



SQUIRE: Eddie Worrall, 8 Bankside Avenue, Uppermill,
Saddleworth, Oldham OL3 6JU Tel: 01457 829349
Email: edworrall@gmail.com

BAGMAN: Jon Melville, 57 Shakespeare Drive, Nuneaton
Warwickshire CV11 6NW Tel: 02476 345543
Email: bagman@themorrisring.org

TREASURER: Steven Archer, 28 The Glade, Fetcham, Surrey,
KT22 9TH. Tel: 01372 454024
Email: RingTreasurer@themorrisring.org

Newsletter No. 102

November 2016

Page The highlights of Newsletter No.102

- 2 Future Events
- 4 Ring Meeting Applications
- 5 Massed Dances
- 6 Morris Ring ARM, 4th March 2017
- 7 Use of black make-up in morris costume
- 9 JMO Day of Dance, Leicester
- 11 Jigs Instructional weekend
- 13 Sadly missed
- 14 Greensleeves on the right track
- 15 Ripley Morris Men day of dance
- 16 Morris Ring Display Boards
- 17 Morris Ring Publications
- 18 Call for Contributions
- 19 Appendix 1: Application forms for ARM
- 20 Appendix 2: Blacking Up – a literature survey



Please read this Newsletter carefully; there are details on application for Ring Meetings and the JMO Day of Dance and the Bagman needs your responses on this, and nominations for an Area Rep vacancy, as a matter of urgency.

Future Events

2017

27th – 29th January

Ring Jigs Instructional

More details on page 11

18th February

Dancing England reboot

Sheffield City Hall, for more information see www.dancingengland.co.uk .

4th March

ARM Oak Farm Lodge, Hatherton

Application details etc. on page 6.

25th – 26th March

Histories of the Morris in Britain

Historical Dance Society conference (in conjunction with EFDSS and the morris organisations) at Cecil Sharp House.

13th May

National JMO day of Dance, Leicester

Hosted by Leicester Morris Men. More details on page 9.

12th – 14th May

Helmond Morris Men weekend of Dance

This meeting of Morris Ring sides is based at a museum of the history of farming before mechanisation on the edge of the city of Helmond in the south of the Netherlands. Accommodation will be outdoor camping around the museum and indoor camping in one of the museum's special halls. Toilets and showers will be available. All meals (except lunch on the Saturday tour) will be taken at the museum. Our aim is to provide a real Dutch experience with tours taking in some of the most beautiful

villages in Brabant. The price of the weekend is expected to be €90. For more information visit the club website <http://morrisdans.nl/helmond/ring.php> which will be frequently updated. Numbers are limited so early application is advised.

2nd – 4th June

Thaxted Morris Meeting

9th – 11th June

Ring Meeting no. 354: Hartley 65th Anniversary Meeting

2017 marks the 65th anniversary of the formation of Hartley Morris Men so to celebrate they will be expanding their long established weekend Ale to offer more places in the form of a Meeting of the Morris Ring. Based in the village of Wrotham, there will be indoor and secure outdoor camping accommodation, modern shower facilities, a professional caterer plus free beer in the hall from 7pm Friday onwards. Saturday tours will be by vintage transport with the massed display taking place in Tonbridge Castle midday on Sunday.

Numbers are limited to 120 at an anticipated cost of around £70.

28th – 30th July

Ring Meeting no. 355: Ravensbourne London Meeting

Dance with the backdrop of some of the most iconic sites in London! These include the Tower of London, St Paul's Cathedral and The Globe Theatre. Take a leisurely perambulation on London Underground and historic buses via the magic of the Oyster Travel Card to the walking tours, taking in a number of delightful pubs that Ravensbourne have already arduously vetted on your behalf at prime tourist spots in London. This is based in an East London school with indoor camping at around the £90 mark (less if possible) which covers:- Indoor camping / Supper on Friday night / Breakfast on Saturday & Sunday / Lunch on Saturday / Saturday Feast with Ale ! / Travel on the Tube and London Buses on Saturday. It's close to good road and public transport links. Potentially maximum 120 guests. Photos, map and contact details etc. all available at www.ringmeeting.org

18th August – 4th September **Australian Morris Ring National Ale**

26th – 27th August **Ring Meeting no. 356: Saddleworth Rushcart Meeting**

Applications to attend Ring Meetings 2017

Sides may now apply for places to attend this summer's two Ring Meetings which are limited on numbers, Hartley (9th – 11th June) and Ravensbourne (28th – 30th July).

