Hello Friends,

**Newsletter**

Sorry this is a bit later than I’d hoped but I’ve now managed to get my act together again. I’ve received some great reports you will see included here. If you don’t have time to put together a full article just a few lines to let us know how or what you’re doing would be greatly appreciated. Also if you would like to see anything else here do let me know. I hope to publish my next instalment in the last week of August or the first week of September (if I survive this year’s rushcart).

This edition sees the departure of Greensleeves from my circulation, they are now in the capable hands of Lewis Augustus.

As ever if you have any matters that you wish to be raised with the advisory council or the ring officers please feel free to let me know using this email address morrisringsouthmidlandsarearep@gmail.com

Morris on,
Geoff Pitt, South Midlands Area Rep, Morris Ring

**News from South Midland Sides**

**Etcetera Morris Men:**

- Etcetera Morris Men spent the late May bank holiday in the Yorkshire Dales helping Leeds Morris Men celebrate their 72nd Annual Dales Tour. We join our friends at Leeds Morris Men every other year to dance out with other Sides from around the country. This time we had our Beast and our Fool with us. We arrived at our accommodation in Grassington on the Friday late afternoon and met in The Foresters for some pre-tour beer and food and to share tales of our travels. Matt and family had had two punctures = two AA call-outs, so they needed some refreshment!

- Saturday saw us dancing in Grassington market place at 9:45 where we were joined by Black Diamond Morris from Darlington and Briggate from Leeds. We then boarded the coach and travelled to Skipton where we danced outside The Royal Shepherd by the canal. Next stop was The Lister Arms at Malham for more dancing and then lunch. We then travelled to The Fountain Inn at Linton for more dancing (and beer) and ended the tour at The Red Lion at Burnsall. Everyone was feeling really refreshed by now – not! But it hadn’t rained all day. All 4 tours (we were Tour A – there was also B, C and D tours) met up for the excellent evening feast in Burnsall village hall – with more beer – followed by a sketch about a horse by the Leeds men. Don’t ask what it was about ...! Other Sides present were Wayzgoose, Whitchurch, Durham Rams, Rainbow, Jet Set, Coton, Sowerby Bridge, Harlequin, Black Gate, Redcar, Richmond on Swale, and Utrecht, Maids of the Mill and Helmond from the Netherlands. Then followed some singing of songs.

- Sunday was a day off, for individual exploration, although Leeds Morris Men were out and about at Hubberholme, Arncliffe and Burnsall. Etcetera Morris Men had an evening meal together at The Black Horse in Grassington.

- On Monday, it was pouring with rain when we were dropped off in Kettlewell, but as the dancing started at 10:00, the skies cleared, and 3 separate tours set off. We were on Tour A again, but this time with Durham Rams, Whitchurch, Briggate and Utrecht / Maids. Our route took us to the Fox & Hounds at Starbottton, Rose & Crown at Bainbridge, Wensleydale Creamery at Hawes, Fox & Hounds at West Burton then back to Kettlewell. Only 4 pubs, although there are 2 at the first/last stop. At Kettlewell each Side did a dance then the weekend ended with a Mass BGG. A lovely sunny day with blue skies and great company. Etcetera Morris Men ended the day with a meal and more drinks at The Foresters. Most of us travelled back on Tuesday through torrential rain and traffic, but all agreed that it had been a great weekend. Many thanks to Leeds Morris Men for inviting us and organising the whole thing.
Kennet Morris:

- In April the Kennet Morris Men voted to change their name to ‘Kennet Morris’ and to remove any gender requirements from their constitution. So we have joined the 40% of Morris Ring sides that are now mixed.

- We began our summer season by dancing out on the evening of 1st May, accompanied by a neighbouring Morris side. We followed the dancing with a May Day themed session of songs and music. On the 6th May we had our customary South Oxfordshire Tour which concludes with popular village fete where we lead the children’s procession and crown the May Queen before the children dance round the maypole. Unfortunately the arrival of rain curtailed the maypole dancing, but we managed to give our own dance performance with the musicians sheltered under umbrellas.

- Another pub evening in mid-May, then on the 27th May we danced at another popular fete in the Berkshire village of Yattendon. Kennet have been dancing at these two village fetes for well over two decades (apart from the years of Covid and Foot and Mouth).

- We also fulfilled a booking at Reading University, giving a display for a class of visiting Chinese students learning the English language.

- We are looking forward to a busy month of June with more pub tours and another University booking.
Letchworth Morris:

- We’ve had a fantastic season so far starting with a great time at Cambridge MM’s centenary day of dance prior to our traditional first of May event with Bedford MM at Ickwell and dance spots in Letchworth and Hitchin.
- Other notable events we’ve attended have been Eel day in Ely, Ickwell May Celebration, Ashwell at Home, Baldock Day of Dance and Thaxted Morris Weekend.
- In an interesting change from pub evenings and days of dance we gave two demonstration sessions for the local dementia support group, including question and answer sessions, which were very rewarding.
- Last Saturday saw us hosting our own Day of Dance, in Letchworth town centre, with guests Baldock Midnight Morris, Golden Hare, Hemlock, Thaxted and Cambridge plus the squire and the treasure of the Morris Ring.
- A few snaps from our tour at the Thaxted meeting:
St Albans Morris:
- Pleased to say the season started off well with us dancing at the Kensworth May Festival. Always a good event in a nice rural setting. Then off for a dance in our home town of St Albans. We are aiming to be seen as much as possible in St Albans and district in the hope of attracting new members. The side is ageing and as with other sides we need some younger people. So fingers crossed ! Next outing was to Westminster day of dance which the side enjoyed. Now we are into regular Monday nights at various pubs.

