



John first began learning morris dancing at Headington Secondary School in 1953. The Headmaster of the day, Cyril Easton, was always keen on local traditions and arranged for William Kimber, with his son Fred, to come along to the school on Thursdays, after the end of lessons, and teach them the Headington Quarry morris dances.

Eventually the day came when William Kimber felt too old to teach, and he retired. The Headmaster appealed for someone to step forward to take Kimber's place as musician at least. John, who was having private piano lessons at the time, agreed to learn the piano accordion. The local church organist, David Rendell, who also played the accordion, was approached and he agreed to teach John the new instrument and the journey had begun.

In 1956 John left school and along with two or three other boys in that year, joined the Headington Quarry Morris Dancers and John began playing for the team more or less straight away on their practice nights. In 1958 Jim Phillips, one of the senior members, was elected Squire of the Morris Ring of England. He took office at Whitley Bay in Northumberland, and the team travelled up North from King's Cross station to support him, with John playing for the team at the age of seventeen.

And there was more – much more! – to come.

In 1973, along with their soul mates the Westminster Morris Men, they were invited to go to Japan as a publicity vehicle for the Department of Trade and Industry. This turned out to be three weeks of hot hard work but also very rewarding, as they were guests of the government.

Three years later they travelled to Washington DC to help celebrate the US bicentennial. They danced on 4 July, Independence Day, and afterwards they were presented to HM Queen Elizabeth upon her visit to the Lincoln Memorial. Life was good!

Since his debut in 1958, John has played for Headington Quarry Morris Dancers for 61 years – but that's not all. John joined the Headington Quarry Handbell ringers in 1957 and over the course of time has helped to develop the repertoire to include five- and six-part harmonies. The annual highlight of the last 62 years has been playing a selection of Christmas tunes in Holy Trinity Church before the midnight service. The Handbell ringers also accompany the mummers and sword-dancers on their Boxing Day tour.

In November 1967 John and the Morris were involved in Bruce Forsyth's Generation Game.

Also in 1967 the Headington Quarry Folk Dance Club was revived after a break of five years and John became involved in forming a band consisting of accordion, guitar, fiddle and drums to play for their weekly meetings. They held their first practice in a house called



'Quarry Turn' and so became known as 'The Quarry Turners' – they still play under that name in this very room where we stand now, 52 years later.

John says he has two claims to fame. Firstly, being called a 'Big head' by Prince Philip when John told him how many tunes he knew; secondly, being chased down Oxford High Street by actress Rosamund Pike, who was taking a degree at Wadham College when he was working there – she wanted to give him a signed photograph when she left. I wonder if he's still got that photo?

Good wishes, John for the Gold Badge award that you so justly deserve.

*Read by Ron Smedley at the Headington Folk Dance Club event 16 November 2019*