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english folk dance
and song society

Gold Badge Citation: Johnny Adams

Many of you here tonight will know of at least one aspect of Johnny's work, and in this convivial setting, it is no doubt first and foremost as a musician that we appreciate him, but, as his long-time friend and colleague Keith Kendrick says: *'perhaps more importantly, he has been a consistent and enthusiastic academic contributor to the fabric of our beloved folk revival.'*

Not only that, but he is also an indefatigable activist, whose constructive, proactive support and extensive technical expertise have led to a number of innovations for the folk world.

When you start to look at all the aspects together, it really begins to sink in just how quietly influential Johnny Adams has been and how very well-deserved this Gold Badge Award is.

As is traditional, we'll start somewhere near the beginning ...

Johnny had a musical childhood, starting on the piano aged 7 and moving on to study church organ whilst growing up in Grantham, where he also took up the trombone and tenor horn and started playing electric guitar in several bands. Aged 18, he moved back to his birthplace of Derby and discovered folk music! Inspired by seeing Martin Carthy and Dave Swarbrick, he wasted no time and bought a mandolin out of his very first pay-packet as an apprentice engineer with Rolls-Royce.

1967 saw Johnny form his first folkie musical partnership with Derek Hale, shortly followed by the first of many collaborations with Keith Kendrick. In 1970 Johnny made his first recording, with the **Druids**, whom Pete Coe judges *'an impressive vocal and instrumental band'*, in which Johnny played piano accordion, fiddle,

mandolin and tenor banjo. Thanks to the support of Ewan McColl, their album 'Burnt Offering' was issued on Argo, on one of the most prominent folk music labels of the time.

Johnny and his then wife, Suzie, joined **Muckram Wakes** in 1973 (according to Wikipedia, on a day out in the Derbyshire Hills with Roger & Helen Watson – allegedly avoiding the TV coverage of Princess Anne's wedding!) and the band subsequently became a full-time professional outfit, touring Britain and Europe and recording a number of highly regarded albums.

Johnny moved to Yorkshire in the late 1970s, and spent the next ten years or so as a professional musician where his portfolio of bands included the **Garden Gnome Ceilidh Band** - Pete Coe credits Johnny with providing the impetus towards a more northern repertoire for ceilidh dancing during their spell together with Chris Coe and Don Wise in that band. From the roots of Muckram Wakes and the Garden Gnome Ceilidh Band sprouted a new hybrid – the **New Victory Band**, which became highly influential in the burgeoning English Country Music scene, particularly through their 1978 album 'One More Dance and Then'.

Then, as the New Victory Band faded, Johnny joined one of the other bands that has been absolutely central in the revival of English traditional dance music: **Old Swan Band**. In my view there were three bands that really shaped the course of the revival in English instrumental music in the 1970s – Old Swan Band, New Victory Band and Flowers and Frolics, and amazingly, Johnny has been a vital part of two of those bands. Although New Victory Band didn't last that long, Johnny has had several other projects with Pete Coe: including political trailblazers **Red Shift**, and the under-appreciated **Hooke's Law** with life partner Chris Coe and Chris Partington, Janet Kerr and Mike Hockenhull.

In 1986 Johnny gave up 'life on the road' to work as a lecturer at Salford University, with the legendary Bill Leader. His initial post was in music recording, with a subsequent move into audio post-production for film & television. The skills he developed here, and the services which he had access to, encouraged Johnny to start up an independent record label, **Festival Records**, in 1988. In the five years of its existence, the label featured a number of well-known folk artistes including Artisan, The Butter Mountain Boys and Gas Mark V.

The next decade saw Johnny busy playing for ceilidhs, with the Old Swan Band being particularly in demand, and new bands **Raw Material** and **Our Northern Branch** also out and about. The latter was a bit of an experiment, being entirely a string band – an idea which resurfaced more recently with the **English String Band**, yet another band where Johnny's contributions in terms of both repertoire and style have been both fundamental and indispensable.

Never one to put his feet up, Johnny has been guest musician, consultant and producer on many albums in recent years and has also been the driving force behind a number of other projects, as the next few items will illustrate.