Whitchurch Morris:
- 2024 has got off to a cracking start.

- Our first dance out was at the invitation of New Moon Morris, we were asked to join them on Ivinghoe village green on Tuesday 30th April to “Bring in the May” they wanted to debut a new dance and try a bit of Maypole dancing. This was fun as I don’t think any of us had tried this. What could possibly go wrong ? Well, nothing went wrong, nobody was strangled, and it was a very enjoyable evening. So much so that we have all agreed to do it again next year.

- The next outing was our May Day Bank Holiday Monday Day of Dance, we met, as usual, at 6.30 am on the top of Coombe Hill, near Wendover. A glorious morning was had by all. We followed that with breakfast at The Hampden Arms, Great Hampden and dancing at various locations for the rest of the day.
• Wednesday 15th May. We were invited by Towersey Horseshoes to join them at The Bell, Chearsley. The usual enjoyable evening at this great pub.

• Tuesday 21st May. This was at The Red Lion, Marsworth. This was a bit of a wash out, but we made the best of it as the pub allowed us to dance inside.

• 24th - 27th May. We were invited to join Leeds Morris Men for The Dales Tour. Glorious weather on Saturday but a bit wet on Monday but a great weekend of dance. This photo is at The Red Lion, Burnsall.

• 1st June - 2nd June, another weekend of dance followed, this time to Thaxted hosted by Thaxted Morris Men. On the Saturday morning five coach loads of Morris dancers left Thaxted to visit beautiful villages around Essex only to return for a fantastic display in Thaxted High Street in the evening. On Sunday there was dancing in the churchyard after the service followed by Country and Morris dancing in Margaret Gardens.
In the next few months, we have a full programme:

Tuesday 11th June, The Crown, Cuddington
Tuesday 18th June, The Red Lion, Little Missenden
Tuesday 25th June, The Grove Lock, Leighton Buzzard
Saturday 29th June, Bekonscot Model Village
Tuesday 2nd July, The Full Moon, Hawridge Common
Tuesday 9th July, The Hampden Arms, Great Hampden
Tuesday 16th July, The King & Queen, Wendover
Tuesday 23rd July, The Swan, West Wycombe
Thursday 29th August, Bucks County Show, Weedon
Sunday 8th September, Amersham Heritage Day
Saturday 5th October, our Day of Dance touring The Misbourne Valley

Westminster Morris:

- Over the last few months, we have mostly been meeting for practices with a few events interspersed. We were very pleased to be part of the London JMO Day of Dance last October celebrating the twentieth anniversary of the exemption of morris dancing from the 2003 Licensing Act and we also had our usual Christmas tour in the Sloane Square area, ably assisted by a couple of the younger members of Thaxted Morris Men. Some of Westminster also enjoyed the hospitality of Winchester Morris Men and Aldbury Morris Men at their Ales in February and March.

- We were lucky enough to have three new dancers and a musician join us over the last practice season, all of whom have now made their debut with the team and another dancer has reappeared after a break. New dancers are always welcome!

- Our dance season has just got off to a great start with our Day of Dance on Saturday 11th May. We were thrilled to welcome twelve guest dance teams: Belles of London City, Camden Clog, Chelmsford Morris, Dacre Morris, Datchet Border Morris, Exeter Morris, London Pride, Ravensbourne Morris Men, St Albans Morris, Thaxted Morris Men, Tower Ravens and Whitethorn, who all made it such a great day. The weather was warm and sunny and there were good audiences everywhere.

We danced at our usual spots at St Margaret’s, next to Westminster Abbey, Victoria Tower Gardens and Trafalgar Square as well as favourite pubs, the Westminster Arms, near Parliament Square, and the Ship and Shovel, near Charing Cross. The Greater London Authority changed their position on Trafalgar Square this year, allowing us a total of three hours compared with only one hour last year. This was very welcome but the change presented its own challenges as we decided to work the tours around two separate performances in Trafalgar Square. Most of our guests seemed to enjoy the format and it was good to maintain a morris presence there that bit longer.
We have just started on our regular Wednesday evening tours in various parts of Westminster and beyond. Two down - Fitzrovia and Clerkenwell - and more to come. We are next out at the Thaxted Weekend of Dance, but this will probably have happened by the time you read this.

Have a look at our social media pages to find out what we are up to. Lewis is already visiting plenty of teams in his role as South East representative, so it would be nice to have some traffic the other way.

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Twitter: @morrisdancers
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