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Newsletter No. 119

February 2021

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Future Events - PROVISIONAL

2021

6th March

Annual Representatives' Meeting

This event will take place online. Details to follow in Newsletter 120.

17th April

JMO Day of Dance, Liverpool, rearranged

19th June

Coventry City of Culture Day of Dance

24th July

Plymouth Morris Muster Ring Meeting

As a result of rescheduling this event the accommodation is no longer available, so it has become a one-day event. Plymouth Morris imagine that many sides will want to arrange accommodation themselves and if there are sufficient dancers available on the Sunday, the event can continue on the 25th July.

21st-22nd August

Saddleworth Rushcart Ring Meeting

25th September

Peterborough Morris Ring Meeting

A Day of Dance in Peterborough without the Feast originally proposed. There will be no charge for the event.

2022

15th-17th July

Letchworth Centenary Ring Meeting

Morris Ring ARM, an online event, 6th March 2021

Plans are in process to host the 2021 Annual Representatives' Meeting online. The intention is that as many people as possible will be able to attend virtually, however, voting will need to be restricted to specific, nominated individuals from member sides who will need to be identified beforehand. More details to follow, but please consider this.

Elections

At the 2021 ARM we shall be electing a new Bagman of the Morris Ring and several Area Representatives are due for triennial election/re-election.

The Agenda for the ARM and relevant papers will be issued in Newsletter 120 later in February. Instructions for voting on motions and elections will be contained therein.

Area Representatives (year of re-election in brackets)

East Midlands, Charlie Corcoran (2021)

South Midlands, Roger Comley (2021)

Northern, Jono Millward (2021)

North West, David Loughlin (2023)

North East, Brian Pollard (2022)

West Midlands, Peter Austin (2023)

Eastern, Nigel Strudwick (2022)

South Wales and West, Paul Reece (2023)

South East, Fred Hands (2021)

A proposed change to the Constitution of the Morris Ring

Proposed changes to the Constitution:

Admission into the Morris Ring

Current Clause 8:

8. Admission of a Club into Membership of the Morris Ring shall, after recommendation by the Officers, be effected by a majority of votes cast at the annual Meeting of Club Representatives. Each Club so admitted shall be provided with a Symbol of its Membership of the Morris Ring, and shall, from within its members, depute a correspondent whose name and address shall be communicated to the Bagman, together with an indication of the central geographic location of the Club and details of the costume of the Club.

Proposal 1- Proposed: Convert Clause 8 to 8a and 8b:

8a. Admission of a Club into Membership of the Morris Ring shall, after recommendation by the Officers, be effected by a majority of votes cast at the annual Meeting of Club Representatives. Each Club so admitted shall be provided with a Symbol of its Membership of the Morris Ring, and shall, from within its members, depute a correspondent whose name and address shall be communicated to the Bagman, together with an indication of the central geographic location of the Club and details of the costume of the Club.

8b. Membership of the Morris Ring, whether as Joint, Associate or Full Members, shall not be open to Clubs or Teams which use full face makeup or painted on coverings, in black or other skin tones not their own, where more than 50% of the visible face is covered.

Rationale: The proposed addition of clause 8b will enable The Morris Ring to exclude new teams and clubs who perform in 'full face' black make up or other skin tones that are not an individual's own from admission into the Membership. This exclusion criteria brings The Morris Ring in line with the other Morris organisations as well as the EFDSS who have agreed to no longer accept this practice as relevant or socially appropriate. The Morris Ring aims to mitigate, for our membership, any future legal action that may arise on grounds of perceived harassment, by members of the public, under the Equality Act 2010.

Current Clause 9: Clubs whose standards fall below those generally accepted by the Member Clubs, may, following the advice of the Officers, be suspended from Membership of the Morris Ring if at

least two thirds of the votes cast at the Annual Meeting of Club Representatives are in favour of such suspension.

Proposal 2- Proposed: Convert Clause 9 to 9a and 9b under a new heading 'Statement of Membership'

Statement of Membership

9a. Member Clubs or Teams of the Morris Ring must adhere to the following Standards of membership or face immediate suspension from The Morris Ring;

1. Pay an annual subscription to The Morris Ring at the agreed cost presented each year by the Treasurer in return for the offer of Public Liability Insurance (full or Associate Members).
2. Must have Public Liability Insurance, if not through The Ring, then through alternative means (joint members).
3. Adhere to the law of their respective country at all times to ensure the Dignity of the Morris is upheld.
4. Meet (in person or via electronic devices) regularly (as defined by individual clubs) for the practice and performance of their chosen style of dance and music.