During the 1990s, Johnny and Chris, together with Pete and Sue Coe set up **Ryburn Three Step**, an independent folk development organisation, to formalise and bring together under one banner their huge catalogue of activities: running folk clubs, ceilidhs, stepdance classes, sessions, mummers and longsword events in their local area around Ripponden in west Yorkshire.

In the same period, he and fellow fiddle-player Chris Partington founded the **Village Music Project**, transcribing old fiddlers' manuscripts into ABC notation and publishing them on the internet, providing an unparalleled insight into the richness of English musical traditions over the past three centuries: a wonderful resource for today's musicians and scholars.

Twenty years ago, in 1998, Johnny joined the Board of the English Folk Dance and Song Society. He served continuously in this role until 2008, starting as a representative for the North West and then becoming a National member. The maximum period of office was, and still is, six years, but the Board was clearly very keen to retain Johnny's skills, contacts and enthusiasm, and for a further eight years, until 2016, he continued doing sub-committee work. Colleague Mary Wilson-Jones says that Johnny *'made a major contribution to the 'ups', often helping to even out and deal with the 'downs' too.'*

During this period, Johnny was the prime mover behind two major resources facilitated by the English Folk Dance and Song Society.

The first was an extensive web-based resource: **Folkopedia**, a peer reviewed website on the Wikipedia model, with the ambitious

aim of '*enabling online research into English traditional arts and the associated global equivalents*', set up in 2006.

Then, in 2007, Johnny's friend - and many of ours - Barry Callaghan, died, leaving a significant project on English traditional music uncompleted. Barry had been working for some years towards publishing a carefully curated collection of dance tunes and had chosen the title: **Hardcore English**. It was Johnny who then managed this treasured project through to publication, with the assistance of Chris Partington and Pete Stewart. The resultant book and double CD have become a standard point of reference for musicians seeking inspiration and role models.

Outside the EFDSS and the Vaughan Williams Memorial Library, there are of course a large number of independent, personal folk music collections and Johnny has been instrumental in the preservation of two of the major ones.

Many of us are aware that the folklorist and collector Doc Rowe has a hugely significant independent archive collection spanning five decades. In 1998 it was Johnny who initiated the **Doc Rowe Collection Support Group**, which he continues to manage. He set this up in a most imaginative and yet deeply practical way, as Doc relates: '*It began with a discussion over a pint ... hearing that storage was costing [then] £160 each month, Johnny typically and methodically suggested that I must know about 44 people who, if we met up, would be likely to offer me a pint, so why not approach the folk fraternity and encourage this contribution on a monthly basis.*' Johnny then of course set up the whole thing on the internet.

And Johnny has also been the Director of another, lesser known collection - the Paul Graney Memorial Archive - encouraging the cataloguing and promotion of this enormous digital audio archive now housed and available in Manchester Central Library.

Johnny is also behind two further essential online tools for the academic discussion of folk song and music: **Tradsong** (attached to independent research group, the Traditional Song Forum) and **Tradtunes**, which supports the Village Music Project. Both groups have memberships with impressive credentials, and erudite enquiries can often be answered from around the world in minutes.

However, to bring us back to the real world, here's a couple of

down-to-earth quotes:

From Chris Partington:

'For some reason, stretching back well before I ever knew him, he never has anything else to do on a Monday evenings but sit in a local pub fiddling to the ever dwindling drinkers, so to stop him being sad some of us local musicians join him there. You'll be welcome too if you're ever up Halifax way.'

From Mary-Wilson Jones:

'When I sought Johnny's guidance on going to the Pace Egging in Midgley, he not only provided a detailed description of the tour but also advised on the best coffee shop in Midgley, guaranteed to be open early! Realising others might find this information useful he then put it up on the Web for anyone to use.'

Johnny's long-time colleague in the Old Swan Band, Fi Fraser (now an EFDSS board member herself) sums up Johnny's qualities: *'He's passionate about all aspects of the traditional arts, and when something need doing, he steps up.'*

So, Johnny Adams, will you please step up now and receive your Gold Badge from Mike Wilson-Jones on behalf of the English Folk Dance and Song Society.

Katie Howson

Katie Howson is a musician, writer, researcher and event organiser from Suffolk. Together with her husband John, she founded the East Anglian Traditional Music Trust, of which she was Director until September 2017. In 2010 she was awarded the EFDSS Gold Badge.