Please email bagman@themorrisring.org with the following information:

1. Side name
2. First choice meeting
3. Second choice meeting (if you could manage both, if not leave blank)
4. Approximate number of attendees

Notes

1. The Bagman, in consultation with the host side, reserves the right to limit the number of applicants from one side to maximise attending sides.
2. Not putting a second choice will not increase your chances of acceptance for your first choice.
3. Priority will be given to sides who have recently hosted Ring Meetings, then on a first-come-first served basis, within logistical constraints.
4. Saddleworth Rushcart is not limited on numbers; please apply directly to the Rushcart Secretary.
5. Thaxted and Helmond are not Ring Meetings, please apply directly to the host clubs.

Ring Massed Dances

Please will sides practice these dances through the winter season and in advance of any Ring events they are attending; please only get up to perform dances you are confident of doing and remember the overall impression is what is important for massed morris, rather than one side's particular interpretation.

<u>Adderbury</u>	Lads-a-Bunchum
	Black Joke
<u>Bampton</u>	Bobbing Around
<i>(finish on rounds)</i>	Rose Tree
	Quaker
<u>Bledington</u>	Young Collins
	William & Nancy
<u>Brackley</u>	Jockey to the Fair
<u>Fieldtown</u>	Valentine
	Balance the Straw
<u>Headington</u>	Getting Upstairs
	Constant Billy (short sticks)
	Blue Eyed Stranger
<u>Lichfield</u>	Vandalls

Morris Ring ARM, Oak Farm Lodge, Hatherton, 4th March 2017

The ARM will be at its now customary location of Oak Farm Lodge, Hatherton (Watling St, Cannock WS11 1SB).

Application forms for attending are located in Appendix 1 of this document. Please be prompt in applying as places for accommodation are limited.

It is likely that recruitment and the viability of sides will be a significant discussion item on the Squire's agenda. Your Area Reps will be contacting you undertaking some research in support of this; please provide them with the information they require in a timely fashion.

Motions and agenda items from Members to be submitted to the Bagman by the end of January, please.

The post of Area Representative for South West and Wales is becoming vacant, following the resignation of Tim Sercombe. Candidates for the role must be a member of one of the clubs in the area and be nominated by at least one of the clubs in that area. In the event of an election, they will be ratified by a simple majority of votes cast by clubs in that area. Nominations by 4th December (or as soon as possible thereafter) to the Bagman, please.

Details of nominations will be provided in the pre-ARM Newsletter; any side in the South West and Wales area unable to attend the ARM can submit a postal vote to arrive at least seven days before the ARM date.

The Use of Black Make-Up in Morris Costume

The Squire and Officers of the Morris Ring have been privy to the legal advice received by the Morris Federation, and have discussed this at length with them and the Open Morris. It is clear it is an uncertain and developing issue that will need to be kept under review.

Past Squire Adam Garland put the following statement on the Morris Ring webpage in response to a number of enquiries from the national press:

It appears that there have been a number of articles written about this matter recently accompanied by some ill-informed comments concerning racism.

I have heard a number of theories regarding the origin of the practice of 'blacking-up,' but the one which seems to be most popular is that performers of the dance knew begging was illegal so disguised themselves by rubbing soot on their faces.

All over the world one finds traditional folk customs for which costume and face paint are integral parts, for example certain tribal dancers in Africa white their faces for the performance. In England, the Morris world is no different; many Morris Clubs use face paint as part of their costume.

The theory of the tradition originating as a form of disguise through the use of soot has been well documented. These days within the three organisations, the Morris Ring, the Morris Federation and the Open Morris, a whole range of different colours can be seen in many places around the country.

The use of one particular colour within these costumes is in no way a statement against one particular societal group and the Morris community refutes the accusation of racism most strongly.

Eddie Worrall, Squire of the Ring, has issued this further statement:

Over the Summer Adam Garland issued a short statement about the issue of using black face paint in Morris and in particular the Morris Ring. Adam's comments still hold good today.

I do not believe there is any intentionally racist behaviour in any of our member clubs who perform like this. I am also sure all of us would want to see action taken against any club who did intend to offend.

The opening paragraph of the Morris Ring's Constitution reads:-

1. The object of the Morris Ring shall be to encourage the performance of the Morris, to maintain its traditions and to preserve its history; to bring into contact all the Men's Morris Clubs or Teams. The purpose of the Ring is not to replace or supersede the existing organisations, but to subserve them. The Clubs shall in all respects retain their independence,

This is the sound basis on which over 80 years of association between Morris Ring clubs has been founded. It recognises the independence of a club and its right to choose how to perform. This clearly extends to the use of black face paint in (for example) Welsh Border dancing as much as any other aspect of Morris.

