JOHN AND KATIE HOWSON GOLD BADGE CITATION

The highest honour bestowed by the English Folk Dance and Song Society is its Gold Badge. It is given in recognition of an outstanding contribution to the folk arts. It seems a fairly arbitrary award in that there is no points system or Blue Peter-type barometer for measurement of achievement (as far as I'm aware, anyway), but more the recognition that a light is burning brightly somewhere which makes it plain that a vital contribution has been or is being made. For many of us here this evening, that light has been burning brightly in Suffolk for quite a while now and it a great honour and pleasure to be asked to say a few words for today's recipients, John and Katie Howson. A brief perusal of their careers will make this clear and perhaps even surprise one or two of you.

John, who was born in Liverpool in 1949, paid his first visit to a folk club in 1965 - whilst still at school - and had the great fortune to see Pakie Byrne and Christy Moore at Jacquie and Bridie's on that seminal occasion. From there on he prowled the Liverpool area for folk music and a chance to play, including the Spinners Club and a first floor spot at the Green Moose Coffee Bar, a folk club run by playwright Willy Russell. He joined the Merseyside Folklore Research Association soon after and started visiting festivals (including Whitby) and various customary events around the country. He formed the group The Wakes with Tom Brown and later Frank McColl and John Kelly, and perhaps inevitably for a Scouser, became interested in Irish music through the Liverpool Irish Centre and visiting clubs in Dublin and the All Ireland Fleadhs. He also began a five-year engineering apprenticeship.

In 1968 he then formed a duo with Bernie Davis, playing a number of instruments including Appalachian dulcimer and pipe and tabor, before founding the Liverpool Folk Club with Bernie and Tony Wilson. He was by this time making musical instruments and had paid his first visit to the Sidmouth Folk Festival.

From 1970 he called dances with the Jack Ketch Band and teamed up with Barbara Bennion as a duo, playing in most folk clubs in the North West. With Barbara and Irish group Seoda Ceoil, which included Mary Black's brother Shay, he then founded the Liverpool Traditional Folk Club and continued to compere at various other clubs, including the Spinners Club, when they were away on tour.

And then, perhaps most significantly, he visited Emma Vickers in Burscough, Lancashire and made his first field recording (Emma was formerly recorded by collector Fred Hamer) and then he met Bob Cann at the Bromyard Festival, organising a tour of Merseyside folk clubs for him with Bob staying at his parents' house for a week. To keep body and soul together John also started teaching at Alsop High School in Liverpool.

Katy was born in Ilford, Essex, in 1956, moving to south-west London aged 4. Initially inspired by the blues, the 1970s saw a leaning towards folk music when she bought her first 'folk' LP, Fairport Convention's Unhalfbricking and visited a folk club, the Cabbage Patch in Twickenham. She also attended her first ceilidh at Dingles in London with the Etchingham Steam Band playing. Whilst studying for her A-levels at Chiswick Polytechnic she helped organise Rag Week events, including some folk music concerts and then, in 1974, at the University in Lancaster, studying for a BA in Linguistics, joined Red Rose Morris, who were taught Cotswold dances by Keith Chandler. Inevitably, she also ended up on the committee for the Bridge Folk Club in Lancaster.

You can see a theme developing here.

In 1977 John attended the first English Country Music Weekend in Cricklade, after which he, being a worker in wood, made a hammered dulcimer and started playing English tunes. Katie that same year bought her first melodeon to play morris tunes and she too also started to explore English Country Music, visiting Sidmouth and Whitby folk festivals before enrolling for a postgraduate teaching course at Edge Hill, Ormskirk, moving to Southport and joining the Argameles north-west morris side.

And in December 1977, (audience participation here, please) at the Bothy Folk Club in Southport, John met Katie and this is where their journey – in more ways than one – really begins.

Although they say there was no master plan but simply a desire to seek a different lifestyle, I remember John telling me more than once that the work of Keith Summers in Suffolk had been an inspiration to him and clearly enough a reason for John and Katy to consider moving to the county, which they did in 1978, John taking a job at Stowmarket High School teaching craft and design. This was obviously a big year for them both because not only did they

move and begin to immerse themselves in the legendary locations of their adopted county, such as the Blaxhall Ship, they continued their festival going, staying with Bob Cann at the first Dartmoor Festival, and met up with the likes of Reg Reader, Jeannie Harris, and Sliabh (Sleeve) Luachra players Julia and John Clifford. Inspired, John embarked on his research into the traditions of Mid-Suffolk, being introduced to such luminaries as Fred Whiting, Oscar Woods, Font Whatling, Dolly Curtis, Billy Bennington, Richard Davies, Dick Hewitt, Walter Pardon in Norfolk, while Katie briefly took up Cotswold morris with Bury Fair while listening and learning from the tradition. She also started teaching in primary schools.

A narrative of what happens in the next thirty three years would take some time and test the patient of the barman and no doubt most of the people in this room. But I can perhaps condense it by highlighting the strands which become obvious as you go through the years; strands which are in many ways quite separate.

