

*Frank Lee was presented with his Gold Badge on 7 October 2023 at the Joint Morris Organisations' Day of Dance at Newcastle City Centre and Gateshead Quays, just two miles from his birthplace.*

Frank was born in Wallsend, Newcastle, in 1945 to a mother and father whose families had worked for generations as blacksmiths and engineers respectively. His mother's father worked at the Ann pit in Walker, which did well by him, in the words of the song, while his father was born in Eppleton pit yard, his grandfather having been chief engineer there.

His parents had met through their cycling clubs, where his mother held a record for the number of miles cycled in a day. They married and moved to Durham, where Frank went to The Tin School at Gilesgate Moor, where he learned his trademark copperplate handwriting, a skill he acquired very quickly with the aid of a judiciously administered London and North Eastern Railway window strap. It was there, too that he became immersed in local folksongs, with a teacher who strongly believed in the preservation of local traditions. Work eventually took his father to King's College, Newcastle, and Frank won a place at Newcastle Royal Grammar School. This led to a pragmatic move to Monkseaton. Frank did not enjoy his time at school, but defied his sniffy headmaster by becoming the first pupil to take 'O' level woodwork.

He saw his first rapper dance when, at the age of 4, his father took him to see the University Rag procession, where Alan Brown, father of Peter, who's here today, and his '49ers were dancing on a lorry flatbed. The '49ers later became Newcastle Kingsmen, and Alan became Squire of the Ring. Another encounter with rapper, some 8 years later, was with a group of men running through a dance outside The Canon at Earsdon. They were dressed in working clothes, and Frank was captivated by the stepping, and the magical appearance of the nut at intervals. He resolved to learn this skill, and tried to join the Royal Earsdon Sword Dancers, but was deemed too young.

From the Royal Grammar School, Frank graduated to Newcastle College of Art and Industrial Design, an esteemed college which later spawned the designer of the iPhone. It was here that Frank learned a wide range of technical skills which would later be of benefit to the rapper world. It was here that his career might have come to an abrupt end when, with his penchant for practical jokes, set-up a fly press so that the heavy iron ball on a swinging arm would swing around and stop dead, half an inch from his temple, he went to fetch some fellow students to impress with this stunt. Unfortunately he was unaware that the stop was loose and at each turn of the fly beam it advanced another inch. "Watch this" he said proudly. The steel ball flew round, smacking him on his head and knocking him out cold, to the astonishment of his colleagues.

Despite his insane behaviour he survived and took an Art Teachers Diploma in Leicester where he met the beautiful Angela Murchie, and despite being assured by his brother that he had no chance, he married her, and they moved to Rothbury where Frank taught Craft, Design and Technology, but occasionally, the pupil/teacher roles were reversed when they'd have impromptu ceilidhs, the first time

Frank had heard the word, in the hall. Thus began his interest in folk dance generally.

The education authority offered Frank a chance to learn pottery at Lambton Castle in 1968, but on arrival there, he met Graham Binless, president of the EFDSS, unloading rapper swords from the boot of his car. It transpired Graham was teaching rapper that weekend, whereupon Frank absconded from his course and found himself cutting his fingers on sword blades instead. He was hooked.

Education reorganisation meant a move to Cumbria, where Frank and Angela moved temporarily into her parent's smallholding, a house now occupied by Maddy Prior, another Gold Badge holder, and thence to the house he now occupies in Brampton, a house which he later learned is named after one of the villages of Cotswold Morris fame. Shortly after the move, Ed Mycock and his wife Sue Allan started a morris team in Carlisle. Frank, at the time, thought morris meant rapper, and he went along, only to be disappointed - it was a Cotswold side. Dave Bloomfield and Tony Ingoe, of Newcastle Morrismen agreed to take the nascent Carlisle team under their wing, and taught them rapper to a high standard. This happened in The Cumberland Arms, and eventually a sword was broken. Frank agreed to try to mend it, he succeeded, and thus began his career as a maker of rappers from scratch.