As many of you will know an issue arose at Shrewsbury Folk Festival in 2015 where a complaint was made about a Border Morris side. The essence of the complaint was that the use of black face paint was Racially Harassing under the terms of the Equality Act 2010, and therefore gave rise to a Civil claim against the side and the Folk Festival. That particular allegation was never taken any further, but did cause change in the booking policy of Shrewsbury Folk Festival and much debate in the Morris world.

The nature of any such claim would be particular to the facts of the case. However, it is clear that sides using black face paint in their performance will be open to such allegations.

The Morris Ring is not a regulator or governing body. It is for sides to decide themselves how they wish to perform. However, clubs will need to clearly understand why they are using black face paint, and open about why they are performing using it with their audience, local communities and press. They must also be ready to defend their arguments if challenged.

Nigel Strudwick, Eastern Area rep, has put together a short paper on the historical references regarding the use of black face paint in English Traditional Dance. I hope this will be of help.

The Joint Morris Organisations continue to communicate on this issue and will monitor how it develops. In the meantime, if any member side has any direct experience of this as an issue please contact myself and the other Officers.

Ed Worrall

Squire of the Morris Ring

The paper authored by Nigel Strudwick is attached to this document as Appendix 2. Nigel is an eminent academic but not a Morris historian; the paper is not intended to be totally comprehensive and if you have additional pertinent material not included therein, please do contact Nigel or the Ring Officers to highlight it.



Joint Morris Organisation's National Day of Dance

Saturday 13th May 2017

Leicester



The Morris Ring, Open Morris and The Morris Federation come together each year for a spectacular Morris event. This year in Leicester there will be more than 60 Morris and Sword Dance sides from across the country dancing around the City.

To attend please apply through your Morris Organisation.

For further information, visit our [Facebook page](#).

Sides will be provided with a programme for the day detailing the 22 dance venues, all of which are within walking distance, along with information about local cafes, pubs, restaurants, parking and public transport (including Park & Ride).

Free to attend.

JMO Day of Dance, 13 May 2017, Leicester

Hosted by Leicester Morris Men

Of the number of sides which can be accommodated, there are 12 places available for Morris Ring clubs (9 for the Open Morris and 3 for the Morris Federation). Places are likely to fill quickly, so if you are able to commit a team to the event, please let me know urgently.

I need the following information, emailed to bagman@themorrisring.org :

Side name

- Contact name
- Contact email
- Contact mobile phone
- Website address
- Dance style (e.g. Cotswold, North-West, Rapper, Border, Molly, Longsword, ...)
- Approximate number attending (only for information)
- Will your side be staying in the Leicester area for Saturday evening?
- Any additional notes (e.g. children's side...)

The Morris Ring Jigs Instructional

January 27-29th 2017 Sutton Bonington Nottinghamshire LE12 5NJ

Jiglicious!

☒I yearn to be a Jig dancer☒

Then the Morris Ring Jigs Instructional is for you!

☒Jigs? No thanks, but it's true my Morris does need new points and plugs☒

Consider it done – MoT while you wait.

☒Too scary for me! I've only just mastered the double-step☒

We'll help you develop the technique, style and confidence to enhance all your dance performances. Minimal pain, maximum wonderfulness. Really!

☒I hear the last Jigs Instructional was sold out☒

Yes. You'd better look slippy, hadn't you?

The Morris Ring invites member sides to send delegates to its annual Jigs Instructional; the event is led by Geoff Jerram (of fame, renown and Winchester Morris Men) and offers Morris men of varying levels of competence a weekend of high-quality dance coaching – even those who have no ambition to perform jigs in public.

Using the solo dance as a vehicle for instruction, this event will give you a good basic grounding in the art and science of Cotswold Morris in general and the Morris Jig in particular. There will be opportunities for detailed instruction in specific traditions (Bampton, Bledington, Fieldtown and Sherborne) and selected jigs in other styles.

There are parallel streams for improvers and for accomplished dancers, plus sessions for less experienced men covering some basic techniques of the Cotswold dance. It all happens in Sutton Bonington, just off the A6 between Loughborough and Derby. The Jigs Instructional is great value at only £47 per man if you book before 31st December (£50 thereafter) and offers

- COSY indoor camping (including showers)
- REALLY GOOD food from Friday supper to Sunday lunch
- DELICIOUS beer for the Feast
- EXPERT and PATIENT instruction
- CONVIVIAL company and a PUB with an abundance of MUSIC and SONG.

SPECIAL OFFER to Morris Ring member clubs: first time delegates receive a £10 discount; second timers get £5 off! Reimbursement is on application to the Morris Ring Treasurer by your side's bagman after the event.

Register your interest NOW! Talk to your side's all-knowing Bagman, or contact the J.I. Bagman, Tony Foard (jigsinstructional@themorrisring.org), who will be pleased to answer any questions you may have. APPLY ONLINE AT THE MORRIS RING WEBSITE (follow the link in the EVENTS DIARY).

