

## Interview – Shirley Harry

### *Summary*

MW introduces. MW asks SH to tell about how she got into folk music and about herself. SH says she usually tells people that her first introduction to folk was through her husband who was into it – got married early 70s. Husband was into Incredible String Band, Steeleye Span, High Level Ranters. However SH was brought up with pop music with no folk music in the house, but was always drawn to acoustic music. Remembers going to a wedding as a child and seeing a guest perform with an acoustic guitar, an Irish song. Veered to towards more “folky” things when listening to pop music – Donovan, Simon and Garfunkel, but has an eclectic music taste (also listened to Led Zeppelin). Will give anything a go, doesn’t particularly like country music or opera. Likes jazz and blues. SH states she comes from the South East – from Farnham, Surrey. Remembers getting the bus home from her primary school and walking to the bus stop. Ian Anderson and Maggie Holland lived across the road from there – Ian Anderson formed Folk Roots mag, has worked recently with Alistair Anderson. Maggie Holland now in Scotland, has written some good songs – they were a folk/blues duo. SH says that Anderson and Holland ran the Farnham Folk and Blues Festival, which was one of the first live gigs that she went to. Remembers seeing Joanne Kelly there. SH says those are her earliest memories of music – describes them as a “foundation”. Lived in South Wales for several years in early 70s before moving back to South East. She then “really” got into folk music – there was a well-known folk club called Stag Folk that SH attended at Shackleford just outside Godalming near Guildford, saw lots of different people there. Got into ceilidh dancing, started going to Sidmouth around 1979/80 and has been going very regularly ever since. This got SH into morris dancing, from watching it. This started SH singing. She says she is not very musical – plays a bit of recorder and is a good drummer/percussionist, but doesn’t play any other instrument, rather uses her voice. Was in the morris side Knockhundred Shuttles from Midhurst, used to occasionally get asked to do presentations as well as pub sessions, which is when SH started singing. SH says that she didn’t do a lot of singing then, struggled with her voice. When she moved to East Anglia in 1989, SH joined a female singing group called Harp Beat – mostly world music. One of the first acapella women’s singing groups. This helped her voice, doing harmonies and finding out where to place her voice. Took singing lessons later on – SH recommends this to give confidence and find out where to sing from. MW asks SH to tell about what she did with the East Anglian Traditional Music Trust when she moved to Suffolk in 1989. SH says that having moved from a folky environment, she looked to see what was going on in Suffolk. Had already seen Old Hat Concert Party in other folk clubs, so was pleased to see that John and Katie Howson were there. Remembers sitting in an upstairs room in the Cherry Tree public house and John and Katie Howson would go and collect all the “old boys” and their wives. SH remembers Hubert telling stories and Ted Chaplain with stepping. She enjoyed those nights, good to listen to traditional singing. Met some like-minded people there – Lyn and John Barnes. Started Reel Dance Ceilidhs with Lyn. Went to stepping competitions. Attended for a long time until Katie Howson started the first traditional music day, SH volunteered to help. Went to a village hall for the Melodeon Day (Melodeons and More event), made the sandwiches in the kitchen – surrounded by melodeons! Moved into larger premises afterwards, helped in the kitchen until the day stopped. Always went to Traditional Music Day to MC, having MC’d at other events at Norwich Arts Centre and at local folk festivals. MC’d the concerts in Edgar’s Farmhouse, never missed a Traditional Music Day, although missed most of the days themselves due to MC’ing, didn’t see other acts until evening concerts. SH loved the experience. Introduced lots of different people, including Mike Waterson and Louis Killen. Encouraged her to sing. MW asks why SH is drawn to folk events. SH says that the music itself speaks to her. She is drawn to the stories in songs. She also likes the camaraderie and the “big community” of folk music, saying “you are never alone”. She now has a

partner, who she has introduced to folk music – he loves it to. SH says that even if you don't know people well, they are always friendly, and you "have a family" even if you're on your own. She has been to lots of places on her own because it is a safe and friendly environment and you will meet like-minded people, which is the same with music, ceilidh dancing, morris dancing. MW thanks. SH says it's great to have the opportunity. Good to think about whose footsteps we're following in, the tradition is evolving not dying.