But Frank soon gave-up on the team in Carlisle, attitudes to public performance were at variance with his own, and he left to join the embryonic Hexham team for a while. Later he was asked to return to Carlisle as Squire, which he agreed to do provided it was on his terms, which were that it should concentrate on sword dancing, and should aim to perform with respectable aplomb, and not be a disgrace to the tradition. The side immediately shrank to about a third of its original membership, the Cotswold dancers forming a team of their own, based in Whitehaven.

Greatness is no doubt about hard work, but sometimes it takes a lucky break to make the big time, and one of those breaks came at Sidmouth Festival when the Carlisle team were running through some rapper moves on the prom. The BBC were there, setting-up their cameras for a later procession, and decided to film the team as a test. The result was that the team were used to open and close the programme they made, and bookings flooded-in from everywhere. They even won enough velvet on a BBC Noel Edmonds competition show to provide them with a swanky new kit. The team now took its performances very seriously, practising three nights per week, and travelling the length of the country in Frank's 12 seat Landrover. On one occasion in Whitby, he terrified his passengers by driving up the vertiginous ramp alongside the 199 steps to the Abbey, later admitting he didn't know if it would make it, compounding the chagrin of his passengers.

Frank's teaching career, meanwhile, had not gone well. League tables and teaching to exams were anathema to Frank, and he quit the job. But Frank had noticed that wherever the team took its rapper dance the spectators were bubbling with enthusiasm, and it became obvious that few people had seen rapper dancing before. John Kirkpatrick said he'd never get tired of watching it, and at a miners' benefit concert Frank had attended with his dad in Hartley, the concert was filled with singing, comedy and conjuring talent of a high order, but it was The Royal Earsdon Sword Dancers that everyone was talking about afterwards. Malcolm Hills, a

colleague from the Carlisle team and now of Wayzgoose, designed a website promoting Frank's ability to make rappers, and from then onward his workshop has never been idle. Peter Brown, son of Alan Brown of Monkseaton, here today had taken the dance to the USA, and Phil Heaton and Aubrey O'Brien two more gold badge holders and also here today, had generated lots of enthusiasm here, especially through the wonderful DERT annual events at which Frank has been a frequent judge, so all it took was a supply of rapper swords and the whole genre exploded. He has made 2683 swords to date, mostly supplied to England and the USA, but also to Scotland, Wales, Denmark, Norway, The Netherlands, Belgium, France, Germany, Czech Republic, Hungary, Australia, Canada, New Zealand, Australia, Taiwan, China and Singapore.

He has written a booklet to help anyone else interested in making rappers. He is now 78, and although his parents clocked-up an aggregate of 200 years he does not anticipate living forever. His earnest hope is that someone will take up the reins and continue making high quality rapper swords or this brilliant folk dance may perish. Frank has always sold his swords for little more than cost price. Quote, "The main objective is to get people dancing".

A summary of Frank's contribution to the folk arts would be woefully incomplete without mention of his melodeon playing . He started playing with Throstle's Nest Morris, a sister side to Carlisle, and founded by Sue Allan. His Durham upbringing had meant brass bands featured largely in his musical experience, the tubas greatly influencing his left hand approach. He is highly regarded as a morris musician and has produced a series of videos of his playing on Youtube, with the box in closeup to help others interested in his style of playing.

Another contribution he has made to the folk arts is the organisation, annually of Durham Folk Party, which he has taken on every year for the last 20 years

After the sad and sudden death of his wife, Angela, herself a noted clog dancer, Frank renewed his acquaintance with Corrie, who he had met while touring with Carlisle. Corrie and Frank married in 2011 and have put on a series of house concerts, in a room temporarily emptied of rapper, longsword and violin and bow making equipment, all proceeds going to the performers. They are both keen to nurture young talent and Frank is always willing to act as a mentor, Will Pound, for one, is grateful to Frank in this regard.

I will round off this attempt at summarising the contribution that Frank has made to folk in general and rapper in particular by misquoting from the final verse of the Gospel of John. 'Now there are many other things that Frank has done. Were every one of them to be written, I suppose that the world itself could not contain the books that would be written.'

Citation prepared by Burt Hunter