



Recruitment - The Future Of The Morris World

Introduction

During 2010 a survey was undertaken of recruitment methods and how successful these had been. There are thousands of people out there who, with a spark of enthusiasm or a little persuasion or indeed bribery, would thoroughly enjoy Morris, and a life with bells on. No, not the film; real life Morris. All you have to do is find them and get them enthused.

However, for one reason or another, the idea of strapping on a set of bells, waving handkerchiefs, painting ones face and wearing tatters, or donning a set of clogs and performing is for a lot of people an alien idea. In order to attract new dancers we must unfortunately roll up the sleeves and employ some elbow grease.

The original summary was compiled from the results of a questionnaire circulated in 2010. It was not theory but the empirical results of good, bad, and indifferent ideas tried out by member sides of the Morris Ring. The original survey questioned the newest recruits in many of our sides and asked them directly, "What got you in and what kept you hooked?"

Over the course of my tenure I have requested that you get in touch with me and give me examples of your recruitment drives and how successful these have been. My thanks to all those who have, and those I specifically spoke to in person.

With the information I have gathered and the existing information collated by Peter Halfpenney, I have produced here an updated document which may assist your efforts.

Some of the findings and personal replies are startling. Some things we are doing right but many things we are doing wrong. Too many things we are not doing at all.

This is neither an exhaustive exercise and sadly there are no magic wands here; there is no panacea for all clubs; there is no 'quick fix'.

This document should be used as a starter's handbook, meant as a tool for guidance to be added to or adapted in a manner to suit your own sides. It will be supported by national initiatives promoted by the Morris Ring as part of the Joint Morris Organisations.

Perseverance must be the watchword; your push for members should be an on-going process.



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What Can We Try?

Whilst it is sides that have built up a recognisable and familiar presence in their own locale that are most successful in attracting new blood, Moulton and Saddleworth for example, making sure Morris is 'normalised' within the community is obviously not an option for some Sides, Westminster for example.

In this regard then, the following methods can be tried by all.

1) Recruitment Committee

- Appoint a Recruitment Officer or Recruitment Committee which meets with nothing else on the agenda but recruitment, it is possible to devise a strategy that the whole club can relate to and be involved with.
- Make all members aware of this committee. Identify your present members with enthusiastic personalities, and make sure the whole side knows who they are and steer potential recruits to them.

2) Area Representative

- Those areas with active and involved Reps are surprisingly the same areas where recruitment is most successful. Coincidence? Maybe, but don't bet on it. However, there is no harm in developing a good working relationship with your Area Rep.

3) Personal contact

- When dancing out make sure you interact with the audience. Never, ever perform to an audience containing potential recruits without advertising for new members.
- Get all the lads (with personality) to mingle with the audience and enthuse about the fun you are having, the places you go and the great things you do. Name drop, "We met/danced for the Queen, Earl So-and-So, Jonathan Ross, Jordan, Osama Bin Laden" etc. "We danced at Buckingham Palace, Chatsworth, Heidelberg, Scafell Pike, Rome, Blackpool" and so on.
- How many of us perform dances where the whole set is facing inward most of the time. Why not alter the dances so an 'all in' becomes and 'all out'; face the audience, make eye contact, and smile!
- It is always worth keeping your eyes open for new neighbours. If you are new to an area, there is a need to build a fresh social life and contacts. There have been some well-respected members of the Morris Ring who were 'told' they would be going to practice by one of the local side who turned up on the doorstep; personal visits and introductions can work well.



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4) Take Ownership of The Side

- All new or prospective recruits should be made to feel part of the side and be welcomed. Actively looking to younger members for ideas re dance venues, running the shows, possibly putting them into positions of responsibility within the Side can reinvigorate things.
- One thing which has been noted is that we're not doing enough to recruit family members. Sides with more family involvement, especially WAGS, get better numbers. Have social events with family involvement and no Morris; Ladies Nights, garden parties, country walks, music and song sessions and so forth.
- Explore present members/new recruits for other relatives and hold 'family tuition days' where people who may know each other can all enjoy the day.
- Hammer home that Morris is good fun.
- Take new members to larger events; Ring Meetings, JMO events, as early as is practical. Let them experience the joy of being with the fraternity of like-minded people for a weekend and having a great time.
- Issue basic costume to new guys early. "You're really one of the lads now."
- Some sides have had success by keeping their approach quirky. Tag Lines such as "The most fun you can have standing up", "Drink ale and keep fit", or "You ain't done it till you've done it with bells on" may seem tacky but in the right setting can be rewarding.
- Always ensure your kit is smart and presentable. people are more likely to join if you are not stained and scruffy!

