



ARSC Conference Keynote Presentation:
Document Records, Gary Atkinson
May 15, 2021 – 3:45-4:45 pm EDT

Gary Atkinson was born in 1956, in Hull, East Yorkshire, England. As a child, his love of music was fired by hearing his father's 78 rpm records, including those by Big Bill Broonzy, Sonny Terry, King Oliver, Jelly Roll Morton and many more.

Gary was thirteen when his older brother, Michael, came home from The Blue Bell Blues and Folk club in Hull, reporting the excitement of seeing artists such as the guitarist / singer Jo Ann Kelly, (the late sister of The Blues Band's Dave Kelly,) who performed the songs of such 'Country Blues' artists including Memphis Minnie and Charley Patton. Around the same time, Michael brought home the album 'Oh Really!' by Mike Cooper, and it proved to be life-changing for Gary. Cooper's slide guitar playing, his 1920s National steel guitars, and references to names such as Blind Boy Fuller, Mississippi Fred McDowell and Son House sparked Gary's interest and led to him learning to play guitar, and in performing at blues and folk clubs in Hull.

By fourteen, he had met some of his first music heroes; Bukka White, Willie Dixon, Walter Horton, Sonny Terry and Brownie McGhee, Champion Jack Dupree and the gospel singer Sister Rosetta Tharpe.

At eighteen, Gary was invited to contribute to the magazine 'Sailors Delight'; Primarily a "blues record auction magazine" but with Gary's help, it also contained a strong dose of humorous, satirical articles to entertain the readership.

At the age of thirty-two he met Gillian, whom he was to marry, and between them they set up a music agency, Spirit Music. Between them they successfully set up tours for American artists in the UK and other parts of Europe. Between 1989 and 1994 they did everything from booking tours, managing them, drove the artists round and Gary was even invited up onto the stage to play guitar with them.

When Gary and Gillian acquired Document Records, in the year 2000, they inherited a huge catalogue of historic recordings but there were challenges, especially with administration, such as the need for the creation of detailed metadata for over 25,000 tracks. It was a case of pulling the company into the 21st century and work to assure its future.

Gary sought to make the Document catalogue more accessible to the public, beyond its established base of 'serious collectors'. With one of the first extensive websites, complete with on-line shopping facilities, for an independent label, plus a major deal in the early days of download distribution by a New York based distributor, Document began to prosper.

Gary is also a Record Producer, Documentary Film Maker, Publisher, Fine Artist, Writer, and avid Record / Book Collector.