VIC GAMMON – GOLD BADGE CITATION

I have been instructed to keep this short, so I'll try.

The highest honour bestowed by the English Folk Dance and Song is its Gold Badge. This is awarded for an outstanding contribution to the folk arts. Eyebrows can be raised, but in this case they are pleasingly at rest because this evening's recipient is Dr. Vic Gammon – and it is a real honour and privilege to stand here and celebrate a man I have known and respected for over thirty years.

Vic is a Londoner, a south Londoner, born in 1946 in Balham, spending his early life in the Clapham Common area before moving to Earlsfield in 1954. Having passed his 11 plus he attended Sir Walter St. John's Grammar School in Battersea – 'a pretty awful experience' he says. He consequently left school with three 'O' levels and started work, as he describes it, in the travel industry, after stints in the stationery industry – at W.H. Smith's - and in the dairy industry – as a milkman with Express Dairies. Self education then became his focus and he finally ended up with a respectable 10 'O' levels and 2 'A' levels.

Like so many others of his generation, he reckons it was hearing the BBC radio programme 'As I Roved Out' that initiated his folk interest, together with Lonnie Donegan's 'Rock Island Line', which he played to death after buying a copy on his tenth birthday. From there came the inevitable toe-dipping into the folk scene of the 1960s before forming The Garrett Singers and running a folk club in Tooting, recording an LP with Argo in the process. The Tooting club shared an audience and pool of musicians which included Rod Stradling, Tony Engel, Pete Wood and Arthur Knevett, who has recently completed a study of the Folk Song Society at Newcastle.

Having reached the giddy heights of Operations Manager with Clarksons Holidays, he left in 1971 to work as a freelance musician and complete his 'A' levels before successfully applying to read history at the University of Sussex the following year. A move to Brighton was therefore essential and really the beginning of the path that has led to this hall this evening.

Vic became, as they say, 'involved' with the Sussex folk scene, which he embraced and which embraced him for the next 20 years. This included a year

out from his BA to play with the Etchingham Steam Band in 1974, playing with the Pump and Pluck Band and Potter's Wheel after resumption of studies in 1975, and generally enjoying some wonderful times with the likes of Will Duke, Alun Howkins, Vic and Tina Smith, Shirley Collins, George Spicer, Gordon Hall and of course the irrepressible Copper Family. His graduation in 1976 was followed immediately by studies for an MA, which he completed but deferred whilst considering upgrading to a Ph.D. All of which neatly segued into work on the Sussex Tune Book, which he edited with Anne Loughran and was finally published by the EFDSS in 1982. Oh yes, and there was the small matter of marrying the lovely Sheila, which he did in 1978, moving from Brighton to Ringmer in East Sussex.

Now began an intense period of study, writing and career development.

In 1984 he obtained his PGCE and became a primary teacher in Sussex whilst joining the Editorial Board of *Folk Music Journal*. In 1985 he completed his Ph. D. and MA (his thesis entitled *Popular Music in Rural Society: Sussex 1815-1914*) and the following year was faculty advisor at the Friends World College in London. In 1989 he was a music teacher at Angmering School before becoming head of music at Downlands School at Hassocks, again in Sussex. In the notes he sent to me he failed to also mention that he was a trustee of the EFDSS between 1986-1989 during what is now known affectionately as 'The House Wars'. Perhaps he has blotted that out of his memory on medical grounds but there are tales to be told – aren't there Vic?!!!

Now came the move north and another chapter. Vic was appointed a senior lecturer in music education at Huddersfield University in 1992 and teamed up with Annie Dearman and Steve Harrison the following year in yet another fruitful and enduring musical partnership. He also became an ardent supporter of Ryburn Three Step, which involved Pete and Sue Coe, Johnny Adams, Chris Coe and Chris Manners, and played in dance bands The Herbs and Rough Music. 1996 saw him lecturing in music education at the School of Education in Leeds where he became a senior lecturer two years later, and two years after that in Popular and World Musics in the School of Music. And then, in 2004, the move to be senior lecturer in Folk and Traditional Music at the International Centre for Music Studies, University of Newcastle, in which he remains a guest member of staff since his retirement in 2010. He has also been

an Arts Council advisor on traditional music and related matters, a member of the music panel on the board of South East Arts, chair of the Oral History Society, an external examiner for Goldsmiths College and the Institute of Education, even an Ofsted inspector – and the list goes on.

Our Vic is a clever boy, and in a land where recognition of the folk arts in formal education and academia is slight to say the least (and thank heavens for Newcastle), Vic has been a pivotal voice for us all. And it is not just what he has had to say in these roles, it is the way he has said it.

For me, Vic's academic status is best measured by the sheer volume and quality of research produced over these years, much of it now published. From his seminal article for *History Workshop Journal* in 1980 entitled 'Folk Song Collecting in Sussex and Surrey, 1843-1914', the groundbreaking 'Song Sex and Society in England' in *Folk Music Journal* in 1982 to his wonderfully crafted monograph *Desire, Drink and Death*, published in 2008, there is a consistency and clarity of thought which offers a balance that is so often absent in the choppy waters of folk music scholarship. And you only have to speak to any of his many students to realise how much this work is appreciated and, dare I say it, actually understood within the vocabulary of academia.

This prodigious output, together with conference presentations, radio broadcasts, musical performances, , West Gallery research and development, music tutoring and music compositions for stage, radio (one of which became the very popular Tale of Ale double album in 1978) and film productions, such as Kevin Brownlow's and Andrew Mollo's film 'Winstanley' in 1975, simply illustrate the depth of understanding he possesses.

Working with Vic in the Etchingham Steam Band, Shirley Collins has said, 'I quickly learned that his genial manner hid a prodigiously wide-ranging and formidable knowledge'. Jon Dudley of the Copper Family similarly stated that 'His immensely jolly persona belied a huge intellect', which resulted in Vic being chosen to write about the family's musical style in the notes for the CD 'Come Write Me Down': 'amongst the best stuff ever written about us,' says Jon. And Will Duke has told me of how he is always encouraging of other performers and how he persuaded one singer that she had a completely

different, lower range that would suite her best – which of course it did to great effect. That was Pam Gilder.

But however clever or prodigious he is, we are basically here to celebrate the man. Vic has a modesty and generosity which, combined with his knowledge, has been a boon for all who care and want to learn about this thing called folk music. How many times I have heard him say, 'I would love to help but I am so busy at the moment I simply don't have the time', only for him to come through in one way or the other with exactly what is required. The folk world is a better place for his huge contribution and so if Vic can come up and join me I shall call upon Mike Norris, the Chair of trustees at the EFDSS to do the honours.