GOLD BADGE CITATION – STEVE ROUD

In all spheres of human activity there comes along every once in a while somebody who makes a significant difference. This can of course be for good or evil (and Adolph Hitler comes to mind) but the focus of today's Gold Badge award is certainly in the former category, especially for all those interested in folklore, and in particular the folk song traditions of the English speaking world. Undeniably joining the esteemed ranks of Francis James Child, G. Malcolm Laws, Roy Judge, Mike Heaney and Vic Gammon, the EFDSS is delighted to finally pin its highest accolade for an outstanding contribution to the folk arts on the lapel of author, indexer, librarian, researcher, folklorist, champion tea-drinker and thoroughly committed supporter and friend of the Vaughan Williams Memorial Library, Steve Roud. But before our illustrious President finally completes that task (which should have happened in 2009) I will attempt to enumerate the copious reasons why.

The beauty of writing a citation for an eminent writer such as Steve is that when I asked him to supply a potted biography to flesh out this piece (I do actually know him well but not *that* well), he basically wrote the perfect description of himself. So, maybe with the occasional paraphrase and interjection, I will unashamedly read out what he said in his typically modest fashion:

Quote.

I was born in Streatham, South London in 1949, the last of four children in a left-leaning family on the verge of becoming lower middle class – we all went to grammar school, for example, but there was no talk of university.

By far the most important influence of my childhood was the Woodcraft Folk, which I joined in 1955, and for many years the whole family was heavily involved in the movement. It gave me a grounding in socialism, co-operation, internationalism, and an interest in the lives of working people, but more to the point here, the Woodcraft's inclusion of singing and dancing as everyday activities gave me a taste for things 'folky'. The folk revival in the

early 1970s chimed well with the particular brand of hippiedom which many of us inhabited at the time, and I became increasingly attracted to the traditional styles and repertoire on which the revival was ostensibly based but from which it was rapidly departing.

Idleness is one of my main character traits, and I frittered away a grammar school education and left school with no qualifications. After some years of dossing around, I eventually drifted into library work and finally went to North London Poly in my early thirties to do a degree in Library & Information Science – ten years after I should really have done it – and I realised that librarianship was what I was particularly suited for.

I have a basic tendency to take apparently unimportant things – like music - too seriously. As a teenager I started a card index of pop songs – first just the ones in my own collection, but soon I was culling details from adverts in the Melody Maker and the New Musical Express and compiling discographies. I kept running totals of weeks spent on the charts, by song title, artist and record label, and in fact invented the Guinness Book of Hit Singles long before the real thing materialised. None of my friends understood why I did it.

I gradually became an omnivorous reader and collector of books and records, and it was folklore and social history which really interested me.

When I got married and moved to Andover in Hampshire, in 1975, my passive interest in things folk entered a more active phase. I had my first opportunity to do real fieldwork, and with Paul Marsh started to gather material on traditional mumming plays in the county, and elsewhere. Along with others interested in the subject, we founded the Traditional Drama Research Group, and I started a newsletter called Roomer. We met veteran collector Mervyn Plunkett, who lived nearby, and we started playing in pubs and meeting old musicians and singers. I became the Honorary Librarian for the Folklore Society, in which capacity I served for over 15 years. I started other newsletters, including Folk Song Research, and FLS News.

I have never much wanted to be a performer, but, over the years, the role I have enjoyed most is that of facilitator. Not one for writing academic papers or articles, I nevertheless wanted to be part of the process of scholarship, and to be involved in my own peculiar way, and the small world of folklore research is an ideal field for this. If there is one unifying psychological trait in all my doings, it is that I enjoy providing the means of access to information for researchers and enthusiasts, whether it is by organising books on the shelves, indexing everything in sight, or organising ways in which those interested in our subject can be put into contact, meet and discuss, and so on. One such initiative, for example, the Traditional Song Forum, provides a useful point of contact for informal communication and co-operation in the field.

In 2000, when Oxford University Press wanted a dictionary of English Folklore, the Folklore Society's Jacqueline Simpson suggested me as co-author, and so I stumbled into book-writing. Various publications for Penguin, Random House, and the Vaughan Williams Memorial Library, have followed – on a range of folklore topics – and I suddenly realised why I had been gathering all that material all those years. In 2007, I was able to give up the day job at Croydon Local Studies Library, to concentrate on writing and research, and I have enjoyed a rewarding relationship with the VWML by helping with various projects – most notably the groundbreaking Take 6 project, which has made so much wonderful original material available online.

In the background to all this, I never got over my need to write things on 5x3 cards and file them in alphabetical order, and once I got seriously interested in traditional music, about 1972, I started an index to songs in my folk song books and records. I always knew that this could be useful to someone sometime, but it was not until I became a librarian and somebody invented the computer that I realised that I had started what could be a major research tool. The Folk Song Index and Broadside Index have grown, in fits and starts, and are now, I believe, an integral part of the traditional song research in Britain and, to a lesser extent, in America, which is very gratifying.

End of quote.

From his pen (or keyboard) we have been given, amongst many articles, reviews, and of course indexes, the following works:

Room, Room Ladies and Gentlemen (with Eddie Cass) (2002)
Penguin Guide to the Superstitions of Britain & Ireland (2003)
Still Growing (with others) (2003)
Pocket Guide to Superstitions of Britain (2004)
The English Year (2006)
Monday's Child (2008)
London Lore (2008)
The Lore of the Playground (2010)
New Penguin Book of English Folk Songs (to be published 2012)

The Folk Song Index currently comprises 184,316 records and he has identified some 23,612 songs, while his broadsides index includes a mere 153,073 records and is soon to be instrumental in linking collections at the Bodleian Library, the University of California and VWML.

It seems to many of us that Steve cannot possibly have time to do anything else with his life apart from indexing, let alone writing, and our sympathies are extended to wife Pam and daughter Kate. However, I know for a fact that certain Danish television dramas have of late distracted him from his obsessions – and judging from his laptop screensaver, he is a proud and devoted granddad, too. So there is perhaps hope for him yet.

But what actually makes this award so deserving is not only the volume of work described here but the character of the man. Steve is generous, both with his information and his time; exudes a passion for his subject and a high level authority within it, and above all has an over-arching desire to make his work available to all in a manner which encourages further research and interest. His impact on the study of folklore through his indexes and books is second to none and, perhaps most important of all, has made us look at things differently, which makes him, as I said earlier,

significant. And this is all wrapped up in a profound modesty.

It is a true honour to be able to say these few words about this man. And I will now ask the lovely Shirley Collins, our President, to award the Gold Badge of the English Folk Dance and Song Society to Steve Roud.

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