

This is Dorothy King, interviewing Rose Harrison, for the Telling Tales project in Bishops Lydeard on Tuesday 8th September 2015.

D Rose, thank you very much for agreeing to do this interview. Erm, can you tell me a bit about your background, where you were born, where you were brought up?

R I was born at the Radcliffe Infirmary in Oxford, where my mother had been doing a part of her midwifery course, particularly wanted to have her first baby there but I was based, or she and I were based at that time in Weymouth, as she had come home from West Africa where she had met and married my father, erm, in the Colonial Service, my father was a doctor in the Colonial Service in Sierra Leone and my mother went out as a nurse and my father was sent to meet this new nurse off the ship, laughs, in Freetown.

D That's great. Were you brought up in Oxford?

R No. I spent the first two years of my life, because my mother returned to my father in West Africa, I spent the first two years of my life with my aunts and my grandfather in Weymouth and then my mother came back to have my sister and after, after a short while, I think, of being in Weymouth, she and we moved to Colyton in East Devon until my father came back from West Africa and took a job in Exeter as a doctor at the old City Hospital and we were subsequently brought up in Exeter.

D A nice city. Let's move on to Halsway. What was your first experience of Halsway Manor?

R My first experience of Halsway Manor was being taken by friends, there was two couples of us, erm, the older couple had been members of a dance group in Dorset and had heard there was to be a Dorset, a Dorset dance weekend at Halsway Manor and arranged this foursome and we went over there for the weekend, staying very soon, really, after Halsway Manor had opened. The band at the time were the Yetties and the caller was Peter Boskitt and we had a fantastic dance weekend. Laughter.

D Did that lead to a regular appearance at Halsway for you?

R Not at all. No, subsequently, a couple of years later, I left where I was working at the time which was over at Lynton, at a place called Lee Abbey and I needed to return to teaching, erm, in order to have the school holidays to give my mother and my sister a hand, they both needed a bit of help, erm and I applied for a teaching post in Crowcombe and became the infant school teacher in Crowcombe in 1970. And during that autumn, a friend who had been on the community with me at Lee Abbey had very close friends of his, Donald and Marjorie Hunt, with whom he had worked at Chitcombe Farm, I think, up in the Blackdown Hills. He had worked with them and was very keen that I should meet them, the new managers of Halsway Manor and he took me over for an evening of the dance group at Halsway back in the autumn of 1970. And when I, this was just after I had moved myself to Halsway Manor, no, to Crowcombe, to start my teaching job and thereafter I became a regular member of Halsway Dance Club and joined in a huge number of the events going on at Halsway at the time throughout the following years.

D Were there a lot of events held?

R Well, there were the annual fetes and there was very often a ceilidh on a Saturday evening and because of the various groups that were staying at Halsway, there were a lot of dances available for us to join in if we wanted to on a Saturday evening, we could go and join what was arranged for the guests. Yes, it was a great time.

D Yes, yes. Erm, did dancing become not enough for you at some stage? Did you move on to making music yourself?

R Yes, I certainly did, but I personally would always always have preferred to have been on the dance floor. Laughter.

D Oh, right.

R Yes, always! But I loved the music as well, but my preference was the dance.

D Okay, okay.

R I always said to Richard I'd rather dance than play; he knew that. Laughter.

D Tell me about the formation of Perfect Cure.

R Perfect Cure came out of five wonderful years that Brian Heaton started up in January 1971, erm, when he first came down to Somerset. He organised a free for all, anybody could go who wanted to make music, dance music and I think we used to meet on a monthly basis and provided Brian was there, we made some pretty good music! It didn't matter what anybody else could do, but just go along and have a go.

D What did you play?

R At that stage, I think I had a flute which I played a little bit. I was starting to learn the guitar and I also played the piano but there was another pianist who was much better than me and played the piano, so I didn't.

D This other piano player, who was better than you, that was erm, Ken Flitton?

R Funnel.

D Funnel, Ken Funnel, yes. Did he have his own piano?

R I think he must have, yes, I'm sure he had a piano at home. I think.

D But it was Brian's piano that moved.

R Yes, Brian's piano was taken round to all the venues where the Brute Force was booked to play.

D Quite an undertaking, to take a piano with you!

R Absolutely. Brian had a trailer that was big enough to accommodate the piano and one of the members of the band was Gordon Kidd, who worked at Minehead with Max Removals, so he was a professional furniture remover and provided he was there and Brian was there and some young stalwart male members of the band, that was fine. He managed to get the piano to all the dance venues.

D And it stayed in tune?

R I think so, I'm sure it did. Laughs. Because Brian wouldn't tolerate it if it didn't!

D So that was Brute Force and that sounded a lot of fun. How did Perfect Cure come out of that?

R Because Brute Force took a great deal of organisation and I think there were about 120 of us in the band and to contact all those people and let them know what was going on and where we were due to play next, I think was just too much. And Brian had given us five wonderful years and then it just came to an end. But there quite a number of us who had enjoyed music so much and had gained a lot of experience in the folk music, erm, in the enjoyment of the tunes and three or four bands actually came out of the end of the Brute Force band. And there was a group of us who were very keen to go on, erm, Richard and Barbara Harrison, Jan and Dick Musson from Broadway. Richard and Barbara lived at Bishops Lydeard, Bob Hughes at Combe Florey and myself at Crowcombe and for about a year we started playing together, meeting in each others' houses but I have to say, that I think those of us from this side found going over to Broadway quite a long way to practice, I think they came to us more frequently. But Jan was actually a very good musician indeed and we were just learning to play folk music and our standard of musicianship was not hers and rather suddenly, she could cope no longer, so that band came to an end. But the rest of us were really, well, Richard and Barbara in particular were very very keen to continue to play folk music and form a band, so we continued and it was much easier, obviously, all meeting up on this side of Taunton between Combe Florey and Bishops Lydeard and Crowcombe and it worked very well.

D So, who played what in Perfect Cure?

R Barbara had given Richard an accordion for their 25th wedding anniversary, which he just loved, it was his passion. Barbara herself was very keen to play the double-bass and did so with equally as much hard work and Richard had arranged for her to be able to move it easily, I think it was some sort of wheel attachment that he had made for her to do that. I think I was playing both the flute and the guitar and neither of those, I didn't have my heart in either of those instruments and then it was suggested I might take up a piano accordion as well, because I played the piano and I loved the tunes so I took that up as well so there were two piano accordions. Bob played the drums.

D And Sheila joined later?

R Sheila joined a lot later.

D Yes, yes. So how many sessions did you have with Perfect Cure in your lifetime?

R Well, the records say that we played for 735 events!

D That's brilliant! How many of those do you think you played at Halsway?

R Quite a number, because when Jack and Charlie, who were the original musicians for the Halsway Dance Group, when they finished, the Committee running the dance group organised various local bands to come in and play and we used to play probably twice a year for them at Halsway Manor, as well as dancing ourselves there when we weren't playing

D Yes, So, just to conclude, you've had a very long history with Halsway Manor. How important has it been in your life?

R Well, at the stage when I was able and free to go, which was from 1966 or 7 or 8, around the end of the Sixties until about 2006 or thereabouts, it was a very major part of my life and I was in many ways sad to stop. But my husband by then, after Barbara's death I had married Richard and it was just too much for him in his old age, he could no longer cope, and so we, as a couple, stopped going. Life has been too busy subsequently to take much active part in it.

D Okay. Rose, thank you so much for giving this interview.