Morris men from the less experienced to the seasoned campaigner are all welcome!

Sadly Missed

Nev Moulden, Mersey MM

Mersey Morris Men's Bird of long standing Nev Moulden died on Tuesday 18th October. He was also a musician with Mockbeggar Morris (Ladies North West).

He was 83 and his health had been in decline for some years. He did make it to the Forest of Dean MM Family Weekend in June.

We think he'd been in the side for 30 years (he regretted being a late starter) and was a dancer and melodeon player.

Peter Stephens, Stafford MM

Peter Stephens was born on 28/04/29 in Abbassia, Cairo. He started Morris dancing in '52 and was co-founder of Stafford Morris Men (The Gentlemen of Stafford) in 1957 serving in all the offices at one time or another, was Keeper of the Log and a fine musician. His favourite dance was The Valentine, Fieldtown. He was Squire at the 50th anniversary in 1997 when SMM hosted a Ring Meeting (the wet one !) for just over 300 men. He supported many other Morris groups and was a mainstay of the folk dance scene as a caller for many years. A stalwart of the Morris and a Gentleman. R.I.P.

Greensleeves on the right track

Press releases a signal failure? Publicity for your gigs keeps getting derailed? Dancing somewhere quirky might just help.

And spots don't come more eccentric than a Northern Line station at rush hour. Our bagman, who tends to know such

people, persuaded a Transport for London manager that, as both Morden station and Greensleeves were sharing ninetieth birthdays this year, we should have a joint celebration. Rising to the occasion, the TfL man sent his PA and persuaded London Underground's Area Manager to welcome us on Tuesday 13th September. This was 90 years to the day since the opening of the southern end of the Northern Line, then known as the City and South London Railway.



London commuters with buses to catch and mobile phones to watch aren't the easiest audience to engage. But sufficient watched to make our dancing worthwhile. And opportunities were there for some cheesy announcements. "Watch out for leaves on the line: we are about to dance *Willow Tree*". "The next dance comes from Staffordshire; yes, announcing the first ever

Northern Line arrival from Lichfield".

But our Publicity Officer Dave Hayes did much better. His persuasive press releases and photos appeared promptly in the media. Well, at least in the media of Wimbledon where Greensleeves are based. As any PR person will tell you, successful publicity needs the right platform. Like the one at Morden station.

Ripley Morris Men celebrate 90 years of Morris Dancing in Ripley
on Saturday 9th September 2017

Records show that a Morris side was dancing in Ripley in or around 1927.

In 2017 Ripley Morris Men will be marking this 90th anniversary with a Day of Dance in the nearby city of Derby.

Ripley Morris Men would like to invite all member sides and individual members of any of the three Joint Morris Organisations to join us in our celebrations.

Planning is in the early stages but we expect that dancing will be from 10.30am to 4.00pm around Derby with a final massed dance on the large Market Square.

To assist us in our planning it would be helpful if your side could indicate interest in joining this event by the end of November 2016 through the contact details above.

We will be sending out further details early in the New Year.

