lot I want to ask you about. But I have a choir waiting.

**YS:** If I was to ask you to describe what Halsway meant to you what would you say?

**AS:** Well, as a caller and a dance researcher this weekend that I run here is the high point of my year. I have the best musicians. I have Paul Hutchinson and John Hymas they play for all eight of these well Paul Hutchison has played for all fifteen of my weekends here and he is without doubt one of the finest accordion player you could hope to work with and John Hymas is just a brilliant violinist. They can do wonderful things, you heard them, you heard what they do so I have some of the best dancers I can get who want to come on this, I have the best musicians. I do an awful lot of preparation for this weekend because it is where I present what I have been doing for the previous twelve months whatever I've been working on. So it is the high point of my year and when I was telling them last night that this was the last of the series I had tears in my eyes, you know.

**YS:** From what I've heard you are the high point of the people here. They have said so much positive things about you as a caller.....

**AS:** My pleasure, my pleasure