

EFDSS Gold Badge Citation for Chris Metherell – 1st August 2022

It is a tremendous honour to be giving this citation to accompany the presentation of a Gold Badge to my good friend and fellow clog dancer and researcher, Chris Metherell. As we know, this is a most prestigious award, only given to individuals who have made an outstanding contribution to English Folk Arts and, without doubt, Chris is very deserving of this recognition and has been for a great many years.

I first met Chris in about 1986 in Ulverston, Cumbria, when I was a member of Furness Clog Dancers and he had come over from Newcastle to teach us Diddy Dixon's Exhibition Steps. As a newish recruit to clog dance, I remember being somewhat apprehensive as I was told that Chris Metherell was a leading step dance researcher and an expert dancer & teacher! Well that workshop experience was truly inspirational and, several years later when I joined Newcastle Cloggies and The Instep Research Team, I was to learn more of Chris' remarkable achievements.

Chris' expertise and vast knowledge of traditional dance must have started somewhere, and indeed, his years performing with Reading Step and Traditional Dance Group between 1970 and 1978 seems to have equipped him well. On moving to Newcastle-upon-Tyne in 1978 his enthusiasm and leadership translated into the setting up of Newcastle Cloggies, which was soon to become one of the country's leading step dance teams.

In the team's early years, Chris recognised that their repertoire was perhaps rather limited but he had also become aware that Northumberland and Durham had been a hotbed of clog dance right up until WW2. In aiming to seek out this valuable heritage, Chris gathered together a group of interested dancers who were to become researchers, and this was the start of The Instep Research Team.

In the 1980s, they collected a considerable amount of clog dance material but Chris' attention to detail meant that a system of accurately recording each step needed to be devised; hence the creation of Newcastle Notation – an excellent method of representing step dance on paper. Chris has championed this system and maintains that, over and above film, it is essential in recording steps in minute detail.

This research resulted in the famous ‘blue booklets’ of The *Newcastle Series* – each one containing step notations, biographical information and analytical notes. Between 1981 and 1988 Chris also edited and published the magazine *INSTEP*, a regular journal which sought to give an overview of the step dance revival through articles, reviews, notations and research notes.

Chris’ belief in developing methods of recording traditional dance was not just restricted to step dance. For many years Chris was the archivist for The Morris Ring and by 2014 he had been instrumental in creating a digital database to facilitate access to their vast catalogue of material; a huge undertaking that would not have been possible without Chris’ expert assistance.

As well as recording traditional dance material on paper, Chris has always valued the importance of good film footage. Over the years he has honed his skill not only to capture dance action on camera, but also to select and edit audio-visual material to compile many high quality products. For example, in 2007 he produced a ‘Memorial Compilation’ for the clog dancer Sam Sherry. Working with Barry Callaghan of Garland Films, they assembled 3 DVDs containing wonderful archive film, memorabilia, and detailed information on all Sam’s known repertoire of steps.

Chris has also been involved with sword dancing for many years; as a dancer with High Spen Blue Diamonds, as a musician with Short Circuit Rapper and as a researcher for Grenoside Sword Dancers. This knowledge and research resulted in the production of the DVD set “Rapper: History of the Miners’ Sword Dance of North East England” published in 2012. An essential accompaniment to the book written by Phil Heaton, Chris’ compilation brings to life all aspects of rapper dancing from 1925 to 2009.

Chris must be the most knowledgeable person in the country as regards clog and step dance and I know that he is highly respected by other authors and researchers. For example, Mats Melin, recently retired senior lecturer at Limerick University, believes that Chris has inspired his own step dance knowledge and research for over forty years. He states:

Chris’ research integrity and skills are masterly. He inspires by performing the dances and playing the tunes on various instruments while being able to impart the history and context of the same.

This 'Guru' status means that Chris is regularly consulted by researchers, dancers and academics in the Folk world and beyond, and he is also a sought-after guest lecturer at several universities. As well as continued involvement with the Vaughan Williams Memorial Library, Chris is a regular contributor to Folk publications and is a renowned reviewer of books, academic papers, articles, CDs and DVDs.

As a step dance researcher, Chris has always been 'ahead of the game', no doubt gaining inspiration from the pioneering work of Tom Flett, a researcher who could be considered 'ahead of his time'. Right from his early research days Chris has assiduously written up every encounter and interview and has gradually accumulated a valuable archive of books, research notes, articles, photos, and other memorabilia.

Chris believes passionately that, as the clock is ticking, it is vital to act when opportunity presents itself and to appreciate that dance material needs to be collected and recorded while it is still in living memory. As regards clog and step dance, without this approach much of the knowledge and understanding we now take for granted would have been lost.

For example, in the 1980s, Chris had been involved in efforts to notate the steps of Les Rice, one of Devon's primary source step dancers. Chris then published the steps as part of the Newcastle series. Some years later, Chris was asked to teach the steps at the Dartmoor Festival. One of the workshop participants was Les Rice's nephew Jason, who had come along specifically to learn his uncle's 'lost' steps.

Coupled with this is Chris' mission to make all step dance material as accessible as possible so that future dancers and researchers can gain an insight into this important genre of dance history. Through the digitisation of all step notations, research notes and other archive material, Chris has enabled the Instep Research Team website to become a valuable resource which is ever-expanding and open to all.

The Instep Research Team has constantly developed over the forty years of its existence and now has a diverse membership of step dancers and researchers all committed to 'spreading the word'. Ednie Wilson, who was one of the

original Instep Research Team members and is our wonderful MC this afternoon, describes Chris' invaluable contribution as follows:

Without Chris' enthusiasm, commitment and drive, The Instep Research Team would never have come into being and would not have evolved and developed to create a resource of National and International importance.

The team's present status as a charity is an exciting development and we are now able to offer bursaries in order to promote further step dance research, transmission and engagement.

I'm sure all will agree that this award is a fitting acknowledgement of the huge debt of gratitude we owe to Chris – for his vision, skill and leadership, for the miles he has travelled to locate, film, and collect steps, and not forgetting the hours spent studying books, screens, and notations. Without doubt, this work and commitment has been pivotal in helping to build a more secure future for our nation's traditional dance heritage.

Chris, with our thanks and very best wishes, please accept your Gold Badge. To present this award I would like to introduce Katy Spicer, Chief Executive and Artistic Director of the English Folk Dance & Song Society.

Alex Fisher (clog dancer & researcher)