Rationale:

1 and 2. It is essential that all member Clubs or Teams of The Morris Ring have Public Liability Insurance (PLI) to ensure that members of teams and the public are protected when performing. The Joint Morris Organisation offers Ring members PLI through its association. Associate members of The Ring may also receive PLI through the Ring or through another organisation. Payment of an annual subscription will ensure that members will receive the offer of PLI, it does not mean that a team has to accept the offer. A Member team does not have to receive PLI through The Ring. Note that currently the Ring provides £10m PLI through the JMO; all alternative arrangements explored only provide up to £5m, which would be an issue for festivals and local authorities, however, it would be better not to include this in the Constitution as it would require amending if the sums insured change.

3. By bringing in this statement we can ensure that the current Constitution adheres to all current legislation. This will bring us inline regarding the Equality Act. The Equality Act 2010 not only covers the workplace but also those in the voluntary arts sector. We as an association of clubs need to ensure that we abide by the law and do not bring the Morris into disrepute.

The safety of our members is paramount. Clubs or Teams must ensure that they are law abiding and follow all government guidelines whenever they are introduced, however temporary they may be. Ultimately it is up to individual Clubs and Teams what activities they choose to do. The Morris

Ring advises. However, if a Club or Team knowingly break the law in their activities then the Morris Ring reserves the right to suspend them for bringing the Morris into disrepute, going against the Dignity of the Morris.

4. The Morris Ring is traditionally known for its standards. There has been a lot of debate over the years as to what is meant by this. Ultimately it can be argued that if a team fails to meet or practice regularly- during normal times- then it is difficult for them to uphold the standard of performance that the Ring has come to expect. By including this statement within the conditions of membership, we introduce a measurable outcome. Individual clubs have the right to define what regular practice looks like for themselves.

9b. Clubs whose standards fall below those within the Statement of Membership following the advice of the Officers, may be suspended from Membership of the Morris Ring if at least two thirds of the votes cast at either an Emergency or Annual Meeting of Club Representatives are in favour of such suspension. **Suspended teams or clubs who address their need to adhere to the Standards within Clause 9a can be reinstated by any two elected officers of the Morris Ring at any time.**

Rationale: Again to address the ambiguity of what is meant by standards it is proposed that we have a definitive list as set out in Clause 9a. By slightly changing the wording of the existing clause 9 we can ensure that our Standards as an organisation have meaning and actually reflect the values of the society that we live in. Clause 9b allows for the suspension of any Club or Team that fails to abide by the Standards presented in Clause 9a. It also allows a suspended Club or Team member to be reinstated when by any two elected officers of the Morris Ring are satisfied with the changes the affected member team has made.

Discussion on the above:

A discussion thread will be set up on the Morris Ring Google Group to facilitate debate on the above changes. This thread will be moderated, to ensure no offensive posts are published (so posts will not appear immediately). The thread will open on Thursday 4th February and close two weeks later on Thursday 18th February. A summary of the discussions and points made will be included with the ARM papers to be issued with Newsletter 120 shortly thereafter. Anyone wishing to join the Morris Ring Google Group should email bagman@themorrisring.org from the email address they wish to have added (note that gmail addresses work better for this).

FAQs relating to the proposed Constitutional changes

1. Why do we have to do this? Isn't it just a reaction to the Black Lives Matter movement? *This is something the Officers have been working on since Shrewsbury Folk Festival banned sides in full-face black makeup (FFBM) in 2015; most festivals now do so. However, the BLM movement has accelerated the need to take action, not least because the potential for violence means sides and their members could be at risk from the public.*
2. Why is the Ring, a non-political organisation, taking action in response to a political issue? *The use of images of morris, especially but not exclusively FFBM morris, in promotional materials for several far-right political groups with extremist views has politicised the issue and placed morris in general in the invidious position of being seen as racist as it is supported by openly racist groups.*
3. If our intentions are not racist, why do we need to worry? *The Equality Act defines racial harassment as giving offence, regardless of intent. Basically, if someone is offended, that is sufficient to show harassment. The only defence would be to present reasons as to why it should not be considered racist, such as to override the presumption that harassment has been caused. A defendant's subjective intention or reasons for their action are not a defence in themselves.*
4. This is a tradition going back hundreds of years, surely that is sufficient defence to an accusation of racism? *The earliest record of dancers in FFBM is 1824, in Dave Jones' materials; this post-dates blackface minstrel shows in theatres and music halls all over the country by 15-20 years. There is no evidence which would stand scrutiny in a court of law dating the practice earlier than that. There is evidence of FFBM in mumming going back much further, to Shakespearean times, however, given that it is no longer acceptable for a white actor in FFBM to play Othello (there was a furore over Olivier doing this in 1964/5), the argument is somewhat irrelevant. It is also worth considering that all other aspects of the "tradition," kit, music, dances etc have been adapted over time.*
5. There have been no successful Civil claims made against dance teams under the Equality Act, so why worry? *It is the view of the morris community and the EFDSS that the likelihood of a successful claim for damages has greatly increased due to the BLM movement. This would have reputational, financial and legal implications for the side, their Organisation and morris in general, plus potential impacts on the standing and careers of individuals concerned.*
6. The Officers of the Ring do not have the power to dictate to sides how they conduct themselves, so under what authority are they doing this? *The Officers and the Ring are charged with upholding the dignity of the morris, which would be severely damaged in the*

event of a successful prosecution for racial harassment. Sides are not being instructed to change their kit, but are being advised they are no longer welcome as members if they do not do so; sides are at liberty to seek their insurance elsewhere.