5) Exposure

- There are many methods of advertising yourselves, and the development of the internet over the last 30 years has been brilliant for our purposes. Leaflets, websites, newspapers, brochures, twitter and facebook accounts are all great methods of promoting your team.
- It would be worth appointing press officer within the team who can target your campaigns more specifically.
- Create a flyer with pictures of younger dancers for example, have leaflets or intro cards with contact details and make sure they are up to date but don't just hand them out, talk to your audience, note down phone numbers/email addresses of interested parties and, most importantly, follow them up. Give them a signed photo with contact details on. If it's more personal they will keep it.
- In this day and age having a good, clear, positive, and up to date website is crucial. But from the point of view of new recruits your website must have a prominent hook for new members on the front page.
- The press officer should build and maintain relationships with local press & TV. Don't let them write the material: feed them press releases and interesting articles. This



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saves them doing the research and ending up with “Incest and Morris dancing” articles.

- Contact other social clubs in your area. eg. schools, youth clubs, scouts and guides, drama societies. If you are asked to perform for their event, don't just turn up on the day; offer a pre-event evening, give them a light-hearted presentation, and a try-it-and-see session. It may be possible to get them to set up a team to perform at their own event alongside your team.
- The Morris Ring has some display boards which can be borrowed in order to provide an eye-catching advert at events.

6) Target Market

- You must appreciate who your target market is. Whilst aiming for a whole group of teenagers may be good for the side it is doubtful that this will be successful; with the Ring's average age being in the early 60s you may find it hard to recruit youngsters when everyone else is their grandfather's age. Aim first for the 40/60 age group and then explore these new recruits for younger contacts.
- The more members you have (of any age) the more you can get out and dance. More exposure means more opportunities to recruit and hopefully this will be an ever increasing circle.

7) Previous Members

- Look up past members or invite them to a session. They were once interested enough to dance out and there may still be a spark of enthusiasm and they might just be missing you!

8) Normalise Morris in the Community

- For smaller villages it is easier to make and maintain contact with local folk activity groups (folk clubs/dance clubs etc). You could offer to put on a show for them dancing and singing. Make a contact on the Parish Council or in the local church and offer to perform for a village event free of charge once per year.
- Further, with the closer links between the Ring, Federation and, Open Morris you must always work together with your other local sides. Joint 'have-a-go' sessions can work well.
- Sides have recently started to set up different groups in the same area catering for different sections of society; Shakespeare and Redcar Sword for example. This may encourage knock-on recruitment to the original side.



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9) Eggs and Baskets

- Multiple methods in tandem work better than single approaches. Prominently link leaflets/brochures/press articles & releases to your activity days and most importantly your website.

10) Teaching Methods

- Involve newcomers straight away. Keep them challenged but also make sure they gain a sense of achievement; perhaps give them just four or five dances to start with. Teach them something early that they can accomplish easily and get them into a set to dance it through.
- Sit with them in the pub and bring them into your social group quickly. Collect and give them lifts to practice at first.
- Everyone learns in different ways and it may be that teaching them the geography of the dances first and then the actual steps/hand movements works better for some.
- Take them out early to a performance arena. Even in winter, get into your local or one of your summer haunts for a session in costume. All members are part of the team. Treat them equally and involve them, even the younger lads. They're not kids, they're Morris Men. There is a smallish rider on this comment and that is, for the sake of safety, it may be better to limit the amount of stick dances very young dancers perform, at least until they are as tall as the shortest member of the side.
- Look for local events at which to perform. Sides with big noise events (e.g. Saddleworth Rushcart) don't struggle to recruit. If there isn't one in your area, do some research to see if there used to be and spark a revival.

11) Funding

- The above methods may incur costs and therefore it may be necessary to look for grants and funding opportunities to help sponsor recruiting events.
- Advertise that you are recruiting NOW; inject a sense of urgency and tell people it is free. However, the side could buy newcomers a pint or two.
- The Morris Ring was formed to serve its member sides. If you need help, the Officers, Past Officers, Area Reps and others have a wealth of experience to support you.
- Subsidise younger members when attending national Ring events thus allowing them to join in on the wider scene.

12) Ease of Access

- Even though, in today's society, most people drive and have access to cars there are still some who don't. Ensure your practice venue is accessible via regular public transport services.
- If there is nowhere with public transport access, set up a rota of drivers who would be happy to pick-up/drop-off non-drivers.



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- Similarly, not everyone has internet access and therefore any side announcements regarding potential bookings or side performances should be easily phoned through to non-internet users. Ensure you have a telephone number for all members of the side and therefore group texts could be sent round.
- Linking with item 5 above, all produced material, whether on paper or electronically, should have the side contact details (email, website, phone number, twitter account, Facebook name, and postal address) prominently positioned.

