

# Halsway Manor Report for March 2019

## **Tutors:**

**Alex Wade, Claire Wren, Cohen Braithwaite Kilcoyne, Michael Hebbert and Dave Elliott**

**MH Photos are by Martin Henshaw, CW by Claire Wren, CP by Christopher Pointeer with permission**

## **Introduction** by Martin Henshaw

I had heard a lot about Halsway Manor from my late friend Geoff Thorp who was constantly recommending that I go to one of their events. Well the West Country Concertina Players have now provided that opportunity by moving their March residential weekend there from Kilve. I had been looking forward to this weekend ever since I heard about the new venue.

The approach to Halsway Manor like that to Quantock Lodge was along a very narrow road but when you turn the final corner you see the Manor in all its splendour with the large garden stretched out in front and a backdrop of the Quantock Hills.

The narrow lane caused problems for some people who had extra large camper vans but most managed to get parked up on the reserved area to the left of the Manor. One person was advised to put his van on the field used for camping only to get stuck due to the soft ground. Fortunately he managed to get towed out by an owner of a large SUV before having to leave.

Renovation of the whole Manor had been recently completed and it looked splendid both inside and out. Particularly impressive were the wooden panelled hall, bar and library. The bedrooms were spacious and light.

About two weeks before the weekend started the programme and music were sent out by Halsway Manor so we could get an impression of what to expect. Putting the link to Dropbox low down in the email meant that it was off my screen and I did not see it until just before leaving on the Friday morning.

On arrival there was the usual welcoming committee and light refreshments. People were allocated their bedrooms and had time to become orientated and greet old friends before the evening meal in the large dining room. The food was really tasty and the staff extremely efficient and helpful over the course of the whole weekend.



Halsway Manor – Photo MH



The Tutors' Photo – CP



Bar Session – Photo MH

## **English Group** by Martin Henshaw

After the Friday evening meal people split into groups for the introductory workshops for the different concertina systems. I joined Alex Wade for the English concertina group workshops and stayed with her for most of the weekend. We took a look at Return to Halsway by Nigel Eaton – “Return” because The West Country Concertina Players had used the venue before but there had been a gap of 20 years since their last visit. All systems groups learnt to play the tune which was then performed by each group after the students’ presentation on Sunday afternoon.

The first English workshop on the Saturday looked at playing in keys other than G. This took the fingers to little used notes on the keyboard. Concentration was necessary when playing a tune in C to try and stop the little finger automatically wanting to play F# when it was not required. E major was another key tried and that required four sharps – two of which are only seldom used. We played amongst other tunes Winster Gallop first in G and then in C, D, A, E, F, and Bb moving from one key to the next without a pause. That provided a really good workout!

The next workshop was concentrating on rhythm and playing tunes such as Dusty Miller, Rusty Gulley, Lads and Lasses and Slangpolksa efter Juringus tunes in 3/2 time and exploring syncopation.

In the workshop on developing your own style we were given a test. Alex played samples of some well known professional players and we had to say who they were. Most of us spotted Alistair Anderson but we had mixed results for the others.

For the next workshop Alex invited players who had instruments covering the baritone and bass ranges to join us in building chordal and baseline accompaniments. The tune used was The Wedding at Riding Mill written by David Oliver for Alex's wedding to Joe Oliver in 2018.

Alex's final workshop was on speeding up playing with techniques such as using more than one finger to play a note when it appeared multiple times in succession.

Alex worked extremely hard over the weekend (there was hardly time to catch your breath), she really earned her keep in a very pleasant and professional way.



Alex W – English Group – Photo MH



Alex W in Concert – Photo CW

## Anglo Group by Louise Yeoman

Having seen Cohen perform with both Granny's Attic and as an individual at Sidmouth Folk Festival and been quite amazed by his Anglo concertina playing, I was so pleased to see he would be conducting the Anglo workshops at Halsway for the WCCP. The last time I attended the WCCP residential weekend was October 2015, when I had not long started playing the Anglo and it has taken me that much time to feel confident enough to attend the intermediate group.

The great thing about these workshops is the teaching and also the familiar faces you see. Malcolm was also on the beginners' workshop in October 2015, Andrew Collins and John Warren have helped me throughout my concertina playing journey. There were 15 of us in the Anglo workshop and every person there I had seen or spoken to before, so it felt like a very friendly and familiar setting.

