

Eddie Upton Gold Badge Citation

John Kirkpatrick wrote the citation – at Eddie's insistence, humorously – and the presentation was made by EFDSS Board member, Jon Brenner, at Sidmouth FolkWeek in August.

Every now and again, EFDSS decides to bestow the honour of a Gold Badge upon somebody who is felt to have made a special contribution to the traditional music, dance, and song that the Society champions. The nominees in this category tonight are: Eddie Upton...!

Eddie Upton was born in Brighton in 1944. The family wasn't musical, but as a boy, Eddie sang in the church choir, and when he discovered the local folk club in 1963, he was overwhelmed by experiencing a crowded room full of people singing their hearts out in the choruses. In 1964 a new club started up in Lewes, specifically to encourage new singers. Eddie went along and made a point of learning a new song to sing there every week.

Eddie became a prominent mover and shaker on the Sussex folk scene. He helped to run a club at The Prince Albert in Brighton for a time; for a while he was in a three-part male harmony group called The Juggs, and then in a four-piece called The Trugs, with Colin Andrews and David and Maggie Robertson, who recorded an LP for Traditional Sound Recordings in the late 1960s.

Eddie joined the local morris team – The Chanctonbury Ring Morris Men – and first danced out with them at the Brighton Ring Meeting in 1967. Eddie danced with Chanctonbury Ring for about ten years, eventually becoming their squire for a couple years.

In the early 1970s, Vic Gammon started a local Sussex band – The Pump and Pluck Band. There was Vic Gammon, his then wife Jen, Will Duke, Alan Howkins and Eddie, who was there as a singer. With this group, Eddie started playing the mouth organ and, eventually, after Will Duke lent him one to have a go on, the Anglo concertina. (Eddie: I've got Will's address here – whenever you've finished with it, he'd quite like his Anglo back!)

Around this time, Ashley Hutchings was living in Sussex with Shirley Collins, and they formed The Etchingam Steam Band, with Vic Gammon, Terry Potter and Ian Holder. As well as being a concert band, they also used to play for dances around the country, and didn't enjoy always having a different caller, so they asked Eddie to call with them, even though he'd never done it before. This was amazing – Eddie stood up there and told people what to do, and they did it! Eddie went on to become

one of the country's favourite dance callers for many years, working with all the top bands at all the major venues and festivals.

After a couple of years, Ashley Hutchings decided he wanted to form a new, bigger band for dancing, and asked Eddie to be co-leader with him. This was The Albion Dance Band, which was a mixture of folkies, early music people and rockers, and the idea was to do dances through the ages. Eddie was the caller, and one of the singers. This band released a glorious LP in 1976 called *The Prospect Before Us*. Ashley said in a press interview at the time that once you're in the Albion Band, you never leave, so Eddie is still in it, even though he hasn't been told about any gigs for the last 35 years or so!

Eddie was also one of the singers on Vic Gammon's double LP *A Tale of Ale*, released in 1977.

So now Eddie was embracing all the folk world had to offer.... I've been advised for legal reasons to gloss over the next bit, which is a real shame, as we all enjoy a good old gossip, especially when it concerns someone with so much to give! [Turn several pages over before continuing.]

Since he left school, Eddie had been working as a bank clerk, but in 1977 he became a mature student at Sussex University doing a degree in politics. He graduated in 1980, and immediately put his new qualification to excellent use by becoming a full-time professional folkie, doing loads of calling, loads of festivals and loads of singing.

In the early 1980s, Eddie joined The Pocket Theatre Company in the Lake District, to step into the rather alarming shoes of Taffy Thomas after he'd suffered his stroke. The company combined theatre with communal country dancing, and Eddie took over Taffy's role calling the dances, with Taffy directing the whole show. This led to further similar projects in the north west, including *The Garden of Eden*, which was a community play about the local brewery in Carlisle, of which Eddie was the musical director. Eddie wrote a couple of songs, and the cast included Maddy Prior.

In 1982 Eddie became Dance Producer here at Sidmouth Festival – a job which included organising the workshops for music and song. In 1986 he became Arena Producer, a post which was later called Display Director, planning the shows there for the next six years, and staging some increasingly impressive themed spectacles.

In 1987 Eddie beat all other contenders and won the post of Folk Musician in Residence at Gateshead, based in the Central Library at Caedmon Hall. Originally this was

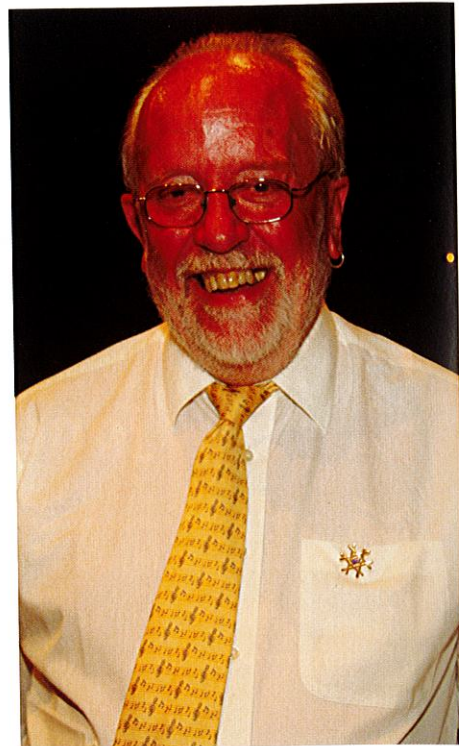


Photo: Derek Schofield

for just twelve months, but it took the locals and Eddie that long just to understand what they were saying to each other, so the contract got extended twice, and Eddie ended up staying there for three years. He showed what a great facilitator he had now become. He started a weekly folk club, and the Caedmon Community Choir, which is still going today. He started a monthly ceilidh series, with Robin Dunn leading the band and Eddie calling, and encouraged other callers to have a go as well. That's still going too. Eddie worked with children in schools, doing dance and band workshops, and published *Caedmon Capers* – a book of dances Eddie had created or developed in these workshops, with tunes by Robin Dunn. He also started regular classes in clog dancing and Irish dancing and ran occasional Folk Days.

In 1992 South West Arts put out feelers for a folk music development agency. Eddie Upton and Wendy Lutley made a submission, and they got the job, creating Folk South West, with Wendy as Administrator and Eddie as Artistic Director. Wendy stayed as co-director for five years, and then left, leaving Eddie as sole director.

Eddie was able to crystallise all his previous experience into a dynamic, new force for folk music in the south west. His eagerness in sharing the breadth and depth of his knowledge, his grasp of what it takes to inspire and enthuse others, his natural warmth and genial personality, all combine to create a setting where all who come into contact with him feel that their lives have been enriched and enhanced by the process. He's always had a loyal team to help him out, but the successes of Folk South West have been because of Eddie's personal vision.

Folk South West made history with a scheme called the Modern Apprenticeship. They employed and supervised the first