Please report back success stories and other recruitment ideas that you find beneficial. The results you achieve are directly proportional to the effort applied.

WORK HARD AND GOOD LUCK.

Original survey and assessments

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Squire of the Morris Ring

Feb 2011

Additional Material

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Squire of the Morris Ring

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Some useful responses to recruitment questionnaire

Reasons for joining

- To lose weight
- Exercise
- Friendly team
- Seen side dancing (but didn't ask to join until invited by a member)
- New to area, needs social contacts
- Previous experience (past clubs or school)
- Thought about it but needed a push to convince me
- Whitby Scratch Morris
- Love tradition
- Love music
- Saw Morris men who looked to be having a good time
- Corcoran's TV piece about Morris dying out
- Retirement activity
- Archaeologist and has an interest in all things ancient (plenty to go at with us then: Ed)
- Underage so came with Dad - side recruited him too!.

Reasons for staying.

- It's fun
- Comradeship Made new friends
- Exercise, physical well-being
- Mental well-being (wait till the beer kicks in: Ed)
- Interesting places visited
- Pubs
- Public performance
- Regular enthusiastic practice
- Boys not treated separately - each is 'one of the lads'
- Newcomers adopted into group quickly No cliques of older members
- Life enriched by membership
- Joined 18-30 group & enjoyed peers of own age
- Festival involvement
- WAGS are involved in activity and formed their own social group
- Music & song sessions
- Ring meetings

Successful endeavours

- Dancing local events Constant local presence
- Promoting 'tradition'
- Involvement with schools



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- Audience participation dance
- Leaflets specific to and with pictures of younger men
- Local radio - prepare well, don't 'wing it'
- Press releases - papers are crying out for good content
- Photo exhibition in libraries/public areas
- Days out with ladies sides (recruit the men)
- Workshops in local schools, also encouraging the teachers to attend practices
- Visit local folk clubs Show to include music, song and dance
- Lads & Dads teaching session through local schools
- Practice in school/college building raises awareness
- Big local events (Village fete, Rushcart, Plough day, Straw bear etc)
- Boxing day, always local audience
- Presentations on aspects of Morris & Folk art in local galleries, libraries etc
- Presentations to other social groups (Scouts, schools, youth clubs etc)
- Good website, not too serious or academic but reflecting the fun we have
- When advertising, tell them it's FREE
- Paid for advert in local paper
- Lied about collection going to beer fund (it doesn't!)
- Applied for local grants for community projects (teaching an activity).

Other comments

- We took a number of different initiatives, all of which have paid off, these included press releases, web site, photographic exhibition, 'SideFinder', a youth project and good old-fashioned word of mouth
- No single approach worked every time Best results when there was a combination of two or more initiatives together
- Didn't always get an instant response to every initiative In some cases we got quick replies, in others it has taken two years to get results, people will respond as and when it suits their circumstances
- Good tips in "Fit To Print" by John Brand and the Morris Ring sheets "Advice on the format of News Releases by Clubs & the Ring etc."
- Also publication available from the Morris Federation Publicity tips – Hints on promoting your team, attracting new members, etc cost 90p
- Keep decent kit - shoddy is uninspiring
- As a taster, teach something easy but with early impact (eg Beaux Adderbury - single stepping for simplicity, sticks for impact. It can be set danced within 90 minutes to give sense of achievement for learners)
- Be non insular and include people Make sure that shows are more than "just" Morris shows
- Sing, recite monologues, play music, have a laugh and involve people



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- Be welcoming to recruits and their wives/girlfriends – the WAGs need to feel as welcome as their menfolk; men need their support to attend regularly
- Don't underestimate the potential for a WAG to gain a recruit – they are natural networkers and can make the new member's partner feel really welcome This is particularly powerful when couples move into the area
- Get a new dancer out in kit as soon as possible, even if he only does one dance and not very well
- A certain anonymous side named after their location (Peterborough!) claim in their posters that it improves your sex life (I'm joining them: Ed!)
- Arrange lifts to practice for newcomers
- Mail shot to primary schools offering free performances associated with a sponsored 'learn to dance' for staff/PTA/parents as part of a summer fayre
- Always get phone numbers/contact details of interested parties and don't forget to follow up with contact
- Learners open evenings
- Morris at the Mac Grant funded learners' day Ask Jockey/see MR website for details
- Dancing Birmingham centre regularly, Jockey built up great local reputation and rapport with passers-by Good PR!
- WAGS annual dinner

Yes, I do remember speaking to you about this, and I will try to help you with your quest, but I am not too sure that we are exploring any different methods of recruitment than any other dance sides Over the 22 years we have been in existence, we have always found it difficult to recruit, but am happy to tell you the methods we use.

