

Paul & Liz Davenport

The award of the EFDSS Gold Badge is fitting recognition for Paul and Liz's years of tireless commitment to the Folk Arts. Both hail from Kingston upon Hull in East Yorkshire. Both had a singing tradition in their respective families - which was a good start. According to legend, they met as teenagers at a Methodist youth club and, to quote, "Seem to have been singing ever since"

A little later Paul discovered The Bluebell pub and Folk Union One – a powerhouse of singing - where he met and was encouraged by Mike Waterson. He also connected with Steve Gardham and was thus introduced to song collecting and subsequently traditional dances through the now defunct Green Ginger Morris and Sword.

Both Paul and Liz went on to teacher training college, Paul at High Melton, near Doncaster, studying Biology and Drama and Liz at Northern Counties College in Northumberland studying Art and Drama. Whilst students they both kept up their individual singing activities and Paul was instrumental in forming a Morris side at High Melton College.

Paul and Liz married in 1971 and settled in the Doncaster area. First teaching posts kept them busy but not to the exclusion of singing and dancing, Paul initiating Green Oak Morris in Doncaster and both singing at, and at times organising local clubs. The arrival of sons Gavin and Gareth forced an inevitable change of pace but no loss of enthusiasm. It was during this period that they engaged in extensive research into several dance traditions. Including notable Morris traditions leading particularly to the revival of the Kirtlington Morris and the famous Lamb Ale in Oxfordshire.. As a result of these efforts Paul was invited by the late Ivor Allsop to be a founder member of the Archive Committee of the Morris Ring. Later discoveries of Plough Lads dances from East Yorkshire, inspired the formation of sides – The infamous Audreys, The Flag & Bone Gang and Rattlejag - to revive and perform these dances.

Whilst a student Paul took up the fiddle, later he added the duet concertina and the melodeon

In 1972 Paul and Liz both secured posts at Maltby Grammar School. It was during this time that Paul was seconded to the London Contemporary Dance School.

Ever the innovator Paul devised a music curriculum that was based entirely around traditional music and song, earning appreciation from OFSTEAD and leading to interesting discussions with the examining boards. It was during this period that whilst researching song material in Leeds Public Library that Liz discovered the location of a considerable quantity of Frank Kidson's manuscript material which was thought to be lost – this material is now located in the 'Locked Cupboard' in the Vaughan Williams Memorial Library in Cecil Sharp House.

In 1994 at Whitby Folk Week I took part in a discussion showcasing folk development initiatives around the country. I had spoken about the early days of the South Riding Folk Network, I think I was either Secretary or Chairman at the time. At the end of the session a couple came up to me expressing their enthusiasm for our ideas and volunteering their help.

Paul & Liz became two of our most energetic supporters. Liz took on and managed our stall and information point at festivals and events, generating valuable funds. The family

has amassed a large collection of books and manuscripts, they delved therein, producing and publishing two successful tune books, a song book, and several monographs drawing on their dance research. A concertina maintenance manual was type set and printed, the author - David Eliot - having generously donated the rights to the SRFN. The output from SRFN publishing was attractive, much appreciated and raised valuable income,

Between 1997 and 2002, Paul edited the SRFN's free newsletter – 4000 copies, quarterly, distributed around the region – Paul was invited to edit English Dance & Song between 2002 and 2005 whilst serving on the EFDSS National Council. Back in Sheffield Paul and Liz led the popular SRFN Tune Session, and Paul organised the Sheffield Union Workhouse Band, a scratch band which supported events and activities with traditional music. The Davenports were central to the organisation of a series of residential workshop weekends which SRFN ran in the Peak District.

In the early 18th Century, Sheffield was home to a group of blind, itinerant, fiddlers whose base of operations was a pub, 'The Q in the Corner' with a legendary and musical landlord, one Samuel Goodlad. Using the Sheffield Local History library, Paul and Liz turned up a wealth of information about these fascinating musicians. The outcome - another tune book and accompanying CD, preserving the repertoire. SRFN had established a good relationship with The University of Sheffield Department of Music and using the blind fiddlers material as the basis, Paul completed an M.Mus degree. A postscript to this story was the campaign to fund and dedicate a plaque commemorating Samuel Goodlad and the fiddlers, at the site of the 'Q in the Corner' in the Sheffield's Paradise Square.

Suffice to say their contribution to the success of SRFN was sustained and substantial.

Back at school Paul started the Generations Project, an 'after school' activity, teaching traditional sword dancing. This led to the formation of a community sword team, Maltby Sword Dancers, which is still active. In 2005, the school Rapper team scooped the Steve Marris Trophy, the top award at Dancing England Rapper Tournament. A considerable achievement by any measure.

In 2006 the Davenports launched Hallamshire Traditions, a Not-for-Profit company giving support to a variety of local folk ventures which include the Sheffield Folk Sessions Festival where they served on the organising committee for nine years; The Yorkshire Garland Project and Hull Folk Archive as well as helping local artists through their own brand label for publishing, and recording. These ventures utilise funds raised through sales of their own CDs, performance fees and current publications.

They have resumed their singing career together, to the tune of five albums, many club appearances and festival bookings. Their song writing goes from strength to strength with their compositions recorded by other artists and often heard in sessions and sing-a-rounds.

In reading through this citation, I am aware that Paul appears more often than Liz but be assured that none of this prodigious output would have happened without the contribution and support of Liz. I can say from experience that it is a truly symbiotic relationship. Long may it continue.

Ron Day is a Sheffield based folk aficionado who has danced with Border and Rapper sides, with Jenny Day, founded 'Raise the Roof' singers club and currently sings with the Sheffield Folk Chorale. He served on the committee and as chairperson of the South Riding Folk Network for a decade, during which time he met Paul and Liz.