

## Interview – Rob Neal

### *Summary*

MW introduces. MW asks about RN and how he got into folk music. RN says he is local, born Oulton Broad, has lived there, Bungay and Great Yarmouth. Went to secondary school in Bungay (Grammar School), taught himself guitar while there (using Burt Whedon method), played pop songs. Towards end of secondary school got together with others to sing. Folk music was becoming popular, did protest songs, Sydney Carter songs, wrote some songs with friends. Went to teacher training college in Bognor Regis. Shared room with Ed Caines who was studying same subject, got together to sing. Used to share rooms, didn't have own room. Started playing together, playing popular folk, Irish songs, Leonard Cohen songs, sang in local pubs for money. Sang songs like The Wild Rover, Leaving of Liverpool. Soon interested more traditional folk music and started playing some. Got interested during second year, were singing The Bold Fisherman, their landlady said "that's not the right version", her father and uncle used to sing that song. Went to record her relative singing, his name was Pop Steer. Recorded The Bold Fisherman, The Lawyer, Grace Darling (not the one sung by RN's wife, Lesley). RN's father had always been interested in supporting RN as a musician, he got into folk songs and collecting in Suffolk. Tried to find people who were singing at that time. Found Sid Chaseton who lived at Mettingham. RN went with his father to record Chaseton, who sang Bungay Roger, We're All Jolly Fellows who Follow the Plough, Faithful Sailor Boy and Old Shep. RN's father found singers in Bungay, found Harry Fen, who had a grocer's shop in Beccles, who had collected in the area. RN's father got copies of his tapes, one of which was recorded in the Laxfield Lowhouse public house, RN got most of his early songs from these tapes, a lot of the Suffolk based songs like Tickler's Jam, Down in the Fields Where the Buttercups All Grow. By this time RN and EC were singing together, called themselves The Bold Fishermen. Sang in various folk clubs including one in Beccles and one in Bungay. This was during RN's stay at college. After college went to London, started a folk club called The Blackbird's Folk Club with Derek Simpson and Christina Williamson, formed a group who went out and sang. Got a job back in Suffolk in 1990, returned to Ipswich and Woodbridge areas and the Suffolk folk scene. MW asks what attracted RN to folk music. RN says it's melodic. He also used to sing lots of ballads, specialised in ballads formerly, likes the storytelling aspect. Mentions that people used to go round towns using ballads to carry news, as we read newspapers. Was given a lot of ballad sheets by John Forman at one time, who was known as the "Ballad King" in London. RN likes the story telling and melodic style of a folk song, later on got into music hall songs which were popular among traditional singers at the time. They were amusing and entertaining. Suffolk singers from the past would often do music hall songs. RN says when they were younger people would listen to whatever you sang, now they want to be entertained, so he has dropped most of the ballads and sings mostly songs which are amusing, have a chorus, or have a good tune. MW says RN is quite active in the Suffolk folk scene at the moment, asks why he stays so involved in Suffolk/East Anglian folk music. RN Says when he returned to Suffolk, he was playing in bands (cello, concertina, mandolin). Joined Katie and John Howson in a band, used to go out with them to listen to local singers like Percy Ling, Ted Chaplin, who were still singing in pubs, got into singing side then. More recently, started a number of sessions to encourage others to make music as there was not that much going on. Wanted to encourage others to get into music making once he retired, started U3A group. Encourage people to take up singing who had never sung before. Ran sessions in pubs – wanted to make sure it was in a pub, so booked some different ones. Got musical friends to come along and help start it off. Others would then pluck up the courage to join in. RN estimates 20-30 people started singing in public because of this. Also wanted to encourage people, particularly young people, to get into dancing and playing music, so started Dance Folkus, (monthly Ceilidh club) with others. MW thanks.