First of all there is the playing. The Old Hat Band was formed in 1980 with the aforementioned Reg Reader and Jeannie Harris. This evolved into Old Hat Concert Party, a sober extension of the former which made an appearance at the Sidmouth Festival in 1982 where John and Katie first encountered the Traditional Bampton Morris Dancers - another sober extension. In 1983 there was the sensationally named Women Wrestling in Mud, formed with Ted Stevens and Mel Dean, a precursor to the Old Hat Dance Band, formed in 1987, again with Jeannie and Reg, along with Ted Stevens, Barry Coope, Mel Dean and Chris Wood. This band was invited to play on Radio 1 and at Glastonbury festival, no less – while the concert party played the equally rock and roll Gateshead Garden Festival. In 1990 Katie's Quartet was formed, initially for local dances, with Reg and Jeannie and Rob Neal. Their CD came out in 1996, Katie and Jeannie’s in 1998 and at last Katie’s solo, The Green Un’ in 2009. Keith Summers once described Katy as ‘The special one,’ long before Jose Mourinho darkened our shores. Along with Polkaworks in 2008, there has been a lot of playing.

The East Anglian Traditional Music Trust was founded in 2000 and set up a year later when Katie left her teaching post to concentrate on it full-time, Katie and John being co-directors. The build up to this strand of their work was gradual but perhaps inevitable as more and more of their time was concentrated on educational and

community activities – effectively acting as a folk development agency for their region and sometimes beyond. I think I can speak for all the trustees when I say that a remarkable amount has been achieved with so little, and although the ride has been a tad rocky in terms of funding and the bureaucracy tedious, Katie has been a model of calm. They have been a joy to work with we, the perfect trustees, have not interferred.

To name but a few of their projects throughout East Anglia will suffice:
2002 Tuning-in project and first Traditional Music Day at MEAL in Stowmarket
2003 Blyth Valley Voices project & book - RVW in Suffolk.
2004 Big Jig celebration of jig dolls organised with guest Pat Pickles and Musical Roots community arts project.
2005 Playback project in Norfolk
2007 the first Melodeon Making course in the UK and publication of tune book, Before the Night Was Out
2009 A partnership project with the Cambridge Music Festival
2011 The Jig doll book (with Pat Pickles) is due to be published. and tenth Traditional Music Day at MEAL in Stowmarket on 3rd September.

There are many more.

But for me (and it all actually ties up to what has already been said) the most significant strand has been their involvement with traditional musicians and dancers: recording them, publishing them, and most specifically nurturing and helping regrow value in what were, for many, fading arts, not least by the performers themselves. Indeed, regrowing the tradition. From the organisation of the English Country Music weekend at Snape in 1981, with perhaps the biggest roster of traditional musicians gathered in one place – ever!! – to the first recording collaboration with Mike Yates on the Who Owns The Game LP in 1984, the release of the first Veteran cassette in 1987, and the publication of books such as Many a Good Horseman in 1985 and Songs Sung in Suffolk in 1992, the impact on local Suffolk communities and far beyond – not to mention the recording industry as all the classic vinyl recordings traditional music was were phased out at that time - has been significant. John bravely claims that the first Veteran CD in 1993, Stepping It Out, pre-dated any traditional music CDs from even Topic Records!!

All of this, plus the aforementioned formation of the Old Hat Concert Party and start of the Old Hat Nights in 1990, all focussing on traditional performers, together with the lunchtime sessions at the Volunteer during Sidmouth week from 1988 until 2004 and involvement with the Whitby festival, have stimulated the traditions themselves, while the digitisation of John's field recordings for the British Library's National Sound Archive and making this wealth of information available to the nation and now the world (something like 295 tapes and getting on for 600 informants from all over Britain) has helped reaffirmed the place of traditional music as a living thing as well as something to be studied. This is a major collection which now sits beside those of Mike Yates, Ian Russell, Patrick Shuldham-Shaw and Roy Palmer – all Gold Badge holders.

And none of this work has gone unnoticed. Richard Baker's fairly high-brow Radio 4 programme Comparing Notes featured John's fieldwork in 1989 and two years later it was featured in the series Collecting Folk on Radio 2 (rather brilliantly presented, I thought). In 1995 John was commissioned to compile a survey of archival sources of folk material for the Arts Council and the National Folk Music Fund, and four years later he joined the steering committee at the British Library's NSA to instigate the 'Traditional Music of England Project'. In between times there was the BBC Radio 2 'Songs Sung in …...' series and in 1999 John and Katie appeared in and choreographed the country dancing for the BBC drama 'All the Kings Men' with David Jason, a skill they honed working with theatre company Eastern Angles in 1985 with The Reaper's Year.

So, 2011, which will see the 45th CD release by Veteran. I asked them, 'What now?' They looked puzzled but came back saying that they were driven by friendships and community – and John is very proud of their 507 Facebook friends and Katy very proud to be Godmother to Joe Daniels (son of the squire of Bampton Traditional Morris Dancers). So, thank heavens, they continue. It's just what they do.

I have skimmed their catalogue of achievements, which are many, and illustrated their obvious devotion and commitment. But for me, to get such an award as they are receiving this evening, there is something else that applies - and I put it down to radiators and drains. Radiators are those people who do the things they love but also for the benefit, enjoyment and pleasure of others and whose

chief reward is achieving those ends; drains those who take from others and expect gratitude for all that they do. John and Katy are most definitely radiators - and in all the time I have had the pleasure to know them they have given selflessly in doing what they have believed to be the right thing. I'm sure you will all agree that their contribution is outstanding and tonight's gathering pays tribute to that. I will now call on our illustrious President, Shirley Collins, to present the Gold Badge of the English Folk Dance and Song Society to John and Katie Howson.