Ross Turrini - Squire

Mick Buckley - Bagman

Nuts in May ~ 53 Amber Heights ~ Ripley ~ Derbyshire DE5 3SP

Home Phone 01773743560 ~ Email ripleymm@hotmail.co.uk

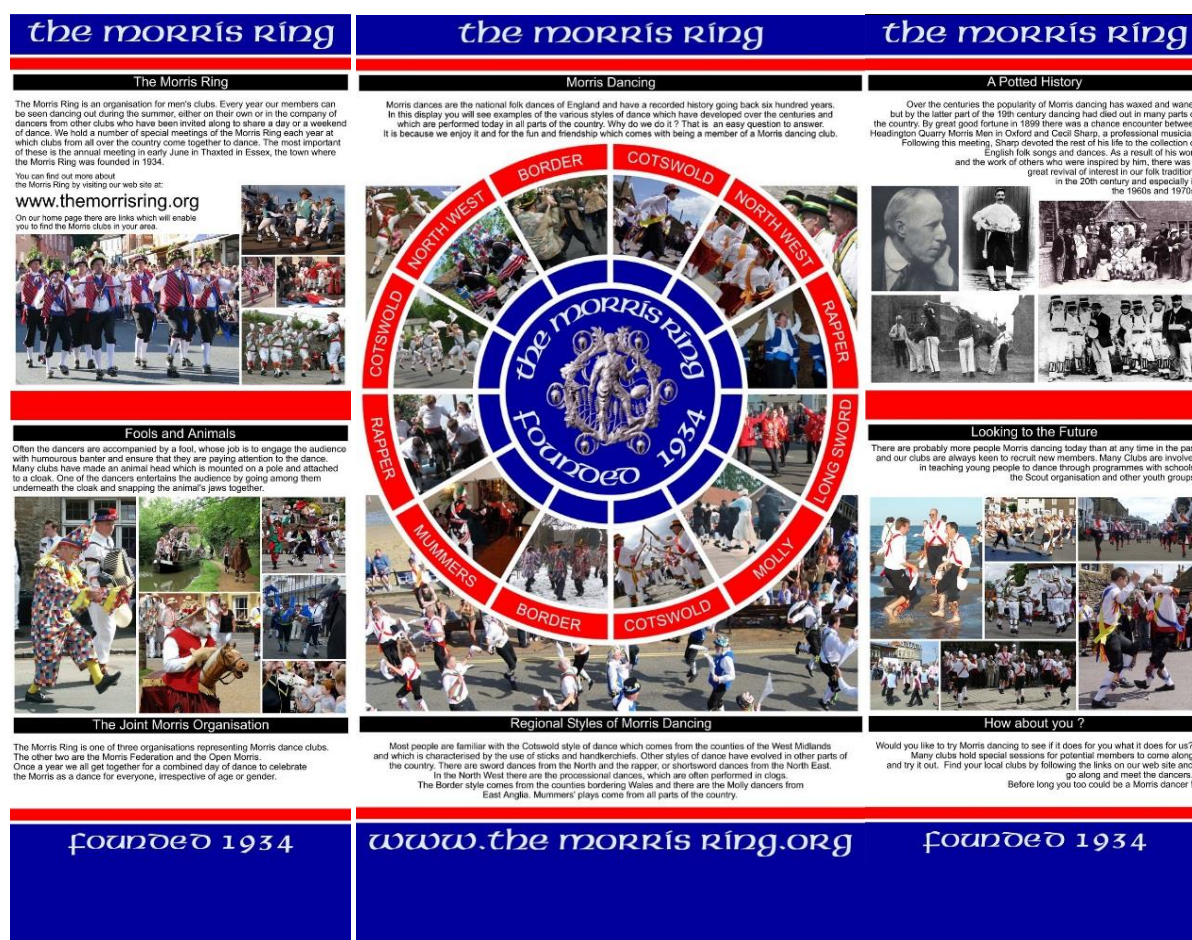
Follow and message us on Facebook.

Morris Ring Display Boards

Are you making full use of this asset?

If you have any opportunity to make use of one of the five sets we possess please contact your Area Rep or the Ring Bagman.

If you want to use them, even if a set is not currently in your area, arrangements can be made to get a set to you.



This is what the complete set of three banners looks like.

Morris Ring Publications

Anthony Foard: Editor of the Morris Circular

33 Cunningham Drive, Bromborough, Wirral, CHESHIRE. CH63 0JX

Mobile Tel: 01513344566

thecircular@themorrisring.org

Mac McCoig Editor of the Morris Dancer

8 Redhills, Eccleshall, Staffordshire ST21 6JW

Tel: 01785 851052

mac.mccoig@btinternet.com

On-line Links:



The main MR website with millions of pages stuffed to the gunnels with all you need to know about the MR:

<http://www.themorrisring.org/>

Follow the latest media reports concerning Morris Matters at <http://www.themorrisring.org/article/morris-matters>

The Morris Ring Google Group (MRGG). Private Forum for debate or announcements. <http://groups.google.com/group/the-morris-ring?hl=en&pli=1>

Contact the Morris Ring Bagman to register to use.

Morris Ring Facebook site: <http://www.facebook.com/pages/The-Morris-Ring/158759257502840>

Morris Ring Twitter: <http://twitter.com/#!/TheMorrisRing>

The Morris Shop *"the Bells and Whistles"*

<http://www.themorrisshop.com/store/index.php?route=common/home>

Call for Contributions

Any items of Morris-related news, please send to me at bagman@themorrisring.org for inclusion in the next Newsletter. Longer pieces to Tony Foard, please, for the Circular.

If you have any photographs, you can send them to Duncan Broomhead, the Morris Ring Photo Archivist (duncan.broomhead@btinternet.com) and any articles, ideally accompanied with photographs, can be submitted to Tony Foard, the Editor of the Morris Ring Circular, details above.

Charlie Corcoran, the Keeper of the Morris Ring Log Book, is keen to receive stories about Ring events, both the formal and the quirky (Charliecorcoran7@ntlworld.com).



Appendix 1 - ARM application documentation

The Morris Ring – Annual Representatives' Meeting Sat 4th March 2017

Name of Side:

Contact Name:

Names of other attendees:

...../.....

