

## Ron Angel



Ron Angel died on 17<sup>th</sup> September aged 83. A pillar of the Teesside folk music community, Ron was a wonderful singer and whistle player and writer of some excellent songs and tunes. He and his songs achieved national acclaim with the Teesside Fettleers in their heyday and his Chemical Worker's Song went on to be sung and recorded around the world.

Ron was born in Billingham on Boxing Day 1930 and always loved music, especially classical. He often told the story of how he first came into contact with folk music in Egypt when stationed there with the Paras in the fifties. Ron mixed with local workers on the camp, learning their language, and was invited to a gathering where traditional songs, dances and stories were performed by everyone there. He was alarmed when he realised that he was expected to take part and embarrassed that all he had to offer was a verse each of The Blaydon Races and Keep Yer Feet Still, Geordie Hinny. He resolved to do something about that.

After demob, Ron had a range of jobs, including selling vacuum cleaners door to door. That was how he met Rita whom he was to marry. He also worked at ICI in Billingham, but *not* on the plant. Eventually he found his niche as a teacher at Ayresome School near the Boro football ground. In his spare time at Ayresome and later at Abingdon Road, Ron taught generations of Middlesbrough schoolchildren how to play the penny whistle.

In 1962 Ron and Rita discovered the new folk club in Stockton. There they met Johnny Handle and Graeme Miles and began to build up a repertoire of songs. When Johnny left Teesside the club floundered but the formation of a group to lead club-nights, The Fettleers which included Ron, rescued the situation. The club and the group, with varying membership but with Ron as a mainstay, went from strength to strength. The Teesside Fettleers split up in 1977 having separated from the Club during

their busy years but Ron remained at its heart. For much of his 45 years association with it he ran the club, inspiring and encouraging a progression of members to sing and play. These included Vin Garbutt, The Wilson Family and The Young'uns who have all acknowledged his massive influence and friendship.

Ron was in great demand on the folk scene. He played in a number of bands for ceilidhs, like Stockton Hop and The Cleveland Bays, and for dance teams like the Cleveland Cloggies and the Locos in Motion morris side. He toured with Richard Grainger and sang at many maritime festivals with The Endeavour Shantymen.

He always said he wasn't a prolific songwriter. At one time, though, performing with Frankie Porter on a weekly local radio programme called Helter Skelter, he would write a song appropriate to the week's theme at the beginning of the week, practise it with Frankie on Wednesday then perform live on Saturday. Songs ranged over diverse topics from tax collectors and lighthouses to going to the cinema (another of Ron's great interests).\*

Ron retired after serious heart surgery in 2007 and continuing health problems meant that we saw him only a few times after that. Sadly he was unable to join us when Stockton Folk Club celebrated its half-century. The day of his funeral was marked, fittingly, by lots of singing - at the crematorium, at a wake with his family and in the evening at what will always be Ron's Club: songs for a dear friend.

\*Some of the lyrics of Ron's Helter Skelter songs can be found here, courtesy of Frankie Porter and Steve Lane

<https://www.dropbox.com/sh/tbpon8a112spta1/AAA9LXCghb-zOBMvh6397ciWa?dl=0>