

Gold Badge Citation – Lawrence Heath

March 2023

Lawrence Heath was born in Godalming in May 1950. He hasn't moved far, even though in recent years family commitments have meant that he's travelled to some far flung parts of the world.

His father was employed by a chain of opticians, for whom he worked as a cabinet maker. As boys, Lawrence and his brother inherited their father's passion for writing stories and for illustrating them. Their mother was from Battersea in South London, the daughter of a railway policeman who was killed in the blitz when she was just 9 years old.

The Heath family was not musical, but Lawrence regards himself as a child of the 60's. He was into The Beatles, psychedelia, Pink Floyd, the jazzy approach of Soft Machine – he described it as music that used one's imagination.

The Harvest label was launched in 1969, and he was hooked by Pink Floyd, Michael Chapman and Anthems in Eden.

He went to university in Canterbury, where he had attended the Students Union Folk Club but when he went back to Godalming for a holiday job he went to Stagfolk, the first non-university folk club he had visited. The guest performer on that first night was Mike Harding.

Lawrence became friends with the organisers, who wanted to start a club in Guildford. He took on responsibility for the club's artwork and posters, so it was graphics that became his way in. He even designed an album cover.

He moved to North Tawton near Okehampton to work as graphic artist for a new magazine, *What's on in the West Country*. He worked there for a year but the magazine didn't take off and he moved back to Godalming in 1973/4 where he helped run Stagfolk at Shackleford Village Hall. He was now working as a computer programmer for the Ministry of Agriculture, a job which he found gave him plenty of time to become even more involved in folk club organisation and with doing graphics.

By the time he met Lin, who danced with the Reading Cloggies, he was much in demand for his graphics, with his work appearing in the national Folk Directory, the Sussex Folk Diary and on various album covers.

In 1976 he visited Sidmouth Folk Festival, which opened his eyes and ears to a whole range of musical activities.

He had put on a sell-out concert with The Yetties in the 1,000-seater Guildford Civic Hall, the first of several such events, and this enabled him to build up a kitty to book the Albion Dance Band for a ceilidh in Godalming Borough Hall the day after Sidmouth.

Lawrence's civil service experience had helped him develop a range of administrative skills and these were put to very good use with a host of folk club, ceilidh, Morris and other folk events. One such venture was Fleur de Lys Morris which is still active more than 50 years on, including one member who started dancing 50 years ago as a girl.

1979 saw the final edition of the magazine *Folk Review*, and Ian Anderson was hoping to buy the magazine from the retiring editor Fred Woods. Things didn't quite work out as

planned but a new quarterly magazine, *Southern Rag*, appeared and ran for 5 years with an editorial team of Ian Anderson, Carolyn Walker and Lawrence Heath. This led to the highly influential monthly *Folk Roots*.

One of the magazine's regular features was the satirical and hugely successful *Borfolk* cartoon, the brainchild of one Lawrence Heath. We found ourselves reading about things that had been part of the regular lives of us performers and organisers. EFDSS, which seemed to have been stuck in its ways for far too long, became DEAFASS – the all too true Dance Earnestly And Forget About Song Society. It was great to find a cartoon asking the same questions as we had been asking for so long. Then we started to look out for ourselves as anagrams. The greatly lamented Peter Bellamy loved becoming Elmer P Bleaty. What a perfect anagram!

Lawrence and Lin got married and celebrated with a ceilidh in, where else, Godalming Borough Hall. All sorts of events started happening, with Lawrence having a finger in many of them – Maltings Hops in Farnham, Farnham Folk Day, Bracknell Folk Festival, though not as organiser.

Lawrence's big event was Footworks – a Festival of social dance, featuring a day of tasters of many forms of social dance and live music from across the world. It was a hugely ambitious venture and it worked!

By now the Heaths had two children and their third child, the Borough Hall Barn Dances in Godalming, had been taken over by Lawrence's new employers, Waverley Borough Council, including lots of sell out New Year's Eves. The Council took responsibility, while Lawrence took a very close interest in everything they did!

In 1996 the Electric Theatre opened in Guildford and within a year Lawrence was putting on occasional, and highly successful, concerts, featuring big name folk acts. The same happened in Cranleigh Arts Centre and Farnham Maltings, all of them professional venues who latched on to the enthusiasm and professionalism of Lawrence Heath as a promoter. Then in 2004 The Guildford Institute became the setting for a Heath folk club. Lawrence reckons he knows pretty well the whole of his audience.

As we all know, Lawrence and Linda have enjoyed immense pleasure, success and not a little anxiety within their family with a daughter who sparkles as a dancer and a son who has won European, World and Olympic gold medals. Now it is Lawrence's turn for an award. This Gold Badge is a truly fitting recognition for a man who is an example of the very best of good practice. He sees administration and promotion as a creative challenge. He loves putting on events and he loves putting them on well. Whether he is promoting a concert for a thousand people or a day of workshops to encourage school teachers to run folk dancing activities with their class, he does it with the same care and attention to detail.

There can surely be no more worthy recipient of this Gold Badge, the highest accolade that folk music can make, than Lawrence Heath.

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