Email: Tel No:

Address:

..... Postcode:

Saturday: Workshops: No of men: _____

Saturday ARM to Sunday morning incl. Sat night accommodation & Sunday breakfast (£25 per person shared twin room)	No@ £ 67	£
Saturday Breakfast (for campers* & early arrivals)	No@ £ 7.50	£
Saturday ARM - including feast (No accommodation)	No@ £42	£
Saturday ARM* - excluding feast (Morning Coffee / Lunch / Afternoon Tea)	No@ £25	£
Feast only	No@ £30	£
ARM only - no meals	No.....@ Free	£ 0.00
Sunday Breakfast (for campers*)	No@ £ 7.50	£
TOTAL		£ .

* There is very limited camping available (for which there will be a small charge). It is essential to book in advance through Mac McCoig. There may also be the possibility of local indoor camping in the village hall in Church Easton; please notify Mac McCoig if you wish him to pursue this option. There is space for up to five campervans at the venue at a cost of £15 for the weekend (2 nights) on a first come basis. Please book this direct with Mac McCoig 07939 084374.

Please specify number of non-alcohol drinkers

Please specify how many require vegetarian meals.....

Please indicate if disabled access is required Yes / No

Please print this form, fill it in and post it (with a cheque for the requisite amount) made payable to
Uttoxeter Morris Men to: Mac McCoig, 8 Redhills, Eccleshall, Staffs. ST21 6JW

Appendix 2 - A survey of the literature on 'blacking up' in traditional dance

I am not a Morris or traditional dance researcher, but I wanted to put together some sort of historical overview of the tradition of 'blacking up' that has hit the media and the internet so much of late due to its supposed 'racist' overtones. What is sorely lacking in most of the comments made by various contributors is a failure to go back to the original sources to see what we can actually learn about the practice insofar as it affects the Morris. Instead, they let their prejudices or preconceptions prevail. I suppose this is just the latest example of the traditional world's reluctance to look at what is actually known, rather than repeating tired old images—the one that jumps to mind is that Morris is a survival of a 'pagan ritual', which has now mostly been retired over the past twenty years. However, that is largely harmless, whereas the present controversy about 'blacking up' could rear up and threaten to bite us, not unlike the Equality Act did in a different guise with female musicians, and before that the Licensing Act.

Before I move to the literature, or really rather a selection of it, I should mention terminology. As far as the Morris is concerned, by virtue of the sheer numbers partaking in it, the issue of 'blacking up' overwhelmingly concerns the Border Morris, in which dancers place a coloured material on their faces; the black version of this is the only one to court controversy. Molly falls into the same category, as indeed does some Mumming, but there are fewer sides overall. I shall return to the vexed question of the Britannia Coconut Dancers later. Border and Molly have been much less studied than, for example, Cotswold, and Border seems indeed only to have gained its name in the 1960s. Also in terminology, there may be a case for distinguishing between 'blacking up' and 'blackface' for a variety of reasons, in the present context the most important of which is the general identification of the latter with Minstrelsy. This is because there is no doubt that the latter has distinct racial overtones. Hence my preferred term for the practice we are surveying is 'blacking up'.

Please remember as you read that the following surveys the literature, does not go back to the primary sources, and attempts no new research.

1. Background to Border Morris

E.C. Cawte, 'The Morris Dance in Herefordshire, Shropshire and Worcestershire', *Journal of the English Folk Dance and Song Society*, Vol. 9, No. 4 (Dec. 1963), pp. 197–212¹

This article is best known for being the first investigation into what we now call Border Morris and in which the term 'Welsh Border Morris' was proposed (p. 207). My purpose is not to look at the history of the style, but rather simply to document the place of 'blackening up' within the tradition.

The earliest record in this article of black faces occurs the latter part of the 19th century, in Much Wenlock (perhaps 1879–1880 and on, Cawte, p. 202), in Broseley in 1885 (Cawte, p. 201). A record of not dissimilar dancing from Shrewsbury in 1878–1879 makes no mention of black faces (Cawte, p. 203).

Blackening up seems to have happened in Aston in Clun in the early part of the 20th century, down to about 1938, where it seems also to be referred to as 'niggering';² something similar is reported around the same time period in Onibury (Cawte, p. 203). [See further below, the Nutters.] Cawte mentions the visit by Sharp to Brimfield in 1909, when photos were taken, where the faces were black and white (Cawte, p. 209).³ Sharp also refers in the first edition of the Morris Book vol I to black faces in White Ladies Aston (Cawte, p. 205). Blackened faces are also noted in Evesham at some point in the period 1875–1895, and some blackened dancers in Bromsberrow Heath (Cawte, p. 206).