When people ask me what I learnt, I mainly say inspiration. Cohen was an excellent tutor, demonstrating to us all his concertina skills. He taught us how to cut notes, with runs up and down to the leading note, there was tapping on the same note, 1121 (tap the index finger twice on the note, then middle finger then index finger) and to create ornamentation. Full chords, half chords, oom pah, octave playing, bass notes and how the bellows determine where you play your chords. How to emphasise the off beat and sing the tune. Picture the notes on the concertina and get some rhythm into your playing.

Of course the evening concert was amazing too. I now keep my notes from the workshop next to my music and every time I practice I try to incorporate a little of what Cohen taught us.

I hear the evening bar sessions were amazing, however being studious I went early to bed and to revise my notes.



Cohen B-K – Anglo Group – Photo MH



Cohen B-K in Concert – Photo CW

## **Band Group** by Rosemary Kavanagh

I am a confirmed Concertina Band addict! From my first experience of finding that concertinas of different sizes often like to congregate together in Bands – that was some years back at a WCCP weekend for beginners – I was hooked! Claire Wren was leading the band back then, and she was leading this band at the new Halsway Manor venue in March 2019. It is still MAGIC, every time.

The music we were covering was Met Office March (a happy little medley of weather related tunes like One Misty Moisty Morning and The Sun Has Got His Hat On), Arthur's Liberty March (composed by Claire from a scrap of an anonymous tune given to her by Arthur Brine), Trois Images (three little pieces documenting a family holiday voyage in France and including a tricky little piccolo part that sounded very impressive in my right ear) and Lilliburlero (an exercise in precision playing). All composed and/or arranged by Claire. All parts had been sent out in advance with practice notes.

The Band Room in the Mews at Halsway Manor was pleasant and comfortable. There were a few no-shows, so a little bit of rearranging parts and chairs, instrument swaps found where necessary and we were off. A quick run through all the pieces. Straight away it was obvious that people had followed the instruction to practice and the first runs were exciting – we all finished at the same time and it sounded pretty good to me.

By the Saturday, Claire had acquired a sore throat. Despite that, she proceeded to pull the pieces apart and put them back together – better, sharper, cleaner. We focused on dynamics, expression and interpretation of time signatures. I think we all worked very hard to put into effect all the instructions and many were rewarded with little chocolate eggs for their exceptional contribution – I think most of us achieved that accolade at some point. The music developed through the day. The teaching was lovely.

On the Sunday morning, poor Claire had taken a turn for the worse (I am pleased to say she is fully recovered now), so Esther Venn stepped in to lead the Band. Although a little daunted by the change in location to the front of the Band (she usually likes to hide behind her Bass at the back), Esther led us all in a kind, patient way, consolidating all the learning from the day before and polishing our performance. It was a lovely morning.



Claire W and Band – Photo CP



Esther Venn Leading the Band in Concert – Photo CP

## **Duet Group** by Paul McCann

Halsway Manor was a new venue for me, and very nice it is too, with hotel-standard rooms and a very pleasant ambience. This time there were only four full-time Duet players at the weekend, with the inimitable Michael Hebbert as our tutor trying to keep order. Being a small group, we were corralled in a small area of the Long

Room (the main dining room), which presented the occasional challenge as we approached meal times, but proved to be a snug and sunny corner in which to play.

Friday evening started with the usual low-key introductions and some playing to get us attuned to each other and for Michael to assess us. As usual, there were at least three different Duet systems present, and so tuition centred on the music and its interpretation more than matters of technique and fingering.

We spent some time looking at a nice Irish tune called “A Spailpín a Rún”, which I still can’t help referring to as “Tailspin and Run”. So enthused was Michael with this tune that he even persuaded a real Irish player to join us for a session to help with the interpretation! “The Maid in The Moon” was a welcome return to English familiarity, and we added The Man in The Moon for good measure! We also looked at a hymn tune, and “After the Ball was Over”, and a Swedish Polska called Skräddare Blanken (The Blanken Tailor, apparently). So there was plenty of variety.

The tutors’ concert was a highlight, as ever, providing a rare chance to hear Michael performing his “regular” material. All in all an excellent weekend!



Michael Hebbert – Duet Group – Photo MH



Michael Hebbert in Concert – Photo CW