7. What impact will this have on the provision of Public Liability Insurance? *The PLI is invalidated if an individual or side knowingly takes action which might cause a loss – that is a standard clause in most insurance policies – and if they consider the potential of an accusation of racial harassment as such an action, then they could invalidate the cover for a side or event, or potentially withdraw all cover from the Ring. The likelihood of this is increased, since the other two Organisations have successfully voted to remove FFBM sides from membership.*
8. This doesn't affect me at all, so shall I abstain from the vote? *An abstention counts towards the number of votes cast, so would technically be a "no" vote, as a 2/3 majority is required for the proposal to succeed. This is something we all have responsibility for.*

Election of Bagman of the Morris Ring

One candidate has been nominated for the post, Peter Austin of Jockey Men's Morris (inter alia).

Personal Statement for post of Bagman of the Morris Ring

Peter Austin – Jockey Men's Morris



As a relative newcomer (only 5 years dancing), I have found a wonderful new world within the morris. In that short time, I've had a very steep learning curve but nevertheless an enjoyable one, joining 7 sides and picking up a variety of traditions along the way. I became West Midlands area rep for the Morris Ring in 2020, taking over from Mark Carter. Among my more recent memorable activities were travelling to Australia in 2018 for a two week tour as a guest of the Australian Morris Ring, helping to organise the Warwickshire Ring Meeting in 2019 and helping to revive the One Day Wonders Travelling Morris in the same year.

Morris is facing several challenges as we enter the third decade of the 21st Century. Chief among them is understanding how we can operate in a world which is still grappling with Coronavirus, which has impacted all of our activities both in and out of morris. There has been some outstanding work done by the Officers of both the Ring and the JMO in the last year to keep abreast of developments as the pandemic has developed, and I hope to carry this forward as the situation continues to change.

That aside, I would like to continue efforts to identify and develop potential recruitment strategies as this issue is still very much to the fore of many sides. To this end we must, as part of the JMO, help to keep the public perception of morris positive and that means monitoring changes in social attitudes and being willing to adapt to new situations. This is critical to ensuring the future of both the Ring specifically and the morris in general.

Supporting statement of nomination:

Leicester Morrismen

Squire: Joe Krych Bagman: Charlie Corcoran mail: bagman@leicestermorrismen.co.uk

14 January 2021

Nomination of Peter Austin for Bagman of the Morris Ring

By his own admission Peter, better known by many as Cheesy, is a relative newcomer to Morris but in that time he has impressed with his enthusiasm and growing skill. Leicester first encountered him as a member of Jockey but although not recently (!) rather like a chameleon, we have met him in various kits. However dressed, Pete is always friendly and cheerful, and a real team player whose passion and enjoyment of the Morris is clear for all to see. As assistant Squire of Jockey and Squire and the driving force behind Knightlow Morris, and for the past year West Midlands Area Rep for the MR, Pete has proved that he has the life experience, organisational abilities and diplomatic skills to fulfil the role Bagman of the Morris Ring. He recognises the profound challenges the Morris world faces in these unpredictable and unprecedented times. He understands the unique traditions and experience that the Morris Ring has to offer as we continue to work cooperatively with our fellow Morris organisations. Following Jon will not be easy but we are confident that Pete will bring youth, courage and enthusiasm to the role and we urge clubs to support his candidature.

Charlie Corcoran Bagman Leicester Morrismen

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On-line Links:



The main MR website with millions of pages stuffed to the gunnels with all you need to know about the MR: <https://www.themorrisring.org/>

The Morris Ring Google Group (MRGG). Private Forum for debate or announcements. <https://groups.google.com/group/the-morris-ring>

Contact the Morris Ring Bagman to register to use.

Morris Ring Facebook site: <https://www.facebook.com/TheMorrisRing>

Morris Ring Twitter: <https://twitter.com/TheMorrisRing>

The Morris Shop *"the Bells and Whistles"*

<http://www.themorrisshop.com/>

Call for Contributions

Any items of urgent Morris-related news, please send to me at bagman@themorrisring.org for inclusion in the next Newsletter. Less time-dependent updates and 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).