From Cawte's appendix on pp 209–210, we see that there is evidence of blackening at Bridgnorth in the 1880s to the 1950s, Dawley from the 1890s to 1929, Ludlow (1920s), and Madeley Wood (1890s).

Cawte's conclusions contain the following important statement from his time when he was collecting his material. A dancer said to him '*They blacked their faces: "you're not a morris dancer without a black face," one old man told me*' (p. 206).⁴ He further comments how the

1 This can be downloaded via JSTOR at <http://www.jstor.org/stable/4521671> (accessed 1 November 2016, but JSTOR is not usually accessible to those without an account or institutional access).

2 Lest anyone comment that this word is regarded as distasteful today, it has to be placed in the context of its time and prevalent language and attitudes. See further below on the Nutters.

3 Roy Dommett's notes on the Morris Ring web site say they had their 'faces blacked with white painted patches' (<http://themorrisring.org/tradition/brimfield>, accessed 1 November 2016).

4 It is not clear as I write this when Cawte did his field research on these dances. No doubt others will know the answer to this, or indeed much more about him. A quick Internet search has not revealed anything to me.

black faces of the Welsh Border Morris distinguish them from other traditions (p. 207). However, Cawte does not further commit himself on the origin of the blacking up process (see further below, the Nutters).

2. Molly

Elaine Bradtke, *Truculent Rustics: Molly Dancing in East Anglia before 1940*. ed. by Jennifer Chandler (London: The Folklore Society 1999)⁵

This booklet serves as perhaps the principal research on Molly, and is an offshoot of the author's 1997 PhD which largely concerned the Seven Champions. The blackface element is principally covered on pp 11–14, especially in the section entitled 'Black-face and transvestism'. Bradtke does not consider any other options for the blacking other than disguise, forthrightly put, '*In the case of Molly dancers, black-face was a form of disguise*' (p. 12). She argues this on the basis of a mix of the evidence for rioters and unruly types blacking up to avoid being recognised and also by the assumption of female attire, the latter as women were less likely to be prosecuted than men for being unruly;⁶ both are of course closely associated with Molly. It is interesting that in her summary tables of evidence on pp 27–38 (much from the records of luminaries from Cambridge MM such as Wortley, Peck and Needham), while blacking up is sometimes specifically noted, it is frequently not specifically mentioned in the sources (which may only mean that the collectors took it as a given).

3. The Britannia Coconut Dancers of Bacup ('the Nutters')

Very different in dance are the Nutters.⁷ As a tradition which now is apparently unique, they have been studied in more depth than many sides, and examining them brings out several interesting perspectives, including that of blacking up. Theresa Buckland has probably looked at them from the academic perspective more than anyone else. Two articles by her particularly seem relevant, and I will here concentrate on how the blacking up might relate to other practices.

T.J. Buckland, 'Black Faces, Garlands, and Coconuts: Exotic Dances on Street and Stage', *Dance Research Journal* 22, No. 2 (Autumn, 1990), pp. 1–12⁸

This article looks at the Nutters' dances, other examples of the tradition, and, of particular relevance here, the involvement of blacking up in the area, 'niggering' as it was known (see

⁵ Not apparently available on the Internet to download.

⁶ On pp 11–12 she suggests that as women in the late Mediaeval period and later were punished less often as they were seen as 'naturally unruly' and 'prone to emotional outbursts'!

⁷ <http://www.coconutters.co.uk/history.html>, accessed 2 November 2016.

⁸ JSTOR: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/1477779>.

caveat in note above). Clearly the Nutters are the only survival of a small number of other groups in this area, several of which were laid low by the carnage of WW1.

The key section for us in this article is the that entitled 'Coconut Dancing and Niggering' (pp 7–9). Blackened faces seem certainly to have been present in the dances of the Rossendale area in the 19th century (Buckland, p. 6), although I cannot pinpoint the earliest clear attestation in the article. Blacking up is generally attributed by the Nutters themselves for the past 80 or so years to the practice of disguising themselves. This can have multiple purposes—it is known well beyond the 19th century as a way of trying to avoid identification and prosecution when nefarious activity was planned (see Molly above), but it can also help anonymise people, like dancers, doing something far removed from their everyday activity. It was Cecil Sharp's adoption around 1911 of this explanation for blacking up in all traditional contexts that seems to have found its way via the EFDSS as the 'official' explanation. Yet Buckland makes the point that in the course of the earlier 19th century, the tradition of nigger minstrels caught on in the UK, and that this had at least an influence on the practice of niggering by which young lads with blackened faces went around the streets around Easter NOT linked with dancing. But the theatrical popularity of minstrel shows with their singing and dancing could perhaps have had an influence on dance traditions.⁹ Associating the Nutters' dance with Morris, with all the possibility of the latter being a corruption of 'Moorish', with its non-white associations, may have confused the origins even more.

