

Folk Music & Song at the Sloop Inn:

The Sloop Inn has hosted three regular folk music & song events from time to time over the last 5 decades.

The first and longest running was the Island Folk Song Club that ran through the 1960's.

The folk club was held every Friday night in the old Boathouse at the back of the Inn. I remember there being fishing nets and oars as a backdrop for the performers and you would know when it was low tide by the smell!!

Through the Sloop's front door came the likes of Billy Connelly, Gerry Rafferty, Ralph McTell, Ewan McColl, Peggy Seeger and members of Steeleye Span, Fairport Convention in various combinations. Just about all the who's who of the folk music scene of those years played at the Sloop Inn. Of course the backbone of the "folk club" was the likes of local resident Cliff Maidment one of the singers & musicians who turned up most weeks to perform and support any guest act that was booked.

A young Cliff Maidment, on the left, with John Underwood, Laurie Say and Roy Middlebrook.



I think the first time I visited the club at the Sloop was around the mid-1960s. I can remember with some visits, Sue, the girl on the door would have to frequently shout out between acts: "Can you all move forward please". At that everybody in the rows of seats would all shuffle forwards dragging their chairs with them, so a few more could then squeeze in. Health and Safety rules regarding limiting attendance to safe numbers had not arrived then!!

In 1967 the folk club was brought into the forefront of local politics. The government wanted to change the electoral boundary by linking the Island and mainland as it is again now!!

This encouraged one of the club members, Laurie Say to write a tongue in cheek song "UDI For I.O.W". A rousing call to arms to stop the change with the chorus; "We'll pick up our pitchforks and give them such a fight, When we declare independence on the Isle of Wight".

Lauri Say burst onto the Island's folk scene writing several songs, including the UDI Song. A set of his songs was recorded on an EP in 1968 "Songs For Singing Islanders" an instant best seller on the Island. There was only one print run, so those that have a copy own a treasure.

I believe it was 1969 that the Sloop Inn changed hands and the new owners wanting to upgrade and become a restaurant. This change and refurbishment also included the Boathouse, so the Island Folk Song Club had to leave. This turned out to be the end of an era, subsequent folk clubs never quite achieved the audience numbers as was achieved on a regular basis by the club in its height of popularity.

Another change of hands and refurbishment at the Sloop led to another Folk Club starting towards the end 1975. Run Fridays on a fortnightly basis, it became quite popular for a while until the club split in 1978 with one section staying in Wootton, moving to the “Tin Hut” and calling itself the Sloop Ashore Folk Club. The club stayed there briefly before moving to Newport.

Again the backbone of the “folk club” lay with the regulars who turned up most weeks to perform and support any guest act that was booked. One being Trevor Couvelle, his wife Eve still lives in the village. Singer, musician and instrument maker, he supplied me my first Bodhran (pronounced boran or bodrun) – a single hand held drum.

Through the 80’s and 90’s there was no regular folk activity at the Sloop, although it was a popular venue for a few folk concerts.

It was not until the new millennium that folk music and song became a regular feature again at the Sloop Inn. In 2006 “Folk By The Fireside” ran on a Thursday night briefly.

Unlike the “folk club” which was in the style of an informal concert, Folk By The Fireside was an informal gathering of musicians and singers who took it in turn to sing or play.

Again, a change in ownership and re-branding of the Sloop saw the demise of that gathering.

However, during the refurbishment in 2007, the old Boathouse wall was exposed. Realizing the musical history of the Sloop Steve & Karen decided to keep it as a feature. So, for those that can remember the old boathouse, an original wall is on show at the far right hand corner of the lounge bar.

Should you wish a touch of nostalgia, pop into the Sloop and reminisce or imagine!