Gold Badge Citation

David Blick

David Blick's Gold Badge was presented by Baroness Jan Royall at a Harvest Home at Byfords Farm, Taynton, Gloucestershire, on 5 October 2013. EFDSS Board member, Doug Oates, was in attendance. The citation was written by **Barbara Sanigar**.



Photo: Roy Tanner

David Blick with Barbara Sanigar

Born in Northampton, David's decision as a teenager to join the YWCA was a life-enhancing one; there he learned morris and country dance. He joined Northampton Morris, having watched them on a rainy Coronation Day, and through them was fortunate to meet Sybil and Ken Clark, Nibs Matthews and Douglas Kennedy. They encouraged him to learn to call at the Square Dance Club. Ken loaned him his melodeon, and David taught himself to play, later learning guitar to accompany his growing repertoire of songs. On his National Service in 1957, David was posted to Germany, where he formed the Four Chords Skiffle Band; they played to appreciative English and American audiences across West Germany.

On being discharged from the army in 1960, David made the life-changing decision to attend London University to gain teaching qualifications. During this time, he enjoyed dancing with Ravensbourne and London Pride morris sides, and singing at clubs and at Cecil Sharp House. While teaching at Kilburn Polytechnic, David met Annie, who was later to become his wife, and in 1965, with their young son, they moved to the Forest of Dean, Gloucestershire, where he took up a post as engineering lecturer in the local college; here they settled and raised their four children.

Joining the Gloucestershire Morris Men, he was fortunate to become friends with Tubby Reynolds, and David Jones of Hereford, and with David and the Hereford Morris, inaugurated the Bromyard Folk Festival.

In 1976, from a casual enquiry while running the Forest Folk Song Club, David recruited eight young men, keen to learn morris dancing, and the Forest of Dean Morris was formed, with David as founder squire. David and Annie researched the Ruardean jacket as recorded by Russell Wortley. This raggy jacket is now copied prolifically, but Forest Morris believe its roots are distinctively in the Forest. The Forest of Dean Morris is a strong, thriving side, performing regularly at home and abroad, still with David as their musician.

With a young family, and having enjoyed the camaraderie of Morris Ring meetings, David and other dancers with young families set out to devise a weekend specifically involving wives and families. The Forest of Dean Family Weekend was born; it is now in its 42nd year and keenly anticipated by many visiting sides from around the country.

The 1970s onwards was a busy time. David met an elderly man, Jimmy Prosser, who in 1910 had taken down the words of the Newnham on Severn mummers' play. This same play is now performed each Christmas period, raising to date over £20,000 for good causes.

1972 saw the launch of the Clearwell Castle Folk Club, much loved by national and local artists, with David always encouraging would-be performers to have a go. Medieval banquets were popular too, and for several years, most weekends would see David and his troupe of musicians and singers, named 1493 after their chosen costumes, performing to large numbers of diners at various venues as far afield as Sussex.

About this time David met a wonderful musician, Jim Jones. He had a talent for making three-hole pipes, and greatly wished to manufacture them from stainless steel instead of brass, because of hygiene regulations. The statement 'it can't be done' became a challenge. Together with Jim's knowledge of tuning and David's engineering expertise, David was able to make the jigs and fixtures necessary to produce craftsman-made pipes, now proudly owned and treasured by many morris musicians.

Since attending the Llangollen International Eisteddfod over many years, David dreamed of taking an English dance group to compete on that world stage. 1994 saw that dream realised when his dance group, Castiard, was accepted to dance in the folk dance competition in 1995. The judges welcomed the first English dance group in twenty years. Castiard were then given the honour of performing two additional dances at the opening evening concert before an audience of 5,000, giving an enormous boost to English folk dance, and permanent smiles to the group, who went on to compete again in 1997 and 1999.

Early retirement in 1993 has seen David even busier with an exhausting list of activities. He is musician for Forest Morris and Wimberry Step Clog, has run country dance classes for Monmouth U3A and local villages for twenty years, runs monthly ceilidhs with his Forest Brown band, and has revived the customs of harvest home and wassailing, along with the famous Newent Onion Fayre. He sings and MCs at local clubs. His latest initiative is a 'slow music' session at his home for would-be musicians of all ages; he is keen to pass on the support he received as a young man. He has a growing family of grandchildren and great-grandchildren, has been a town councillor for 14 years, and mayor three times.

It seems that this should be more than one man's life story. All who are fortunate to know David are grateful for his friendship, encouragement, leadership ability, warmth and sense of fun. He is a much loved human being, and richly deserves the recognition of the Gold Badge.

Barbara Sanigar met David in 1970 when she went to work at the college where he was an engineering lecturer. She was swept up in his enthusiasm for folk, and encouraged to sing, join the step clog group he played for, and be part of his ceilidh band, becoming part of his extended family.