Thus the possibility cannot be excluded that the blacking up in Bacup does have its origins in the minstrel shows of the 19th century. Buckland suggests (p. 9) that the fact that the Nutters used to blacken their hands as well as faces until the 1950s might favour this interpretation.

T.J. Buckland, "'T'Owd Pagan Dance": Ritual, Enchantment, and an Enduring Intellectual Paradigm', *Journal for the Anthropological Study of Human Movement* Vols. 11 No. 4 and 12 No. 1, 11 415–452¹⁰

This article focuses on how dances may be unwittingly or deliberately turned into something that they were never via the human desire for tradition and mystery, and how the understanding of these dances may be varied over the years to and from their origin, if that can be ascertained (my summary). The Nutters feature heavily in this as her main example, and the article covers a lot of the same ground as the previous one, although perhaps from

⁹ In fact, without drawing it further, Buckland on p. 8 suggests this music hall fad could have influenced the blacking of the Welsh Borders, referring to an article by G. Ashman in *Traditional Dance* vol 5, which I have as yet been unable to locate.

¹⁰ I am not presently sure of an internet source for this.

a more anthropological perspective. She does point out that no records exist specifically to link the Nutters with minstrelsy. However, she does acknowledge how interpretations would change over time, and might unconsciously try and move the traditions in a different direction—such as in this case, the link with Moorish and Morris might put the origins of the Nutters away from one in which modern eyes might see an element of racism. Pp 440–441 are important in this. The rest of the article is well worth a read but applies more generally than just to blacked-up faces.

4. The changing perceptions of folk dancing in a country where there are more black people than ever before

This of course brings us to the whole unpleasant issue that sparked off the need for this summary. A 287 page MPhil thesis from 2013 needs to be brought into play.

Patricia (Trish) Bater, *'Blacking Up': English Folk Traditions and Changing Perceptions about Black People in England*. MPhil thesis, 2013, National Centre for English Cultural Tradition March 2013¹¹

I have not the time, space or will to summarise this whole lengthy work, so I will just select key sections. It all needs to be read through, but chapters 4 to 7 are perhaps the most relevant to the current enquiry. I will mention parts briefly of these.

Chapter 4: Historical References to Blackened Faces in England

This is a survey of the data. For Border, most of the same material as noted by Cawte, and the Nutters, as in Buckland; it also encompasses Molly (mostly from Bradtke) and Mumming, and of course all sorts of other traditional customs where there is evidence for blackened faces, including a brief word on the old chestnut of whether 'Morris' is at all related to 'Moorish'. I do not think that there is any point in this short document of listing all of the material, the original thesis being so readily available.

Chapter 5: Current Practice

Pretty much a survey of what goes on now, most of which will be well known to readers.

Chapter 6: Reactions, Reasons and Responses

Reactions include those of the authorities, the dancers and the spectators, both black and white. Again these are mostly the ones of which we are aware; the authorities' legal reactions to events associated with the 'Darkie Day' / 'Mummers' Day' in Padstow are interesting (pp 202–206).

Chapter 7: Discussion and Conclusions

¹¹ Downloadable at http://etheses.whiterose.ac.uk/4181/1/MPhil_upload.pdf (accessed 3 November 2016).

This is most definitely worth a read, even if one reads nothing else. It makes it clear that no one explanation fits all the 'facts' such as they are, although she acknowledges the prevalence of the disguising theory today: *'Even if it was never part of, or the whole reason for, the original mummers, Molly dancers and Border Morris men blackening their features - and I fear it is too late ever to discover the truth of this - it is the reason now current amongst performers and the one provided to the general public.'* (p. 260). As has been evident from the other readings examined above, there are clearly cases where imitation of blacks is behind it, but there are many that are not so straightforward, and the disguise option still remains a valid possibility.

5. Conclusion

The situation is complex, both in the nature of the data, and in relation to the modern response to blacking up, which obviously primarily comes from those who are ignorant of the traditional responses. The fact is, however, that whatever the real reason for the practice of blackface (which may in itself have become part of the folklore [see Bater quote in italics above]), the response of the viewer is initially unaffected by it, and it is that response that may give rise to future problems.

I am not qualified as to comment on the legal aspects today of the issue, although I would draw attention again to the Padstow enquiry above. Whether there are more legal sources available since 2013 I do not know—and I am not privy to any legal advice being obtained by the Fed or the Open.

Nigel Strudwick

November 2016