1. We now have a good website, which is essential, and this has helped a lot with getting us recognised However, when we first started, we had no website, and recruitment was by word of mouth, events we attended, and leaflets we handed out I must admit our current website does need updating, but this is down to work overload and nothing else However it does always have our current practice and event dates listed
2. A good well worded leaflet - we hand these out to members of the public at all our local events, and if any members of dance sides approach us for leaflet, then we have them to give out to them as well I've attached our current leaflet for you, so that you can see it, because I think I forgot to bring them to JMO
3. We usually have an annual Open Day, when we heavily advertise in local magazines, and around local schools and clubs We demonstrate some of our dances and get new members to join in Of those who attend, on average we get about 80% interested in joining - that's usually between 6 - 8 members per year, age range



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usually between 6 & 12 years Once they have joined, most stay for many years, and more recently, most until they go to university

4. Some of our best recruitment has come from major local events, where we always announce that new members are welcome - sometimes we get interest, but more often not We have also demonstrated to local Brownie and Guide Clubs, and this has sometimes given us new members

I think the key thing is to get out there and demonstrate I find that the majority of the general public has either no idea what it's all about, or they have a very biased opinion probably influenced by bad publicity and ridicule Once they see what we do, we usually get a really good response, but it does take a lot more to convince whole families to get involved, and YM does rely on whole family commitment The children these days have far more interests than they had years ago, and families can be stretched to the limit at times We are extremely lucky that we have mostly full commitment from all our current YM families, and this helps tremendously Some parents are also our musicians, and this is also a great help

If you are looking for ideas that might boost recruitment for all sides, then you may need to take a look at the "Folk Works Week" which takes place in August every year in Durham My husband has been going for years, and so have some of our past members It's not only inspiring, but great fun It is mostly music, but it would be fantastic if we could have something like that started up in the South of England, to cover not only music, but dance as well It should be in the Summer holidays, and should be looked upon as a Summer Activity for all - children and adults alike It's just an idea, and it would be lovely if it came to fruition somehow, but would need lots of organising and good venues, and also many volunteers and possibly combined organisations to get it off the ground - that could be a big seed to sow!!!

On another note - I think one of the reasons why we have so many elderly dance sides, is because they have not been happy in accepting children to dance with them, and have only just realised their mistake Therefore it has become too late to encourage children to dance with OAP's, they should have thought about this years ago!!

Just a bit of history of our group - It was very easy to form, because the group was made up of our 2 boys, (including our Andrew Swaine), and about 8 other children from our adult group English Miscellany This formed the basis of a good start, as these children had been watching their parents dance for most of their lives, so had a good insight how to dance already It would have been more difficult to start a children's group from scratch I'd just like to tell you that out of that original group, came not only our Andrew, but Edwin Beasant, who helped form Pilgrims Way, (now a thriving musical and singing quartet); Sally Page (nee Skye), who is a past editor of Puddingstone, (the Hertfordshire



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Folk Magazine); and Ruth Rose, who now teaches Camden Clog In the years following that, we have been lucky to have some good musicians as well - Katherine Chandler (nee Hazell) is a very fine fiddle player, and now plays with my husband's Barn Dance Band Jenny Page, (another fiddle player), who did a Folk music degree at Newcastle University, and then went on to play with the band Spindrift More recently - Katherine Bates, (who danced with us for more than 10 years until she went to University), came back to help me with the teaching and organisation of YM, and has recently also joined the Rapper Side Tower Ravens, together with another YM member (Rhona French) We saw Tower Ravens at St Neots yesterday, and they are delighted with their two new recruits

Mike Stevens Young Dancers

Shakespeare and Redcar Sword, Monks Eaton

- starting other sides in the hopes of attracting members to the original
- Be Friendly and welcoming
- Less 'politics'
- I first encountered Morris Dancing in the mid-1970s, in the idyllic setting of thatched cottages surrounding a village green; as I recall, about five sides were dancing at the time; but being newly married with young children, there was never enough spare time to consider becoming a dancer Fast forward to around my retirement age, I attended Mendlesham Church Plough Sunday service, where East Suffolk were dancing
- I had previously met Peter Kay, and at the church lunch following the service, Peter, Mike Barclay and I were chatting about my interest in the Morris. Peter suggested that I came along to practice one Monday evening. This I did, and thoroughly enjoyed both the dancing and the camaraderie of the other members the rest is history!
- I feel that it is important to promote our English heritage, and I am proud to be of of those who aim to keep our traditions alive
- TV, Newspaper adverts, web blogs, face book, twitter, youtube channel
- Actively appoint younger men to positions of responsibility