Gold Badge Citation – Ian Anderson

Ian Anderson received his Gold Badge at Cecil Sharp House on 31 October. The presentation was made by EFDSS President, Shirley Collins, and the citation was written and read by **Ben Mandelson**.

When I asked Ian for his proudest moment in a career which stretches back into the twentieth century, he told me 'Proudest moment (and I think the best thing I ever did) was Bobstock,' – *Ten Thousand Times Adieu* – the Bob Copper Centenary event, held at Cecil Sharp House on 24 January 2015, and he added 'I should then have quit while ahead...!'

Although ignited by a coffee-bar encounter with a Muddy Waters album in Weston-super-Mare, aged 15, a wig-changing moment for Ian, turning him into a 65-year-old Mississippi bluesman from the Severn Delta, a much later revelation – that Ian came from a family of traditional English *jalis*, griots (folk singers, if you will) is as follows, in Ian's own words.

'From the Somerset Levels side of my father's ancestry (my father's mother's mother's branch) – climbing up the complicated family tree where you have to go up some generations, across and down again – [we have] Charles Norris, collected from by Cecil Sharp in (if I remember correctly) 1909 at Shapwick Station, Somerset. A version of the song "The False Bride" was one of them. Only thanks to Shirley Collins' exemplary sleeve notes to a version of the ballad "Lord Allanwater" did I discover that my great grandmother Emily Agnes Stears was "collected" by Ralph Vaughan Williams in Horsham in 1904.'

Both sides – 'The Full English'. Bob Copper's comment was 'See, I always knew you were one of us.' Cecil Sharp, Ralph Vaughan Williams and Bob Copper! This is a hat-trick of the people!

Both of these griot songs, 'The False Bride' and 'Lord Allanwater', having been handed-down from mouth to collector to paper to record player in impeccable traditional *jali* fashion, have been performed and recorded by Ian. And Ian has also played and recorded with Bob Copper (and Jill, John and Jon) on the legendary *Prostrate with Dismal: Bob Copper Sings the Blues* EP, which I mention to emphasise Ian's long history of recording, of performing, of record producing, of label-running, of broadcasting and of event organising – time-constraints hold me back from reading out an extended and outstanding list here. All of these practical, hands-on, do-it-yourself / did-it-myself things have given him the experiential insight which has enabled him to steer the longest-running-in-print-and-never-missed-an-edition magazine which is now known as *fRoots*, née *Folk Roots*, even earlier née *Southern Rag*. For 36 Years.

You might care to know that his first published piece had been many years earlier, in the *AeroModeller* magazine ('launched November 1935') in the July 1962 edition, price two shillings, in which – on page 338 – the corner-stones of his descriptive writing style were already thrilling a hungry public in the bleak years before Facebook.

I will mention:

The musician: Ian's first ever paid gig was 50 years ago this December (Backwater Jook Band on TWW TV!). Then solo, then Hot Vultures (1973 with Maggie Holland), and – in 1980 – the English Country Blues Band (marrying the Hot Vultures blues road experience with English folk music). A key career moment was learning to sing in English and playing in Tiger Moth English ceilidh band. There was a long semi-retirement, then (Shirley's fault again!) the Blue Blokes 3 and the False Beards.

Record labels/producing: Ian founded the labels Village Thing, Rogue and Weekend Beatnik, and now keeps a hand in with Ghosts from the Basement.

Clubs and festivals: Ian's first was Folk Blues Bristol and West from 1967 ('I was 19!' he says). Then Farnham Folk Day and Bracknell Folk and Roots in the 1980s. There were lots of one-off events, including the English Roots Against Apartheid Ceilidh, Roots at The Roundhouse, Bridges at QEH and the above-mentioned Bobstock of 2015. For the last four years Ian has curated the Cellarful of Folkadelia at Sidmouth FolkWeek.

Radio: For 12 years he presented *Folk Routes* on the BBC World Service, and there were other series for Radio 2, Jazz FM and many one-offs.

Organising tours: First, for Mississippi Fred McDowell in 1969 (aged 21), then Dembo Konte and Kausu Kouyateh in 1980, and many more, championing music from Gambia, Madagascar, England...

Writing: After the aforementioned *AeroModeller*, there were music columns in the 1960s for *Western Daily Press* and *Blues Unlimited*... through to *fRoots* today...



Photo: Derek Schofield

Shirley Collins with Ian Anderson

A soldier in the World Music wars of the 1980s and a winner of the WOMEX Award for Professional Excellence in 2010, making the word 'folk' into a welcome greeting, not a keep-out sign. An enthusiast, a supporter and a revealer. All of these experiences, Ian's experiences, realised through the pages of *fRoots*, show that it *is* possible to recognize many kinds of folk musics; many kinds of *musics*; that valuing one kind does not mean dismissing another, *and* that stressing the community and commonality of expression (even if played on different instruments or sung in different languages) gives us all access to a multiplied richness, and a sense of the multiple worlds that we can enjoy.

Ian said to me years ago that his favourite closing couplet from an English folk song is that of the lovely 'Sweet Primeroses', which, as the Copper Family sang, and Shirley Collins recorded, says:

> *'There is many a dark and a cloudy morning*
> *Turns out to be a most sunshiny day.'*

It's a positive and uplifting message, optimistic, and a good thing to carry around in the head. The sun shines like gold, and this is the time to celebrate with a Gold Badge.

Ben Mandelson is a leading freelance world music record producer, a musician and the Founding Director of WOMEX.